

The Northern Ireland Assembly Minister for Culture, Nelson McCausland, has accused the minority community in Portadown of pursuing a policy of 'cultural apartheid'. This is a gross and insulting distortion of the facts. The International Criminal Court defined apartheid as being inhumane acts 'committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime'.

The true origins of the apartheid regime in Northern Ireland can be traced at least as far back as June of 1795 when a Rev. George Maunsell called on his congregation 'to celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne in the true spirit of the institution' by attending a sermon to be given by a Rev. Devine of the Established Church at Drumcree on Sunday the 1st of July. That 1st of July Sunday service gave birth to the 200-year-old tradition of 'First Sunday' 'Church Parades' to and from Drumcree Church. On page seventeen of a '*History of Ireland*' (Vol. I), published in 1809, Francis Plowden described the Rev Devine's sermon as having:

so worked up the minds of his audience, that upon retiring from service, on the different roads leading to their respective homes, they gave full scope to the antipapistical zeal, with which he had inspired them, falling upon every Catholic they met, beating and bruising them without provocation or distinction, breaking the doors and windows of their houses, and actually murdering two unoffending Catholics in a bog. This unprovoked atrocity of the Protestants revived and redoubled religious rancour. The flame spread and threatened a contest of extermination...

Two hundred years later, in July 1995, we had the 'first', 'Frst Sunday', 'Drumcree Siege' and the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland published '*The Order on Parade*'. In that 'educational' booklet the Grand Lodge held that 'If people were better informed as to the nature of the Orange Institution they would be in a much better position to understand the purpose of parades'. The booklet went on to explain Orange culture and defended all and every Orange Parade as being part of a colourful tradition that fulfilled a common need to celebrate political and religious commitments and beliefs. They described Orange parading as being 'a celebration', 'a display of pageantry', 'a demonstration of strength' that provides 'a sense of tradition', 'a testimony and a statement of beliefs', and 'the culmination of each lodge's activities'.

Now we have a Minister for Culture who is determined to revive two centuries of sectarian rancour and cultural ignorance by presenting the centuries-old struggle against the sectarianism that has poisoned relations between the two communities in Northern Ireland as being an expression of 'cultural apartheid'. Perhaps if the Minister were better informed as to the history of the Orange demonstrations of strength that have issued from the doors of Drumcree Church ever since 1795 he would be in a better position understand what motivates opposition to that particular expression of Orange culture. Should the Minister or the 'educationalists' and 'historians' in the Grand Orange Lodge wish to learn more about the origins, history, and effects of their culture and traditions on the minority community in Northern Ireland they can find a couple of research papers on my blog at <http://orangecitadel.blogspot.com>.