

PREJUDICE AND TOLERANCE IN ULSTER, by Rosemary Harris. *Manchester University Press, Manchester/Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa, New Jersey*. xvi + 234 pp. £3.

'Law', remarked Lévi-Strauss once, 'was theology and has now become journalism.' Perhaps it was precisely because our mentors were so aware of the dangers of anthropology becoming journalism that they gave it a rather theological aura; the highly specialized language, the stressed absence of 'relevancy', the clearly demarcated schools of thought, the piety with which one read the approved works of the founding fathers, an unspoken disapproval of any attempt at popularization, all gave one a sense of being on the threshold of mysteries. Yet here is a book which is both theology and journalism in the good senses of the two words; theological in the lucid passion with which it analyses and synthesizes, journalistic not simply in its relation to contemporary concerns but also in a remarkable skill for seeing how the furnishing of a room or a practical joke or a chance meeting can suddenly mirror a community's whole stock of hopes and fears. In this book Dr Rosemary Harris, herself an Ulsterwoman by adoption, has fulfilled the anthropologist's task of describing a particular social structure in relation to a chosen problem, in this case the balance of conflict and cohesion in a rural area of western Ulster; yet she has also done what theologians and journalists seldom do, but ought to want to do; to speak on behalf of the inarticulate, or rather to say what they wish to say but fail. In Dr Harris the poorer Protestants of Ulster, surely the most friendless and the worst led of all the groups caught up in the tragedy, have at last found a faithful and intelligible interpreter.

Dr Harris' study of Ballybeg, a decayed and diminutive market town, and the surrounding countryside, was undertaken in the early fifties before her work in south-eastern Nigeria, but there is still on it the bloom of vividly recalled experience. Ballybeg town supplied services to the local farmers, but had only a small and impermanent population of its own; those who wanted to get on got out. The surrounding farmers (at the time of the study farm labourers were few) were divided in two ways, by religion, and by the kind of farm they held, the relatively prosperous lowland 'infield' farms contrasting with the poorer upland 'mountain' farms. The core of Dr Harris' study lies in the criss-cross of actions and values which arose from the

overlapping of these two divisions; for, as she shows with convincing details, it was the difference of farm types, not the seemingly all-dominating religious contrast, that determined the differing patterns of family and social life to be found around Ballybeg.

Although the mountain farms were of greater acreage, this was more than compensated for by the better soil of the infield farms. There was to be sure a similar standard of living among the more prosperous mountain farmers and the ordinary infield farmers, but the infield also had some 'yeoman' farmers whose standards of living resembled those of the urban middle class. Of the mountain farming people, 72 per cent were Protestant and 28 per cent Catholic, whereas 65 per cent of the infield population were Protestant and 35 per cent Catholic. Both mountain and infield farmers were interested in improving their methods and their profits; but the greater mechanisation and greater prosperity of the infield farmers were associated with different kinds of co-operation, social visiting and family life.

On the mountain farms 'swopping', a co-operative work ring, was the characteristic form by which the farmers could get extra manpower when needed. Swopping was much more than a purely economic link; it implied the right to come freely into the house of another member of the ring and pass the evening there, and was essentially egalitarian. The infield farmers had traditionally employed labourers, and had subsequently mechanized. The co-operation between them took the form of lending machinery rather than of working together, and did not imply easy social contact. The infield farmers had made another significant change in ceasing to use the kitchen as the centre of all social life. A visitor who came to borrow something might be granted access to the kitchen, but not to the dining- or sitting-room, and even the granting of access to such rooms, with their emblems of different standards of taste and living, could create embarrassment rather than ease. The relation of husband and wife differed also between infield and mountain; hill wives would sometimes work in the fields besides their menfolk, whereas the infield wives never did, yet the infield wives knew much more about their

husbands' activities than did the mountain women. This related to the difference in patterns of visiting; the infield wife was much more likely to be often alone with her husband than was the upland woman. If marriage provided more companionship in the infield, neighbourliness was warmer in the hills, where weddings and wakes and funerals still provided occasions for neighbours to gather without distinction of class or religion.

Yet despite their frequent contacts with their Catholic neighbours, it was precisely among the Protestant hill farmers that prejudice against Catholics was most marked. Dr Harris conclusively disposes of a number of theories put forward to explain relations between Catholics and Protestants in Ulster, and offers two explanations of her own for the mixture of personal tolerance and ideological prejudice; the taboo on religious or political discussions between Catholics and Protestants, which meant that people in daily contact could have the most fantastic images of each others' beliefs, and the sense of insecurity of the poorer Protestants who (in addition to being extremely Anglophobe) suspected the Unionist leadership of plotting to hand over the Ballybeg area to the Republic. To assert themselves against the better-off Protestants (whom, they thought, would swim, whereas they themselves would sink, in a united Ireland) they therefore stressed their Protestantism, largely in the form of political anti-Catholicism, and were mostly keen members of the Orange Lodges.

Dr Harris' treatment of the Orange Order is interesting and to some extent novel. In the conventional left-wing stereotype the Orange Order is an instrument in the hands of rich Protestants to divide the poor on sectarian lines; for the poor Protestants of the Ballybeg

district the Orange Order was an instrument pointed in exactly the opposite direction, since 'The one institution in which the uninfluential the unsophisticated could deal with their leaders as equals without acting improperly was the Orange Lodge. Here leaders could be safely criticised; here some attempt could be made to expose them to the force of public opinion.' (p. 197). Her conclusion is that there is little hard evidence as to the supposed greater bigotry of the poorer Protestants; their greater display of prejudice in the political and religious setting is more a consequence of the strains between Protestants of different classes. Interestingly, 'individuals could and did collect money and offerings for bazaars from neighbours of "the other side" if the object were purely religious, but no-one could do this for a political purpose' (p. 137).

Inevitably, Dr Harris has to make some comment on the relevance of her material to the present situation, but her remarks are completely in accord with the Ballybeg canon of 'modesty' (not seeking to domineer). She points out that the hostility with which the poorer Protestants greeted any sign of reformism on the part of Unionist politicians was something built into the social setting. She shows too the extreme naïvety of the Civil Rights leaders in imagining that by the late sixties class antagonisms had effectively replaced religious ones in the Ulster scene.

Much more could be said about this book, particularly about the skill with which Dr Harris sketches Ballybeg personalities; let me finish by praising her for the success with which she has shown 'Ballybeg as a community in which there was a vast amount of tolerance and good will' (p. xiv).

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**THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY TO ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND**, by Henry Mayr-Harting.  
*B. T. Batsford, London 1972. 334 pp. £4.*

This extremely valuable book is a supplement to an earlier classic: Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Bede's data are explained, criticized and augmented in the light of modern scholarship. Particularly impressive are the chapters which explain the results of the conversion of the Saxons: the conflict between Christian morals and the standards of the ex-pagans, the mixed church culture which grew from the missions of Roman and 'Celt' and the eventual triumph of Roman jurisdiction. These intricate matters are treated with precision and subtlety, with the help of a

wealth of information from Irish and continental sources and from archaeology.

Bede's own description of the effects of the conversion is excellent; it is his account of the conversion itself which is open to criticism as many conversion studies are: the work of Providence is made less mundane, so that the previous degradation of the converted is exaggerated, as is the rôle of the converter, and an antagonist may be introduced—the *Brettones* in Bede's case. Dr Mayr-Harting is well aware of these trends and treads carefully, e.g. he does not follow the blurb's line that the Anglo-