

Daniel O'Connell

"The Altar of Liberty totters when it is cemented only with blood." This insightful remark was made by an Irishman whose life's goals were twofold: Catholic emancipation and repeal of the Act of Union. This Irishman's obsession was nationalism without violence.



Daniel O'Connell was born on August 6, 1775 in Carhan, about one mile east of Cahirciveen in Co. Kerry. The old custom of fosterage was still prominent in those parts, and young Dan was adopted and raised by his Uncle Maurice O'Connell, known as Hunting Cap.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was an angry O'Connell who heard the bells of St. Patrick's ring out to proclaim the new [Act of Union](#), the suicide decision of the Irish Parliament. As he stated in 1800, "I know that the Catholics of Ireland still remember that they have a country, and that they will never accept any advantage as a sect which would debase and destroy them as a people."

Although many of the Penal laws were relaxed in 1793, Catholics could still not sit in Parliament. The old Catholic Committee headed by John Keogh prepared many petitions which Henry Grattan, Irish M.P., duly presented to the House of Commons. All were followed by negative results. In a speech in 1808, the young barrister Daniel O'Connell attacked this old routine of petitioning, and called for a new tone of demand. It was becoming evident to all that a new leader had risen among the Irish.

In 1823 O'Connell founded the Catholic Association. The genius of this new organization was that its membership was extended to all people of all, classes. Even the peasantry could afford its penny a month rent which was collected by the parish priest at the doors of the church. The Catholic Association's real success was demonstrated during the famed 1828 Clare election. The Association pitted O'Connell against the long reigning FitzGerald family. O'Connell won but was unable to take his seat in Parliament until 1829 when Catholic Emancipation was finally granted. This course of events by pacifistic agitation has given O'Connell his rightful title of "The Liberator," his title to this very day.

In the 1840's, O'Connell turned his full attention back to his first goal, "Repeal of the Union." "Union," cried O'Connell, "is a crime to begin with and

must continue to be, unless crime, like wine, improves with old age." In April of 1840, O'Connell founded his Repeal Association, based on the same mass organization as the Catholic Association of the 1820's. His powerful voice reached the people of Ireland through the many "Monster Meetings" held across the country, especially at Tara. The final meeting to be held at Clontarf was declared illegal by the government. O'Connell, fearing bloodshed, cancelled the meeting but was himself arrested anyway. During his short imprisonment, his message to his people was the same, "Obey my advice ... no violence." His conflicts with a group of young radicals known as the Young Irelanders eventually brought the Repeal Association to ruin.

In O'Connell's final years, his utmost concern was the great famine which now plagued his country. In his last speech to the House of Commons, his once powerful voice, now hardly audible, pleaded, "Ireland is in your hands ... she cannot save herself."

On May 15, 1847, Daniel O'Connell died in Genoa, Italy. His heart was embalmed and placed in Rome according to his dying wish, "my body to Ireland, My heart to Rome, My soul to God." Daniel O'Connell's achievements by pacifistic and constitutional means shall never be forgotten. It was appropriately said at his funeral oration in Rome, 'God does not create a great man for the use of a single age or a single people.'

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