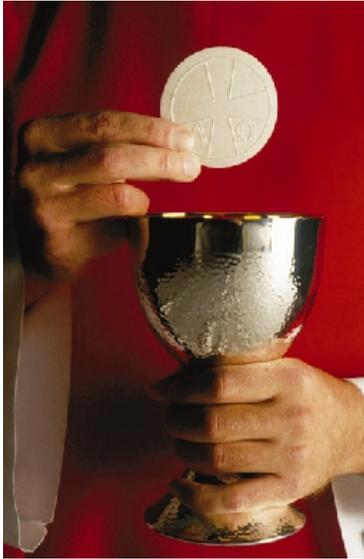


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Church of Ireland minister officiates at “Easter Rising” Mass!



An unholy row has erupted after a “Protestant” cleric marked the 90th anniversary of the Easter Rising by celebrating Mass with three Roman Catholic priests. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland have promised to launch investigations after it was revealed that the minister had brought 20 members of his congregation to the Augustinian Priory in Drogheda, Co Louth, where they took Holy Communion.

Since Church of Ireland minister, the Rev Michael Graham, con-celebrated Mass with “Father” Ignatius O’Donovan and two other priests on Easter Sunday, a row has broken out over the possible implications for ecumenism.

It is understood that the event had not been discussed with the Catholic hierarchy.

Archbishop of Armagh and RC Primate of All Ireland, Dr Sean Brady, said he intended to seek further details about the exact circumstances of the Mass. The head of the Church of Ireland

said he would also be investigating.

Shared concerns

Archbishop Robin Eames, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, said: “... I share Archbishop Brady’s concern over the implications for ecumenical relationships and I will be similarly requesting more information.

But “Father” O’Donovan told the Irish Times he had had no intention of defying Church rules - which strictly prohibit intercommunion - in organising the special Mass.

He said Taoiseach Bertie Ahern had been the inspiration for the landmark service, which attracted around 1,000 people.

“It was Bertie Ahern who gave me the inspiration when I heard him appealing for an inclusive commemoration of the Rising.”

Greetings

Rev Graham was greeted with prolonged applause by the large congregation when he appeared at the altar. He later told the worshippers that “this is the first public celebration in Drogheda of the Eucharist by a Catholic priest of the Anglican tradition in a Catholic church of the Roman tradition since the Reformation.”

Reaction to the event has been interesting. An overwhelming three quarters of the Irish Roman Catholic priests back their Augustinian colleague who said mass with a Church of Ireland minister.

They said “Father” Iggy O’Donovan was right to jointly celebrate an Easter Sunday mass with Rev Michael Graham, an Anglican rector in Drogheda, according to a Dublin-based



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newspaper poll just after the event.

Anger

The priests were angered by the very public criticism of the mass by primates of both faiths - Archbishops Robin Eames and Sean Brady - with one saying he should be "commended not sanctioned for taking such a brave step".

Twenty years earlier

Following the news of the "independent" ecumenical initiative, another Church of Ireland cleric has spoken for the first time of how he celebrated Mass with a Roman Catholic priest more than two decades ago.

Canon Brian Smeaton, a well-known churchman in Ramelton, Co Donegal, revealed yesterday that he concelebrated Mass with a Scottish priest while on a visit to Edinburgh in the early 1980s.

"The two of us said Mass at an altar in a hall and we both consecrated the bread and wine and received Holy Communion together," said Canon Smeaton, who is now retired from active ministry.

"I had received permission to go ahead by the local bishop, and we did it without any fuss or publicity," he told the Irish Independent. "We did not cause any confusion in people's minds.

The people there welcomed it. The confusion comes from the rules of the institutional church. It is the church leaders who make difficulties for the people."

fuel

Canon Smeaton's blunt admission added further fuel to the controversy which continued to rage yesterday over the joint Easter Sunday Mass in Drogheda.

In all the discussions that have followed in the wake of the Drogheda mass, no mention has been made of what the official teaching of the Church of Ireland is on the matter. The 39 Articles of Religion, supposedly still binding on the Church of Ireland, states very clearly that masses are "blaphemous fables, and dangerous deceits", Article 31.

Few care anything at all for these Scriptural truths. A man can be an oath-breaker and a blasphemer and a peddler of deceit and still be heralded as a wonderful innovator and figure of virtue.

Where we are!

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" Isaiah 5:20-21.