Who is Leading?
Archbishop John Thomas Troy and the
Priests and People in the Archdiocese of Dublin
1787-1823

Vincent J. McNALLY

Introduction

Ireland is presently going through a paradigm shift similar to one in the early nineteenth century, but this one is far more radical. Just as 1823 spelled a watershed in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Irish people, which was best exemplified in the Irish nation, so Vatican II (1962-1965) and Ireland's membership in the European Community/Union in 1973 marked a watershed in the same relationship. Ireland as a nation is much changed; the Irish people are much more open to multinationalism, and certainly far more pluralistic and multicultural than they had ever been before the 1960s and 1970s. The Catholic clergy of Ireland will eventually have to recognize that the historic marriage of convenience between Catholicism and Irish nationalism has run its course.

Where goes the Irish Catholic church? Perhaps it might become a catalyst for justice and peace in such places as Northern Ireland by reaching out to non-Catholics in that community and condemning all violence, from whatever quarter; to date it has largely ignored such a challenge. It could become a church supporting the interests of all the people of Ireland, even women, atheists and gays. As such it will have to become a church no longer living in an Irish past, but rather challenging the present, and calling upon the Irish people to become all they can become now and in the future. Thus it will have to be a church that finally accepts the challenge of truly preaching, supporting and living a far more radical reality than Irish nationalism, in a word: the gospel of Jesus Christ.[1]

The Roman Catholic Church in Ireland Before 1820

---

[1] Peadar Kirby, *Make Up Your Mind Series: Is Irish Catholicism Dying?* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1984), pp. 91-93.

In exploring from whence the present situation took rise, there is a traditional assumption that the Irish Catholic clergy have long had an overwhelming influence in shaping and controlling Irish society; according to this viewpoint, the priest or bishop led the laity. Prior to the 1820s the reality, however, was quite the reverse. Utilizing the history of the Church in Dublin during this period, we will show that far from being a leading force in shaping events in Ireland, the Catholic clergy were rather followers of events. In fact, the laity set the political agenda. The clergy, if they wished to improve their popularity, had to follow.

For many years leading up to the 1820s and the advent of modern Irish nationalism, there was a comparable indifference among all classes of Ireland's Catholics regarding organized Catholicism, reflected in the institutional church's minimal influence over social or political issues, and such an indifference is well born out in its most important church, the archdiocese of Dublin. Before the 1820s Dublin Catholics, of all classes, shared a marked lack of interest in organized religious practice. Though Catholic teaching had long considered missing Sunday mass a serious sin, until 1823, and well before the period being discussed, Dublin chapels were never more than half full. Certainly part of the explanation lay in a religious indifferentism and even anti-clericalism which were natural consequences of the Enlightenment and the social radicalism of the age, major factors that would ultimately lead to the French Revolution, and which definitely affected educated Catholic lay attitudes in Ireland during the period.[2] It is also certainly true that the poor, then the bulk of the Catholic laity of Dublin, dirty and ill clad, would have found attending a Catholic chapel service an embarrassment due both to the staring eyes of their social "betters," and also because, like other members of the congregation, they were required to pay before they were even admitted as well as to contribute during mass. Also folk beliefs, such as festive wakes, holy wells and patterns continued to be far more popular than organized worship, especially among the peasantry, but also among their social superiors. In short, the consciences of most Dublin Catholics of all classes simply ignored the obligation of church attendance.[3]

---

[2]   Dublin Diocesan Archives, Troy Papers, (hereafter DDA, TP) John Thomas Troy, 'Report on the ... Diocese," 1802, Ibid., J.T. Troy, "Report on the State of the Diocese," August 20, 1816; R.E. Burns, "Parsons, Priests and The People: The Rise of Irish Anti-Clericalism 1785-1789," *Church History* 31 (1962): pp. 151-162; S.J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland: 1780-1845* (New York: St Martin Press 1982) pp. 90, 94.

[3]   David Miller, "Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine," *Journal of Social History* 9, 1 (1975) pp. 81-98; S.J. Connolly, "Religion and History," *Irish Economic and Social History* 10 (1983) 70-1; *Poor Inquiry* (1835) Appen. A, pp. 357, 380, 434, 436n, 440, 669; Connolly, *Priests and People*, 135ff.

In attempting to combat the problem, John Thomas Troy, the archbishop of Dublin (1787-1823) during the early half of this period, and the major focus of this study, required his priests to refuse non-church goers the right to a church marriage, to be godparents and, if women, to be churched after childbirth. Still, reflecting the extent of the dilemma, Troy advised the Dublin clergy against employing extreme, though canonical measures, such as excommunication or the denial of Christian burial, since these, he implied, would only add to the already serious indifference towards church attendance.[4]

Low attendance meant deteriorating church buildings. Physically the Catholic chapels of Dublin of the period were at best modest or at worst miserable affairs. Though the penal code stipulated that Catholic places of worship had to be secluded structures without steeples or bells, the law set no limits either upon their size nor their internal adornments. However in 1802 Troy complained that, while the Catholic chapels of Dublin were at best "decently appointed," he continued to envision the day when attendance figures would permit them to be appointed with 'splendid furnishings." As for the rural parts of the archdiocese, where attendance was even worse, eyewitnesses reported that most chapels were then "extremely wretched" structures.[5]

Low attendance also spelled poor collections, and thus there would have been no funds available to build new chapels. Actually financial restrictions made it difficult even to maintain the existing structures and, with one notable exception, none were built until after 1823. The exception, a significant one, was the present St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral of Dublin, the erection of which was to prove just how indifferent the Catholic laity were to any formal practice of their faith.

The idea of building a new cathedral was foolhardy from the outset. It was more a matter of "image," and certainly not a practical necessity, that prompted Troy to initiate the scheme in 1803. The legislative Union of 1801 had given rise to renewed hope among the diminutive old guard, status quo Catholics, such as Troy. In exchange for their support for the Union measure, a fact which infuriated the new and rising generation of Irish Catholic nationalists lead by Daniel O'Connell, the British government had promised people like Troy that after its passage Irish Catholics would soon have

<hr />

[4]   DDA, TP, J.T. Troy, "Report on the ... Diocese," 1802; Ibid., "Report on the State of the Diocese," August 20, 1816.

[5]   DDA, "Regestum" I: 73-5; Ibid., J.T. Troy, "Report on the State of the Dublin Diocese," December 9, 1802; Rome, Propaganda Fide Archives (hereafter RPA), "Scritture referite nei Congressi-Irlanda" (hereafter "Irlanda") 16 p. 241, Troy to Antonelli, March 10, 1787; N. Donnelly, "The Diocese of Dublin in the Eighteenth Century," *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 3rd Series 9 (1888) p. 1006.

legislation giving them complete emancipation. Such assurances would prove empty. But a few, like Troy, still believed them in 1803. To prepare for such an anticipated eventuality and the resulting political and social prestige for Dublin Catholicism, Troy decided to build a new cathedral. He choose as its site the late Earl of Annesley's townhouse on Marlborough Street, purchased by the diocese for the then enormous sum of £5,100.

Troy was clearly determined to demonstrate that Catholic chapels in Dublin no longer needed to seem invisible. Reflecting this mentality, in a report to Rome at the time, he expressed an uncharacteristic resentment towards the status of Dublin's two ancient cathedrals which, he complained, were still in the hands of the "heretics" of the Established Church of Ireland, a situation Troy hoped would soon change. Nevertheless, despite such bravado, in advertising the venture, caution continued to rule, and Troy avoided even the mention of the word "cathedral." Instead he noted merely that the location would be used to erect "a handsome, commodious and *metropolitan chapel.*"

Catholic monies for such an enterprise, especially from its thriving middle class, were certainly available, for the Dublin economy, largely because of the Napoleonic wars, was then in a boom phase. However, the continued indifference of Dublin Catholics towards organized worship remained a major problem. Actually the situation was so bad that Troy was not able even to lay the foundation stone until 1815. At the time of his death on May 11, 1823, the day before the inauguration of the Catholic Association, the building committee was still trying to raise funds to complete the project. Yet the committee clearly, and no doubt inadvertently, put their finger on a major reason for their predicament when they noted, with "deep regret," that the failure was mainly due to a lack of "national feeling" among the Catholic laity, a "feeling" finally enkindled in 1823.[6]

Another important barometer of religious indifference among Dublin Catholics was a serious shortage of candidates for the priesthood. Though there was a steady rise in the size and wealth of the Catholic middle class after 1750, especially visible among Dublin merchants, this fact was not reflected in their desire to see their sons become priests. For though the Catholic population of Ireland more than tripled in the century before the great famine, the number of clergy needed to serve them did not even double. Ostensibly Troy blamed the shortage on the French Revolution which had forced the closure of most of the Irish colleges on the Continent. Maynooth College had begun to address the problem. It had been founded with

---

[6]   DDA, Pro-Cathedral Papers, *To the Public*, May 13, 1803; Maurice Craig, *Dublin 1660-1860* (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1969), 264ff; Ibid., "Report of the Committee for Building the Roman Catholic Metropolitan Chapel," June 11, 1821.

government funds in 1795, largely because lay support, both moral and financial, was lacking. Yet as late as 1818 Troy suggested that the real reason for the major difficulty in recruiting candidates was the lack of social respectability of having a priest in the family, a feeling harboured especially by most of the wealthier members of the middle class.[7]

The lack of social respectability was compounded by the relatively poor level of income among the Catholic secular clergy. This was due in part to the nature of its source which was based largely on informal levies, such as Christmas or Easter dues or stipends for sacraments, all of which could fluctuate greatly depending on lay willingness or ability to pay. When clergy became demanding, lay reactions could become quite hostile and public. Such apparent financial uncertainty did not encourage the better-off Catholic middle classes, whether merchants or farmers, to view the priesthood as a desirable career, even though the evidence indicates that clerical incomes rose or at least kept pace during the period with their more prominent laity. The real or perceived irregularity of clerical incomes was further heightened when they were contrasted with the legally enforced incomes of the clergy in the Established Church of Ireland. For example, the annual income of the Protestant archbishop of Dublin during the period, based largely on rents from enormous estates, as well as tithes, was over fifteen times (£9,320 pa versus £600 pa) that of his Catholic equivalent. And though not as dramatic, the lower clergy of the Established Church in the archdiocese of Dublin enjoyed incomes, again from rents and tithes, at least four times higher (£300 pa versus £75 pa) than the average of their Catholic counterparts.[8]

Lack of clergy also translated into an aging clergy. And the problem continued to grow, so much so that it became increasingly difficult to fill vacant parishes. When they were, they were now often filled with absentee or sickly clergy resulting in a steady increase in complaints from the religiously observant laity about the lack of pastoral care.[9] For example in one

[7] Connolly, *Priests and People*, pp. 32-6; Viscount Castlereagh, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, Edited Charles Vane. 3: p. 400; W.H.E. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Longmans-Green, 1913) 3: pp. 326-28; Maurice O'Connell, "Maynooth College," *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 85: p. 412; Ibid., 86: pp. 2-3; DDA, TP, Cardinal Litta to Troy, September 5, 1818.

[8] Castlereagh, *Memoirs*, 4: pp. 133-38, 153, 157; DDA, TP, J.T. Troy, "Report on the...Diocese," 1802; Ibid., "Meeting of the Catholic Parishioners of St. Nicholas Without," September 16 & 28, 1794; Connolly, *Priests and People*, pp. 47-53; 244-46; Donald H. Akenson, *Church of Ireland: Ecclesiastical Reform and Revolution 1800-85* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) pp. 84-95.

[9] DDA, TP, "Meeting of the Catholic parishioners of St. Nicholas Without," September 16 & 28, 1794; Ibid., "Parishioners of St Mary's to Reverend William Clarke," September 4, 1792; Ibid., "Announcement of a meeting of the Parishioners of St. Mary's," September 6, 1792; Ibid., "Regestum" 1:73-5; Ibid., Mr Michael

case among many in Dublin at the time, in September 1800 thirty-four parishioners of St. James Parish complained to Troy that they were not being properly served even with Sunday mass, and that some parishioners had actually been "launched into eternity *without the rites of the Church*!"[10]

Poor morale, reflected in a lack of clerical discipline, was a natural consequence of feeling overworked, underpaid and certainly undervalued. However, maintaining clerical discipline appeared to be a futile enterprise. For instance, Troy had insisted that his clergy attend monthly conferences which were designed to improve their knowledge of such issues as mass stipends and attendance, liturgical vestments, the necessity of the sacrament of penance, but especially, by their mere attendance, to instill greater order and decorum. Yet participation was irregular, and, probably given the crisis in numbers, priests appeared to excuse themselves with impunity. As part of their pastoral duties, Dublin priests were also required to submit annual reports on the state of their parishes. Few such reports survive in the Dublin diocesan archives, and, given the importance Troy gave to maintaining such records, it seems reasonable to assume that this requirement was also largely ignored.[11]

Educating the laity, especially the poor, in church sponsored schools might have heightened interest in Catholicism, but there was no money to support them. Such schools would become a reality in 1831 when the Irish national school system was inaugurated by the British government. On the other hand, for those intent upon building strong nationalist sentiments, such as Daniel O'Connell, the national schools scheme was essential in producing an educated populous that would both nurture and thus increase nationalist feelings. The fact that the British government gave the churches, Protestant as well as Catholic, effective control of the national school system, was seen as a major factor in greatly strengthening the identification of Irish

Hughes to Troy, George Quay, November 22, 1796; Ibid., "Thirteen Parishioners of St. Andrew's to Troy," Townsend Chapel, November 28, 1796; Ibid., Troy to Michael Hughes, North King Street, Dublin, November 30, 1796; Ibid., "Thirty-four Parishioners of St. Andrew"s to Troy," ND.

[10]   10 DDA, TP, "Memorial of Certain Inhabitants of St. James'... Dublin," September 20 1800; Ibid., "Regestum" 1:28-41; Ibid., Troy to "Messrs P. Kane, B. Shannon and other Roman Catholic memorialists of ... St. James," September 19, 1800. By predating his reply, Troy appears to indicate that he had anticipated their complaint of a lack of a priest and tried to reveal his sensitivity to the growing problem.

[11]   DDA, TP, "Schema for Diocesan Clergy Conferences, 1787-1815."

nationalist sentiments with organized religion, especially Catholicism.[12] However, this was certainly not the case before 1831.

Before 1831 formal education was largely private, fairly expensive and haphazard. For those Dubliners who could afford it, Catholic or otherwise, most education was carried out in small, private schools. They were usually operated by one or two people, often husband and wife, who may or may not have been Catholic. Though religious instruction was sometimes included in the curriculum, it was of a very general nature, and in no way stressed the importance of church support or attendance. As for the Catholic poor, there were attempts to educate them through the parish and charter schools operated by the Established Church with the obvious hope that they would all become good Protestants. However, due to lack of funds and a general indifference to converting the poor, such enterprises had little impact. Catholic church equivalents also failed due to funding problems. Thus, as noted, the Catholic poor of Dublin harboured the same indifferentism towards their church as their social betters, and even more so, given the church's apparent insensitivity to their condition, which in part at least was due to its lack of funds or the staff necessary to address such concerns.[13]

Certainly evidence from surviving sermons indicate the reasons for their failure to increase attendance in the Catholic chapels of Dublin. For example, Troy's sermons, which seem representative, covered such subjects as the apostle's creed, the ten commandments, prayer and the sacraments. Dry, rational, unemotional, even boring would certainly be apt descriptions of Troy's efforts. In one example, Troy noted, in discussing the question of "eternal life," and basing his comments on theological commentaries, maintained that the bodies of the blessed had four qualities: "impassability, splendour or clarity, agility and subtlety," and everyone would be "about thirty-three years of age." As for the five senses, they too, according to Troy, would be gratified in the next life, "joy to the just ... pain to the damned." In a word, eternal life seemed as tiresome as Troy's somewhat absurd attempt to describe it. Preaching was clearly a neglected art among the Catholic clergy of Dublin. And in an age of enlightened scepticism, such as the eight-

---

[12]   Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 59-68.

[13]   DDA, TP, J.T. Troy, "Report on the ... diocese," 1802; Ibid., Troy-Murray Papers (hereafter TMP), J.T.Troy, "Report on the State of the Diocese," August 20,1816; Ibid., Dominick, Archbishop of Myra to Troy, Rome, June 10, 1804; Ibid., "Ex Audientia," October 4, 1814; Ibid., James Power of Waterford (1804-1817) to Moylan, Waterford, December 19, 1804; RPA, Irlanda 18: p. 310, Troy to Propaganda, November 2, 1805; Census 1861, Pt IV, pp. 38-41; Connolly, "Religion and History," pp. 70-1; Miller, "Irish Catholicism," pp. 81-98.

eenth century, such pie-in-the-sky theology was often the object of merciless satire, especially among the poor.[14]

Lack of interest in church attendance was also reflected in the general lack of influence that the Irish clergy had over their laity long before 1823. A marked example was the Irish Catholic Committee. Since its founding in the middle of the eighteenth century the Committee had been composed of a handful of the minority Catholic nobility and landed gentry as well as a few professionals. The Committee had pleaded the Catholic cause before the Irish parliament, largely by means of humble petitioning, essentially begging it to remove the penal legislation of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that denied Irish Catholics the full protection of the law as well as participation in the political life of the country. For Irish Catholics, the penal laws made land tenure and ownership very difficult or impossible, prompting many Catholic gentry to convert to the Established Church and thus protect their inheritance. These laws also excluded Catholic bishops from entering Ireland to ordain priests with the objective of promoting the decline and final disappearance of the lower clergy. Except for the early years of the eighteenth century, such prohibitions were officially ignored by the Protestant rulers of Ireland. A major reason for this was the paradoxical lack of importance most Catholics placed upon the formal practice of their faith, as well as the general and corresponding lack of influence that their clergy had over them. Therefore, the laws banning the general operations of the church remained a dead letter throughout most of the penal period.[15]

Until Troy, no Catholic clergyman, much less a bishop, had ever been an official member of the Committee. Such revealed the tensions that had long existed between most of the Irish bishops and the Committee. It reflected the fact that most bishops feared that the Committee was determined to compromise them in church matters, whereas the Committee was convinced that their bishops, most of whom still viewed the penal laws as a

---

[14]   DDA, TP, J.T. Troy, Sermon on the Creed, November 20, 1791. There area number of other extant Troy sermons on a variety of subjects such as original sin and Christ's passion, the latter containing several anti-Semitic statements; Desmond Keenan, *The Catholic Church in Nineteenth Century Ireland: A Sociological Study*, Macmillan, 1983 (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan), pp. 19-22; J.C. Messenger, *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), pp. 90-1; Emmet Larkin, "Church and State in Ireland in the Nineteenth Century," *Church History* 21 (September 1962) p. 299; W. J. Fitzpatrick, *Life, Times and Correspondence of the Right Reverend Dr Doyle, Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin*, 2nd ed (Dublin: J. Duffy, 1880), 1: p. 109; William Meagher, *Notices of the Life and Character. .. of His Grace, the Most Reverend Dr Daniel Murray, Late Archbishop of Dublin* (Dublin: G. Bellew, 1853), 2: pp. 33-4.

[15]   Sean J. Connolly, *Religion and Society in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1987), passim.

form of "noble" suffering for their faith, were not really committed to Catholic relief. Such ill feelings and suspicions reached a new high in 1774 when the Irish parliament, in a reflection of its growing, though still feeble, spirit of toleration, proposed an oath allowing Catholics to qualify their allegiance in exchange for eventually being granted full citizenship. Among other things, the oath required Catholics to deny the papacy's "temporal or civil jurisdiction, power, superiority or pre-eminence directly or indirectly within" Ireland. In Munster, the bishops supported the oath taking their lead from their metropolitan, Dr. James Butler H of Cashel (1774-1791) who was a firm Gallican.

In the rest of Ireland, however, the hierarchy remained staunchly nonjuring. This was especially true of Troy's predecessor in Dublin, Archbishop John Carpenter (1770-1786) who had never associated with the Committee. Dr. Thomas Burke, who preceded Troy as bishop of Ossory (1759-1776), shared Carpenter's feelings regarding the Committee and the 1774 oath. In fact, Burke considered swearing allegiance to a heterodox king the "greatest imaginable absurdity."

When Troy succeeded Burke in Ossory (1776-1786), he soon concluded with most of his already juring priests that the attitude of Carpenter and Burke belonged to an earlier and less tolerant age. It was an opinion that endeared Troy to the Committee which he unofficially joined while still in Ossory. On the other hand, Troy's decision alienated him from Carpenter as well as the other bishops of Leinster. However, by 1779 the political climate changed after the first Catholic relief act of 1778 which required the oath. Fearful of completely alienating themselves from the Committee and Catholic lay leadership, the most hardened episcopal nonjurors such as Archbishop Carpenter grudgingly did what they said they would never do: they swore allegiance to George III. Troy did the same, although he did so out of conviction and not fear.[16]

Throughout most of its history before the French Revolution, the Committee reflected its aristocratic and landed class origins. However, by 1790, increasingly influenced by events in France, it began to acquire new members, mainly from the merchant class, a number of whom were not only more democratic and liberal, but even radical in their political outlook. In an effort to balance this new element, and because of his determination to influence its deliberations, Troy had officially joined the Committee in 1790, the first bishop to do so. In that year he had successfully counselled them against adopting an oath of loyalty to the crown based on one recently

---

[16] Vincent J. McNally, *Reform, Revolution and Reaction: Archbishop John Thomas Troy and the Catholic Church in Ireland, 1787-1817* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995) pp. 1-37.

accepted by the English Catholic Committee. The oath ignored even the possibility of papal infallibility. It totally denied the pope's right to interfere in any way in how Catholics exercised their consciences or their duties as citizens. In arguing his case for the Irish Committee's rejection of the English Catholic oath, Troy noted that while the Catholic laity were competent in "temporal and political concerns," the Irish bishops alone had the right to speak on points of "religious doctrine."[17]

Such clerical leverage over their laity was not only new but also very short-lived. Influenced by events on the Continent, throughout 1791 and 1792 Troy watched as the Catholic Committee became increasingly radical in its demands upon the government. In 1791, fearing the growing union between the Committee and the militant and democratic United Irishmen, sixty-seven old guard members of the Committee, all aristocrats or landed gentry, and Troy, still its only bishop, signed an address of loyalty to the government. It left all future Catholic relief "to the wisdom and discretion of the legislature."[18] The reaction of the rest of the Committee was immediate and overwhelmingly negative. Some advised Troy to reform his thinking and support national freedom if he ever expected his Church to have any influence in Ireland. Other Irish Catholics, who saw little or no value in organized religion, dismissed Troy and the Catholic Church. Censure and obloquy also poured into Dublin from 'almost all the counties and principal towns in the kingdom," accusing the signers of "enmity to the [Irish] people" as well as "cowardice and neglect in forwarding ... [Irish Catholic] interests." As for the signers' democratic opponents, they were applauded as champions of the Catholic people of Ireland.[19]

17   R. Dudley Edwards, "The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee 1773-1792." *Archivium Hibernicum* 9 (1942) p. 114; DDA, TP, Troy to the "Respectable Members of the [Irish] Catholic Committee," Dublin, February 13, 1790; Durham, Ushaw College Archives (hereafter DUCA), Troy to unidentified clergymen, possibly Joseph Wilkes, a Benedictine priest and a leading member of the English Catholic Committee, March 10, 1790; Bernard Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival in England 1781-1803*. (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), 1: p. 126 et seq., 294, 333-34; RPA, "Lettere della Sacra Congregazione" (hereafter Lettere) vol. 258: fol. 622, Antonelli to Troy, Rome, September 25, 1790.

18   Patrick Rogers, *The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation*, 1778-1793 (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1934), pp. 213-17; Lecky, *Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 3: p. 10; Francis Plowden, *Historical Review of the State of Ireland* (Philadelphia: McLaughlin & Graves, 1805-06), 3: 156-61; Edwards, "The Minute Book," pp. 139-40, 144; "Address to ... Westmoreland," December 29, 1791, *Ross's Dublin Public Register of Freeman's Journal* 30, no. 62; DDA, Delany Letter Book (hereafter DLB), Caulfield to Troy, Ross, November 18, 1791.

19   DDA, DLB, Troy to Moylan, Dublin, December 23, 1791; Ibid., Delany to Troy, Tullow, December 30, 1791; Ibid., TP, Caulfield to Troy, Ross, December 31, 1791; Ibid., Troy to Francis Plowden, Dublin, January 10, 1803; Ibid., Troy to Francis Plowden, Dublin, March 22, 1804; William James McNeven, *Pieces of Irish History*,

Troy's response was an almost desperate effort to regain lay Catholic support. In 1791 the Irish Catholic Committee, determined to be one with some of the most radical critics of the old regime, singled out papal infallibility as a hated symbol of that system. In a published declaration they not only rejected the theological possibility of such a tradition, but implied that it was both a "sinful" and "immoral" notion.[20] When the Committee asked Troy to approve their radical declaration, he did so. In his desire to placate, he had totally reversed his position from the previous year. Although he assured his superiors in Rome that he had only approved the declaration as a "theologian" and not as a bishop, he could hardly deny his predicament. As for the Catholic laity and the lower clergy, the anti-papal declaration gained widespread support in Dublin and throughout the country, and demonstrated in a most graphic manner the low regard many, if not most Catholics, including the clergy, had for their institution, especially its hierarchy. At the same time, there were numerous reports during the spring and summer of 1792 of growing incidents of anticlericalism in many parts of the country, especially against the bishops.[21]

About this time Edmund Burke observed the obvious regarding the Irish Catholic clergy when he noted: "though not wholly without influence, they have rather less than any other clergy I know." The social and political radicalism of the period merely served to highlight what had long been a fact: the minimal importance of organized Catholicism in Ireland. It was caused certainly in part from the lack of a Catholic aristocracy that would at least have given lip service to its importance. Yet even more it seems to have been due, not to any lack of belief in the spiritual or supernatural, but rather an irreverence for formal religion and its clergy whose ceremonies, especially marriage and confession, had for generations been "mocked and parodied" by the masses of Ireland's people. Both middle class and peasantry, if they showed any interest at all, preferred such traditional pieties as holy wells and wakes to organized worship. No doubt such popular religious practices as

(New York: Bernard Dornin, 1807), p. 21.

[20]   RPA, Scritture Originali...Congregazione Generali (hereafter SOCG) vol. 889, fols. 23, 26, 36; O'Conor to Antonelli, August 13, 1791; September 19, 1791; October 17, 1791; Ibid., Lettere 260: p. 641, Antonelli to O'Conor, Rome, December 24, 1791; RPA, Fondo di Vienna (hereafter Fondo) O'Conor to Antonelli, "Belenegare," March 17, 1792; Ward, *Catholic Revival*, 1: p. 140; Edwards, "The Minute Book," pp. 157-58; Marianne Elliott, "The Origins and Transformation of Early Irish Republicanism," *International Review of Social History* 23 (1978) pp. 405-28.

[21]   DDA TP, Troy to Papal Nuncio at Brussels, Dublin, April 9, 1792; Ibid., DLB, Caulfield to Troy, Wexford, March 24, 1792; Ibid., Lanigan to Troy, April 12, 1792; Ibid., Caulfield to Troy, Wexford, March 31, 1792.

well as anticlericalism were further reinforced by the clergy's frequent and vain condemnations in an attempt to end such popular pieties.

The weakness of clerical influence was evident again in 1793 when Irish Catholics gained their greatest measure of relief before 1829. The Irish Catholic Committee accused Archbishop Troy of embarrassing their cause by signing his name to the petition for relief with his title: "Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin." The Committee immediately "demanded" that he prefix his title with "titular." Otherwise they feared the bill might be overturned in the Irish Lords. Though hurt and insulted by the laity's requirement, Troy dared not openly express his feelings to them for fear of their removal of his name from the petition. He finally signed: "John Thomas Troy, D.D., for himself and the Roman Catholic clergy of Ireland." When the oath attached to the 1793 relief act included the demand that Irish Catholics foreswear papal infallibility, Troy not only accepted the inclusion, but even defended the "prudence" of the inclusion in a letter to the Vatican.[22]

In an attempt to take revenge for what he considered was the "scandalous ignorance ... and ...irreligion" of the Committee's radicals or "democrats," Troy published his lengthiest and most widely known pastoral, *Duties of Christian Citizens.* Appearing in print just before the Lords began to debate the passage of the 1793 relief act, Troy clearly intended *Duties* to embarrass the supporters of the act and even defeat it. For though the act was already guaranteed passage since Whitehall demanded it, Troy would have been ignorant of that fact. Needless to say, avowed enemies of the Catholic cause in the Lords, such as the Earl of Clare, were delighted with *Duties,* for it was a bold declaration of the Roman Catholic church's spiritual supremacy and orthodoxy over all other churches. As such Clare used Troy's pastoral as a major example of why it was essential to oppose the further opening of the constitution to Irish Catholics. The Catholic laity, radical and otherwise, expressed their disapproval, even disgust over *Duties,* and wondered why Troy had supplied their sworn enemies with a "weapon of acrimony" at such a delicate political juncture. Only his fellow bishops in Ireland, all of whom were too frightened to express their open anger towards their laity, privately applauded Troy for his courage and determination in publishing *Duties.*

---

[22] Edmund Burke, *Correspondence ...1744..1797,* ed. Charles Fitzwilliam, (London: F. & J. Rivington, 1844), 4:12, Burke to Grenville, September 19, 1792. Connolly, *Priests and People*, pp. 74-77, 148-65; Cashel Diocesan Archives (hereafter CDA), Bray Papers (hereafter BP), February 19, 1793; Edmund Curtis and R.B. McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, (London: Methuen, 1943), pp. 200-1; CDA, BP, Teaghan to Bray, Killarney, March 4, 1793; Ibid., Troy to Bray, Dublin, March 16, 1793; DDA, TP, Troy to Catholic Committee, Dublin February 13, 1790; RPA, "Acts Sacra Congregationis" (hereafter Acta) 164: pp. 475-506v, General Congregation, June 16, 1794; Ibid., Scritture riferite nei Congressi-Anglia (hereafter Anglia) 5: 577, Troy to Antonelli, Dublin, February 28, 1795.

While as a "pastoral," *Duties* was a counterproductive failure and made Troy's work as a bishop that much more difficult, it was clearly a deliberate effort to reveal his frustration and indignation, and demonstrated how far he was prepared to go to make those feelings public, even if they prompted the defeat of further Catholic relief.[23]

The legal establishment of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth in 1795, one of Troy's greatest achievements, again underscored the significant weakness of organized Irish Catholicism over the minds of its people. It was the closing of the Irish colleges in France, a direct result of the French Revolution, that caused the opening of Maynooth. The former colleges had been open to both the clergy and laity and depended for their survival upon the generosity of the Irish laity, especially upon those who attended them. Yet Maynooth was to be limited to candidates for the priesthood. At first the bishops, with Troy in the lead, hoped to gain lay support for their project, and thus also admit lay students. But the Irish laity, especially the leaders on the Catholic Committee, had no interest in giving their bishops any real authority over future educational schemes. They merely asked for the hierarchy's approbation of the Committee's plan which, similar to the now largely defunct Continental system, would have educated the laity and clergy together, but would have been open as well to non-Catholics. Unwilling to concur, Troy declined to approve the plan. The Committee's Secretary,

---

[23]   *Parliamentary Register*, 13: pp. 94-135, 310, 317, 324; Lecky, *History of Ireland*, 3: pp. 142-3; John Thomas Troy, *Duties of Christian Citizens addressed to the Roman Catholics of the Archdiocese of Dublin* (Dublin: P. Wogan 1793) p. 103; Cashel Diocesan Archives, (hereafter CDA) Bray Papers, (hereafter BP) Anthony Thompson, Catholic Committee Member to Bray, Dublin, February 28, 1793; DDA, TP, Bray to Troy, Thurles, April 2, 1793; Ibid., Caulfield to Troy, Wexford, 23 March 1793; Ibid., O'Reilly to Troy, Drogheda, March 18, 1793; Ibid., James O'Donel, vicar apostolic of Newfoundland, St John's, December 27, 1793; Ibid., John Carroll, bishop of Baltimore, July 12, 1973; CDA, BP, Valentine Bodkin to Bray, Rome, January 11, 1793; Ibid., Troy to Bray, March 26,1793; Ibid., Troy to Bray, April 9, 1793. Daire Keogh, "Archbishop Troy, the Catholic Church and Irish Radicalism: 1791-3" in *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion*, David Dickson (Dublin: The Lilliput Press 1993) pp. 132-34. Keogh indicates that *Duties* was produced to assist the passage of the 1793 relief act and that Troy was unaware that Catholic lay reaction would be so negative. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that Troy was well aware of how the Catholic democrats would react, and given the recent public humiliations he had suffered at their hands, Troy was prepared to embarrass them even if this meant that *Duties* might contribute to the defeat of the relief act, for Troy had no knowledge that Whitehall had demanded its passage. See: McNally, *Troy and the Catholic Church in Ireland*, chapter 3 which deals specifically with *Duties*.

Theobald Wolfe Tone condemned Troy and his supporters and declared: "Damn them! Ignorant bigots!"[24]

Troy realized that his only hope for the adoption of his clerical education scheme now lay with the Dublin government. Initially Dublin Castle provided Troy's college project with no more than feigned interest and benign neglect. However, by 1795 Whitehall had removed Viceroy Fitzwilliam because of his enthusiastic support for complete Catholic emancipation. Fitzwilliam's replacement was Lord Camden who was prepared to champion and fund Troy's episcopally controlled college to train priests. It was an arrangement which the leading Catholic laity correctly judged a "sop" by the government in place of what Whitehall and Camden were determined to resist: complete Catholic emancipation. The great Irish Protestant MP and champion of Catholic emancipation, Henry Grattan rightly condemned the Maynooth "Royal" College Bill of 1795 as a "using [of] the Catholic clergy ... to pervert religion into an instrument against liberty." As for the leading Catholic laity, by 1795 their disdain towards their clergy, especially the Irish hierarchy, had reached a new low.[25]

After the horrors of the Irish Rebellion of 1798, anything that even smacked of radicalism was under a cloud in Ireland. The movement to gain full emancipation was set back for years until the advent of a new generation of lay leadership under the genius of Daniel O'Connell. Beginning in 1808, and using lay opposition to a royal veto over episcopal nominations as well as a promised government pension for the Catholic clergy, O'Connell began developing his plan for a national movement to employ the Catholic church

[24] Francis Plowden, *Historical Review of the State of Ireland* (Philadelphia: McLaughlin & Graves, 1805-06) 4: p. 55; CDA, BP, Troy to Bray, Dublin, March 16,1793; Ibid., Troy to Bray, Dublin, May 7, 1793; Ibid., Troy to Bray, Dublin, April 27, 1793; McNeven, Pieces, pp. 72-3; Killarney Diocesan Archives (hereafter KDA) Renehan Transcripts (hereafter RT), Bray to Moylan, Tipperary, May 2, 1793; Theobald Wolfe Tone, *Life ...Written by Himself and Continued by His Son with his Political Writings and Fragments of his Diary*, Edited by his son, William T.W. Tone (Washington, D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1826), 1: p. 197, see Ibid. 1: pp. 173, 196, 198.

[25] John Beresford, *The Correspondence of... Edited by William Beresford*, (London: Woodfall & Kinder, 1854), 2: p. 73; CDA, BP, Bray to Egan, April 26, 1795 which includes copy: Troy to Bray, Dublin, April 25, 1795; DDA, TP, Kilwarden to Cornwallis, January 2, 1802 transcript of original formerly in Dublin Public Record Office and destroyed in 1922; Patrick Duigenan, *A Fair Representation of the Present Political State of Ireland* (Dublin 1800) pp. 216-17; *Dublin Journal* May 2, 1795; *Parliamentary Register. .. of the House of Commons of Ireland 1781-1797* (Dublin: J. Moore, 1782-1801), 15: pp. 201-03; *A Report of the Debate in the House of Commons of Ireland on the Bill Presented by. ..Grattan for Further Relief of His Majesty's Popish or Roman Catholic Subjects* (Dublin, 1795), p. 107; McNeven, *Pieces*,p. 63.

and its clergy as *the* major element in gaining national cohesion. While outwardly cordial, Troy's relationship with O'Connell was always one of mutual distrust. However a new generation of bishops, guided by the next archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray (1823-1852), always a firm O'Connell supporter, enthusiastically accepted O'Connell's invitation with revolutionary consequences for the Catholic church in Ireland.[26]

Church buildings were the first, major and very visible sign of this change. Before 1823 Catholic Dublin was church poor, and, due mainly to meagre attendance and lack of funds, the archdiocese was barely able to support the chapels that then existed. As seen, a glaring example of the problem was in the only church built during the earlier period, the pro-cathedral, which, though the planning was begun in 1803, remained in debt until after 1823. However, after 1823 Dublin rapidly became church rich. In fact the Catholic churches (or "chapels" as they were popularly known) built in Dublin during the time of Archbishop Murray were described as "among the finest architectural buildings anywhere in the British Isles." All of, what might be called the penal law chapels on the back streets of the city were rapidly replaced with their new namesakes at very prominent locations, costing a formerly undreamt of sum of almost £150,000! One contemporary provided as reason for this very marked change, the "better fortunes" of the Catholic laity. Actually, the "better fortunes" were more accurately not monetary, but rather national and political. The major beneficiary of this development was the institutional church, given the role in 1823, principally by Daniel O'Connell, of providing the most visible sign of a new sense of national identity.[27]

Church buildings translated into more people and more money, but most important of all, far more enthusiasm for a church that was increasingly viewed by the formerly indifferent Catholic laity as the greatest symbol of the new Irish nation. A quote from the *Irish Catholic Directory* of 1837 spells out what, in comparison to the church's situation only a few years before, could only be described as a political resurrection:

---

[26] Connolly, *Religion and Society*, p. 13; Oliver MacDonagh, "The Politicization of the Irish Bishops 1800-1850," *The Historical Journal* 18 (1975), p. 53; CDA, BP, McCarthy to Bray, November 5, 1808; Ibid., O'Shaughnessey to Bray, Newmarket-on-Furgus, November 9, 1808; Ibid., Power to Bray, November 4, 1808; Ibid., Power to Bray, December 15, 1808; Maurice R. O'Connell, *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell* (Shannon & Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission 1972-1980) documents: pp. 632, 634-35, 713, 762, 1023.

[27] *Desmond J. Keenan, The* Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), pp. 119-121. William Meagher, *Notices on the Life and Character. .. of the His Grace, the Most Reverend Dr Daniel Murray, Late Archbishop of Dublin* (Dublin: G. Bellew, 1853), 1: p. 95

Catholicity, pure and undefiled, is everyday advancing in Ireland. Although the people are still persecuted and impoverished by men who give them nothing in return, yet new churches are erecting in every diocese .... Our venerable prelates have taken the lead in promulgating admirable ecclesiastical statutes.... In every diocese the clergy of the respective districts have conferences at stated periods. An annual retreat of the clergy headed by their respective superior is held for one week.

Thus a spirit of enlightened piety is promoted amongst the laity. The divine mysteries are more frequently administered than in past days of proscription. Sermons and exhortations are more common: – abuses at wakes, fairs and funerals are diminished: parochial libraries are on the increase: confraternities and religious sodalities in almost every parish unite and combine in many pious exercises.

Education is on the increase: Catholic colleges, seminaries, academies, and schools... are multiplied. The Sabbath is in general well observed... suppressing the horrid crime of drunkenness.

Through the medium of the Catholic Society of Ireland and the Catholic Book Society... periodical Catholic literature, at present so shamefully deficient, can be placed in a flourishing condition.[28]

These passages provide a very early description of the new relationship between Catholicism and nationalism in Ireland. With its reference to Irish Catholics as "still persecuted and impoverished by men who give them nothing in return," specifically the largely Protestant Irish landlord class, the *Irish Catholic Directory* was siding, something it had never done before, with the masses of the Irish peasantry, and thus officially identifying the Catholic church with a major nationalist cause of the nineteenth century, land reform. Again, in noting the recent return to public worship by the same Catholic masses as opposed to the "past days of proscription," there emerged the historic fantasy of a penally persecuted church similar to the nationalist overstatement of the persecuted Irish nation.

"Education," especially after the establishment of the national school system in 1831, was also to form a sort of "holy" bond between the Catholic Church and the nation. The "seminaries ...and schools" became naturally united in their objectives. The latter's "holiest" task being to supply the former. To join the Church, especially to enter the priesthood, was to enlist in a disciplined and dedicated religious army of the highest order. In its essence, the Catholic priesthood expressed much of the aspirations of the new Ireland. Clergy, bishops as well as priests, became implicit nationalist politicians. In fact, one might suspect many priests demonstrated far more dedication to the calling of nationalism than to the preaching of the gospel.

---

[28] *Irish Catholic Directory* (Dublin: Gills, 1837) pp. 79-81.

Not surprisingly, with such a mentality, there was an enormous increase in vocations to the religious life and priesthood, now viewed as a sort of nationalist calling. These religious soon provided legions to staff schools and hospitals to address the needs of all classes of Catholics, including the formerly neglected poor, and especially inculcated in their charges Irish nationalism as a new form of Catholicism. Like God and country, Jesus became an Irish nationalist, and Ireland's quest for national freedom became not only "just," but also "holy."[29] Literature was now connected with "Catholic," and by implication, the Catholic nation, and thus the only literature a "good" citizen of Catholic Ireland would ever read; spurning any literature that differed from the new "reality." Such nationalistic jingoism was both laying the foundation and indicating the new model and direction of Irish Catholicism less than a generation after most of the Irish people had largely ignored the earlier version.

Nowhere is this change more obvious than in the contrast between Archbishop Troy and his successor, Archbishop Murray. To give one very telling example, Troy once conducted a solemn *Te Deum* to please the Irish government. The opportunity came in 1789. After careful consultation with Dublin Castle, Troy conducted a solemn *Te Deum* celebrating George III's recovery from his first, supposed bout of mental illness in 1788. Whereas Troy had been a firm champion of the Union, Murray, under the influence of O'Connell, was a firm repealer. In 1844, after agitating for repeal, O'Connell was jailed for three months. Upon O'Connell's release, Murray, in defiance of the same Irish government, celebrated the occasion with a solemn *Te Deum.* While the two incidents were separated by less than two generations, they represented light years of difference in the political realm.[30]

The Roman Catholic Church and Irish Nationalism

Over the last 150 years Irish nationalism, more than any other single modern factor, has turned Ireland into a Catholic confessional state providing many with the illusion of clerical control. If modern nationalism had its beginnings with the French Revolution of 1789, this paper has attempted to show that both Irish nationalism and modern Irish Catholicism had their joint beginnings in 1823 when Daniel O'Connell initiated the Catholic Association and implicitly established its dual aims of Catholic emancipation and repeal of the legislative Union of 1801 between Britain

---

[29]   McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, p. 243. Quotation from "Report on the Committee appointed by the Catholic Association, 1824."

[30]   McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, p. 243. Quotation from "Report on the Committee appointed by the Catholic Association, 1824."

and Ireland. The Catholic clergy's decision, both bishops and priests, to support O'Connell's program was a momentous one. By it the church would shortly became the major conduit for the Association's operations. Through use of the parochial system, the priest became a major political spokesperson for the Association as well as the local collector of the "Catholic Rent," a penny a month contribution which soon provided a vast income to the Association. Henceforward the church would be linked to the rising aspirations of the Irish nation. "Catholic" and "Irish" would became synonymous in Irish society, and they would remain essentially so until at least the 1960s and 1970s.