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Edmund Rice (1762-1844) and the Genesis of a
Religious Congregation.

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A dissertation submitted to the University of Glasgow in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Theology (Research).

Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

Supervisor: Professor Ian P. Hazlett.

August 2007

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Edmund Rice 1762-1844

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the assistance, encouragement and direction given to me by many individuals, and the facilities and expertise made available to me in the course of my study of 'Edmund Rice (1762-1844) and the Genesis of a Religious Congregation'.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to my supervisor Professor Ian P. Hazlett. His enthusiasm for the subject, his familiarity with the theological and historical context and his perceptive comments provided me with invaluable guidance and support. I was fortunate, too, that through his support I received financial assistance from the Miller Fund which allowed me to make a research visit to the archives of the Christian Brothers in Rome.

It is essential, too, that I acknowledge the staff of the various libraries and archival repositories where I have worked: the University of Glasgow, the Mitchell Library Glasgow, the National Library of Ireland, the library of the Royal Irish Academy, the Dublin Diocesan Archive, the Pontifical Irish College, Rome, and the Cregan Library, St Patrick's College, Dublin. Above all, I owe a debt of gratitude to the archivists of the Christian Brothers; Karen Johnston in Dublin and Br Neville Thornton in Rome. Especial thanks must go to Br Greg Wall for his constant support and assistance. I owe a special debt to friends and colleagues who have read and commented on earlier drafts. These include: Br Donal Blake, Dr Eugene Broderick, Paul Caffrey, Professor John Coolahan, Professor Tom Dunne, Br Edmund Garvey, Dr James Kelly, Br Martin Kenneally, Dr Marian Lyons, Professor Denis

McLaughlin, Dr Mary Shine Thompson, Professor Nigel Yates and to Dr Matthew Stout for his cartography.

My greatest debt, of course, is to Katie Keogh for all her support and assistance.

Abstract

This thesis examines the genesis of the Irish Christian Brothers. It seeks to place them in their historical context and to understand them as they understood themselves.

The Brothers emerged at a dynamic period in the history of the Irish Church. The last quarter of the eighteenth-century had brought a relaxation in the penal laws which allowed the Catholic church to emerge from the 'catacombs', thus facilitating its transition from a mission to a church.

This thesis charts the role of the Brothers in that context; not simply as agents of change, but as individuals effected by the spirit of the age. It aims, also, to illustrate the complexity of the penal era. Long understood as a century of unrelenting and uniform persecution, the Catholic experience in the period (1691-1829) is now represented as one of 'endurance and emergence' in which Catholics adapted creatively to the challenges and opportunities of the age. It will demonstrate the character of eighteenth-century Irish Catholicism and the difficulties which reform minded prelates faced in their attempts to introduce the practices and devotions associated with the Council of Trent.

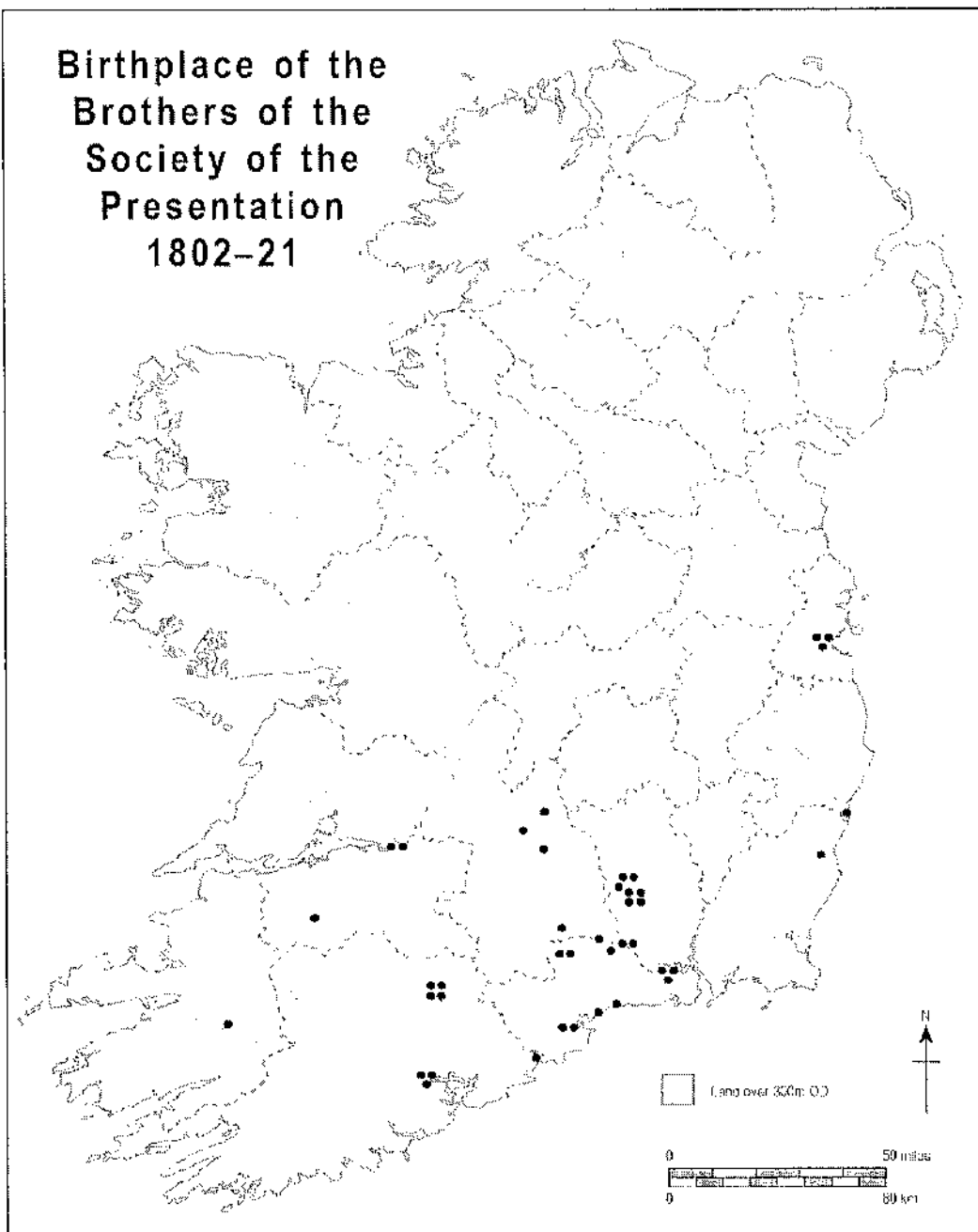
It demonstrates, too, the extent to which Rice's two congregations were animated by the piety and theology of early-modern Catholicism. This spirituality was embodied in the Rules and Constitutions of the congregations and the Brothers strove to transform Irish society in that spirit. The Brothers' ultimate aim was not simply the provision of education, but a special kind of Catholic education. They attempted to evangelise the un-churched urban poor and to introduce them to the new devotions of the age.

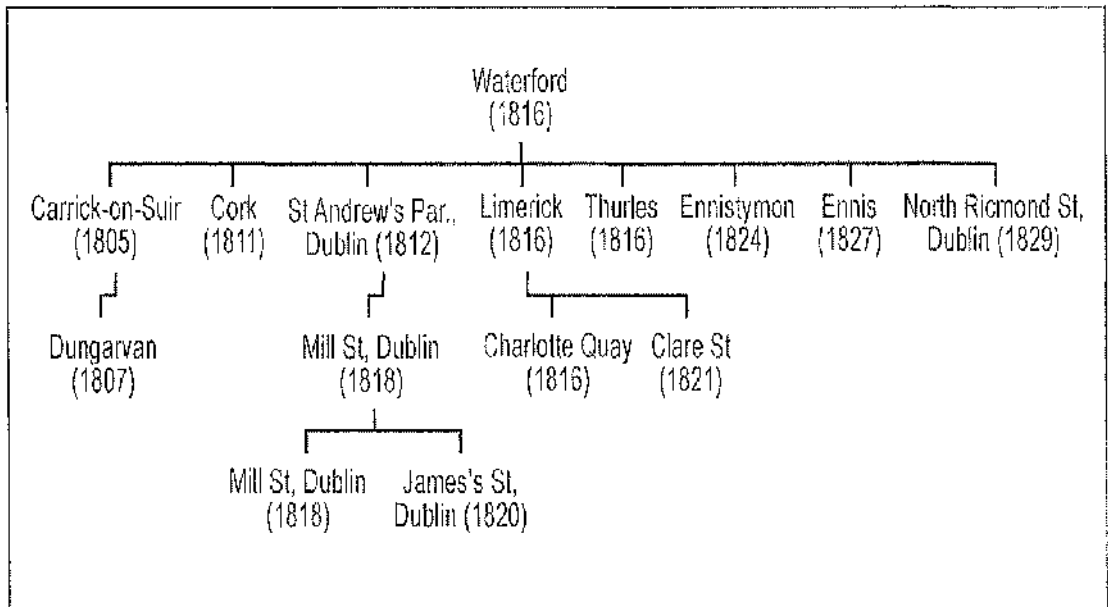
In so doing they contributed greatly to the confident and assertive character of nineteenth-century Irish Catholicism.

Abbreviations.

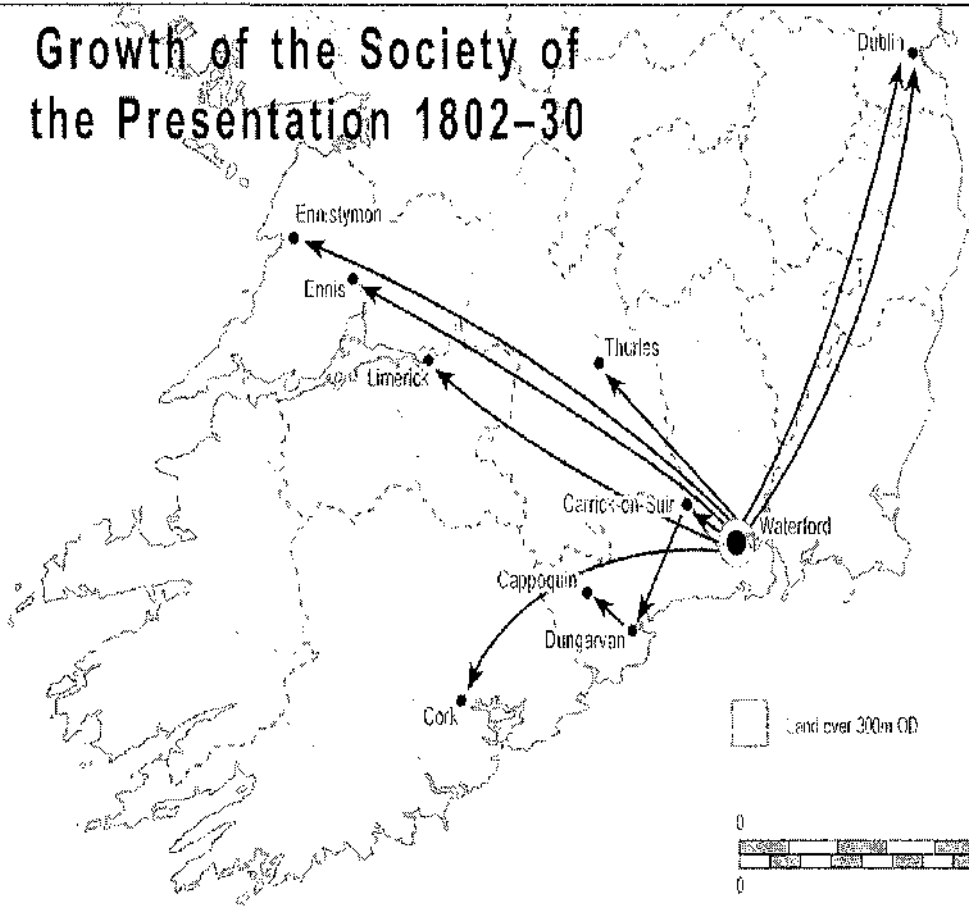
<u>Arch. Hib.</u>	<u>Archivum Hibernicum.</u>
CBER	<u>Christian Brothers Education Record.</u>
CBGA	Christian Brothers General Archive, Rome.
CDA	Cashel Diocesan Archive.
<u>Collect. Hib.</u>	<u>Collectanea Hibernica.</u>
DDA	Dublin Diocesan Archive.
<u>IHS</u>	<u>Irish Historical Studies.</u>
ICAR	Pontifical Irish College Archive, Rome.
<u>IER</u>	<u>Irish Ecclesiastical Record.</u>
<u>ITQ</u>	<u>Irish Theological Quarterly.</u>
<u>Positio</u>	<u>Cause of Canonisation ... of Edmund Ignatius Rice ...</u> <u>Positio super virtutibus</u> (Rome, 1988).

**Birthplace of the
Brothers of the
Society of the
Presentation
1802-21**





Growth of the Society of the Presentation 1802-30



INTRODUCTION

The life of Edmund Rice (1762-1844) spanned a crucial era, from the dawn of Catholic Emancipation to the eve of the Great Famine (1845-50). These were vital years in the formation of Irish Catholic consciousness, marking the emergence from the Penal era and the establishment of the modern Church. In all these matters, Rice and the two religious congregations which he founded made a significant contribution, fostering confidence and helping create a literate modern society.

No religious congregation in Ireland has attracted more attention than the Christian Brothers. Yet for all that has been written, we lack a satisfactory account of their origins and founding character. And even though Rice has been the subject of at least seven biographies, the details of his life and motivation remain vague.¹ As a consequence, lay commentators have focussed upon the state-building role of the Brothers, and their commitment to 'Faith and Fatherland', while paying scant attention to their religious inspiration and ecclesiastical priorities.² Amongst the Christian Brothers, too, there has been a tendency to examine the foundation of their order with little reference to the historic context or the social environment from which it emerged. The result has been studies which are technically accurate, but are imbalanced and tend towards hagiography rather than history.

¹ D. Blake, A Man for our times: a short life of Edmund Rice (Dublin, 1994); J. D. Fitzpatrick, Edmund Rice (Dublin, 1945); D. Keogh, Edmund Rice, 1762-1844 (Dublin, 1996); [M. McCarthy,], A Christian Brother, Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers (Dublin, 1926); D. McLaughlin, The Price of Freedom: the education charism of Edmund Rice (Brisbane, 2007); M.C. Normoyle, A Tree is Planted: the life of Edmund Rice (Dublin, 1976); N. Ó Gadhra, Éamann Iognáid Rís 1762-1844 (Dublin, 1977); O'Toole, A. L., A Spiritual Profile of Edmund Rice, 2 vols (Bristol, 1984).

² B.M. Coldroy, Faith and Fatherland: The Christian Brothers and the development of Irish Nationalism, 1838-1921 (Dublin, 1988).

It must, however, be acknowledged that Edmund Rice is a difficult subject for a biographer. The absence of a diary, memoirs, or a contemporary biographer, makes him an elusive subject and our images of the man's personality are restricted to mere glimpses. His contemporaries, for instance, appear to have been unaware of the most basic details about his early life including his short marriage and the identity of his wife. His archive, too, is extremely limited and is essentially of a business nature with little by way of personal comment or reflection. Rice's earliest extant letter, for instance, is dated from 1810, eight years after he founded his Brotherhood.³ This is an enormously significant letter, in so far as it contains a précis of his school system. Yet there are no letters in Rice's archive which could be compared to the fulsome correspondence of Nano Nagle, his contemporary and inspiration, who has left for posterity a window into her spirituality and the workings of her soul.⁴

In an effort to compensate for this lacuna, the Christian Brothers' General Chapter of 1910, which voted to promote the cause of their founder for canonisation, launched an ambitious oral history project which aimed to collect recollections and memoirs of Edmund Rice.⁵ The fruits of this project have influenced subsequent biographies, from Br McCarthy's monumental study (1926) up to and including Denis McLaughlin's most recent assessment of Edmund Rice's educational charism.⁶ As a historical source, however, many of these Memories are of limited value. Neither can the collection properly be described as 'folklore', since the project was conceived with an obvious agenda, the promotion of the canonisation of the Founder, or more precisely, the promotion of the Congregation of Christian Brothers

³ Edmund Rice to Thomas Bray, 9 May 1810, Cashel Diocesan Archive.

⁴ T.J. Walsh, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters* (Dublin, 1959).

⁵ General Chapter Minutes (1910), CBGA, Rome; M.C. Normoyle (ed.), Memories of Edmund Rice (Dublin, 1979).

⁶ [M. McCarthy,], *A Christian Brother, Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers* (Dublin, 1926); D. McLaughlin, The Price of Freedom; the education charism of Edmund Rice (Brisbane, 2007).

itself. In this sense, many provide a twentieth-century perspective on Edmund Rice, which describes not so much his heroic virtue, but rather the Catholic values of Independent Ireland.⁷

There are, of course, other factors which have frustrated attempts to interpret the world of Edmund Rice and the first Brothers. Not least of these are the difficulties associated with the historiography of eighteenth-century Ireland, which has tended to exaggerate the nature and duration of the penal laws.⁸ Within this context, histories of the Christian Brothers have been written in accordance with the traditional Catholic, and nationalist, interpretation of the laws which emphasised the elements of the popery code which applied to the practice of religion, but avoided the essential security considerations which inspired the laws. As a consequence, the penal era (1691-1829) is presented as an age of unrelenting persecution in which Catholics suffered uniformly under an alien government intent on eliminating the faith of their fathers. Such perspectives have distorted the complex realities of eighteenth-century Ireland and the real significance of Edmund Rice and his contemporary religious reformers.

This thesis aims to address these difficulties. In the first instance, it seeks to employ the fruits of recent scholarship to present a nuanced interpretation of the penal age, which demonstrates not merely the persecutions of the period, but the creative ways in which the Catholic community responded to the challenge of religious practice. This will be investigated in a case study of the Rices of Callan in County Kilkenny and the difficulties which the church encountered in the age of 'endurance and emergence'.⁹ It will illustrate the striking degree to which the church emerged from the 'catacombs' in Rice's lifetime, decades before the so-called 'Devotional

⁷ See P. Burke, 'How to become a Counter-Reformation Saint', in D.M. Luebke (ed.), *The Counter Reformation* (Oxford, 1999), pp 129-42.

⁸ T. Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question 1690-1830* (Dublin, 1992).

⁹ T. Power and K. Whelan (eds), *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1990).

Revolution', and the extent to which that revival was a consequence of the reforming zeal of the Brothers and their peers.¹⁰

In terms of the education debate, too, the thesis seeks to demonstrate the realities of educational provision in penal Ireland, particularly the availability of schooling in Waterford, the third most literate city in Ireland. The thesis is not a history of the Brothers' schools or Edmund Rice's system of education. It is rather a discussion of the ecclesiastical and philosophical context from which it emerged. This investigation suggests emphatically that Rice's priority was not merely schooling, but the provision of a distinctly Catholic education, along the lines of the pedagogy developed by Jean Baptiste De La Salle (1651-1719) in continental Europe. In this context, too, it is clear that Rice was not merely a philanthropist, but sought from the outset to embrace the religious life. In this sense, for the early Brothers the schools were a ministry, rather than just educational provision. The thinking represented the major shift in Western Christianity from sheer devotionism to an informed understanding of the faith, from passive reception and obedience to articulate knowledge and personal responsibility.

At a more fundamental level, beyond an institutional history, this thesis seeks to demonstrate the immersion of the Brothers in the reformed devotions of the age. It is immediately apparent that Edmund Rice belongs within the tradition of Early Modern Catholicism, and the general Catholic revival in the context of Protestant heresy and increasing secularisation. This is evident in the complex unfolding of his spiritual journey and reliance upon the classics of the Catholic Reformation, especially Scoupli's Spiritual Combat and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, with its emphasis on discernment and perseverance in the pursuit of perfection. In terms of its expression, too, these influences are manifest in the surviving documentary

¹⁰ E. Larkin, The Historical Dimension of Irish Catholicism (Dublin, 1984)

record and the foundational instruments of the Congregation, particularly the Presentation Rule (1802) and the subsequent Manual of School Government (1845). These institutionalised not just the sacramental theology of the age, but the Tridentine emphasis upon the essential connection between faith and good works, and so meritorious sanctification, in the form of charity and labour for the salvation of souls.¹¹

In his ecclesiology too, Rice aimed not to create an elite or parallel church, but rather placed his brotherhood at the service of the emerging church in Ireland, and amongst the diaspora in England, Gibraltar and Australia. Recent literature has emphasised the role of the new religious orders in evangelising the urban poor, many of whom were alienated from the institutional church. Yet the Christian Brothers, in addition, addressed more immediate concerns of the Church.¹² This was particularly apparent within the context of the 'Bible Wars', the subject of the last chapter of this thesis. Usually referred to as the 'Second Reformation', within Ireland it may in fact be seen as a continuum of the reforming impetus of the sixteenth-century. Yet, if this is true, it might also be argued that the Brothers and the teaching orders played a vital role in 'Trenting the Irish', or completing the process which the penal laws had frustrated.¹³ Yet just as the Catholic Reformation took on a conservative character in Europe, so too, the Christian Brothers spearheaded Ireland's 'Counter-Reformation' of the 1820s. Within that scenario, Edmund Rice, like his great patron, Ignatius of Loyola, became synonymous with both tendencies in the early-modern Church: practical reform and spiritual renewal.

This thesis attempts to understand Edmund Rice and the early Christian Brothers as they understood themselves. It seeks to do so by examining the

¹¹ H. Outram Evenett, 'Counter Reformation Spirituality', in D.M. Luebke (ed.), The Counter-Reformation, pp 47-63.

¹² M. Peckham Magray, The Transforming Power of the Nuns: women, religion and cultural change in Ireland, 1750-1900 (Oxford, 1998).

¹³ J.W. O'Malley, Trent and All That: renaming Catholicism in the early-modern era (Harvard, 2000),

historical context in which they worked, but specifically by understanding the theology and piety which animated the Brothers and the ecclesial community which they served and helped shape.

THE CHURCH IN THE CATACOMBS?

'[Catholics] were no longer tortured for their belief, but they were hindered by inability from cultivating it – they were no longer condemned to ignorance by law, but prevented from rising out of it by necessity'.¹

In this changed environment Edmund Rice began his great enterprise in 1802. In a small converted stable in Waterford, he launched an educational apostolate which in time would spread not only throughout 'the kingdom', as he desired, but to the four corners of the earth.² The timing of that initiative was crucial to its success, as a gradual thaw in the penal laws afforded unprecedented opportunities to the Catholic community to make a church of their mission. Within this process, Edmund Rice played a vital part, bringing his acumen and energy to a project which resulted not simply in the creation of a church, but of a modern literate nation.

This 'thaw' in the penal laws reflected changing circumstances in Ireland, but it was also an indication of the nature of the legislation.³ Raised on the memories of the Ulster rebellion and massacres of 1641, Irish Protestants believed that they remained dangerously exposed to the threat of a renewed

¹ Waterford Chronicle and Munster Advertiser, 2 Aug. 1845.

² Edmund Rice to Thomas Bray, 9 May 1810, CDA.

³ For the most recent discussion of the penal laws see, James Kelly, 'The Ascendancy and the Penal Laws', in J. R. Bartlett and S. D. Kinsella (eds), Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Ireland (Dublin, 2006), pp 133-54.

attack from a formidable Catholic enemy, at home and abroad. The Williamite Wars (1688-91) reinforced these fears, while the generous terms of the Treaty of Limerick (1691) which concluded the conflict, left the defeated Catholics in a stronger position than might have been expected. The promise of religious toleration, the retention of the estates of those surrendering in arms, and (incredibly, given the ongoing wars with King Louis XIV) affording combatants passage to France left the victors with the sense that they had won the war but lost the peace. Within this context, the penal laws, which aimed to secure the Kingdom from future threat, stemmed from a deep insecurity rather than from 'vengeance [or the] unbridled licence of triumph'.⁴

The Protestant nation owed its existence to the destruction of Catholic power, or as the Archbishop of Dublin William King (1650-1729) put it, 'either they or we must be ruined'.⁵ The penal laws were rooted in these sentiments, and rather than representing a systematic 'code', were in fact a collection of measures enacted in an *ad hoc* fashion over half a century in response to a variety of immediate pressures and grievances.⁶ In this sense, the introduction of laws and the extent to which they were applied may be represented as a crude barometer of Protestant security in eighteenth-century Ireland. Significantly, the first of the laws, enacted in 1695, which forbade Catholics from keeping arms or a horse worth more than £5 with cavalry potential, addressed immediate security concerns (7 William III c. 5). So too did the 'Act to Restrain Foreign Education' (7 William III c. 4) which aimed to limit communication between Irish Catholics and potential allies amongst their continental co-religionists. This act prohibited 'any child or other person ... to be trained in any popish university, college or school, or in

⁴ W. P. Burke, Irish Priests in penal times (Waterford, 1914, reprinted Shannon, 1969), pp 164-5.

⁵ William King, The State of the Protestants of Ireland under the late King James's government (Dublin, 1691), p. 292.

⁶ S. J. Connolly, Religion, law and power: the making of Protestant Ireland, 1660-1760 (Oxford, 1992), p. 263.

any private popish family'. A further clause of the same law reflected the subversive nature of education within a colonial context, in which the schoolmaster was a critical cultural influence:

Whereas it has been found by experience that tolerating papists keeping schools or instructing youth in literature is one great reason of many of the natives continuing ignorant of the principles of the true religion, and strangers to the scriptures, and of their neglecting to conform themselves to the laws of this realm, and of their not using the English habit and language, no person of the popish religion shall publicly teach school or instruct youth, or in private houses teach youth, except only the children of the master or mistress of the private house, upon pain of twenty pounds, and prison for three months for every such offence.⁷

Rather than intending to condemn Catholic youth to ignorance, this law attempted to secure a Protestant control over education by curbing the political influence of the schoolmaster.

The penal laws, then, are best understood as an attempt by the Protestant state to protect itself against 'popery', the dangerous political system which Catholicism represented, not the Catholic religion itself, hence the focus of the laws upon land, the legal profession and the exercise of religious authority. In an eighteenth-century context, land lay at the heart of all political power, so the most determined of the laws were directed against property. As Corish has noted, 'here the penal code was meant to bite and made to bite, to reach what Edmund Burke (1729-97) was to call its "vicious perfection"'.⁸ Certainly, the 1704 Act 'to prevent the further growth of popery' (2 Anne c. 6), represented a formidable attempt to complete the destruction of the Catholic landed interest which the Treaty of Limerick had left largely intact.⁹ Its provisions prevented land passing from Protestants to Catholics by prohibiting a Catholic from buying land or leasing it for more than thirty one years; leases of the permitted length had to be held at a prohibitive rent

⁷ 7 William III, c. 4.

⁸ P. J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in seventeenth and eighteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 1981), p. 73.

⁹ Connolly, *Religion, law and power*, p. 273.

of at least two thirds of the yearly value. The notorious gavelling clause demanded the division of the estate on the death of the proprietor, unless the eldest son conformed to the Church of Ireland, in which case he would inherit the entire estate; if the son conformed in the father's lifetime, the father became his 'tenant for life'.

Catholic land ownership was greatly reduced as a consequence of this legislation. At the start of the eighteenth-century, Catholics held an estimated fourteen per cent of the land, illustrating the great transfer of land which had taken place as a result of the Cromwellian settlement, but by 1776, Arthur Young believed that the figure had fallen to five per cent. This dramatic reduction in Catholic fortunes has traditionally been accepted as evidence of the success of the penal laws, but the figures need qualification as there were dramatic regional variations in the application of the laws and there were many ways in which penalties could be avoided. In this sense, the stark implications of Arthur Young's figures represent what one commentator has called a 'statistical trap'.¹⁰ Recent research has emphasised the degree to which Catholics could rely on trustees. Moreover, conformity to the established Church of Ireland was often nominal, or strategic, and there existed a large 'convert interest' of land-owning families like the Brownes, the Lynches, and the Dalys who could shield their Catholic relatives from the rigours of the law.¹¹ A distinction must also be made between ownership and leasehold: when property in the form of leasehold and livestock is taken into account, it has been estimated that Catholic personal property amounted to half the total by the end of the eighteenth-century. Furthermore, since no concerted effort was made to exclude Catholics from trade, especially the provisions trade, they came to possess great economic

¹⁰ L. M. Cullen, 'Catholic Social Classes under the Penal Laws', in T. P. Power and K. Whelan (eds), Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the eighteenth-century (Dublin, 1990), p. 57.

¹¹ L. M. Cullen, 'Catholics under the penal laws', in Eighteenth-Century Ireland, i (1986), pp 29-31.

strength in the commercial classes, particularly in Munster and Leinster.¹² It is a combination of factors like these which explain the relative prosperity of the Rices of Westcourt, sheltered in the heart of Butler territory in County Kilkenny.

Similarly, the religious clauses of the code were concerned more with the exercise of religious authority than the practice of religion itself. In the 1960s, R.E. Burns wrote that the laws intended that 'the whole nation would be Protestant', but as Maureen Wall argued subsequently, mass conversion could never have been the intention of legislation which aimed essentially at the preservation of a status quo rather than a dilution of the Protestant interest.¹³ Because the primary concern of the penal code was the preservation of property and power, there were significant ambiguities with regard to religious practice.¹⁴ In 1697, for example, an 'Act for Banishing all Papists exercising any ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and all regulars of the popish clergy' (9 William III c. 1), targeted clerics not on account of their priesthood, but because:

the late rebellions in this kingdom have been promoted by popish bishops and other ecclesiastical persons of the popish religion, and forasmuch as the peace and publick safety of this kingdom is in danger by the great number of said the clergy now residing here, and settling in fraternities contrary to law, and to the great impoverishing of his Majesty's subjects who are forced to maintain them, and said clergy do not only endeavour to withdraw his Majesty's subjects from their obedience, but do daily stir up and move sedition and rebellion.

¹² LM Cullen, 'Catholic social classes', pp 57-84; Connolly, Religion, law and power, p. 311; idem, Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland (Dublin, 1981), p. 27; D. Dickson, 'Catholics and trade in eighteenth-century Ireland', in T. Power and K. Whelan (eds), Endurance and Emergence: Catholic Ireland in the Eighteenth-Century (Dublin, 1990).

¹³ R. E. Burns, 'Irish popery laws; a study of eighteenth-century legislation and behaviour', Review of Politics, vol 24, no. 4, (1962), pp 485-508; Maureen Wall, 'Penal Laws', in G. O'Brien and T. Dunne (eds), Catholic Ireland in the eighteenth-century: the collected essays of Maureen Wall (Dublin, 1989), p. 8.

¹⁴ P. J. Corish, The Catholic Community, p. 74.

Four hundred and twenty four regular priests were transported in 1698, mainly to France. Many more remained in Ireland passing themselves off as secular clergy, while others returned once the initial commotion had died down. The position of the Catholic hierarchy in 1698 was already extremely weak. There were no more than eight bishops in the country and three of these left under the terms of the Act.¹⁵ Had the terms of this 'Banishment Act' been strenuously implemented, the Catholic church in Ireland could have been eliminated in two generations. The entry of priests from abroad was forbidden and there could be no ordinations without bishops; without priests there would be no sacraments and without the sacraments there would be no church.

In 1703-04 further legislation was introduced to reduce the perceived threat posed by the hundreds of diocesan clergy who remained in the kingdom. Under the terms of the 'Act for Registering Popish Clergy' (2 Anne c. 7) priests were compelled to appear before the court of sessions and to provide vital details, including the date and place of their ordination and the name of the ordaining prelate. Attempts were also made to reduce clerical numbers by authorising only one secular priest per civil parish. Priests were confined to their own county, forbidden from keeping a curate, and obliged to present two securities of £50 as a guarantee of their 'good behaviour'.¹⁶ Added to this, further penalties were introduced to punish bishops and friars who had returned illegally to the country. Ironically, the terms of the Registration Act, under which almost eleven hundred priests registered, had the effect of granting legal recognition to the Catholic diocesan clergy and, far from leading to the extinction of the church, actually facilitated its re-emergence. Registered priests were free to say Mass and administer the sacraments, churches remained open, and the act contained sufficient loopholes to allow for creative exploitation, often with the collusion of compliant magistrates.

¹⁵ J. G. Simms, 'The bishops' Banishment Act of 1697', in *Irish Historical Studies*, xvii (Sept. 1970), pp 185-99.

¹⁶ Kelly, 'The Ascendancy and the Penal Laws', p. 139.

Many regulars — members of religious orders — registered as diocesan clergy and bishops as parish priests, so that by Queen Anne's death in 1714 there were fourteen bishops in Ireland.

Additional measures were introduced in the aftermath of a failed Jacobite landing in Scotland in March 1708. In a context where the Stuart kings retained the right to nominate Catholic bishops for Ireland, and where the clergy openly avowed their support for the exiled James II, parliament attempted in 1709 to extract an oath of abjuration from diocesan clergy, rejecting the Jacobite Pretender's claim to the throne and the supposed 'deposing power' of the Pope (8 Anne c. 3). A mere thirty-three priests made the oath of abjuration, and this rendered the status of the remainder precarious. Bishop Hugh MacMahon of Clogher (whose uncle had been chaplain to James II) in his relatio status, or report to Rome of 1714, declared that in consequence of the oath:

the open practice of religion either entirely ceased or was considerably curtailed according as the persecution varied in intensity. During these years a person was afraid to trust his neighbour lest, being compelled to swear, he might divulge the names of those present at Mass. Moreover, spies were continually moving around posing as Catholics.¹⁷

The same report contains an evocative description of the celebration of Mass in the period; while it reflects hostile local circumstances, it nevertheless belies revisionist attempts to minimise the extent of the penal persecution:

Greater danger ... threatened the priests ... with the result that priests have celebrated Mass with their faces veiled ... At other times Mass was celebrated in a closed room, with only a server present, the window being left open so that those outside might hear the voice of the

¹⁷ Hugh MacMahon, Relatio Status (1714) cited in Henry A. Jefferies, 'The early penal days: Clogher under the administration of Hugh MacMahon (1701-1715) in Henry A. Jefferies (ed.), History of the Diocese of Clogher (Dublin, 2005), p. 147; L. J. Flynn, 'Hugh MacMahon, Bishop of Clogher (1707-15) and Archbishop of Armagh (1715-37)', in Seanchas Ard Mhacha, 7, (1973), pp 109-73.

priest ... and herein the great goodness of God was made manifest, for the greater the severity of the persecution, the greater the fervour of the people.

Over the countryside, people might be seen, meeting, or signalling to each other on their fingers, the hour Mass was due to begin, in order that people might be able to kneel down and follow mentally the Mass which was celebrated at a distance. I ... have often celebrated Mass at night with only the man of the house and his wife present. They were afraid to admit even their children so fearful were they.¹⁸

Deprived of the protection of the 'Registration Act', these non-juring priests were vulnerable to the attention of the 'discoverer', who was rewarded for information leading to the arrest of illegal clergy or schoolmasters (8 Anne c. 3, 1709).

Yet, while the penal laws were motivated primarily by considerations of security, and were not against the Catholic faith *per se*, it was an implicit intention of the legislation to advance the 'Reformation' of Ireland. The Williamite Parliament, for instance, attempted to reform the religious calendar and the celebration of 'holy days':

Whereas many idle persons refuse to work at their lawful calling on several days in the year, on pretence that the same is dedicated to some saint, or pretended saint, for whom they have or pretend to have reverence, and chuse to spend such days in idleness, drunkenness, and vice, to the scandal of religion, no other day except those days listed herein... shall be kept holy.¹⁹

Other legislation sought to end traditional pilgrimages, which had attracted 'vast numbers' to Lough Derg, in County Donegal, and holy wells across the country (2 Anne c. 6 1703). More significantly, the same Act offered an annual provision of £20 to 'every popish priest who shall convert and

¹⁸ Hugh MacMahon, *Relatio Status* (1714), *Ibid.*

¹⁹ 7 William III c 14(1695).

conform to the Church of Ireland as by law established'.²⁰ This 'reforming' tendency of parliament became more explicit thirty years later, when the Church of Ireland primate, Hugh Boulter (1662-1742), extended the scope of government education measures by giving them an evangelical character, based upon his sense that:

It is of the utmost consequence to bring [the papists] over by all Christian methods to the Church of Ireland ... The ignorance & obstinacy of the adult papists is such that there is not much hopes of converting them. But we have hopes if we could erect a number of schools to teach their children the *English* tongue, & the principles of the Christian religion, we could do some good among the generation that is growing up.²¹

Such sentiments provided the inspiration for the 'Charter Schools', founded in 1733, which Thomas Wyse claimed 'out-churched the church' and were hated by Roman Catholics on account of their proselytism.²²

Ironically, the Primate's anxiety and the 'Charter School' initiative was sparked, in part, by a sense amongst Protestants that the penal laws had failed. Indeed, in 1727 Archbishop William King had observed that the Catholics had 'more bishops in Ireland than the Protestants ... and twice (at least) as many priests. Their friaries and nunneries are public'.²³ This sense was confirmed by the returns made in the Report on the state of Popery, presented to the Irish House of Lords in 1731, which indicated the extent to which the Catholic Church had begun to reorganize; almost every diocese had a bishop, clerical numbers had risen, Mass houses continued to be built and a rudimentary educational system, with '549 Popish schools' was in

²⁰ See Kelly, 'The Ascendancy and the Penal Laws', pp 137-38.

²¹ Hugh Boulter to Duke of Newcastle, 7 May 1730, Letters written by ... Hugh Boulter D.D. ... (Dublin, 1770), ii, pp 11-12; See K. Milne, The Irish Charter Schools 1730-1830 (Dublin, 1997).

²² Thomas Wyse, Speech of Thomas Wyse ... on moving leave to bring a bill for the establishment of a board of national education ... (Dublin, 1835), p. 15.

²³ Cited in Connolly, Religion, Law and Power, p. 288.

place.²⁴ This Catholic recovery continued throughout the eighteenth century, but just as Mass houses had been closed during the invasion scares of 1709, moments of international or domestic crisis usually brought a renewed application of the penal laws. This happened in 1715, 1720, 1745, during the war of the Austrian Succession (1740–8) and the Seven Years' War (1756–63). Nigel Yates has described such sporadic harrying as 'uncomfortable reminders' that 'passive toleration could not be guaranteed'. Victims of this persecution included, Bishop Nicholas Sweetman of Ferns, accused of enlisting men for foreign armies in 1751; Archbishop Michael O'Reilly and 18 Armagh priests arrested in 1753, and the judicial murder of Fr Nicholas Sheehy in 1766.²⁵ It was incidents such as these which justified Luke Gardiner's claim, in 1782, that 'the papists were safe from the penal laws so long as the generous and merciful disposition of their countrymen disdained to put them into execution'.²⁶

II

By the middle decade of the eighteenth-century the threat of Jacobitism had passed. In 1760, two years before Edmund Rice was born, Catholics greeted the accession of King George III with 'effusive declarations of loyalty', while Pope Clement XIII's failure to recognize Charles Edward, on the death of James III, 'the Old Pretender' (1766), removed a great deal of suspicion of Catholic loyalty and allowed the church to emerge 'from the catacombs'.²⁷ Kevin Whelan has identified a 'Tridentine surge' in the following decade, but while contemporary travellers such as Arthur Young and Thomas Campbell were struck by the vitality of the Irish church, it would be some time before it achieved the exacting standard required by the

²⁴ James McCaffrey, 'Report on the State of Popery, Ireland, 1731', in Archivum Hibernicum, vol I, Dublin, 1912, p. 11.

²⁵ Nigel Yates, The Religious Condition of Ireland 1770-1850 (Oxford, 2006), p. 25.

²⁶ Patrick Rogers, The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation, 1778-93: a neglected phase of Irish history (London, 1934), p. 18.

²⁷ Kelly, 'The Ascendancy and the Penal Laws', p. 147; Rogers, The Irish Volunteers, p. 2

Council of Trent (1545-63).²⁸ The dislocation caused by the penal laws inevitably led to a weakening of institutional structures within the Church and in many areas conditions remained much as they had been in 1542, when the first Jesuit mission under Alfonso Salmerón, one of St Ignatius' original companions, arrived in Ireland.²⁹ Yet ironically while persecution prevented the full implementation of the reforms of the Council, reaction to the persistent proscription of the faith may have actually facilitated the process of evangelization and pastoral rejuvenation once the restrictions were lifted.³⁰

The second half of the century witnessed a significant attempt by reform-minded bishops to correct the general laxity which characterized the Irish Church. Surviving visitation reports from the 1750s indicate that, in the dioceses of Ferns and Cashel at least, the bishops presided over a working parish system.³¹ In the 1770s, Archbishop John Carpenter initiated an ambitious reform pattern in Dublin which would be followed by his confreres throughout Ireland. Hugh Fenning has noted that 'if he was not quite a Gregory or Leo, it was not for want of effort', but Carpenter might also be compared to Carlo Borromeo (1538-84), the model bishop of the Early-Modern period, whose statutes and administration of the archdiocese of Milan set the standard for bishops in the early-modern period.³² From his

²⁸ K. Whelan, 'The regional impact of Irish Catholicism 1700-1850', in W. Smyth and K. Whelan (eds), *Common Ground: essays on the historical geography of Ireland* (Cork, 1988), p. 254; H. J. Schroeder, (ed.), *The Canons and Decrees of the council of Trent* (Rockford, Ill., 1978).

²⁹ S. Meigs, *The Reformation in Ireland* (Dublin, 1997), p. 73.

³⁰ Alison Forrestal, *Catholic Synods in Ireland, 1600-1690* (Dublin, 1998); see Alexandra Walsham, 'Translating Trent? English Catholicism and the Counter-Reformation', *Historical Research*, vol. 78, no. 201 (August, 2005), pp 288-310.

³¹ P. J. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: a historical survey* (Dublin, 1985), p. 131; C. O'Dwyer (ed.), 'Archbishop Butler's visitation book', *Arch. Hib.*, xii (1946), pp 1-90, and xxxiv (1977), pp 1-49; W. H. G. Flood (ed.), 'The Diocesan manuscripts of Ferns during the rule of Bishop Sweetman (1745-86)', *Arch. Hib.*, iii (1914), pp 113-23.

³² Hugh Fenning, 'The Archbishops of Dublin, 1793-1786', in J. Kelly and D. Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic Diocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 200), p. 210; see T. Wall, 'Archbishop Carpenter and the Catholic Revival' in *Repertorium Novum* (1955), pp 178-9; J. W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That: renaming Catholicism in the early-modern era* (Harvard, 2000), p. 67.

appointment in 1770, Carpenter sought to extend the principle of episcopal government recommended by the Council of Trent. He maintained exact administrative records; he published provincial constitutions and a large collection of 'Instructions and Admonitions' intended to be read from the altars of his diocese.³³ These reflect a priority to regulate clerical behaviour and particular efforts were made to curb the 'fondness for liquor ... the fatal rock on which too many, alas ... [were] unhappily shipwrecked'.³⁴ The archbishop appealed to the 'indolent and slothful' and while his preference was to 'try first every gentle method', he was not shy to apply the most severe censure.³⁵ In 1772, he suspended the parish priest of Blessington, County Wicklow, 'for having abandoned his flock'. Similarly, the 'Rev but unhappy Randolph Byrne', parish priest of Castledermot, County Kildare, was suspended and threatened with excommunication for unspecified 'scandalous behaviour'.³⁶

The fullest surviving visitation reports of the period are those of the bishop of Meath, Patrick Joseph Plunket (1738-1827), a former professor at the Lombard College, Paris, and champion of reform within the Irish Church. It is not unreasonable to assume that the conditions described in his first visitation (1780) were replicated in rural parishes across the eastern counties. At Kilskeer, in the barony of Upper Kells, he reported:

The altar step, and the place about the altar, by no means clean or orderly. The crucifix too bad. A cruet or small phial for the wine absolutely wanting. The chapel not closed, and therefore exposed to dirt and profanation. A clerk absolutely necessary to keep up some little decency in the house of God.³⁷

³³ M. J. Curran, 'Instructions, admonitions, etc of Archbishop Carpenter, 1770-86', *Repertorium Novum*, 2, no. 1 (1958), pp 148-71.

³⁴ John Carpenter, 'Address to the pastors assembled in Francis Street, 1770', in M. J. Curran, 'Instructions ...', p. 152.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 152.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 154.

³⁷ P. Plunket, 1780 Visitation diary, in A. Cogan, *The Diocese of Meath Ancient and Modern*, iii (Dublin, 1870), p. 27.

Similarly at Oldcastle, County Meath, his observations suggest the poverty of the parish liturgy in the rural areas of the diocese:

Neither order nor decency about the altar. The altar steps too low. The priest cannot properly convey his words when he stands almost on a level with the people. It is a shame that there should be but one set of altar linen and one rusty suit of vestments in such a considerable parish. A black pewter chalice, greatly impaired, is absolutely unfit for the celebration of the divine mysteries, and must be dishonourable to a respectable congregation.³⁸

In almost every parish, Plunket complained of the poor quality of the vestments, the sacred vessels and the irregularity of the sanctuary. Of greater concern to him, however were the lax liturgical practices of priests who failed to preach on Sunday or who were ignorant of the decrees of the Council. At the parish of Turin, Plunket wryly commented that 'every face seemed to wear visible marks of dissatisfaction at the pastor's unpastoral conduct'.³⁹

Plunket's concerns, and the demands he made upon his clergy, reflect the renewed vigour of the episcopacy in the late eighteenth-century. Throughout the country, younger bishops engaged in regular visitations of their dioceses; many parishes were visited annually and complaints were carefully investigated. The ignorance of the laity was of special concern and the priority of catechesis is reflected in almost every episcopal report to Rome in the period 1782–1803; congregations showed little respect during the Mass and it was common for bishops to refuse confirmation on account of poor preparation. At Kilkskeer, in June 1780, Bishop Plunket noted: 'the children in general ignorant of the essential parts of the Christian doctrine, and not understanding what they say ...'⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid, p. 28.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 27.

While there was a basic parish school system in place by the 1730s, these 'hedge schools' excluded all those unable to pay fees. As an interim solution to the problem of Catholic education, the bishops increasingly relied on educated parishioners formed into the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine to assist in the task of evangelization.⁴¹ Its members gave instruction to the children for one hour after the last Mass each Sunday. The societies were governed by a priest, who was assisted by a committee elected annually from the predominantly female membership. A surviving register of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament and Christian Doctrine established in Mary's Lane, Dublin, in 1798, illustrates the nature of its apostolate:

11. The children should be divided into different classes according to the following order; 1st Class – Prayer including the Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity. 2nd Class – Small Catechism. 3rd Class – Abridgement of the General Catechism. 4th Class – General Catechism. 5th Class – Fleury's Historical Catechism, but to this last lesson no one is to be admitted but such as shall be declared fit by some priest of the Chapel ...

15. That the members do recite each day some one of the following devotions, viz: the Office of the Blessed Sacrament, or the *Pange Lingua* ...⁴²

Such schemes demonstrated efforts to promote orthodoxy and the devotions associated with the Council of Trent. As part of this process, a considerable amount of religious and devotional material was printed, including John Carpenter's altar-missal. The first, the archbishop claimed, to have been 'published in these Kingdoms', this missal contained the feasts of the Irish saints and represented an important milestone in Ireland's devotional revolution.⁴³ By 1782, Archbishop James Butler's General Catechism had gone through eleven editions in the seven years since its publication, including a Dublin edition, published anonymously by Archbishop Carpenter

⁴¹ M. Brennan, 'The Confraternity of the Christian Doctrine in Ireland', Irish Ecclesiastical Record (1934), pp 560-77.

⁴² M. V. Ronan, An Apostle of Catholic Dublin: Fr Henry Young (Dublin, 1944), p. 124.

⁴³ Fenning, 'The Archbishops of Dublin', p. 213.

as a Catechism for the instruction of children (1777). Of the limited devotional material available in the Irish language, the most significant included the Sixteen Irish Sermons in an Easy and Familiar Stile (1736), published by Bishop James Gallagher of Raphoe (1725-37).⁴⁴ Significantly, Archbishop Carpenter's Ritual (1776) included as an appendix, an Irish translation of his 'Instructions and Exhortations' made by Charles O'Connor of Ballinagare, an accomplished scholar and founder of the Catholic Association.⁴⁵

Reform-minded bishops were also determined to address the shortcomings in clerical formation which resulted from the dislocation of the penal laws. In the absence of domestic seminaries, priestly formation varied and aspirants followed no set pattern. Clerical students required a classical education which was frequently provided by the local schoolmaster. Candidates often lived a number of years with their parish priest, serving what might be described as an apprenticeship, after which they would present a letter of recommendation to a bishop. Many, though not all students, were ordained before traveling to the continental colleges to commence their theological studies. This practice of ordaining theologically untrained young men gave rise to many abuses, and was a source of constant debate in the eighteenth-century. Yet, in the absence of sufficient burses to support their education, early ordination was often a practical necessity since it allowed student priests to live on their mass stipends. A continental education, however, was not necessarily a guarantee of standards: one memorandum, from mid-century, was critical of clerics returning to Ireland 'to convert heretics who know more theology than they do themselves'.⁴⁶ Similarly, in his visitation reports for 1780, Bishop Plunkett frequently stressed the need for 'altar-

⁴⁴ See Ciarán Mac Murchaidh, 'Dr James Gallagher, alumnus Kilmorensis: Bishop of Raphoe (1725-37) and Kildare and Leighlin (1737-51)', in Breifne, X, no. 40 (2004), pp 219-37.

⁴⁵ Fenning, 'The Archbishops of Dublin', p. 213.

⁴⁶ Hugh Fenning, The Undoing of the Friars of Ireland (Louvain, 1972), p. 193.

cards ... that the priest may say the credo and last Gospel, &c., without a mistake'.⁴⁷

To compensate for this, the most energetic and reforming bishops convened diocesan conferences, through which they attempted to renew their clergy, in a programme advocated by the Fathers at Trent.⁴⁸ One day conferences were held between the months of April and October in many dioceses and fines were imposed on those absent without reason. Bishop John Troy instituted the conferences in Edmund Rice's home diocese of Ossory in 1780. These provided a model which many of his confrères followed. Troy chose a theme for each year, and the surviving Dublin plan for 1790 reflects his meticulous approach:

January	Paschal communion—can it be deferred?
February	Viaticum for children and Mass stipends.
March	Why hear Mass, the altar and vestments.
April	The ceremony of the Mass, its language, can it be said in the vernacular?
June	Penance, what is it? Is it necessary, is it a true sacrament of the New Law?
July	Matter for penance and contrition.
August	Sacramental confession.
September	Is contrition necessary only for mortal sins?
October	The minister of penance.
November	Reserved cases, who has faculties to absolve them?
December	The sign of confession. ⁴⁹

Clerical education remained a challenge; as late as 1818, twenty three years after the foundation of the Royal College at Maynooth, Bishop Patrick McNicholas of Achonry complained that 15 of his 35 priests, who had been ordained for four years or more, were theologically untrained.⁵⁰ It would be

⁴⁷ P. Plunket, 1780 Visitation diary, p. 42.

⁴⁸ M. Mullet, *Catholicism in Britain and Ireland, 1558-1829* (London, 1998), p. 187.

⁴⁹ J. Troy, 'Schema for the diocesan clerical conference for 1790', DDA.

⁵⁰ Liam Swords, *A Hidden Church: The Diocese of Achonry, 1689-1818* (Dublin, 1997), pp 370-71.

the middle decades of the nineteenth century before there were sufficient seminary places to end the phenomenon of 'half-educated and ill-formed priests', thus bringing Irish clerical formation into line with European Tridentine practice.⁵¹ As late as 1830, Br Joseph Leonard joked that the Christian Brothers 'should open a school to teach priests to spell correctly':

Did such a school, exist it would be useful – I had letters from two P[arish] P[riests] this last month which for language and grammar I would blush to see exhibited by a third rate boy in our school [at Cork].⁵²

Apart from issues of quality, the most 'ominous problem' facing the Irish Church was its inability to provide sufficient priests to provide an increasingly ambitious pastoral programme in the context of a population explosion.⁵³ It was frequently claimed in the first half of the eighteenth century that the population could not support large numbers of clergy, and a series of Apostolic rescripts were secured from Pope Benedict XIV (1740-58), to limit ordinations and to stem the number of friars in Ireland. By 1800, however there was a universal complaint amongst bishops of a shortage of priests. While estimates of clerical numbers are incomplete, 1,089 priests availed of the protection afforded by the Registration Act (1704); the 1731 Report on the State of Popery indicated the presence of 1,445 priests in Ireland, and in the context of the Union debate (1800), the bishops informed Lord Castlereagh that figure had risen to 1,800.⁵⁴ Analysis of these figures points to a decreasing clergy:people ratio in eighteenth-century Ireland, since, between 1731 and 1800, the population increased by about eighty eight per cent, while the number of priests rose by just twelve per cent. There were, inevitably, great regional variations, but this roughly translates to one priest for every 1,587 Catholics in 1731, at the height of the 'penal era', compared to one for every 2,676 at the end of the century.⁵⁵ In Rice's Ossory, Bishops

⁵¹ Emmet Larkin, The Pastoral Role, p. 44.

⁵² Br Joseph Leonard to Fr Pius Leahy, OP, Lisbon, 17 Feb. 1830, CBGA, Rome, 25/296.

⁵³ Emmet Larkin, The Pastoral Role, p. 9.

⁵⁴ Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, IV (London, 1853), pp. 97-103.

⁵⁵ S. J. Connolly, Priests and People in Pre Famine Ireland (Dublin, 1981), pp. 32-3.

Burke, Troy and Lanigan constantly complained of a shortage of priests. While Troy ordained twenty three priests between 1778 and 1785, there were only sixty priests in the diocese by 1792, but this still allowed for a ratio of one priest to every 1,600 Catholics, significantly lower than the national ratio.⁵⁶ Such statistics were poor consolation to Bishop Troy, who in another context noted that a scarcity of priests 'made the piety of the people grow cold'.⁵⁷

Problems associated with popular religious expression were equally challenging. While bishops had few concerns about the religious enthusiasm of the people, there was anxiety about its unorthodox expression in the celebration of rituals which marked the rites of passage, especially 'wakes' which had been repeatedly condemned since the original Counter-Reformation synods held in Ireland in the early seventeenth-century. The ordinances for the province of Armagh (1618), for example, denounced 'idlers and buffoons' who introduced 'improper songs, obscene gesticulations, and ... the works of darkness' into wakes.⁵⁸ Episcopal sanctions were applied to limit these abuses, but such measures produced little success. In the case of the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, for example, statutes were introduced, in 1648, which forbade priests saying mass for a corpse 'at whose wake such immodest songs, profane tricks or immoderate crowds are permitted'.⁵⁹ Yet a century later, his successor, Bishop James Gallagher, continued to publish denunciations of the 'unchristian diversions' associated with wakes: excessive alcohol, lewd entertainment, mock-sacraments and sexual games.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role*, p.9.

⁵⁷ John Troy, *Relatio Status*, Dublin 1800, DDA.

⁵⁸ Cited in J. Bossy, 'The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Ireland, 1596-1641', *Historical Studies*, VIII (1971), p. 164.

⁵⁹ S. J. Connolly, *Priests and People*, pp 148-65.

⁶⁰ P. J. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 135: see: Gearóid Ó Cruaí, 'The Merry Wake', in J. S. Donnelly and K. Miller (eds), *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850* (Dublin, 1998), pp 173-200.

Likewise, the celebration of festivals and 'patterns' (from 'patron' saint), were targets of the hierarchy's attempt at civilizing and moralizing the masses, since on these occasions, too, religious observances were often merely a prelude to more secular festivities.⁶¹ In 1782, Bishop Troy of Ossory condemned such gatherings for 'wicked purposes':

Instead of praying they wish damnation to themselves and acquaintances with most horrid and deliberate imprecations. They profane the name of God and everything else that is sacred by most execrable oaths and finish the day by the perpetration of the grossest impurities, by shedding their neighbour's blood, by murder, and the transgression of the law.⁶²

Troy, of course, was merely reiterating the sentiments of his predecessor, Thomas Burke, who in 1761, condemned the 'robbing, riding, cursing, swearing, thieving, excessive drinking, and other great debaucheries' practiced at St John's Well.⁶³ Yet in spite of the determined efforts of the episcopate, such patterns survived into the middle of the nineteenth-century. Amhlaoihbh Ó Súilleabháin's [Humphrey O'Sullivan] description of the pattern at St James' Well, in Edmund Rice's Callan, in 1829, illustrates the attraction of such occasions:

There were gooseberries and currants and cherries for the children: ginger bread for grown girls: strong beer, and maddening whiskey for wranglers and busybodies: open-doored booths filled with lovers: bagpipers, and 'riosp-raspers' [fiddlers] making music there for young folks: and pious pilgrims making their stations around the well.⁶⁴

The ultimate solution to these excesses, of drunkenness, riot and 'transgressions of every duty', of course was to move the celebrations indoors into a clerically marshaled space, where their devotion could be

⁶¹ Diarmaid Ó Gioáin, 'The Pattern', in J. S. Donnelly and K. Miller (eds), *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850*, pp. 201-22.

⁶² John Troy, *Pastoral Address to the Clergy of Ossory (1782)*, CDA.

⁶³ H. Fenning (ed.), 'Some eighteenth-century broadsides', *Collectanea Hibernica*, XII (1969), p. 56.

⁶⁴ M. McGrath (ed), *The Diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan*, ii (Dublin, 1936), p. 183.

celebrated in a more 'becoming manner', at the parish chapels in accordance with the norms of Trent.⁶⁵

Such aspirations reflect the increasing degree of social control the clergy exercised in the period. They have also been interpreted as the attempted 'Romanisation' of traditional religious expression, or a conflict between Tridentine Catholicism and Ireland's so-called 'Celtic Christianity'. Such conclusions, however, overstate the reality of a religious expression which was not in fact essentially 'Celtic' but pre-modern. More specifically it was a product of the troubled history of the Irish Catholic Church, the disturbance of the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent penal laws which had forced religious practice out of doors. At a sociological level, too, the transformation is best interpreted not as the imposition of foreign discipline on a native religious expression, but rather the 'victory of one indigenous Catholic culture over another'.⁶⁶ In essence, it reflected the increasingly dominant influence of the merchant and professional classes within Irish Catholicism.

Cardinal Cullen's conscious decision to consecrate the church of the Sacred Heart, Donnybrook, on the old fair day in 1866, is a graphic illustration of the hierarchy's determination to effect a moral-reformation of Irish Catholics in accordance with the bourgeois values of their own class. Accordingly, the dedication was represented as atonement for the wickedness of the fair, which Fr Mathew had described as a 'moral plague-spot'. The contemporary press, too, celebrated the church as 'a great landmark which will point out where vice and immorality were vanquished'.⁶⁷ The possibility of replicating this victory elsewhere, however, was predicated on the provision of

⁶⁵ Pastoral Address of John Troy, Dublin Chronicle, 23 June 1787.

⁶⁶ Mary Peckham Magray, The Transforming Power of the Nuns; women, religion, cultural change in Ireland 1750-1900 (Oxford, 1998), p. 5.

⁶⁷ Freeman's Journal, 27 Aug. 1866; Fergus D'Arcy, 'The Decline and fall of Donnybrook Fair; moral reform and social control in nineteenth-century Dublin', Saothar, 13 (1988), pp 7-21.

appropriate chapel accommodation, but this was not available until the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁸

Chapel building became an absolute priority of the clergy. Indeed, the Church's ambitious building programme represents the most tangible manifestation of the revival which the Church experienced in Edmund Rice's lifetime. The progress of chapel building began in mid-Munster/south Leinster and filtered slowly into the poorer regions of Ulster and north Connacht. This reflected the regional fortunes of Catholicism as an institutional force, which was more firmly established in the richer areas, amongst the upper social classes and in the English speaking towns. While this phenomenon is contrary to the received image, it is not surprising given the historic Norman/Old English influence in the region and their enthusiasm for Counter Reformation.⁶⁹ The city of Waterford, for example, had three Mass houses in 1746, including St Patrick's where the young merchant Edmund Rice would worship forty years later. In 1846, Charles Smith described it as:

A fine modern building, the aisles supported by stone pillars, the panels of the wainscots carved and gilded and the galleries finely adorned with paintings. Besides the great altar there are two lesser, one on either hand, over each of which there are curious paintings. Facing the great altar is a large silver [sanctuary] lamp and chain of curious workmanship; round the house are niches filled with statues of saints.⁷⁰

In these urban chapels, while the Mass was the central act of worship, the reformed Catholic devotions were also well developed. Greater devotion to the Eucharist was promoted by the Archconfraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, and sodalities of the scapular were introduced by the friars in the 1720s. The rosary, too, was promoted with great effect; it served not merely as a symbol of traditional loyalty, but as an instrument to bring the practice

⁶⁸ For the fullest discussion of this issue see Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role*, pp 137-86.

⁶⁹ Whelan, 'The regional impact of Irish Catholicism', p. 7.

⁷⁰ Charles Smith, *The Ancient and Present State of the County and City of Waterford ...* (Dublin, 1746), p. 181.

and doctrine of the Counter-Reformation into the heart of the Church.⁷¹ In Wexford, the Franciscans were promoting the 'Stations of the Cross' in 1749, while the Jesuits in Dublin encouraged devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and conducted novenas to St Francis Xavier (1506-52), who personified the spirit of the Catholic Reformation.⁷² Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament had been common in Order churches from about 1720, while many chapels performed benediction or sung vespers on Sunday afternoons.⁷³ There is evidence, too, that these solemn liturgies were of the highest standard. Catholics in Waterford possessed a magnificent set of fifteenth century vestments; once believed to have been a gift of Pope Innocent III (1161-1216), their use must have contributed greatly to the solemnity of the liturgy in Edmund Rice's adopted city.⁷⁴

Such devotions were not possible in poorer, rural parishes. While the 1731 Report on the State of Popery indicated the survival of mass rocks, particularly in Ulster, rural Catholics usually worshipped in 'some sort of shed', converted stables or 'mean thatched Cabins; many or most of them open at one end'.⁷⁵ As time passed, these older chapels were replaced, to such an extent that even in Ulster, by 1766 Alexander McAuley noted considerable advances:

Till within these few years, there was scarce a Mass house to be seen in the northern counties of Ulster. Now Mass houses are spreading over most parts of the country. Convents, till of late were hid in corners. Now they are openly avowed in the very metropolis. From the Revolution[1688] till a few years ago, Mass houses were little huts in

⁷¹ See Anne Dillon, 'Praying by number: the confraternity of the Rosary and the English Catholic Community, c. 1580-1700', History, Vol. 88, no. 291 (2003), pp 451-71.

⁷² Hugh Fenning, 'A time of reform: from the penal laws to the birth of modern nationalism, 1691-1800', in B. Bradshaw and D. Keogh (eds), Christianity in Ireland (Dublin, 2002), p. 143.

⁷³ D. Keogh, 'John Thomas Troy, 1786-1823', in J. Kelly and D. Keogh (eds), History of the Catholic Diocese of Dublin, p. 227.

⁷⁴ Lewis, Topographical Dictionary ... (1837), p. 692.

⁷⁵ E. McParland, Public Architecture in Ireland, 1680-1760 (New Haven, 2001), p. 37.

remote and obscure places. Now they are sumptuous buildings in the most public and conspicuous places.⁷⁶

Few contemporaries failed to be impressed by the material improvement of chapel buildings, although 'sumptuous' was certainly an overstatement.⁷⁷ The penal chapels of the eighteenth-century were basic, resembling the descriptions contained in Bishop Plunket's visitation diary outlined above. The older rural chapels were generally between fifty and sixty feet long and half as wide, with a mud floor and a low, thatched roof. These barn-like structures were built by local craftsmen, using local materials; with whitewashed mud or stone walls, there was a window on either side of a simple raised altar and a door at the back of the chapel. There were no galleries or furnishings, congregations stood or knelt during Mass, and chapels were almost without decoration, apart from a crucifix behind the altar.⁷⁸

The penal Mass house, teach an phobail, was the focal point of the community, serving as church, school, and meeting place; on occasion it was even used for threshing corn. As late as 1828, the Cashel Provincial Statutes laid down that 'it is not permissible without leave from the bishop', to keep school in a chapel, and that under no circumstances were cattle to be found in any place of worship, 'nor is it to be profaned [with] threshing or any other servile work'.⁷⁹ The new churches, or 'barn chapels' of the late penal years, were grander in scale, built of stone and with a pitched, slated roof; steeples and bells however, were still forbidden under the penal laws. The chapels remained simple in decoration, but efforts were made to improve the sanctuary, the altar and the quality of the vestments and altar plate. From

⁷⁶ A. McAuley, Septennial parliaments vindicated (Dublin, 1766), cited in Rogers, Irish Volunteers, p. 5.

⁷⁷ K. Whehan, 'The Catholic Church in Tipperary, 1700–1900' in W. Nolan and T. McGrath (eds) Tipperary: History and Society (Dublin, 1985), pp. 225–7.

⁷⁸ P. J. Duffy, Exploring the History and Heritage of Irish Landscapes (Dublin, 2007), p. 118.

⁷⁹ Cashel Provincial Statutes (1828), cited in N. Yates, The Religious Condition of Ireland, p. 203.

the barn plan, they evolved to an L-shape and the more common cruciform plan. Floors were generally flagged, and galleries, often with pews, accommodated the larger congregations.⁸⁰

The level of building is recorded in the episcopal relationes status sent to Rome. In prosperous Munster, where church building proceeded faster than elsewhere, Bishop Matthew McKenna built eleven new churches in Cloyne in the ten years after 1775 and James Butler II spent one thousand guineas building a house and improving the church in Thurles. Francis Moylan boasted that the churches of Tralee and Killarney, which he had built, surpassed any Protestant church in the diocese in size and workmanship.⁸¹ The new cathedrals, too, in Waterford (1793) and Cork (1799) spoke volumes about Catholic confidence and pretensions. More than this, they were a witness to the re-emergence of the Catholic hierarchy. In the early decades of the century, bishops communicated with their flock from their 'refuge' ('in loco refugii nostri'); Archbishop Christopher Butler of Cashel, for instance, lived outside his diocese, with his cousins at Westcourt, in County Kilkenny for much of his long episcopate (1711-57).⁸² By the early 1790s, though penal legislation was still in place, the bishops had conspicuously re-established themselves in the principal town of their diocese.

Yet even the larger chapels were proving inadequate given the increased population and the more elaborate scale of public liturgies. The consecration of Edmund Rice's confidante, Bishop James Lanigan of Ossory, at Kilkenny in 1789, is indicative of the level to which the Catholic establishment had emerged from the restrictions of the penal era, and also of the difficulties the church faced in accommodating larger congregations. On that solemn

⁸⁰ K. Whelan, 'The Catholic parish, the Catholic chapel and village development in Ireland' in *Irish Geography* (1983), pp 1-16.

⁸¹ See D. Keogh, The French Disease: the Catholic church and Irish radicalism, 1790-1800 (Dublin, 1993), pp 12-13; P. O'Donoghue, 'The Catholic Church in Ireland', pp. 24-7; P. Corish, The Irish Catholic Experience, p. 160.

⁸² William Carrigan, The History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory, iii (Dublin, 1905), p. 318.

occasion three bishops were present in the sanctuary along with seventy two priests. One witness remarked that 'the chapel was so crowded that the gallery began to give warning of some danger'.⁸³ In a recent study, Emmet Larkin has assessed these stresses and concluded that the revival, indeed the survival, of the Church was only possible because of the 'stations', which had emerged in the penal era.⁸⁴ Twice a year, priests traveled through their parishes in preparation for Christmas and Easter, celebrating mass and hearing confessions in family homes, thus allowing the faithful to complete their annual obligations.⁸⁵ Ironically, while reforming bishops, like Carpenter, Troy and Plunket, attempted to move religious practice into clerically supervised 'sacred spaces', the shortage of chapel accommodation dictated that out-door celebration remained a feature of Irish Catholicism until after the Great Famine (1845-50).

By the last quarter of the eighteenth-century, then, the Catholic Church in Ireland had begun its emergence from the catacombs of the penal age. This revival was the initiative of an energetic episcopate. By the end of the century the limitations of that programme had become apparent and as the Waterford Chronicle observed 'necessity' impeded its advance. The baton then passed to a prosperous Catholic laity, who provided not simply the physical resources to complete the project, but the confident and uncompromising vision which became the hallmark of nineteenth-century Irish Catholicism.⁸⁶ Foremost amongst these was Edmund Rice, Waterford merchant and 'herald of a new age of Irishmen'.⁸⁷

⁸³ P. Power (ed.), 'A Carrickman's (James Ryan's) diary 1786-1809', Waterford Arch. Soc. Jn (1913), p. 19.

⁸⁴ E. Larkin, The Pastoral Role, pp 189-259.

⁸⁵ P. J. Corish, The Irish Catholic Experience, p. 134.

⁸⁶ Waterford Chronicle and Munster Advertiser, August 1845.

⁸⁷ Cork Examiner, 9 September 1844.

II

THE RICES OF CALLAN

In 1900, as their centenary approached, the Irish Christian Brothers launched an ambitious campaign to build a 'Mother House', novitiate and a training college in Dublin. The site chosen was 'Marino', the north Dublin home of the eighteenth-century 'patriot', James Caulfeild (1728-99), Lord Charlemont 'the Volunteer Earl'.¹ The climax of that monumental effort was a great bazaar held at the Rotunda Gardens, in Dublin, in the summer of 1903. In preparation for the occasion, the Brothers published *Juverna*, a newsletter which elicited support from the congregation's schools across the world. No opportunity was lost to promote the project, including the situation of the campus, on the fields of Clontarf, where Brian Boru, with crucifix in hand, had died in 'defence of creed and country' on Good Friday, 1014. Righteously inspired, readers were duly urged 'to emulate the zeal of Brian in promotion of Christian education' through their contribution towards the noble project at Marino.²

Significantly, the same publication contained what might be considered as the first biography of their founder published by the Christian Brothers. In just under two thousand words, readers were presented with a 'Brief sketch of the life of the Rev. Bro. Edmond[sic] Rice ... Christian educator of God's poor' and founder of 'a loved and distinguished IRISH RELIGIOUS

¹ See D.S. Blake, *St Mary's Marino: Generalate and Teacher College* (Dublin, 2005).

² *Juverna*, no. 3, 1 May 1903, p. 41.

CONGREGATION'.³ Yet, just as Juverna had taken liberties with the story of Brian Boru, the 'last High King', its account of modern Ireland's first Brother was equally florid. The treatment of Rice's youth was particularly unsatisfactory, not least on account of the absence of detail:

EDMOND RICE, Founder of the Christian Brothers, was born in June, 1762, in Callan, Co. Kilkenny, where the early years of his life were spent innocently and happily in a highly respectable, but simple and edifying family circle. Affectionate, dutiful, pious and devoted to study—he passed his youth in uneventful quiet.

More importantly, this emphasis on simplicity and tranquillity created an impression greatly at odds with the complex realities of eighteenth-century Ireland, and of County Kilkenny in particular. In a sense, however, this description of Rice's youth was of its time and reflected Catholic understanding of the penal era which would find its clearest expression in Daniel Corkery's emotive Hidden Ireland (1924), which influenced the historical orthodoxy of the newly established Irish Free State.⁴ At its simplest, this reading of the eighteenth-century presented a stark contrast between the arrogant world of the 'Protestant Ascendancy' and the 'hidden Ireland' of Catholics smarting uniformly under the unrelenting persecution of the penal laws. Not surprisingly, this paradigm has dominated Edmund Rice studies, but the reality was altogether different from this crude black and white analysis of the penal laws and their practical application.

I

At one level, Rice's native Callan does reflect the 'Gaelic survival' described by Corkery, himself a product of Edmund Rice's Presentation Brothers.

³ Juverna, Souvenir Brochure, July 1903 [unpaginated].

⁴ Patrick Walsh, 'Daniel Corkery's The Hidden Ireland (1924) and Revisionism', New Hibernia Review, Volume 5, Number 2, (Summer, 2001), pp. 27-44; L. M. Cullen, 'The Hidden Ireland: reassessment of a concept' in Studia Hib., ix (1969), pp. 7-47

Callan lay in the centre of 'a cultural reservoir', spanning north-Tipperary and south-Kilkenny.⁵ Here the remnants of the Ormond family and the Catholic Butlers, who had benefited from the terms of the Treaty of Limerick (1691), retained a great deal of their influence and were able to shelter the region from the worst excesses of the penal laws. Superficially, the 'Gaelic survival' was revealed in the extent to which the Irish language remained the vernacular in south Kilkenny. In all probability, Irish was the language of the Rice home at Westcourt, where Edmund would have been called 'Éamann' by his family.⁶ William Tighe noted how the 'common people' seldom spoke any other language, while at Mass the priests 'preached alternatively in Irish and English', but always in Irish when determined to be understood.⁷ In 1775, Bishop Thomas Burke of Ossory published a catechetical Summary of the Christian Religion in Irish, while later still, Bishop Kyran Marum (1814-27) commissioned Irish translations of The Eternity of the Soul and other devotional texts because significant numbers of Catholics in the south of his diocese could not speak English.⁸

The Butler influence was also a significant factor in the survival of the Catholic Church in the region. The choice of three successive Butlers as archbishops of Cashel in the eighteenth-century was an acknowledgement of that favour, but their presence also afforded continuity and local political influence.⁹ In 1704, for instance, at the height of penal persecution, the parish priest of Callan used a house belonging to the Ormond's as a chapel.¹⁰ Later in the century, Archbishop Christopher Butler (1711-57) was sheltered by his cousins at Callan and there is a tradition that he used to

⁵ F. Ó Fearghail, 'Catholic Church in County Kilkenny' in W. Nolan and K. Whelan (eds), Kilkenny: History and Society (Dublin, 1990), p. 229

⁶ L. Ó Cáthnia, 'Edmund Rice and his social milieu, in S. Carroll (ed), A Man Raised Up: recollections and reflections on Venerable Edmund Rice (Dublin, 1994), p. 13.

⁷ W. Tighe, Statistical observations relative to the county of Kilkenny made in 1800 and 1801 (Dublin, 1802), p. 515.

⁸ F. Ó Fearghail, 'Catholic Church in County Kilkenny', p. 240; M.C. Normoyle, A Tree is Planted (Dublin, 1976), p. 13.

⁹ F. Ó Fearghail, 'Catholic Church in County Kilkenny', p. 229.

¹⁰ *Idem*.

recite the rosary in Irish beneath the trees at Westcourt, beside the Rice home.¹¹ Throughout the century, Callan was well served for priests. When the Dominican bishop of Ossory, Thomas Burke, complained of clerical shortages in 1766, there were three secular priests and four Augustinians in town.¹² The parish church beside the Green was typical of many penal chapels with its stone-walls, trampled clay floors, rustic benches and a spartan wooden altar. The friars meanwhile lived in a thatched cottage on Clodeen, or 'Clothier's' Lane, and two neighbouring cottages, joined together, served as a chapel.¹³

On the land, too, the existence of local patrons such as the Butlers enabled Catholics to avoid the rigorous application of the penal laws. Catholics could preserve their land-holdings by relying on trustees, nominal conversion to the established church and the presence of large 'convert interest' of land-owning families like the protestant Butlers who had Catholic relatives and sympathies. In this sense, contrary to the traditional historiography, many conversions to the Established Church reinforced, rather than weakened, the Catholic position. Catholics relied on these converts for their protection, not only on the land, but in the legal profession where former Catholics were a significant presence. In the Irish parliament their cause was defended by sympathetic members like Lucius O'Brien (1733-95) and Anthony Malone (1700-76), while at Westminster Edmund Burke (1729-97), Nano Nagle's cousin, championed their cause.¹⁴

A large portion of the land in south Kilkenny and north Tipperary remained in Catholic hands due to the sympathetic influence of the Butler. The Catholic

¹¹ William Carrigan, The History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory, iii (Dublin, 1905), p. 318.

¹² F. O'Fearghail, 'Catholic Church in County Kilkenny', p. 229; T.C. Butler, The Augustinians in Callan, 1467-1977 (Kildare, 1977).

¹³ Carrigan, Ossory, iii, p. 315.

¹⁴ T. Power, 'Converts' in Power and Whelan (eds), Endurance and Emergence, pp. 101-129; M. Brown et al (eds), Converts and Conversion in Ireland 1650-1850 (Dublin, 2005).

branch of the family owned considerable land in county Tipperary, including a large estate at Cahir and another at Kilcash. On their Cahir estate alone, 97 of 141 leases in the period 1720–50 were to Catholics like the Sheehys, Nagles and Prendergasts.¹⁵ These prosperous families, middlemen farmers engaged in grazing and dairying, were vital in the preservation of the Gaelic culture celebrated by the Munster poets of the eighteenth-century. They were, in Whelan's phrase, 'the tradition bearers, who survived *in situ* through national upheavals to provide the backbone of a cohesive, if secretive, culture'.¹⁶ In Callan, the leading Catholic families were the Butlers of Westcourt Castle, where Colonel John Butler, a nephew of the First Duke of Ormond, had settled at the old Manor house, and the Smyths of Damagh, at Callan Lodge which they had acquired in the 1730s. Beneath this sub-gentry there was a layer of strong farmers who had advanced socially from the small-farm ranks in the expanding economy of the eighteenth-century. Included in this group were the Rices of Westcourt.

The Rices had no great social standing among the old families of county Kilkenny, but their rise to the petit-bourgeois level of their town was reflected in the appointments, by the strongly Protestant Corporation of Callan, of Edmund's grandfather (another Edmund) as an Applotter (1754) and his father as market juror (1762) for the town.¹⁷ While the nature of these functions is unclear, the holders may have had a role in the calculation of local taxes (cess) and an arbitration, or quality control, function at the town's market. That two generations of Rices held these positions was a reflection of their business acumen, as well as an indication of the upward and downward esteem with which they were held. This was a significant achievement in a troubled town like Callan and with landlords like the Agars. That said, the earliest references to the family appear in the hearth tax rolls

¹⁵ Thomas Power, *Land, politics and society in eighteenth century Tipperary* (Oxford, 1993), p. 149.

¹⁶ K. Whelan, 'Gaelic Survivals' in the *Irish Review*, no. 7 (1989), p. 140.

¹⁷ *Positio*, p. 24; L.M. Cullen, 'The Social and Economic Evolution of Kilkenny in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', in Nolan and Whelan (eds), *Kilkenny*, p. 280.

for 1665–6, where John Rys and Patrick, Richard and James Rice appear in the townland of Sunhill.¹⁸ However, through strategic marriages with rising families, the Rices advanced to a point where they were 'related to all the independent farmers in the locality'.¹⁹ The marriage of Edmund's parents reflected this pattern; his mother, Margaret, was one of the Tierneys, an 'old Catholic family of gentle stock' who farmed one hundred acres at Maxtown.²⁰ The family were respected by and related to many of the region's prominent families, including the Smyths of Damagh and the Mahers of Tipperary, while several of the family held office amongst the Augustinian friars at Callan. Fr Daniel Tierney established a novitiate there in 1781, and Fr James Tierney became prior in 1791.²¹

Margaret Tierney was a widow and her marriage to Robert Rice gave him two step-children, Joan and Jane Murphy. Together they had seven sons, including Edmund, their fourth. Sources for the history of the family are scant; there are, for instance, no records of baptism or marriage for any of the Rices, since parochial registers were not kept at Callan until 1821.²² In fact, the most complete source for the history of the family is the will of Robert Rice (1787) and it is from this that details concerning the composition of the family are drawn.²³ In an effort to fill this lacuna, the Christian Brothers' General Chapter of 1910 launched an ambitious folklore project, which attempted to collect recollections regarding Edmund Rice and his family as part of the canonisation process.²⁴ This collection, edited by Br Columba Normoyle, is a valuable source, but the memoir genre is not without limitation and must be read critically, since many of the recollections tend towards hagiography. Martin Ryan, for example, in his submission (c.1912), recalled that Rice 'from his youth upward he had an inclination towards piety.

¹⁸ M.C. Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 2.

¹⁹ M.C. Normoyle (ed), *Memories of Edmund Rice* (Dublin, 1979), p. 218.

²⁰ M.C. Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 2.

²¹ Carrigan, *Ossory*, iii, p. 315.

²² *Positio*, p. 12.

²³ Will of Robert Rice, September 1787, Registry of Deeds, Dublin, no. 375.

²⁴ M.C. Normoyle (ed.), *Memories of Edmund Rice* (Dublin, 1979).

I heard the people say that since he was a boy barely able to walk ... he frequented Holy Mass at the Augustinian Church'.²⁵ In fact the inherent weakness of such recollections was recognised by Br Mark McCarthy, the author of Rice's first major biography (1926), who acknowledged that:

the memory of his virtue became a cherished tradition ... and to have known Edmund Rice, or to be able to say that one's father or mother knew him and conversed with him, was regarded as an honour by the older people of Callan, so great was the veneration inspired by his early virtues and subsequent works of zeal and charity.²⁶

It is possible, however, to reconstruct an impression of the lifestyle of the family, from contemporary descriptions of the region.

The Rice home at Westcourt was similar to many owned by their class. It was a long, low cottage with a deep thatch; warm in winter and cool in summer. It had four bedrooms, each ten feet by nine, a parlour and kitchen, both seventeen feet by twelve, and a hall way. In keeping with most large Catholic farmers, their lifestyle was frugal, as is reflected in William Tighe observations on the simplicity of the Aylwards, a prosperous family in the county:

They slaughter their pigs generally at home and eat the offal which is the only animal food they usually make use of, living principally on potatoes and some griddle bread. Their incomes are probably not less than £600 or £700 a year.²⁷

This modest lifestyle and frugality was a prized virtue, but in the longer term it was the key to the strength of rising families like the Rices. With small outgoings, the families were able to endure hard times, but during the agricultural boom in the last quarter of the century they were in a position to accumulate capital, which allowed for education, commercial investments and the provision of all important dowries.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 281.

²⁶ [McCarthy], *Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers* (Dublin, 1926), p. 52.

²⁷ Tighe, *Statistical observations*, p. 385.

The Augustinian friars, who had been in the town since 1467, were frequent visitors at Westcourt and the Rices received their early education from one of their number, Patrick Grace (1747-1830). The 'Bráithrín Liath' (the little grey brother/friar) as he became known on account of his premature greyness, was a wandering schoolmaster before he joined the Order in 1774. It was at this time that he was employed by the Rices to give instruction to their children. This young man made an enormous impression on the boys and it is to his influence that John Rice's vocation to the Augustinians has been attributed, while the 'well disposed Edmund was deeply moved by his mentor'.²⁸ Grace returned to Callan after his ordination in Rome in 1783 and spent the remainder of his life amongst his native people. The subject of significant folklore, one tradition recalls how the thatch of the old penal chapel at Clodeen lane collapsed, in 1810, while Grace was at the altar, but that the congregation held the roof aloft until the aged friar completed the mass.²⁹

In time, Edmund attended the local 'hedge school' in Moat Lane. For a population of almost three and a half thousand, Callan was poorly served for schools, with a 'hedge school' and a second conducted by the Protestant rector. One of the earliest Christian Brothers, Edward Francis Grace (1782-1859), has left us a description of the hedge school he attended as a boy in Callan, twenty years later. It was a small, one storied building which catered for thirty students; it is tempting to surmise that this was the school attended by the Rices:

The Academy ... consisted of a small antique structure covered with a verdant coat of thatch. The door was the only lateral aperture, and the remains of what were once windows were securely closed ... When a 'new boy' presented himself for admission he was approached in somewhat courtly style by the master, a portly man, attired in frieze

²⁸ [McCarthy] Edmund Ignatius Rice, p. 51.

²⁹ William Healy, History and Antiquities of Kilkenny, City and county, 1, (Kilkenny, 1905), p. 118.

body-coat, knee-breeches, and woollen stockings, and cordially greeted with the pious salutation, 'God save you' ... This established confidence and led to the business part of the reception, during which the aspirant to participation in the benefits of the 'Academy' was informed that the terms were four pence a week and a half-penny for dancing, which was practised on the door of the 'Academy' laid flat on the clay floor. Thus the door, like Goldsmith's bed by night and chest of drawers by day, had "its double debt to pay".³⁰

Students were taught individually and the greater part of the day was spent 'writing', copying headlines and 'rehearsing' or learning facts by heart. In time, Edmund graduated from the 'Academy' to a school in Kilkenny, possibly the predecessor of 'Burrell Hall', established by Bishop Troy as the first diocesan college in Ireland (1782). Edmund was the first of his family to be educated to this level. This was perhaps an indication of his ability, but more likely a reflection of the improved financial position of his family. The Rices paid £20 per year for their son to board at Mr White's school, (the equivalent of the Master's income at Callan), which stood on the site now occupied by St Mary's Cathedral in the city. For this he received a classical education. The range of subjects taught in such schools usually included: English, writing, grammar, globes, maps, drawing and sometimes Latin.³¹ Such schools provided a thorough grounding in commercial subjects, mathematics and bookkeeping, which fitted Edmund for his subsequent apprenticeship to his uncle Michael, a prosperous merchant in the City of Waterford.

II

'Thus, happily and peacefully, in the sanctuary of a model Catholic home, the child's love of God and his holy religion grew as he advanced in years', so Br McCarthy described Edmund Rice's youth in Westcourt.³² Yet just as the Juverna biography accentuated the tranquillity of the age, so too does

³⁰[McCarthy], Edmund Ignatius Rice, p. 49.

³¹J.D. Fitzpatrick, Edmund Rice (Dublin, 1945), p. 44.

³²[McCarthy], Edmund Ignatius Rice, p. 49.

this account ignore the realities of Callan, which was known as Calainn a' Chlampair, or 'Wrangling Callan', for good reason. Indeed an old adage went, 'walk through any town in Ireland, but run through Callan'. Evidence suggests a radical disparity between the comfortable lifestyle of the Rices and the experience of the majority in the town, which was characterized by tension and poverty, and illustrates clearly the folly of simple notions of a 'penal consensus', depicting Catholics uniformly languishing in a sea of undifferentiated poverty.

Kennedy's thorough study of the economy of Callan points to the poverty of the town.³³ Documentary evidence for eighteenth-century Callan is scarce, but travellers who visited described it invariably as 'a poor dirty town', or a 'wretched village' of 'mean appearance'.³⁴ One such commentator, Rufus Chetwood, an English visitor, has left us a fine description of the town in 1748:

This place seems to lie in the ruins Oliver [Cromwell] left it [in 1649]. You see the remains of three castles, and an old church of the Gothic building [old St Mary's] on the right as you enter the town, but the roof is gone and all the rest a mere anatomy ... The situation of this place is very agreeable, upon a stream called the King's River, dividing in two branches above the town ... The main stream runs under a bridge of four arches, and the small one (after driving a mill) under two ... Upon this stream about a mile below Callan, is a very famous iron mill, that brings great profit to the proprietors. The town is built in the form of a cross, and in the centre a cross is erected, with a square glass lantern, that gives light in the night to travelers that come from the four cardinal points of the compass. One would imagine this town should be in a more thriving condition since the two great roads of Cork and Limerick go through it.³⁵

³³ J. Kennedy, 'Callan a corporate town 1700-1800', in Nolan and Whelan (eds), Kilkenny, pp 289-304

³⁴ James Kelly, Henry Flood; patriots and politics in eighteenth-century Ireland (Dublin, 1998), p. 40.

³⁵ R. Chetwood, A tour through Ireland in several entertaining letters (Dublin, 1748), pp 146-9

The economic condition of the town declined even further as the century progressed. The population of the civil parish increased rapidly, from thirteen hundred in 1731 to around three and a half thousand by the end of the century, but there were few employment prospects: the iron mill closed in 1788 on account of a timber shortage and James Agar's weaving industry never matched expectations. In 1845 the Parliamentary Gazetteer described the town as 'the very impersonation of Irish poverty and wretchedness'.³⁶ With such bleak prospects, many had no option but to join the large numbers emigrating to Newfoundland; included in this flow was Edmund's eldest brother, Thomas, who left Callan with his family in 1825.³⁷ Whatever prosperity the town enjoyed arose out of its role as a parliamentary borough and market town for the surrounding countryside. There were two market days per week, Wednesday and Saturday, and three fairs were held annually; in 1790 that number was increased to four. The local schoolmaster/shop-keeper Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin [Humphrey O'Sullivan] described the scene of one undistinguished fair day in 1827:

A bright sunny morning: a bracing south-west wind: seven o'clock, the clouds lying on the mountains: the day growing dark: two cows and nine or ten pigs on the fair green: a tent being put up: eleven o'clock, small pigs dear being sent to England: sucking pigs dear: if a low price were asked for a yearling it could be sold: no demand for any other kind of cattle: plenty of calves and yearlings there, but little demand for them ... little business at the one tent which is on the fair green: no business being done by the small traders, alas! 'Better crossness than loneliness.' It is a 'mock-fair' unquestionably.³⁸

Yet, while the fair brought cash into the town, it did little to relieve the crushing poverty, which was reflected in the quality of housing; of a total of 530 dwellings in 1800, only 39 paid hearth tax and 46 window tax.³⁹ Another contemporary has left a vivid picture of the misery of the village which stands

³⁶ Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland, 1844-45 (Dublin, 1845), i, p. 298.

³⁷ Positio, p. 11.

³⁸ McGrath (ed.), Diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan, i, p. 45.

³⁹ Tighe, Statistical observations, pp 457, 460, 464.

in stark contrast to the 'sanctuary of [Rice's] model Catholic home' described above:

Like too many of the peasants in the south of Ireland, they are miserably lodged; there are numbers of them who have not a bedstead, not even what is called a truckle-bed frame; a pallet to sleep on is a comfort unknown to them; a wad of straw or perhaps heath laid on a damp floor forms their resting place; but very few of them have anything like sheets; their blankets are generally wretchedly bad; in short the bed clothes are ragged and scanty; they put their coats and petticoats over them in aid of their blankets in cold weather, too often they are still damp having been put imperfectly dried by a miserable fire after they were worn at work in the rain.⁴⁰

Ironically, too, the repeal of several of the penal laws in 1778 and 1782, rather than advancing the plight of the dispossessed actually served to accentuate their sense of social exclusion.

The first of these 'Relief' measures, as they were known, was introduced by Luke Gardiner MP and formed part of the government's military recruitment drive in the context of the American War of Independence (1775-83). The Act dealt almost exclusively with landed property; it allowed Catholics to hold land on equal terms with Protestants and the hated gaveling law was removed. Ultimately the importance of the act lay not so much in its content as in its principles, which Edmund Burke correctly predicted would 'extend further' in time. Forty years later, in the wake of O'Connell's 'revolution', Thomas Wyse vindicated Burke's confidence, arguing that Gardiner's Relief Act 'was the first step which really emancipated'.⁴¹ The 1778 relief measures left intact all the restrictions on the Catholic clergy and worship, but towards the end of the War in 1782, the government sponsored a second relief act which was much more sweeping than the first. The remaining disabilities relating to land were removed and the secular clergy were freed to perform

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 480

⁴¹ E. Burke to G. Nagle, 25 August 1778, *Burke Corr.* iii, pp. 18-20; T. Wyse, *Historical sketches of the late Catholic Association of Ireland*, I, (Dublin, 1829), p. 101.

ecclesiastical functions legally. Of paramount importance in the context of Edmund Rice's subsequent vocation, the Act also allowed the establishment of Catholic schools, on receipt of a license from the Church of Ireland bishop, but endowment of such schools was forbidden.⁴²

These measures represented an unprecedented opportunity for Irish Catholics, to the extent that their legal position was 'transformed as to merit the use of the word revolution'.⁴³ From the perspective of the clergy, the relief measures removed the legal obstacles to the Catholic revival, described in chapter one, and it is from the 1780s that we can see the 'Tridentine surge' in earnest.⁴⁴ In Callan, however, that revival was impeded by the presence of an ineffectual parish priest, Darby Murphy, who had been appointed to the town in 1768. Twenty years later he was suspended by Bishop John Dunne (1788) and was subsequently excommunicated for resisting the sentence. There is no record of the cause of his suspension, but Carrigan, the diocesan historian, perhaps euphemistically attributes it to 'the neglected condition in which he kept the parish chapel', which he failed to rectify despite repeated warnings from his bishop.⁴⁵ From the point of view of the laity, the relief measures created a climate of unprecedented opportunity. This springtime was especially welcomed by ambitious, rising families like the Rices whose frugal lifestyles had allowed them accumulate capital. Once the penal laws were dismantled from 1778 onwards, these families availed of leases, and often outbid their more ostentatious Protestant neighbours in the acquisition of land. By his death in 1787, Robert Rice had assembled a farm of 182 acres, fifty-five of which were at Westcourt and the remaining 127 at Ballykeefe.⁴⁶

⁴² See T. Bartlett, 'The origins and progress of the Catholic Question in Ireland in Power and Whelan (eds), Endurance and Emergence, pp 1-21.

⁴³ T. Bartlett, 'The origins and progress', p. 8.

⁴⁴ See N. Yates, The Religious Condition of Ireland, pp 214-48.

⁴⁵ Carrigan, Ossory, iii, p. 348.

⁴⁶ Registry of Deeds, Will of Robert Rice. 1787; Applotment Book, Parish of Callan, 18/6/1827, applotment nos 358, 363, 364

Yet the advance of such large tenant farmers was not made without serious consequences, and increasing land-hunger led to heightened social tensions. Significantly, several of the recollections collected for Edmund Rice's cause for canonisation comment on the notorious ambition of the family who made every effort to consolidate and enlarge their holding, even when this verged on land grabbing. The Rices, apparently, were 'ambitious for land and were anxious to get rich quick'. Another reminiscence claimed that they 'were considered to have been perhaps, endowed by a too keen sense of business', and again that 'they were fond of land and were always anxious to secure a good place'.⁴⁷ One contributor expressed the bitterness created by this process:

I heard some old people refer to the fact that Edmund Rice took farms which some less prosperous people were unable to hold. He re-set these farms and from the proceeds financed his schools. Some of the descendants of the people who had lost their holdings in the Minauns area of Callan were rather critical and embittered against Brother Rice.⁴⁸

Such images are greatly at odds with traditional representation of Westcourt as a place where 'the poorer children gathered ... [and] where Edmund's mother saw that they had plenty to eat'.⁴⁹ Such conflicting memories, however, are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Such tensions and dispossession gave rise to agrarian violence, which found expression in the 'Whiteboy' and subsequent 'Rightboy' movements.⁵⁰ These emerged in protest against the enclosure of common land in Tipperary in 1761, but the violence and 'levelling' of the Whiteboys eventually spread through much of Munster and south Leinster, threatening the security of the region, within the wider international context of the 'Seven Years War' (1756-63). In Callan the effects of the enclosure were significant; one-third of the

⁴⁷ M.C. Normoyle (ed.), *Memoirs*, pp. 114, 138, 253.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁴⁹ D.H. Allen, *The Presentation Brothers* (Cork, 1993), p. 2.

⁵⁰ J.S. Donnelly, 'The Whiteboy movement, 1761-65', *I.H.S.* (1978), pp 20-54.

land around the town was common land, but this had been walled in and rented at punitive commercial rates.⁵¹ In time the Whiteboys widened their agenda to oppose high rents, cess, evictions and, above all, the hated tithes paid to the Anglican clergy. It was in the context of these disturbances that Fr Nicholas Sheehy was executed at Clonmel (1766), twenty miles from the Rice homestead, in a judicial murder which reflected the potential of 'arbitrary repression' at a time when the formal application of the penal laws appeared to wane.⁵²

Simple sectarian interpretations cannot be applied to this movement, which illustrates clearly the complexity of late eighteenth-century Irish society. Indeed, in Butler territory, where many of the landlords were Catholic a great deal of its attention was directed against avaricious Catholic farmers. In 1775, Archbishop James Butler II was incensed at the ingratitude of the people towards their traditional protectors, and denounced the Whiteboys for their assault on Ballyragget, 'a town belonging to a Butler'.⁵³ Whiteboy violence was condemned by the Munster bishops in a series of pastorals, but the archbishop of Cashel, took measures further. He organised the people of Ballyragget into a vigilante style league, sworn at their chapel by a justice of the peace to defend their landlord, his brother Robert Butler (1774).⁵⁴ At the other end of the social scale, too, migrant workers were intimidated because they represented a threat to the poor of Callan, who themselves relied on the casual and seasonal work on the local farms. Occasional skirmishes took place in Callan, but in time these migrants, or 'spailpíni', became targets for organized Whiteboy aggression. Tipperary men working in Ballyragget, Urlingford and Johnstown were attacked and made swear never to work in Kilkenny again while, in 1779, rumours were

⁵¹ M.C. Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 18.

⁵² S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998), p. 510; W. P. Burke, *History of Clonmel* (Waterford, 1907), pp 360-405.

⁵³ Cited in W. G. Neely, *Kilkenny, an urban history, 1391-1843* (Belfast, 1989), p. 159.

⁵⁴ P. Wallace, 'Archbishop James Butler II' in W. Nolan (ed.), *Thurles: the cathedral town* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 47-54.

spread that press gangs were operating at the hiring fairs in Kilkenny to frighten off would be labourers from outside the county.⁵⁵

It was against this troubled background that Bishop Troy of Ossory delivered his gothic excommunication of the Whiteboys in 1775, and again in 1779, condemning them to:

everlasting Hell ... When they shall be judged, may they be condemned ... may their posterity be cut off in one generation. Let their children be carried about as vagabonds and beg and let them be cast out of their dwellings. May the usurers search all their substance and let strangers plunder their labours. May there be none to help them, nor none to pity their fatherless offspring. May their names be blotted out ... let their memory perish from the earth. Let all the congregation say Amen, Amen, Amen.⁵⁶

The Catholic Church increasingly aligned itself to the political establishment and the preservation of the status quo in the face of such social challenge. In August 1778, a great number of 'the most respectable Roman Catholics' of the city and county of Kilkenny took the oath of allegiance to King George III.⁵⁷ Edmund's father, Robert Rice, joined that number in the following year, 'thereby not only assuring his loyalty to the Crown, but ... securing ... his lands'.⁵⁸ So too did the clergy of Ossory, led by their bishop John Troy, who accepted the oath as a 'condition sine qua non of our establishment in this Kingdom'.⁵⁹ However, this alignment, was not made without consequence and the period witnessed a dramatic rise in anti-clericalism, which illustrated the increasing alienation of the 'faithful' poor from the emerging institutional church. The violence of the Rightboys, directed at the clergy, was a manifestation of this. In one instance, the aged Bishop Michael Peter Mac Mahon of Kilalloe, attempted to calm the disturbed parish of Castleconnell in

⁵⁵ Kennedy, 'Callan', p. 293; J. Burtchaell and D. Dowling 'Social and economic conflict in county Kilkenny 1600-1800' in Nolan and Whelan (eds), Kilkenny, pp. 251-73.

⁵⁶ John Troy, Pastoral and Excommunication (Kilkenny, 1779)

⁵⁷ John Brady (ed.), Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century Press, pp 191-92.

⁵⁸ J.D. Fitzpatrick, 'The Rice Family', CBER (1969), p. 2.

⁵⁹ John Troy to Bishop Fallon, 14 Sept. 1778, DDA.

1786, but his pleas produced an exodus from the chapel, by the 'people would not listen to a word from him'.⁶⁰ Closer to the Rice home, Fr Michael Darcy was attacked on the altar by a band of Rightboys as he celebrated Mass at Mullenaglock near Nilemilehouse, on the Kilkenny-Tipperary border.⁶¹ It was not without reason then, that Bishop Denis Conway of Limerick (1786) predicted 'a total overthrow of Religion Province [of Munster], if the Almighty does not stretch forth his powerful Arm to avert it'.⁶²

This was the real 'hidden Ireland' of Edmund Rice's youth. Not the tranquil oasis described in Juverna, but rather a complex society marked by unprecedented levels of class conflict, social tensions and divisions within the Catholic church. Far from the accepted notions of the conflict between 'big-house' and the great mass outside the gate, it was there that the real struggle took place as Catholics jostled for position in a rapidly evolving society. It is amongst this conflict that Edmund Rice is best understood, rather than in a mythical 'penal consensus' or misleading sense of 'muintearas' [friendship/community], which serves only to obscure the idealism of his subsequent achievement.⁶³

⁶⁰ Bishop Conway, Limerick, to Archbishop Butler, July 1786, Cashel Diocesan Archives.

⁶¹ P. Power (ed.), 'A Carrickman's (James Ryan) Diary 1786-1809', Waterford Arch. Soc. Jn. (1913), p. 80.

⁶² Bishop Conway, Limerick, to Archbishop Butler, July 1786, Cashel Diocesan Archives.

⁶³ A.L. O'Toole, A Spiritual Profile of Edmund Ignatius Rice, I, (Bristol, 1984), p. 3.

III

THE WATERFORD MERCHANT

When Edmund Rice made his way to Waterford in 1779, there was no bridge across the Suir. The young apprentice stood on the Kilkenny side of the river and waited for the ferry which carried him the distance to his new life beyond. The next twenty years were to be the most eventful in his life; these years brought him commercial success beyond expectation. They also brought unforeseen personal tragedy which changed the course of his life. His was a classic conversion experience, not dramatic in the sense of St Paul's, but these years were marked by a number of well-defined steps which chart his transition from merchant to founder.¹

I

Michael Rice, Edmund's uncle, had a provisioning business near the Quay in Waterford. Like other merchants in the city, he had benefited greatly from the agricultural boom in tillage and dairying which brought prosperity to the south-east in the second half of the eighteenth-century. Waterford, with a population of 30,000, was ideally placed to reap the benefits of this economic miracle. A great deal of the agricultural surplus from the rich lands of its hinterland were shipped along the three rivers, the Suir, the Nore and the Barrow to be processed in the city, where the rivers converged.

¹ See J.E. Carroll, 'From Charism to Mission to Ministry: Edmund Rice and the founding years of the Christian Brothers' in *Edmund*, 10 (Rome, 1991), pp. 19-43.

Waterford developed flour-milling, brewing, distilling, bacon-curing, tanning, soap making and other industries whose products were exported through its fine port. These goods went to England, Spain and Portugal, but fortunes were also made servicing the triangular trade with the West Indies and North America.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the port had prospered, to an extent where it rivalled Cork in the colonial trade; Charles Smith (1746) has left a dramatic impression of this vibrant city:

The Quay is about half a mile in length and of considerable breadth, not inferior to but rather exceeds the most celebrated in Europe. To it the largest trading vessels may conveniently come up, both to load and to unload, and at a small distance opposite it may lie and constantly afloat. The Exchange, Custom House and other public buildings, ranged along the quay are no small addition to its beauty, which together with a number of shipping afford an agreeable prospect. The whole is fronted with hewn stone, well paved and in some places it is forty feet broad. To it are built five moles or piers which stretch forward; at the pier heads ships of 500 tons may load and unload and lie afloat. In the road before the Quay the river is between four and five fathoms deep at low water where sixty sail of ship may ride conveniently, clear of each other in clean ground.²

The later decades of the century brought further expansion. The French Wars (1793-1815), too, increased trade. Between 1790 and 1810 it is estimated that as many as 1,000 ships, averaging 900 tons each, visited the port annually. In addition, Waterford had a fishing fleet of eighty vessels which gave rise to a local fish-curing industry.³ The Rices shared in the prosperity of Waterford where Catholics made up one-third of the merchant numbers.⁴ Michael Rice engaged in extensive home and foreign trade and appears to have specialised in livestock, slaughtering, packing and exporting meat to Bristol. In addition he had lucrative contracts with the army, the

² C. Smith, The Ancient and Present State of the County and City of Waterford (Dublin, 1746), p. 195.

³ S. Lewis, Topographical Dictionary of Ireland (London, 1837), p. 687.

⁴ E. Wakefield, An account of Ireland, statistical and political. ii (London, 1812), p. 624

Admiralty and shipping companies. A significant portion of his trade was with Newfoundland; exporting meat and importing the dried 'lander' fish which formed an important part of the Waterford diet.⁵

Edmund lived with his uncle at his home in Arundel Place, off Barron Strand Street. He worked alongside his cousins Patrick and Robert, but neither of these appears to have had an inclination or aptitude for trade and in time he bought their share of his uncle's business.⁶ In 1788, John Rice joined his brother Edmund in Waterford; having learned the details of the export trade, he was sent to Cadiz to oversee the Spanish section of the business.⁷ The mobility of families like the Rices in the south-east is quite remarkable. Cullen believes that it is not present on such a scale in any other part of Ireland, outside the Presbyterian community of the north. He attributes this to 'a combination of social pressures and aspirations which predisposed even the lower classes to mobility', with as many as 5,000 crossing the Atlantic annually in search of seasonal labour in Newfoundland.⁸ A more recent commentator has identified this mobility as an important part of Catholic re-emergence. Kevin Whelan has pointed to essential links between the surviving gentry/strong farmers group and their co-religionists in the towns. He identifies a 'synchronisation of zones', reflected in 'the symbiosis of town and country ... the integration of marriage fields and the constant replenishment of town families by rural recruits'.⁹ All of these features are illustrated in the case of Edmund Rice.

Under the direction of his uncle, Edmund honed his natural business skills. There are few recollections of him from this time, but the earliest description comes from Br Austin Dunphy:

⁵ M.C. Normoyle, *Memories*, pp. 120, 175.

⁶ *Positio*, p. 12.

⁷ J.D. Fitzpatrick, *Edmund Rice* (Dublin, 1945), p. 55; Fitzpatrick later rejected the notion that John Rice had gone to Spain, *CBER* (1969), p. 8.

⁸ L.M. Cullen, *The Emergence of Modern Ireland 1600-1900* (Dublin, 1981), p. 126.

⁹ Whelan, 'Regional impact', pp 258-62.

He was unquestionably a very remarkable man. The first time I saw him was in the year 1796. He was then a very fine looking man, and bore a high character among the Catholic people and mercantile classes of the country. Indeed, he was respected and trusted by men of all creeds and classes ...

He was above middle height, being about six feet, of sanguine complexion, with eyes large and expressive, and of a bright hazel colour. His frame of body was formed for active habits, and his intellectual powers were of a high order. He had broad and just views of life and its varied problems, and possessed great mental vigour and steadfastness of purpose. He was generous, warm-hearted, and most paternal.¹⁰

Almost all of the recollections collected by Br Hill, and his successors in the folklore project, refer to his keen business sense. Yet, just as his family in Callan had established a reputation for fairness, reflected in their appointment as market jurors, in Waterford Edmund was remembered for his commercial integrity:

In his dealings with others, in buying and selling Br Rice's probity and uprightness could be noticed, as in these particulars he seemed to stand on a higher level than others. When buying he offered the full value without huckstering.¹¹

Such a reputation was paramount in a trade based entirely on trust, where there were no written contracts, and where business was conducted by verbal agreements, sealed by handshake, more often than not, over a drink. In this context, Edmund learned that a man was as good as his word, a maxim which would direct his life, but would blight his old age. More of the Memories refer to his sense of humour, a vital asset in trade; other recollections recall his piety and how the young merchant would say his rosary as he traveled to fairs.¹²

¹⁰ [McCarthy], Edmund Ignatius Rice, p. 67; CBGA, Rome, 25/093.

¹¹ M.C. Normoyle, Memories, p. 184.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 34.

If there was a criticism of Edmund in this period, it was that he had become something of a dandy.¹³ Several of the Memories recall that he was 'too fastidious about his dress', echoing an observation of John Shelly, a native of Callan and member of the Royal Irish Academy, made in 1863, less than twenty years after Edmund's death:

Mr Rice was, in his early days, of a gay and worldly disposition. Whilst on a visit one time with his uncle to Callan, he was met by the [local] poet [James Phelan of Coolagh] on entering the house of God. The poet was struck by his gaudy dress and the levity of his of his manners, so totally unfit for a worshipper in the house of prayer. On Mr Rice's coming out, the poet addressed him in our ancient language and in words of much religious fervour of the impropriety of his conduct. The words of the poet made a deep impression on him, and from that time he was noticed to be an altered man.¹⁴

Clearly, Edmund enjoyed the lifestyle prosperity brought him and his bustling social circle at Waterford included the Aylward and St Leger families, as well as Edward Shiel, who had amassed a fortune in Cadiz, and who was the father of Richard Lalor Shiel (1791-1851) the politician and Catholic activist. There is a tradition, too, that Rice had a close friendship with the poet Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin (1715-95), whom he is reputed to have met in the 'Yellow House' on the Lacken Road, beyond the city. In cultural terms, the existence of such a friendship points to Edmund Rice's inclusion in the Gaelic survival of Munster, but the sincerity of Tadhg Gaelach's religious conversion, reflected in his Pious Miscellany, can not have failed to influence the young merchant.¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 26, 34.

¹⁴ John Shelly, 'The Founder of the Christian Brothers Schools in Ireland', The Victorian, 30 May 1863, cited in Positio, p. 28.

¹⁵ [McCarthy], Edmund Ignatius Rice (Dublin, 1926) p. 58; see P.J. Daly, Furnace of Love, from the Irish of Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin (Dublin, 2002).

Ironically Edmund Rice's most intimate relationship is the one about which we know the least. It was about this time, possibly in 1785, that he married, but no details of that short marriage survive except for the information contained in the newspaper announcements of the death of his wife in January 1789:

Died at Ballybricken the wife of Mr Rice.¹⁶

Other than this we can say nothing that is archivally based about the wife of Edmund Rice; indeed, a cynic might ask if the Mr Rice referred to was our subject Edmund. Nor do we know much more about the couple's daughter Mary, who is believed to have been 'delicate' or handicapped in some way. The absence of detail concerning 'Mrs Rice' is perhaps the most glaring example of the difficulties in writing a satisfactory biography of a man who left no diary, Memories, or a personal correspondence other than one through which he conducted his business as merchant and religious superior. Above all, his modesty and reticence make him an elusive subject for a biographer; his contemporaries were not even aware of the most basic details of his brief marriage.

Perhaps this absence of information may be attributed to nineteenth-century attitudes towards religious life, particularly the tendency to exalt consecrated virginity above the married state. Sandra Schneiders has spoken of the concept of 'born again virgins' within the early church, in so far as widows embracing religious life could start anew.¹⁷ There was however no such latitude within nineteenth-century Irish Catholicism, which reflected the prevailing European spirituality, which has been characterised as cerebral,

¹⁶ Dublin Evening Post, 17 Jan. 1789; Freeman's Journal, 17 Jan. 1789; Falukner's Dublin Journal, 17 Jan. 1789; Hibernian Journal, 19 Jan 1789.

¹⁷ Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Edmund Rice and Religious Charism', unpublished paper delivered at Christian Brothers General Chapter, Rome, 2002.

'disembodied and anti-incarnational'.¹⁸ Edmund Rice himself was coy about his past. Writing to the Superior of the Presentation Convent in Waterford, on the occasion of the death of a mutual friend, he made a significant observation to Mother Keeshan, who was herself a widow:

O what Thanksgiving should we not give to God for calling us into Religion, and to have us divested from the cares of providing for husband, wife or children. May He be blessed and praised for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁹

Br McCarthy's biography of Edmund Rice (1926), which runs to five hundred and thirty five pages, treats the marriage in just one paragraph. The absence of information is curtly excused by the fact that 'the early brothers, with a delicacy of feeling which is commendable, seldom refer to it', a reflection, perhaps of contemporary attitudes towards the married state.²⁰ Almost nothing is known about Mrs Rice although McCarthy argues that:

We may assume that a gentleman of his kindly nature and virtuous habits must have been an ideal husband, and that one of his strong character, practical sense, and religious principles made a wise selection in choosing the lady who was to be the mistress of his home.²¹

The first time she is named is in the memoir of Martin O'Flynn collected one hundred and sixty years after her death. This was the only one of the 250 memoirs published by Br Normoyle which offered a name and a surname. Yet even this informant was unsure and described her as 'Mary or Bridget'

¹⁸ Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Reframing Religious Life* (London, 1998), p. 28.

¹⁹ Edmund Rice to Mother M.P. Keeshan, n.d. [1836?], in M.C. Normoyle(ed.), *A Companion to a Tree is Planted; the correspondence of Edmund Rice and his Assistants 1810-42* (Dublin, 1977), p. 194.

²⁰ [McCarthy], *Edmund Ignatius Rice*, p. 55.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 55

Elliott, the daughter of a Waterford tanner.²² More recently it has been asserted that Mrs Rice was 'Maria Ellis', whose family had a livery yard in New Street.²³ This echoes information gleaned by Berchmans Cullen, who conducted extensive research on Rice's Waterford connections, in the course of which it was suggested to him that Edmund's wife was an 'Ellis', possibly a sister of Br Patrick Ellis, one of the early Brothers.²⁴ There is a tradition, too, that Mrs Rice may have been a Mac Elligott from Annewtown, County Waterford; perhaps this is why it became Rice's favourite place for peace and relaxation during the trials of his later life.²⁵

The search for Mrs Rice is frustrated by the paucity of archival evidence and the lack of parochial registers for the period in the diocese of Waterford and Lismore. In the absence of such hard information, creative interpretations have been offered for her identity. Br Liam Ó Caithnia flew a number of kites, one of which suggested that she may have been a Protestant, or that the couple were married in the Protestant church.²⁶ Such a proposition is credible; Edmund Rice was on good terms with the leading Protestants of the city, where inter-church relations reflected the mutual toleration and co-operation which characterized the latter decades of the eighteenth-century.²⁷ Nevertheless, once that relative ecumenism gave way to the open hostility of the 'Second Reformation' in the 1820s, it was unlikely that Edmund Rice's marriage to a Protestant would not have been flaunted by the Brothers' enemies in the 'Bible Wars'.²⁸

²² Normoyle, *Memories*, p. 224; Liam Ó Caithnia, 'The Death of Mrs Edmund Rice', in P. S. Carroll (ed.), *A Man Raised Up: reflections and recollections on Venerable Edmund Rice* (Dublin, 1994), p. 76.

²³ J. O'Neill, *A Waterford Miscellany* (Waterford, 2004), p. 135.

²⁴ Br W.B. Cullen to Br David Fitzpatrick, 7 Oct. 1949, CBGA Rome, 0012/137.

²⁵ Br W.B. Cullen to Br John E. Carroll, 22 Sept. 1970, CBGA Rome, 0012/137.

²⁶ Liam Ó Caithnia, 'The Death of Mrs Edmund Rice', p. 77.

²⁷ N. Yates, *The Religious Condition of Ireland*, x.

²⁸ See D. Keogh, 'The Christian Brothers and the Second Reformation in Ireland', *Éire-Ireland*, Volume 40:1&2, Spring/Summer 2005, pp. 42-59

In his recent study of the education charism of Edmund Rice, Denis McLaughlin has challenged the assumption that Mrs Rice was 'a lady of a well to do family', suggesting instead that her people may have been 'relative nobodies', or modest farmers, from whom Rice purchased pigs at local fairs or markets.²⁹ This thesis is offered on the basis of a number of observations, and circumstantial evidence, but primarily upon her willingness to live with Edmund at Ballybricken, 'a part of the city where vice and ignorance prevailed to a greater extent than elsewhere'.³⁰ McLaughlin deduces from this, and the Memories of Edmund's charity in the city, that not alone was Mrs Rice 'not too precious to live among the common folk', but that 'this fun loving, rural, hospitable teenager must have shared Rice's sensitivity and compassion for the poor, since their Ballybricken home became Rice's first school', fifteen years before he started his enterprise in Mount Sion.³¹

This argument is not without its attraction and suggests, as McLaughlin argues, that 'Ricean education' may have been 'conceived within a loving family dynamic'.³² Ballybricken, however, was not a mass of undifferentiated poverty. It is true that the most prosperous areas of the city were nearest to the quay, but Ballybricken was an exception. The area was the centre of the livestock trade, with its associated conditions, but the housing stock reflected the full range from the homes of prosperous merchants through to the urban poor. That Ballybricken was a hub of activity is reflected in the presence of as many as thirty pubs in the district. These were effectively the exchanges or 'bourses' of the city; it was there deals were made and labour hired. For a merchant like Edmund Rice not to have a presence in Ballybricken was unthinkable.³³

²⁹ D. McLaughlin, The Price of Freedom, (Forthcoming), Chapter 1.

³⁰ Tipperary Vindicator, 4 Sept. 1844.

³¹ D. McLaughlin, The Price of Freedom, Chapter 1.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ I am grateful to Jack Burtchael for this information.

Significantly, too, given the Rice family's notorious ambition, it is improbable that he would not have made a strategically advantageous marriage. Indeed, Whelan has argued that the marriage patterns of families such as Edmund's were 'carefully controlled to nurture family interests'.³⁴ More crudely, it has been argued that within an eighteenth-century context, the requirements for such marriages were virginity and a dowry; without both any union was inconceivable.³⁵ In the last analysis, the fact that the death notice of Mrs Rice of Ballybricken appeared in no less than four national newspapers suggests categorically that she was a person of consequence and standing within the social hierarchy of Waterford.

The marriage ended with Mrs Rice's tragic death in January 1789, leaving Edmund as a twenty-seven year old widower and father of a 'delicate' daughter. The circumstances of her death are as equally elusive. Family tradition, related by Sister Josephine Rice of St John's Newfoundland in 1929, holds that Mrs Rice died in a riding accident:

The Founder had been married to a lady of a well-to-do family who was fond of the hunt as most wealthy people were in those days. When she was well-advanced with child, she was riding and was thrown from her horse, dying as a result of the accident. The doctor managed to save the child who had evidently been injured by the fall and hence did not develop normally. This was the child he provided for when he began his work.³⁶

This account has been convincingly challenged by Ó Caithnia.³⁷ As a folklorist he questioned the reliability of the transcription: why would Sr Josephine refer to Edmund Rice as 'The Founder'? Apart from this and other textual criticisms, he speculates on how this tradition could be preserved for one hundred and forty years by the Newfoundland Rices when not one of the 250 interviews contained in Normoyle's *Memories* refer to the event? Ó

³⁴ K. Whelan, 'Mentalities', p. 126.

³⁵ J. Kelly, 'The abduction of women of fortune in eighteenth-century Ireland' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 9 (1994), pp 7-43.

³⁶ Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted* p. 25.

³⁷ L. Ó Caithnia, 'The Death of Mrs Edmund Rice', pp. 67-79.

Caithnia rejects this riding accident thesis and instead accepts the tradition that Mary Rice died in the fever which swept Europe in 1789; that 'dreadful fever' which Dorothea Herbert claimed, 'raged all over the World ... and carried off Millions in every quarter of the Globe'.³⁸

The veil of secrecy which surrounds Mrs Rice also cloaks our knowledge of Edmund's daughter Mary. In fact, the invisibility of the mother may have contributed to the rumours that his daughter was illegitimate.³⁹ Moreover, in the context of a bitter dispute with Bishop Robert Walsh of Waterford and Lismore, it was alleged by his adversaries that from Edmund's 'loins issued many a bastard child, some of which breed and spurious progeny are still living'.⁴⁰ Little is known about Rice's daughter, although the Memories indicate a general awareness of her existence, and several of these recollections recall her presence at Westcourt.⁴¹ A contemporary Brother described her as 'weak-headed', while some of the memoirs refer to her as 'delicate'.⁴² Cullen, on the basis of the memoirs he collected at Callan, was emphatic that she was 'not of unsound mind, unbalanced, crippled or deformed', but it is usually assumed that Mary Rice was handicapped, although the nature and extent of her disability is unclear.⁴³ In this context, Ó Caithnia believes that the story of the fall from the horse is more correctly related to the child's condition and not the mother's death. Similar motifs were often invoked to account for handicap or mental weakness in order to protect 'the good name of the family'.⁴⁴

³⁸ Dorothea Herbert, Retrospections, 1770-1806 (London, 1929), p. 203.

³⁹ Br Mark Hill to T. C., Whitty, 19 May 1913, CBGA Rome.

⁴⁰ 17 Pastors of the Diocese of Waterford, to Propaganda Fide, 11 Sept. 1818, SCRI, vol. 21, f. 513 cited in M.C. Normoyle (ed.), Roman Correspondence, pp 28-30.

⁴¹ Normoyle (ed.), Memories, pp 38, 42.

⁴² Br M.I. Kelly to Br T. Hearn, 2 April 1850, GBGA Rome, 25/294.

⁴³ Br W.B. Cullen to Br John E. Carroll, 22 Sept. 1970, CBGA Rome, 0012/137.

⁴⁴ L. Ó Caithnia, 'The Death of Mrs Edmund Rice', p. 76.

Following the death of his wife, Edmund moved from Ballybricken to Arundel Place, where Joan Murphy, his step-sister, helped him care for Mary.⁴⁵ When, in 1802, he embarked on his mission he entrusted his teenage daughter to Patrick Rice, his brother at Westcourt. On his death in 1833, Mary moved to Carrick-on-Suir, County Waterford, where she remained in the care of her D'Alton cousins until her death in 1859; a monument was erected to mark her grave at Carrigbeg following Rice's beatification in 1996.⁴⁶ Throughout his life Edmund cared for his daughter; we can surmise that he visited her at Callan and subsequently at Carrick, where he called frequently to the Brothers' monastery. What is beyond doubt, is that he provided generously for her physical welfare and his accounts for 1826 reveal that she was maintained at a considerable expense of £16 per annum.⁴⁷ Following his death the Christian Brothers continued to support her, although their attempts to administer Edmund Rice's labyrinthine accounts indicates the limited extent to which he had informed even his closest confreres of his family and daughter. In 1850, Br Ignatius Kelly wrote to the Assistant Superior General of the Congregation:

There is an impression on my mind that about the year 1836 I heard Br Ignatius Rice make some statements about those poor relatives in Callan ... as if there was something due to some of them, but of this I am quite uncertain, but I suppose there are many of them there, and why this person in particular should, for so long a time, receive so much, does not appear, and it might be worth enquiring into ... If it were that weak-headed creature, the daughter, I should feel ourselves bound to support her.⁴⁸

That Br Ignatius, one of Edmund's closest friends, was ignorant of these personal details is an indication not only of Edmund's reticence, but of the extent to which the founder's married years had been forgotten or perhaps

⁴⁵ Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 27.

⁴⁶ Cullen surmises that Mary Rice's carer was a married D'Alton cousin; Br W.B. Cullen to Br John E. Carroll, 22 Sept. 1970, CBGA Rome, 0012/137.

⁴⁷ Extracts from the Account Books of the Congregation, listing payments made for the maintenance of Ed. Rice's daughter, CBGA Rome, 0012/137.

⁴⁸ Br Ml Kelly to Br T. Hearn, 2 April 1850, CBGA Rome, 25/294.

avoided. It is difficult to credit that in a small city such as Waterford, that no one would recall this crucial episode in the life of the city's most illustrious adopted son and his wife, about who all we can say is: 'Died at Ballybricken the wife of Mr Rice'.⁴⁹ In the absence of additional sources, anything more is simply conjecture.

II

Edmund's desolation at the death of his wife can only be imagined. Of a friend in similar circumstances he later wrote, 'may the Lord help her, she is now [in] the dregs of misery and misfortune. I pity the poor Mother, it will break her heart'.⁵⁰ Yet this double tragedy was to play an enormous part in his conversion and from this period onwards it is possible to identify an increased religious and social consciousness and perhaps, the consciousness of his religious vocation.

We have already noted the so-called 'Tridentine surge' which took place in the last decades of the eighteenth-century; in the city of Waterford the process was lead by Thomas Hearn, vicar general of the diocese and parish priest of Trinity Within. This revival was manifested in many ways, chapel building being perhaps the most obvious, including the Cathedral of Waterford completed in 1796. The first cathedral to be built by Catholics in Ireland since the Reformation, it was designed by local architect John Roberts, a protestant who had also built the Church of Ireland cathedral in the city in 1774. In a significant reflection of the status of Catholics in Waterford, their new cathedral was erected at a cost of £20,000, whereas

⁴⁹ L. Ó Calthnia, 'The Death of Mrs Edmund Rice', p. 77.

⁵⁰ E. Rice to M.P. Keeshan, n.d. [1836] in M.C. Normoyle (ed), *A companion*, pp. 494-5.

the Anglicans had spent less than £6,000 on theirs.⁵¹ There were, however, more dynamic aspects of this renewal and these were reflected in the increased levels of devotional printing as well as the growth of pious confraternities in the city, including the sodalities of the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin. Edmund Rice was part of this revival and enthusiastically embraced the exacting spirituality of the Catholic Reformation, which was characterized by sacramental devotion, heroic efforts at meditation and prayer, and the exercise of good works.⁵²

About the year 1790, at the age of thirty-eight, he joined a number of young men in Waterford who formed a pious association, under the influence of the Jesuits, who had remained in the city following the suppression of their congregation by the Holy See in 1773. This was to be a particularly formative period in Edmund's life; it was within this circle that he was introduced to the wealth of Jesuit spirituality. The Waterford group met in St Patrick's, the 'Little Chapel' in Jenkin's Lane, and was committed to living more active Christian lives, along the lines promoted by St Ignatius and his early companions. Among the various duties they promoted were: private prayer, spiritual reading, the practice of charity and the frequent reception of the sacraments of communion and confession, which the Jesuit Pierre Favre [Peter Faber] (1506-46) had advocated 'more than anything else' as the foundation for a new and happy life.⁵³ This was a radical commitment since frequent communion was uncommon; in 1829, for instance, Bishop James Doyle reported that only ten per-cent of the faithful of Kildare and Leighlin were regular monthly communicants.⁵⁴ Yet while frequent communion was not particularly stressed by the church until the pontificate of Pius X (1903-

⁵¹ N. Yates, The Religious condition of Ireland, p. 244.

⁵² H. Outram Evennett, 'Counter-Reformation Spirituality', in D. M. Luebeck (ed.), The Counter-Reformation (Oxford, 1999), pp 47-65.

⁵³ J.W. O'Malley, The First Jesuits (Harvard, 1993), p. 139.

⁵⁴ E. Larkin, The Pastoral Role, p. 185.

14), Edmund was a daily communicant since this time and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament remained the defining hallmark of his spirituality.⁵⁵

In spite of his limited education, Edmund immersed himself in the spiritual classics as he sought to bring meaning to his apparently unfulfilled life. He delighted in The Imitation of Christ, by Thomas à Kempis (1379-1471), a book to which he remained devoted throughout his life. It, too, encouraged frequent communion and confession. At its simplest, The Imitation was a call to inwardness and reflection. It was not abstract or simply intellectual, but in O'Malley's phrase, 'it spoke to the heart from the heart'; it was a call to conversion, 'to personal appropriation of religious truth in holiness of life'.⁵⁶ In addition, Edmund's name appears on subscription lists for several religious imprints, including a 1793 Waterford edition of The Spiritual Combat (1593), a translation of Lorenzo Scupoli's (1530-1610) classic devotional work which St Francis De Sales described as his 'golden book'. Its sixty-six chapters presented a 'battle plan' or strategy for achieving perfection and salvation: they were to the Theatine Order (f. 1524) what the Spiritual Exercises were to the Jesuits. This was an influential handbook and its importance at this stage of Edmund Rice's spiritual development can hardly be over-estimated. A recent edition of the classic has grouped Scupoli's reflections into eleven chapters, the titles of which suggest immediate resonances with Edmund's spirituality:

Understand the means for attaining Christian perfection; Distrust yourself; Trust God; Use trustworthy spiritual methods; Pray; Rely on the Eucharist; Persevere in spiritual combat; Govern your heart; Give yourself to God; Do not yield to discouragement; Learn to preserve your inner peace.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ A.L. O'Toole, A spiritual profile of Edmund Ignatius Rice, i (Bristol, 1984), p. 58.

⁵⁶ J.W. O'Malley, The First Jesuits, p. 266.

⁵⁷ Lorenzo Scupoli, Spiritual Combat: How to Win Your Spiritual Battles and Attain Peace (Sophia Institute Press, 2002).

As Rice's spiritual biographer has observed, in Scupoli Edmund 'had to hand an approved manual of perfection which provided a methodical approach to the spiritual life congenial to his ordered business mind'.⁵⁸

The most significant step in Rice's spiritual development came in 1791 when he subscribed to a Dublin imprint of the Douai Bible.⁵⁹ This was the critical moment in Edmund's formation, for he accepted literally his Saviour's invitation to make his words his home. The surviving Bible is not just heavily thumbed, but it contains Rice's original annotations and twelve texts which he transcribed under the heading 'Texts against Usury' inside the flyleaf:

T E X T S A G A I N S T U S U R Y

Ex 22:25 If you lend money to any of my people that is poor, that dwelleth with thee: thou shalt not be hard on upon them as an extortioner, nor oppress them with usuries.

Lev 25:35-6 If thy brother be impoverished, and weak of hand, and thou receive him as a stranger and sojourner, and he live with thee: Take not usury of him nor more than thou gavest. Fear thy God, they thy brother may live with thee.

Dt 23:19 Thou shalt not lend to thy brother money to usury, nor corn, nor any other thing.

Ps 14:5 He that hath not put out his money to usury, nor taken bribes against the innocent; he that doth these things shall not be moved for ever.

Ps 54:11-12 Day and night shall iniquity surround it upon its walls; and in its midst thereof are labour and injustice. And usury and deceit have not departed from its streets.

Prov. 22:16 He that oppresseth the poor, to increase his own riches, shall himself give to one that is richer, and shall be in need.

⁵⁸ A.L. O'Toole, *A spiritual profile*, I, p. 87.

⁵⁹ Carroll, 'From Charism to Mission to Ministry', p. 21.

Prov. 28:8 He that heapeth together riches by usury and loan gathereth them for him that will be bountiful to the poor.

Ez. 18:31 That grieveth the needy and the poor: that taketh away by violence: that restoreth not the pledge: and that lifteth up his eyes to idols: that committeth abomination: that giveth up usury and that taketh an increase; shall such a one live? He shall not live.

Ez. 18:31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed, and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit: and why should you die, O House of Israel?

2 Esd. 5:11 Restore ye to them this day their fields, and their hundreth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine and the oil, which you were wont to exact from them, give it rather for them.

Mt. 5:42 Give to him that asketh of thee; and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away.

Lk. 6:35 But love ye your enemies; do good and lend, hoping for nothing thereby; and your reward shall be great and you shall be the sons of the highest for he is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.

A literal analysis of the selection may suggest an unhappiness on Rice's part with his business practice to date. Some Catholic merchants had added to their fortune by money lending. While there is no proof that Edmund Rice engaged in the practice, given the recollection that the Rices were 'endowed by a too keen sense of business', it is not improbable that he did.⁶⁰ Besides this, there was rumbling controversy amongst the Catholics of Munster throughout the eighteenth-century on the morality of lending at interest. As late as 1824 Bishop Coppinger of Cloyne declared that he was 'fully aware that many worthy ecclesiastics have their scruples upon legal interest'.⁶¹ In some respects, however, the emphasis upon the 'Texts against usury' has distracted attention from the possibility that the transcriptions may provide a

⁶⁰ Normoyle, *Memories*, p. 138.

⁶¹ Coppinger to Bishop Laffan, 11 October 1824 in D. Dickson, 'Catholics and trade in Eighteenth-Century Ireland' in Power and Whelan (eds), *Endurance and Emergence*, pp. 92-3.

key towards an understanding of Rice's spirituality. Indeed Carroll has argued that they reflect his image of God, and the appeal of the notion of the covenant between Yahweh and his people, 'a merchant concept: a bargain, a contract that he could understand'.⁶²

At a broader level, this engagement with the Scriptures reflects the extent to which Edmund accepted the radical challenge at the heart of the Gospel. It is tempting to imagine him reading the story of the 'Rich Young Man'. He was particularly struck by the inseparable connection between the love of God and the love of neighbour. He was fired by the concept and his subsequent life was driven by a desire to fulfill the imperative presented in chapter twenty five of St Matthew's gospel, where Jesus delivers the parables of the ten virgins, the talents, and the description of the last judgment:

25:34. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

25:35. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.

25:36. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

25:37. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

25:38. When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

25:39. When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

25: 40. The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

25: 41. Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

25:42. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

25:43. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

⁶² Carroll, 'From Charism to Mission to Ministry', p. 21.

25:44. They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

25: 45. He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

25:46. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

This parable demonstrates the essential Christian understanding of *caritas*; in a very striking way Matthew 25 became the constant yardstick against which Rice measured his actions.

The text is not annotated in his Testament, nor is there documentary evidence that this was so, but an extrapolation of his behaviour suggests the text provided a moral checklist which he conscientiously observed as he strove to exercise the corporal works of mercy. Rice's commitment to the poor was reflected in his involvement in many of the charitable societies present in Waterford. In the absence of a formal mechanism for state intervention prior to the establishment of poor law schemes in the 1830s, the alleviation of distress was left principally to private charity. Waterford had a number of Catholic charitable societies. In 1771 the Butler and Fitzgerald charities established two hostels each; in 1779 the Wyse charity provided a further three. In 1793 Edmund Rice was among the founding members of the Trinitarian Orphan Society, which maintained the large Congreve mansion on New Street where one hundred boys and girls were housed and educated.⁶³ In the following year, during a time of particular famine and distress in the city, Edmund was among the founders, if not the initiator, of the 'Waterford Society for visiting and relieving distressed room-keepers', a group not unlike the St Vincent de Paul Society.⁶⁴ He had also particular concern for the plight of prisoners, as advocated in Matthew 25. This was a significant apostolate, since there was little long term incarceration in the eighteenth-century. Prisoners tended to fall into two categories, debtors or

⁶³ Garrett Connolly to E. Rice, 6 Feb. 1820, in Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 55.

⁶⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Edmund Rice*, p. 59

those awaiting sentence, execution or transportation.⁶⁵ Edmund visited the prisons and assisted the inmates materially, providing them with food and small funds to help relieve the misery of hunger and overcrowding. This was to be a constant feature of his life and special apostolate of the early Christian Brothers; on his arrival in Australia, too, Ambrose Tracey (1868) initiated a ministry to prisoners at Melbourne.

There are two fascinating accounts of individual beneficiaries of Rice's charity to the stranger. The first concerns the young Italian immigrant, Charles Bianconi, whom Rice advised and helped secure premises in Clonmel. In time, Bianconi established a thriving transport system and was elected Mayor of Clonmel, but he never forgot his early benefactor and each year sent £50 and twenty suits of clothes for poor boys. His appreciation for the 'good friend who took a kindly interest' in him was reflected in a clause of his will which ran 'failing direct issue, I bequeath to the Christian Brothers the reversion of my property'. Bianconi was survived by a daughter.⁶⁶

The second beneficiary was a poor black slave boy who Edmund saw on the deck of a vessel at the quay in Waterford. Rice bought the boy from the ship's master and entrusted him to the care of the Presentation Sisters on Hennessy's Road. When the boy grew he worked as a messenger for the sisters and later Edmund helped him purchase premises at Gracedieu in the city. In time 'Black Johnnie, whose legal name was John Thomas, succeeded in business and on his death his property, consisting of two houses, was left between the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Sisters.⁶⁷ Traditional accounts of this history have presented the details of this encounter in a pious and sentimental fashion, stressing Black Johnnie's industry and piety learned from his benefactor, repeating, for example the

⁶⁵ Philip Woodfine, 'Debtors, Prisons, and Petitions in Eighteenth-Century England', *Eighteenth-Century Life* - Volume 30, Number 2 (Spring 2006), pp. 1-31.

⁶⁶ [McCarthy], *Edmund Ignatius Rice*, pp. 277-8; O'Connell, *Life of Charles Bianconi*, p. 36.

⁶⁷ A. O'Neill, 'Nuns and Monks at Hennessy's Road', Carroll (ed.), *A Man Raised Up*, pp. 79-96.

adage that in death his soul was as white as his skin had been black in life.⁶⁸ In its historical context, Edmund's actions in freeing the boy reflect the sentiments of his contemporary abolitionist William Wilberforce; it anticipated the abolition of the slave trade by almost a decade (1807), and the emancipation of British slaves by thirty years (1833). The liberation of a slave by a merchant who had benefited greatly from the Trans-Atlantic trade, so dependent upon slavery, is indicative of Edmund's full and radical conversion and serves as a metaphor for the liberty he would later bring to the poor of Waterford through the power education.

Of course, Edmund's contemporaries in Waterford were more concerned about what would later be called 'Catholic Emancipation'. Rice did not hesitate to lend his support to that campaign either. After 1778 and 1782, the bulk of the religious and economic disabilities of the penal era had been removed, but the political restrictions remained on the statute book. Since the middle of the century, Catholic interests had been represented by an ineffectual Catholic Committee. Already by the 1780s, tensions had begun to develop within this body as the confident new middle class began to challenge the old aristocratic leadership. In the past the Committee had been content to beg relief from their 'gracious sovereign' in deferential terms, but under the influence of French Revolutionary ideology this more aggressive faction demanded redress for Catholic grievances as a right rather than a reward to be sought with deference.

Waterford had played a prominent role in Catholic politics of the eighteenth-century; in the 1750s the leadership of the Catholic Committee was largely provided by Thomas Wyse, one of a wealthy mercantile family with continental connections. It was understandable that ambitious, prosperous Catholics would turn their attention to political disabilities and Edmund Rice was no exception. In 1792 the Irish parliament passed a relief bill which

⁶⁸ [McCarthy], Edmund Ignatius Rice, p. 64.

granted minor concessions to the Catholics. Nevertheless, sufficient concessions were made to turn the debate in College Green into an anti-Catholic tirade. The parliamentary session generated considerable resentment within the Catholic community and there was particular bitterness amongst the Catholic Committee at the insults hurled in their direction. The Committee was dismissed in parliament as 'shop-keepers and shop-lifters', 'men of very low and mean parentage'. Wolfe Tone, its secretary, was particularly incensed at the depiction of the Committee as a 'porter-drinking' rabble meeting in 'holes and corners'.⁶⁹

These attacks placed the Committee on the defensive, but resentment quickly gave way to anger. In March 1792 it published a 'Declaration', demonstrating that the principles of Catholicism were in no way incompatible with the duties of citizens or 'repugnant to liberty, whether political, civil or religious'. The declaration answered many of the attacks levelled at Catholics during the parliamentary debates; it renounced all interests in forfeited estates and declared that, if restored to the elective franchise, they would not use the privilege to 'disturb and weaken the establishment of the Protestant religion or Protestant government' in the country.⁷⁰ The Committee decided to muster as much support for this Declaration as possible. Chapel meetings were held around the country to garner support and gather signatures; significantly that Edmund Rice, together with Bishop Egan and Dean Hearn, was among the one hundred leading Catholics of Waterford to sign the declaration, is an indication of the extent to which he belonged within the city's elite.⁷¹

The Committee mounted equally forceful campaigns in 1793 and again in 1795, but on these occasions Edmund's name was absent from the

⁶⁹ T.W. Tone, cited in D. Keogh, The French Disease, pp. 55-6.

⁷⁰ R. Dudley Edwards (ed.), 'The minute book of the Catholic Committee, 1779-92', Archivum Hibernicum, ix (1942), pp. 157-60.

⁷¹ Waterford Herald, 8 May 1792.

Waterford Addresses. Nor was he amongst the 209 signatories of the Memorial of the Catholics of Waterford in favour of a legislative union in 1799. This may be accounted for by the bitter and acrimonious nature of the Union debate in the city, and the involvement of the Church of Ireland dean, Christopher Butson, in the Catholic agitation in defiant opposition to the anti-Union stance of his bishop, Richard Marlay.⁷² Edmund's mind was turning increasingly from political to religious matters, as he sought to give his conversion concrete expression. His brother John had returned to Ireland in 1792 to join the Augustinian Order at New Ross. Edmund, it appears, was contemplating a similar course, but circumstances would direct the expression of his vocation in a different and novel direction.

⁷² Waterford Herald, 10 April 1793; 31 January 1795; cf G. C. Bolton, The Passing of the Irish Act of Union (Oxford, 1966), pp 138, 150-1.

IV

THE PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT

In 1975 a contributor at a Christian Brothers' spirituality conference spoke of 'the providential death of Mrs Rice in 1789'.¹ Thirty years later such sentiments appear politically incorrect, but the sense of the statement stands in so far as the desolation of his bereavement marked a pivotal point in the vocation of Edmund Rice. Working from his brokenness, his priorities changed perceptibly and the alleviation of the misery of others became a primary concern. While initially he considered the classic flight from the world, the chronic poverty of Waterford city and a critical confluence of circumstances convinced him that it was there he belonged, rather than in the seclusion of a cloistered life.

I

As a widowed father, the obvious option for Edmund Rice was to remarry, just as his mother had done following the death of her first husband. Edmund chose otherwise and contemplated a religious vocation, but it was not clear how that calling would be expressed. For a decade he engaged in a complex process of reflection, characterised by Archbishop John Charles

¹ The Irish Times, 3 November 1975.

McQuaid as an obscure groping towards his vocation.² Initially, he appears to have considered joining the Augustinian order. This was an obvious choice; he had worshipped in their chapel at Callan, while his first teacher, Patrick Grace, and several of his mother's family were Augustinians. His brother John entered their novitiate at New Ross in 1792, but tradition asserts that he discouraged Edmund from following the same path.³ The spirituality of the Jesuits, too, appealed to him greatly, but the order had been dissolved in 1773, by Pope Clement XIV, in response to pressure from European monarchs. The suppression was an unmitigated disaster for the Church; the pope acknowledged that he had 'cut off his right hand', but for Edmund Rice it ruled out a vocation within which he could have been perfectly content.⁴ It would seem, too, that he was attracted by the contemplative life and the thrust of much of his spiritual reading tended towards monasticism. The *Imitation of Christ*, in particular, to which he was so devoted, extolled the 'solitary sweetness of the monk's cell' and placed little importance on apostolic activity.⁵ Tradition asserts that Edmund considered joining the Cistercian monastery at Melleray in Brittany.⁶ Yet neither was this a viable option, since French monasteries had been suppressed by the revolutionary government in 1791.

This was the range of choice available to Rice, and it is significant that none of the traditions or memories indicate that he gave any consideration to a vocation as a diocesan priest. Clearly his inclination was towards the religious life. Characteristically, Edmund weighed his various options carefully, but his important decision was not made alone. Throughout the process of discernment he relied on a close circle of trusted friends and

² Cited in Michael Viney, 'The Christian Brothers', in *CBER* (1969), p. 125.

³ J.D. Fitzpatrick, 'The Rice Family', in *CBER* (1969), p. 8.

⁴ Nicholas Alkin and F. Rank Tallett, *Priests, Prelates and People: a history of European Catholicism since 1750* (London, 2003), p. 33.

⁵ John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, p. 265.

⁶ Dáire Keogh, *Edmund Rice, 1762-1844* (Dublin, 1996), p. 40.

advisors. In the first instance, he drew on the counsel of his peers within the pious association centred on St Patrick's chapel. There he enjoyed the direction of the Jesuit priests, and the manner and form in which Edmund isolated and annotated the twelve scriptural texts in his Douai Bible reflect the influence of a spiritual director at this critical period of his spiritual formation.⁷ Rice's companions made an annual retreat. It is likely, too, that they followed an adapted form of the Spiritual Exercises, the rigorous programme of meditation and self-reflection composed by St Ignatius with the express purpose of 'disposing the soul ... to seek and find' God's will and ordering one's life accordingly.⁸ Amongst his circle of friends, Fr John Power, subsequently bishop of Waterford, was a considerable influence, although it was his sister, remembered simply as 'Miss Power', who is traditionally credited with Edmund's ultimate decision to dedicate his life to God in the service of the poor of his adopted city.⁹

McCarthy's description of Miss Power's spirited intervention in Edmund's resolution is significant; not so much on account of its veracity, but in so far as it reflects both orthodox interpretation of his inspiration and the way in which his hagiography has been constructed. In McCarthy's recreation of the encounter, Miss Power confronted Edmund, reprimanding him for his intention of leaving 'his native country' to enter religious life abroad:

It would be a strange and inconsistent thing for you to travel leagues of land and sea, and shut yourself up in a monastery in some distant place, while the sons of your poor countrymen at home are, owing to untoward circumstances, utterly unacquainted with the rudiments of divine or human knowledge, and running wild through the town, without a school, or a teacher, or any possible means of acquiring the most elementary education ... Would it not, Mr Rice ... be far more meritorious work, and far more exalted, to devote your life and your wealth to the instruction of these neglected children in the principles of religion and in secular knowledge, than to bury yourself in some

⁷ A. L. O'Toole, A Spiritual Profile, 1, pp 42-5.

⁸ Elder Mullan (ed.), The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius (Rome, 1914), p. 12.

⁹ [McCarthy], Edmund Ignatius Rice (Dublin, 1927), p. 70.

Continental Religious House, where you will have no scope for the exercise of active benevolence?¹⁰

Miss Power's challenge touched a nerve in Edmund, but his dilemma remained, since none of the traditional orders in Ireland appealed to him. Nevertheless, a retreat to a monastery was not an option, not least on account of the likely consequences, which Power had identified, of such a flight on the fledgling charities, the Orphan Society and the Distressed Roomkeepers, which he helped establish in the city.¹¹

The earliest historical record of the foundation of the Christian Brothers identifies 1793 as a key year in the resolution of Edmund Rice's decision. This forty page manuscript, entitled 'An Account of the Origin, Rise and Progress of the Institute of the Society of Religious Brothers' [Origin] describes the first twenty years of its history from its foundation in 1802, through to the General Chapter of 1822.¹² It has been attributed to Br Austin Dunphy (a confidante and member of Rice's General Council, 1822-9), and dated to 1829; it provides the first account of Edmund's decision to teach the poor:

In the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety three, Mr Edmund Rice of the City of Waterford formed the design of erecting an Establishment for the gratuitous education of poor boys. In the following year he communicated his intention on the subject to some friends, and particularly to the Right Reverend Doctor James Lanigan, Roman Catholic Bishop of Ossory, who strongly recommended him to carry this intention into effect; and assured him that in his opinion it proceeded from God. From this time forward Mr Rice did not lose sight of the object he had in view; though from various causes, he did not commence the building till the year 1802.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See J.D. Fitzpatrick, 'A lost chapter in the life of Edmund Rice', *CBER*, 1950, pp 110-21.

¹² F.R. Hickey (ed.), 'The First History of the Congregation', in *CBER*, 1982, pp 5-30.

¹³ Ibid, p. 7.

The 'various causes' which delayed the enterprise may have included Rice's desire to care for his daughter Mary, but politically, circumstances militated against such an initiative. Europe had been convulsed since the outbreak of the Revolution in France in 1789. While foreign observers initially looked on with a mixture of horror and delight, the advent of war between Britain and France, in February 1793, removed the security afforded by distance from the conflict. Moreover, events in France radicalised Irish patriotism. Yet while Wolfe Tone welcomed the Revolution as the 'morning star of liberty for Ireland', the Catholic establishment saw it as an assault on Christianity itself.¹⁴ Sections of Presbyterian opinion assessed the Revolution in equally apocalyptic terms, and interpreted the burning of papal effigies in France as the demise of the anti-Christ, and a prelude to an imminent providential intervention if not the Second Coming itself.¹⁵

As Tone observed, the French Revolution quickly became the test of everyman's political creed. Yet while we have no documentary evidence of Edmund's stance, it is significant that while he signed the early declarations of the Catholic Committee, he appears to have withdrawn from political activity by 1793.¹⁶ It is probable that he shared the caution of the Catholic propertied classes, and as a merchant involved in the provisioning trade he was heavily dependant on contracts from the Admiralty and the army which he was unlikely to jeopardise. In the context of Edmund's vocation, more practical considerations might have effected his decision to remain in business in the short term at least. The war with France created a boom in agricultural trade, which brought prosperity to Waterford and its merchants.

¹⁴ See Dáire Keogh, 'Archbishop Troy, the Catholic church and radicalism in Ireland, 1791-3' in D. Dickson *et al* (eds), The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism and rebellion (Dublin, 1993), pp 124-34; see Nigel Aston, Christianity in Revolutionary Europe, 1760-1830 (Cambridge, 2002)

¹⁵ I.R. McBride, 'When Ulster Joined Ireland': Anti-Popery, Presbyterian Radicalism and Irish Republicanism in the 1790s, Past and Present, No. 157 (Nov., 1997), pp. 63-93; D.W. Miller, 'Irish Christianity and Revolution', in Jim Smyth (ed.), Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Union: Ireland in the 1790s (Cambridge, 2000), pp 195-210.

¹⁶ Dáire Keogh, Edmund Rice 1762-1844, p. 34.

Such considerations could not have been ignored by Edmund who would have seen these profits as the means to fund his philanthropic mission.

I use the word 'philanthropic' consciously, because while it has been argued that Edmund had decided upon his vocation by 1793, the manuscript history cited above suggests otherwise.¹⁷ The 'Origin' refers to Rice's 'design of erecting an Establishment for the gratuitous education of poor boys', but it does not claim that by 1793 he had considered the foundation of a religious congregation. Similarly, with reference to the postponement of the project, Dunphy says nothing of Rice's vocation but states explicitly that 'he did not commence the building till the year 1802'.¹⁸ Perhaps at this early stage, then, the educational initiative may simply have been another philanthropic project which Edmund was about to add to his care of the poor, the sick and the orphans of Waterford.

II

It is clear that Edmund Rice was animated by the education question. Amongst his surviving correspondence there is little by way of social commentary or political analysis, but in one letter to the Superior General of the De La Salle Brothers he outlined the detail and consequences of the education clauses of the 'popery code':

Among the many cruel penal laws which were enacted against the Catholics of Ireland since the Reformation, there was one which forbade any Catholic to teach school or even to be a tutor in a private house under pain of transportation for life! His being detected in the act of teaching any one subjected him to this terrible punishment without even the formality of a trial ... It was in force for an entire century, and you will judge, it must have great power in demoralising the people.¹⁹

¹⁷ Denis McLaughlin, 'The founding of the Irish Christian Brothers; navigating the realities through the myths', *Australian EJournal of Theology*, no 5 (August 2005), pp 1-41.

¹⁸ F.R. Hickey (ed.), 'The First History', p. 7.

¹⁹ E. Rice to De la Salle Superior, Paris, 19 August 1826, Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 159.

The penal laws, it will be recalled, were rooted in Protestant anxiety in the wake of the Williamite Wars, and are therefore best understood in terms of national security. Within this context, the initial intention of the educational aspects of the legislation was not to condemn Catholics to ignorance, but rather to 'restrain foreign education' (1695), in order to limit contact with potential allies in Catholic Europe. But no matter how the laws began, in time the provisions were extended to a point where Catholic schools were theoretically outlawed. The 1709 amendment to the 'Act to prevent the further growth of popery' (8 Anne, c. 3), for instance, decreed that:

Whatever person of the popish religion shall publicly teach school, or instruct youth in learning in any private house within this realm, or be entertained to instruct youth as usher, or assistant by any Protestant schoolmaster, he shall be esteemed a popish regular clergyman, and prosecuted as such ... and no person, after November 1, 1709, shall be qualified to teach or keep such a school publicly or instruct youth in any private house, or as usher, or assistant to any Protestant schoolmaster, who shall not first ... take the oath of abjuration, under a penalty of £10 for every such offence—a moiety to go to the informer.

There is good evidence that this legislation was enforced, at least in the first half of the century. Writing in the 1930s, P.J. Dowling compared eighteenth-century education to 'a kind of guerrilla war' where the teacher, like the priest was frequently on the run.²⁰ It was easier for schoolmasters to avoid prosecution than priests, but there are numerous instances of masters being punished. Corcoran in his study of the penal era lists nineteen indictments against popish schoolmasters brought before the Limerick grand jury alone between 1711 and 1722.²¹ In reality, however, the educational restrictions, like the other provisions of the penal laws, were relaxed outside of times of international crisis and political threat.

²⁰ P. J. Dowling, *Hedge Schools of Ireland* (Dublin, 1933).

²¹ T. Corcoran, 'Enforcing the penal code on education', *Irish Monthly*, ix (1931), pp. 149-54.

So rather than ending Catholic education, the effect of the legislation was to drive such schooling underground, producing in the process the celebrated 'hedge schools'.²² Much has been written about the hedge schools and they have become the subject of great lore. Many accounts are excessively laudatory and others dismiss them as places of squalor. The truth lies somewhere in between, as The Nation acknowledged in 1847, when the Young Ireland newspaper concluded: 'say what you like of them, [the 'hedge schools'] did good not easily measurable!'²³ Catholic teachers were operating outside the law, but after 1730 they were largely left undisturbed. In 1731 a House of Lords committee was appointed under Archbishop Hugh Boulter to enquire into the state of popery, and it reported the existence of over 550 popish schools. Some areas were better served than others: the bishop of Clonfert had one school in every parish, while in the diocese of Ferns there was no 'Popish schoolmaster' in or near the town of Wexford.²⁴

The Charter Schools were established in the wake of Boulter's report in an effort to promote English Protestant education in Ireland, and as such were hated by many Catholics; one later commentator described them as an attempt 'to carry the nation by a coup de main'.²⁵ This state sponsored initiative coincided with the visitation of Ireland by Fr John Kent, a native of Waterford, who reported to Pope Benedict XIV on the condition of the Catholic Church in Ireland.²⁶ Kent's investigations were minimal, and critics alleged that he had only seen as much of the country as could be observed from the window of the coach which carried him from Waterford to Dublin.²⁷ Nevertheless, his recommendations to Rome and the intensification of

²² Antonia McManus, The Irish Hedge School and the Its Books, 1695-1831 (Dublin, 2002).

²³ The Nation, 18 Dec. 1847.

²⁴ E. Cahill, 'The Native Schools of Ireland in the Penal Era', Irish Ecclesiastical Record (1940), p. 21.

²⁵ Speech of Thomas Wyse ... on moving leave to bring in a bill for the establishment of a board of national education ... (Dublin, 1835), p. 15.

²⁶ H. Fenning (ed.), 'John Kent's report on the state of the Irish mission, 1742', Arch. Hib (1966), pp 59-102.

²⁷ H. Fenning, 'From the Penal Laws to the Birth of Modern Nationalism', in Bradshaw and Keogh (eds), Christianity in Ireland, p. 137.

proselytism with the establishment of the Charter Schools prompted the Catholic clergy to systematise their schooling, so that by the second half of the century, there was an effective parish school system over much of the country. In many cases the mass house served as a school during the week and this strengthened the renewed parish structures. The close links with the parish is also reflected in the priority given to education and catechesis in episcopal visitations of the period. Archbishop Butler's reports from Cashel in the 1750s illustrate the important part played by the schoolmaster in parish life. In most cases masters were required to teach catechism and were reprimanded for failure to do so. At Templemore, for instance, Archbishop Butler directed the pastor 'to recommend to ye schoolmaster to teach Christian doctrine and instruct ye midwifes concerning baptism'.²⁸

In the latter years of the eighteenth-century, the number of schools increased rapidly; by the turn of the century, it is estimated that there were over 7,000 hedge-schools accommodating as many as 400,000 pupils in Ireland.²⁹ The essential point, in this instance, is that these schools, like 'The Academy' at Callan, attended by Edmund Rice, were pay schools. As one recent commentator has argued 'hedge schools' were in fact private schools established on teacher initiative which survived as long as they proved financially profitable.³⁰ As such, they excluded those who were unable to pay fees and, as late as 1824, it is estimated that approximately 60 per cent of school age children were not attending school, due to a combination of poverty and lack of schools.³¹

²⁸ J. Murphy, The Diocese of Killaloe in the Eighteenth-Century (Dublin, 1991), p. 156.

²⁹ E. Cahill, 'The Native Schools of Ireland in the Penal Era', Irish Ecclesiastical Record (1940), p. 22.

³⁰ M.E. Daly, 'The development of the National School system, 1831-40' in A. Cosgrove(ed.), Studies in Irish History Presented to R. Dudley Edwards (Dublin, 1979), pp 150-63.

³¹ M.E. Daly, 'The development of the National School system', p. 154.

Waterford, however, was surprisingly well served for schools.³² The common perception is that Edmund Rice founded his Brotherhood in Waterford in order to care for the poor boys of the city for whom nobody else cared. The reality, however, was quite the contrary; rather than lacking educational provision, Waterford was the third most literate city in Ireland after Belfast and Dublin (table 1). Moreover, an extrapolation of the statistics contained in the census of 1841, suggests that the foundation of Edmund Rice's schools brought no dramatic increase in the levels of literary attainment in Waterford.³³ This would indicate, as John Kent has argued, that Rice was not simply concerned with the provision of education, but rather of Catholic education, as an alternative to the schooling on offer in the city.³⁴

Table 1. Extrapolation of literacy levels for Males in Waterford 1841.³⁵

Age group in 1841	46-55	36-45	26-35	16-25
Attended school in decade	1791	1801	1811	1821
Could read and write	62%	67%	70%	70%

In 1791, there were ten pay schools in the city of Waterford. Two of these were under Catholic management: one conducted by Fr Ronayne and the other by Mr Waters, whose school was attended by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. In these private schools, the annual fee was six guineas for day pupils and thirty guineas for boarders; such charges automatically excluded the children of the working classes. There were no Erasmus Smith or Diocesan schools and a mere eight Parochial Schools were attended by 235 pupils, paying minimal fees. There are no statistics to indicate the

³² Michael Quane, 'Waterford School in the opening decades of the nineteenth-century', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 101, pt 1 (1971), pp 141-5.

³³ J.E. Kent, 'The Educational Ideals of Edmund Rice, founder of the Presentation and Christian Brothers', (MEd dissertation, UCC, 1988), pp 56-7.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 46.

³⁵ Analysis of 1841 Census, in J.E. Kent, 'The Educational Ideals', p. 56.

numbers of children educated by private tutors, going from house to house throughout the city. Free education was provided by a small school adjacent to St Patrick's chapel; funded by the Valois bequest, it catered for thirty three boys. There were, in addition, three endowed schools, these were: the Charter School at Killotran which had between fifty and sixty students; the Blue Coat School for poor girls had thirty-four pupils in residence and the Bishop Foy School, founded in 1707, catered for seventy-five boys.³⁶ These schools, the only schools in the city providing free education, became the focus of a bitter debate in 1797, following the publication of a pastoral address by Bishop Thomas Hussey. That pastoral has traditionally been considered seminal to the ultimate decision of Edmund Rice to establish his 'Society of the Presentation'.³⁷

Thomas Hussey became bishop of Waterford and Lismore in December 1796.³⁸ Born in county Meath in 1746, he had a distinguished international career as chaplain to the Spanish ambassador in London. This position had placed him at the centre of a bustling social scene in the city and his friends included Dr Johnson, Edmund Burke and many of the leading Whigs. Since 1793, he had played a crucial role in the negotiations with the Lord Lieutenant leading to the establishment of St Patrick's 'Royal' College, Maynooth, and he was rewarded with the presidency in 1795. Described by Bowen, perhaps anachronistically, as 'a pro-ultramontanist', he was willing to stand up to the Protestant Ascendancy in church and society.³⁹ This was not immediately apparent; if anything his appointment as bishop was due to his previously impeccable loyalist credentials and proven willingness to work with the Dublin Castle administration.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Hussey's episcopate was characteristic of the new confidence enjoyed by the Catholic Church in the period; from the outset his administration was in stark contrast to the

³⁶ J.D. Fitzpatrick, *Edmund Rice*, p. 95.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³⁸ D. Keogh, 'Thomas Hussey', pp 403-26.

³⁹ Desmond Bowen, *History and Shaping of Irish Protestantism* (New York, 1995), pp 186-7.

⁴⁰ See Dáire Keogh, 'Thomas Hussey', pp 182-201.

reserve of the penal era. While his predecessor William Egan was consecrated in secret in his sister's house at Taghmon, county Wexford, in 1771, Hussey's episcopal ordination took place in Francis Street chapel, Dublin on 26 February 1797. The ordaining prelate was Dr John Troy of Dublin and he was assisted by the archbishop of Armagh and Bishops Moylan of Cork, Tehan of Kerry and Delaney of Kildare and Leighlin. In further breach with the past, the occasion was marked by the presence of a military guard of honour.

Hussey was the first Catholic bishop to reside in the city of Waterford since the time of Bishop Comerford, who had died in France in 1652.⁴¹ On arrival in Waterford, the new bishop began a formal visitation of his diocese. His initial observations are contained in a letter to Edmund Burke, written in May 1797.⁴² Hussey devoted considerable attention to a description of the schools of the diocese. Within two months of his arrival, the bishop boasted that he had been able to establish a charity school in the principal towns of the diocese in order 'to instruct the children of the poor, gratis, in reading, writing and accounts'. The bishop was particularly concerned at the proselytising activities of the free schools of Waterford where 'the clergy of the establishment wanted to have no catechism taught but the Protestant one, and seemed inclined to assimilate them to the Charter schools'. Hussey noted that his opposition was shared by the Quakers of the city, the most numerous branch of Protestants and 'the most regular and industrious sect'.

The bishop revisited this theme in a notoriously controversial pastoral address to the clergy of his diocese in the following year.⁴³ The pastoral, which dealt with a wide spectrum of diocesan concerns, began with the

⁴¹ W.G. Murphy, 'The life of Dr Thomas Hussey (1746-1803), Bishop of Waterford and Lismore' (M.A. UCC, 1968), p. 145.

⁴² T. Hussey to E. Burke, 9 May 1797, Earl Fitzwilliam (ed.) *Burke Corr.*, iv (London, 1844), pp 444-6.

⁴³ T. Hussey, A pastoral letter to the Catholics of the united dioceses of Waterford and Lismore (Waterford, 1797).

rhetoric normally associated with the hierarchy, but very suddenly changed its tone:

In these critical and awful times, when opinions seem spreading over this island, of a novel and dangerous tendency—when the remnants of old oppressions and new principles which tend to anarchy, are struggling for victory, and which in collision may produce the ruin of religion—when a moral earthquake shakes all Europe, I felt no small affliction and alarm, upon receiving the command of the Head of the Church to preside over the Catholics of these united dioceses.⁴⁴

Hussey's allusions to the French ideology, the politicisation of the United Irishmen and the impending rebellion were stark, but it was the reference to 'the remnants of old oppression', the remaining penal laws, which raised such reaction. This double-edged approach characterised the pastoral and gave rise to much ambiguity as the bishop continually contrasted the present with the 'forgotten' past.

Bishop Hussey publicly challenged the proselytising schools and commanded his priests to resist their efforts:

Stand firm against all attempts which may be made under various pretexts to withdraw any of your flocks from the belief and practice of the Catholic religion. Remonstrate with any parent who would be so criminal as to expose his offspring to those places of education where his religion, faith or morals are likely to be perverted ... if he will not attend to your remonstrances, refuse him the participation of Christ's Body; if he should continue obstinate, denounce him to the Church in order that, according to Christ's Commandment, he be considered as a heathen and a publican.

The priests of the diocese were urged to make their flocks aware that they were members of 'the Catholic communion', not a 'small sect, limited to that country where that sect itself was formed'. They were members of a great church which had lasted 1700 years, thrived in every part of the world and would 'flourish until time shall be no more'. Consequently 'they should not be

⁴⁴ Hussey, *Pastoral*, p. 3.

ashamed to belong to a religion, which so many kings and princes, so many of the most polished and learned nations of the world glory in professing'. The pastoral also included an uncompromising condemnation of the practice of forcing Catholic soldiers to attend Protestant religious services under pain of flogging.

Understandably, given the tense political atmosphere of the period, the pastoral met with a barrage of criticism. At least five pamphlets appeared criticising its content and questioning its motives. At very best it was a 'saucy contemptuous challenge — daring us to enter anew ... the rancorous field of controversy'.⁴⁵ The conservative firebrand Dr Patrick Duigenan believed that it was 'as seditious a publication as any which has appeared in modern times, provoking the Irish Romanists to insurrection'.⁴⁶ The more moderate Anglican bishop of Meath, Thomas Lewis O'Beirne, a convert from Catholicism and a former seminarian, reacted strongly to Hussey's advocacy of segregated education and declared that 'the worst enemies of Ireland could not devise a scheme more effectually calculated to keep this distinction of the King's subjects a distinct people forever, and to maintain eternal enmity and hatred between them and the Protestant body'. He was convinced the bishop intended to erect a spiritual wall to replace the civil barriers which were being dismantled.⁴⁷ Dr Troy, the Catholic archbishop of Dublin, too, criticised the pastoral believing it contained 'too much vinegar ... not sufficiently tempered with oil', and noted that there was opposition to it from the poor of Waterford who believed that Hussey's sentiments might jeopardise their chances of employment in Protestant households and businesses.⁴⁸ In a very telling comment, however, America's first bishop, John Carroll of Baltimore, whose instincts were closer to Hussey's than his

⁴⁵ T. Tickle, *A letter to the Rev. Dr Hussey* (Dublin, 1797), p. 1.

⁴⁶ P. Duigenan, *A fair representation of the present political state of Ireland* (London, 1799), p. 20.

⁴⁷ O'Beirne to Castlereagh, 27 April 1799, in *Castlereagh Corr.* ii, p. 283.

⁴⁸ J. Troy to T. Bray, 15 April 1797, CDAs.

cowed confreres, confessed that he had read it with 'pleasure and approbation'.⁴⁹

Hussey's advocacy, was welcomed by Edmund Rice and it provided the impetus needed to confirm his choice of vocation. Conscious of this, the preacher at the great celebration of his month's mind mass in October 1844 referred to the warm friendship between the two and influence of the 'enlightened and apostolic bishop' Thomas Hussey, who 'in troubled times and at considerable risk ... hesitated not to vindicate the cause of free religious education'.⁵⁰ A century later his biographer spoke of 'the natural kinship between the minds and characters of these two men' which 'helped considerably in bringing to fruition the divinely inspired purpose of Edmund Rice'.⁵¹ In this respect, however, it is important to see Hussey not as a bigot as described by Patrick Duigenan, but as a liberal Catholic, who has once served as ambassador of King George III. In fact the pastoral aroused the anger of the establishment precisely because it voiced the liberal opposition line in the face of the intransigence of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland.

Emphasis upon their relationship and the influence of Hussey's 'incendiary', however, does not imply that Edmund Rice was motivated by an aggressive desire to combat proselytism, as his earlier biographies have been interpreted.⁵² Such an interpretation is anachronistic, which reflects more the altered attitudes of the 1820s; the issue at stake in the 1790s was not one of combat, but rather of offering opportunities and alternatives to Catholic children. Rice was neither reactionary nor sectarian and his ecumenism was reflected in his interdenominational friendships and his service with members of other denominations on the boards of various charities. In responding to Hussey's clarion, Edmund sought to offer an

⁴⁹ John Carroll to John Troy, 12 Nov. 1798, DDAs, Troy Papers.

⁵⁰ F.R. Fitzgerald, 1 October 1844 in J. Shelly, Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers (Kilkenny, 1863), p. 42.

⁵¹ J.D. Fitzpatrick, Edmund Rice, p. 85.

⁵² Denis McLaughlin, 'The founding of the Irish Christian Brothers', p. 11.

alternative to the endowed schools; gratuitous Catholic education which was formerly unavailable in the city. In a sense, he demonstrated liberal sentiments similar to those articulated by Daniel O'Connell twenty years later. In the context of the 'Second Reformation', and debates on the system of National Education, the Liberator declared: 'let Protestants educate their own children as they choose. All that Catholics ask is to be allowed the same privilege'.⁵³

Edmund Rice was concerned not merely with schooling but to offer a 'special kind of education, even a special kind of Catholic education'.⁵⁴ Clearly, too, he was not content to remain a philanthropist, but sought to embrace the religious life. The difficulty was how the two ambitions could be reconciled within the constraints of the traditional male religious orders in Ireland, which would not allow the kind of apostolate he had in mind. The manuscript history, 'Origin', suggests that Edmund discussed his intentions with James Lanigan, bishop of his native Ossory, in 1794.⁵⁵ That Lanigan was supportive is no surprise. He was an enthusiast of Catholic education and in the previous year he had expanded 'Burrell Hall' in Kilkenny (the successor to Edmund's alma mater) to make it Ireland's first diocesan seminary.⁵⁶ As a graduate and former professor at the University of Nantes, France, Lanigan would have had first hand experience of the De La Salle Brothers and may have shared his thoughts on that religious brotherhood with Edmund.⁵⁷ The 'Origin' expresses Lanigan's support for his planned 'Establishment'. In 'his opinion it proceeded from God', but it is surprising that if this was so that the bishop, nor any of his successors until 1859, invited either the Presentation or Christian Brothers into his diocese.⁵⁸ It was claimed, too, by Br Bernard Dunphy, in evidence before a Royal Commission (1825), that Edmund had

⁵³ Cited in Dáire Keogh, 'O'Connell and Irish Catholic Education', in Kevin Whelan (ed.), *Daniel O'Connell* (Dublin, 2002), p. 38.

⁵⁴ J.E. Kent, 'The Educational Ideals', p. 4.

⁵⁵ F.R. Hickey (ed.), 'The First History', p. 7.

⁵⁶ Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role*, pp 48-52.

⁵⁷ Denis McLaughlin, 'The founding of the Irish Christian Brothers', p. 16.

⁵⁸ F.R. Hickey (ed.), 'The First History', p. 7.

submitted his proposals to Pius VI in 1796 and that the Pope had 'encouraged Mr Rice to proceed'.⁵⁹ Such an approach is difficult to entertain given the Napoleonic annexation of the most prosperous of the Papal States, the Legations of Ravenna and Bologna, and the subsequent humiliation of the 'Citizen Pope' in the spring of that year.⁶⁰ In any event, the solution to Edmund Rice's dilemma was closer to hand and in this instance, too, the influence of the Power family was critical.

III

Tradition attributes the arrival of the Presentation Sisters in Waterford to the initiative of Fr John Power. According to a pious legend, recorded in the annals of the South Convent, Cork, the establishment of the convent was the result of a chance encounter, when Fr Power heard the confession of a young servant girl at St John's. Impressed by the sincerity and sophistication of her confession he enquired where she had received such a formation, and was informed that she had been educated by the Presentation sisters in Cork.⁶¹ This was an apostolic teaching congregation founded in 1775 by Nano [Honora] Nagle. A native of Ballygriffin, near Mallow, the Nagles were a Catholic sub-gentry family; steeped in the Gaelic traditions of the Blackwater Valley.⁶² The family had been prominent in the Jacobite cause and was seriously disadvantaged by the penal laws.⁶³ Nevertheless, Nano's childhood was privileged and her French education, where the family had strong mercantile connections, illustrates the extent to which the rigour of the laws could be evaded. On her return to Ireland, in 1746, she was struck, not only by the poverty of the people, but more

⁵⁹ Statement of Br Bernard Dunphy before the Commissioners of the Primary Education Inquiry, 1825, App 252; Normoyle, *A tree is planted*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: a history of the Popes* (Yale, 2006), p. 259.

⁶¹ Cited in Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns* (Oxford, 1998), p. 26.

⁶² Basil O'Connell, 'The Nagles of Ballygriffin and Nano Nagle', *Irish Genealogy*, 3, (1957), pp 67-73.

⁶³ T. J. Walsh, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters* (Dublin, 1959), pp 23-34.

significantly by their ignorance of religion and their gradual decline into superstition and vice:

she was afflicted to perceive that these poor creatures were almost strangers ... [to the business of Salvation, our duty to God, and the great mysteries of Religion]. Under a misconception of their obligations, they substituted error in the place of truth: while they kept up an attachment to certain exterior observances, their fervour was superstitious, their faith was erroneous, their hope was presumptuous, and they had no charity. Licentiousness, while it could bless itself, and tell the beads, could live without remorse, and without repentance; sacraments and sacrilege went hand in hand, and conscience was at rest upon its own stings.⁶⁴

Her first biographer, William Coppinger, bishop of Cloyne and Ross (1791-1831), interpreted this reaction in terms which echoed the anxiety of his contemporary reformers at the alienation of the lower classes from the institutional church and their more general preoccupation with moral reformation:

By the plainest analogy she had every reason to fear, that the evil was not confined to the poor immediately around her. She turned the matter in her thoughts, she meditated fondly upon it, she traced it to posterity through all its consequences. Idleness, dishonesty, impiety, drunkenness, like specters stalking before her; but for the present she could only sigh at the prospect.⁶⁵

Significantly, the bishop's description of Nano's moment of conversion served as a trope which Rice's biographer borrowed in his analysis of the critical moment in Edmund's spiritual journey. This is especially true in his narration of Edmund's decisive encounter with Miss Power and her challenge which settled his mind on a vocation as a teaching Brother.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ W. Coppinger, The life of Miss Nano Nagle, as sketched ... in a funeral sermon preached in Cork on the anniversary of her death (Cork, 1794), p. 8.

⁶⁵ W. Coppinger, Nano Nagle, p. 8.

⁶⁶ [McCarthy], Edmund Ignatius Rice (Dublin, 1927), p. 70.

There were, however, striking resonances in the conversion narratives of both founders. Like Edmund, Nagle's process of discernment would be tortuous. Initially she joined a convent in France, but her Jesuit confessor advised that 'her duty was to return to her native land to instruct Irish children; to disobey this inspiration would imperil her soul's salvation'.⁶⁷ Moreover, Coppinger constructed Nano's hagiography with a conscious allusion to that of St Patrick:

But the poor Irish still rushed on her mind; their spiritual necessities haunted her unremittingly; - thousands of tender babes seemed to implore her assistance.⁶⁸

On her return, she established a free school for girls in Cove Lane. As numbers grew she moved to a new building in Philpot Lane and by 1769 she had seven schools in various locations in Cork, catering for two hundred boys and girls. Nano left a description of her school, in terms which would certainly have delighted both Fr John Power and Edmund Rice:

At present I have two schools for boys and five for girls. The former learn to read, and when they have the Douai catechism by heart they learn to write and cipher. There are three schools where the girls learn to read and when they have their catechism by heart they learn to work. They all hear Mass every day, say their morning and night prayers, say the catechism in each school by question and answer all together. Every Saturday they all say the beads, the grown girls every evening. They go to confession every month and to Communion when their confessor thinks proper. The schools are open at eight. At twelve the children go to dinner, at five o'clock they leave school.⁶⁹

As the years progressed, Nano sought to secure the permanence of her schools and, on the advice of her spiritual director Patrick Doran SJ and his nephew, Bishop Francis Moylan, she began negotiations with the Ursuline Sisters in Paris, to whose care she hoped to entrust the project. In 1771, the

⁶⁷ Walsh, p. 43; Coppinger, *Nano Nagle*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Coppinger, *Nano Nagle*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Nano Nagle to Miss Fitzsimons, 17 July 1769, cited in Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, p. 345.

Ursulines sent four Irish born novices and a mother superior to Cork, where they established a fee-paying school in Cove Lane, in a convent which Nagle had provided for them.⁷⁰

Before long, however, the limitations of the Ursuline regime and ethos became apparent to Nano, who realised that their enclosed life militated against her cherished apostolate of education of the poor and the exercise of the works of mercy. As a result, she decided to establish a new type of sisterhood and on Christmas Eve, 1775, together with three companions she commenced her novitiate:

On this day these four ardent and zealous followers of the humbled and Crucified Jesus commenced their novitiate, delivering themselves up unreservedly to the practice of the most severe monastic discipline and to all the privations and austerities to which their future poor, laborious and annihilated life was in every shape calculated and likely to lead them.⁷¹

Nano's decision was not made lightly and her actions raised the ire of Bishop Moylan who violently opposed this initiative, fearing that it would undermine the Ursuline community, of which his sister was a member.⁷² Nagle, however, was not for turning; driven by a strong social mission, in a characteristically tenacious display, she threatened to leave Cork rather than compromise.⁷³ The bishop, whose brother had fought alongside George Washington in the American Revolution, backed down and the annalist notes that 'he remained ever after silent on the subject'.⁷⁴

In the foundation of the Presentation Sisters, Nano Nagle had managed to square the circle, in so far as she had created a congregation which

⁷⁰ Rosemary Raughter, 'Nano Nagle', *Oxford DNB* (Oxford, 2004).

⁷¹ Presentation Annals, cited in Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, p. 99.

⁷² Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns* (Oxford, 1998), p. 17.

⁷³ David Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005), p. 454.

⁷⁴ Cited in Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power*, p. 17.

combined the essential elements of the religious life with her apostolic zeal. The Presentation Sisters, however, were not the first female order to do so. The Daughters of Charity had pioneered this lifestyle in seventeenth-century France; where, in the words of their co-founder, Louise de Marillac, they were enclosed only by obedience and had the fear of God as their 'grille'.⁷⁵ In England, too, Mary Ward caused a commotion when she established a female congregation in 1603, modelled upon the Jesuits. Her Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary rejected traditional enclosure and, as a consequence, the sisters were dismissed as 'wandering nuns' or 'galloping girls'.⁷⁶ These communities had rebelled against the legislation of the Council of Trent, which had attempted to regulate the position of women within the Church. While the Conciliar Fathers disciplined the priesthood through scrutiny and training, 'women were regulated by removing them from society – placing them beyond the realm of sin' contained by the security of the cloister.⁷⁷ Within this context, Ward was imprisoned for two months, by the Inquisition in Germany in 1731, and it was not until 1749 that Pope Benedict XIV's encyclical *Quamvis Iusto* recognised the legitimacy of the institute and, by extension, in ending forced enclosure, conceded the right of women to form a new style of religious life.⁷⁸

Nano extended this initiative to Ireland. She had identified the root cause of the misery of the poor as the ignorance of religion among them, and her Sisters embraced the contemporary European 'ideology of the schools', which argued that only in childhood instruction could vice be destroyed and virtue established.⁷⁹ The young servant girl who presented in confession at St John's appeared to justify this faith and Fr Power was excited at the

⁷⁵ Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *Refining Female Religious Life: French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth Century Catholicism* (London, 2006).

⁷⁶ R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 38.

⁷⁷ Susan E. Dinan, *Woman and Poor Relief in Seventeenth Century F.R. ance; the early history of the Daughters of Charity* (London, 2006), p. 20.

⁷⁸ Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power*, p. 17.

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Raply, *The dévotes; women and church in seventeenth-century France* (Montreal, 1990), p. 119.

possibility of what could be achieved if a Presentation foundation were established in Waterford. The realisation of that dream was achieved through kinship-based co-operation which would become the hallmark of the diffusion of religious communities in the period. Two of the priest's family, Ellen Power, his widowed sister-in-law Margaret Power, and a companion, Mary Mallowney, traveled to Cork to make their novitiate as Presentation Sisters.⁸⁰ They subsequently returned to Waterford in 1798 to open their school at Hennessy's Road, funded from their dowries.

From the outset, the project had the eager support of Edmund Rice, who gave the sisters his financial advice. In 1796, he leased a site for the sisters and the initial accounts of the convent are partly in his hand writing. He signed the wills of eleven of the early sisters; he acted as agent and business manager and provided for their financial security by affording them annual interest of 10% on their dowries, a rate in excess of any offered by a commercial bank. As late as 1825, such mundane details as a supply of cocoa appears in his writing in the sister's cash book.⁸¹ His interest however was not purely commercial and it appears that, at last, the novelty of the Presentation life provided the resolution of his agonizing search.

Revisionist interpretations, beginning with O'Hanlon in the 1970s, have questioned this traditional emphasis upon the extent to which Edmund was moved by Nano's example and the sense in which he was inspired to do for the boys of Waterford what she had done for girls in Cork.⁸² Yet the parish priest of Carrick-on-Suir, preaching at Edmund's Month's memory in the Cathedral in Waterford, stressed the 'noble example' of the Ladies of the

⁸⁰ Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power*, p. ???; *Positio*, p. 20.

⁸¹ *Positio*, p. 20; Asumpta O'Neill, 'Nuns and Monks at Hennessy's Road', in P. S. Carroll (ed.), *A man Raised Up*, p. 86.

⁸² W.A. O'Hanlon, 'The early Brothers of the Society of the Presentation', *CBER*, 1979, pp. 3-148; Denis McLaughlin, 'The founding of the Irish Christian Brothers', p. 19.

Presentation which 'stimulated the man whose memory we this day honour, to share in their meritorious labours'.⁸³

Moreover, of the few anecdotes of Edmund Rice which survive from the period, one describes a seminal encounter between himself and a friar when they shared a room at an inn, in some unidentified market town.⁸⁴ The friar prayed throughout the night, and Edmund was so deeply affected by this experience that it has been identified as a crucial breakthrough in his spiritual development. Indeed, his biographer, David Fitzpatrick, described Rice's account of this stirring Emmaus experience as 'possibly the only recorded occasion when he disclosed the inner workings of grace in his soul'.⁸⁵ In his spiritual biography, O'Toole has suggested that the 'pious friar' may have been Lawrence Callanan (1739-1818), Nano Nagle's Franciscan confessor who had been invited by Bishop Moylan to write the rule and constitutions for the Presentation Sisters in 1791.⁸⁶ The friar was eminently suited for this task, since in 1786 he had been appointed Apostolic Visitor to the Irish Franciscan foundations on the continent, with a special brief to study educational methods.⁸⁷ If Callanan was indeed the friar, it is not difficult to imagine the extent to which this stimulating encounter would have prompted Edmund towards his ultimate vocation.

Acknowledgement of this Presentation influence, however is not to suggest that Edmund Rice 'joined a spiritual movement that was both middle class and feminine', or that the Brothers could 'legitimately be described as "male nuns"'.⁸⁸ It shows rather how a confluence of circumstances gave shape to Rice's mission as founder of a congregation of teaching brothers. Moreover,

⁸³ F.R. Fitzgerald, 1 October 1844 in J. Shelly, Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers (Kilkenny, 1863), p. 41.

⁸⁴ See [McCarthy], Edmund Ignatius Rice, pp 60-1; Normoyle, Memoirs, pp 267-68.

⁸⁵ J.D. Fitzpatrick, 'Our Venerable Founder's Practice of the Virtue of Faith', CBER (1961), p. 31.

⁸⁶ AL O'Toole, A Spiritual Profile of Edmund Rice, I, (Bristol, 1984), pp 152-53.

⁸⁷ Walsh, Nano Nagle, p. 139.

⁸⁸ Denis McLaughlin, 'The founding of the Irish Christian Brothers', p. 19.

rather than being possessed of an exclusive vision, Edmund's vocation was honed within an influential founding circle, which included bishops (or future bishops) Hussey, Lanigan and Power; colleagues and collaborators, John Rice, 'Miss Power', the Jesuit society centred upon St Patrick's and possibly the 'pious friar' Lawrence Callanan.

THE GENTLEMEN OF THE PRESENTATION

There was no eureka moment in Edmund Rice's groping towards discernment, but the example of Nano Nagle, her life and the hybrid congregation which she had created, served as a prism to direct what had previously appeared as the irreconcilable attractions of a religious vocation and the care of the poor. Inspired by her example, and galvanized by Bishop Hussey's advocacy of Catholic education, Edmund put ideas of a contemplative life behind him and embarked on his mission to do for the neglected poor Catholic boys of Waterford what Nano Nagle had done for the girls of Cork.

I

A combination of good fortune and business acumen had allowed Edmund Rice amass a considerable fortune. The last quarter of the eighteenth-century had witnessed an economic miracle in the Irish agricultural sector. During the period 1770 to 1800, beef exports to Britain quadrupled, butter doubled and pork increased four-fold. By the end of the century 130,000 pigs were slaughtered annually in Waterford and, with guaranteed navy contracts, Bishop Hussey believed this brought as much as £520,000 to the city of Waterford.¹ Edmund Rice benefited greatly from this boom. In 1787 he acquired the family holding at Ballykeefe on the death of his father. Seven

¹ Thomas Hussey to Edmund Burke, 9 May 1779, *Burke Corr.*, ix, pp 444-6.

years later he inherited his uncle's thriving mercantile business in Waterford. The young merchant was thus ideally placed to reap the benefits of the economic miracle. Like so many of his class, Rice had a deep mistrust of the banking system and nervousness about the hugely increased volume and variety of paper money in circulation.² The gradual repeal of the penal laws, however, allowed him to invest his profits in landed property. A deed of conveyance drawn up in 1815 indicates that Edmund held house property and as much as 1,500 acres in his own right. These lands, together with the Garter Inn at Callan, ten houses in Waterford, and three on St Stephen's Green, Dublin, were spread over the counties of Kilkenny, Tipperary and Laois.³ This property had a capital value of £50,000 and rent alone could earn its owner as much as £5,000 each year, the equivalent of one quarter of the total spent by the Catholics of Waterford building their magnificent cathedral.⁴

Booming demand for agricultural produce, however, increased social tensions throughout the south of Ireland. Rents rose and this in turn created land hunger and all the associated injustices opposed by the Whiteboys and Rightboys in the 1780s. Yet for Edmund Rice the period had brought prosperity, and he benefited greatly from his extensive contracts with the Admiralty, particularly since the advent of war with France in 1793. During the rebellion of 1798, these government connections guaranteed his geographic mobility, and he was one of the few who were allowed to pass unchallenged at all the military posts in Carrick, Waterford, Clonmel, Tipperary and Limerick.⁵ Nevertheless, Edmund must have been struck by the misery inflicted during the summer of 1798, when upwards of 30,000

² D. Dickson, *Old World Colony*, pp 147-8.

³ Registry of Deeds, Dublin, 715, 145, 489080 in M.C. Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, pp 437-8.

⁴ J.D. Fitzpatrick, 'The Finances of Our Venerable Founder', in *CBER* (1969), p. 13.

⁵ Br Austin Dunphy, 21 June 1846, CBGA, Rome, M.C. Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 23.

souls perished in the violence.⁶ Fortunately he was in a position to save from execution John Rice, the husband of his half-sister Jane Murphy. Known as 'the Wild Rapparee', he had fallen foul of the authorities during the rebellion. Edmund hid him in his home until an opportunity arose and then he was smuggled in a barrel to Newfoundland. Many others were less fortunate and, in the following year Edmund witnessed the grisly execution of Francis Hearn, a nephew of his friend, Thomas Hearn, Vicar General of the diocese and architect of the Catholic revival in Waterford and Lismore.⁷

Dean Hearn was amongst the influential circle whose example inspired Edmund to embrace the cause of education. Indeed, while Thomas Hussey had left Ireland in the tumult which followed the publication of his controversial pastoral, it fell to the dean to implement the bishop's ambitious plan for the erection of a diocesan system of elementary schools. In September 1799, Hearn had called a meeting of the leading Catholics in Waterford to establish a fund to build schools across the diocese. It is probable that Edmund was included in the group assembled by the dean and, no doubt the enthusiasm of the gathering served to confirm his resolution to devote his life and resources to the provision of Catholic education. Significantly, too, as a consequence of the meeting, Hearn rejoiced that 'we are busy now in procuring schoolhouses for the poor children of both sexes'.⁸ It is within this context of a diocesan campaign, then, rather than in isolation that Edmund embarked upon a course which would produce a revolution in Irish education.

II

⁶ L.M. Cullen, 'Rebellion Mortality in Wexford in 1798', in Journal of the Wexford Historical Society, no. 17 (1998-99), p. 9.

⁷ Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 5 Nov. 1799.

⁸ Thomas Hearn to Thomas Hussey, Sept. 1799, Waterford Diocesan Archive.

Edmund Rice was no Saint Francis. He was not a founder who gave up all to follow Christ, but rather he retained his considerable property and investment, and with these financed his great work.⁹ Indeed, it was this reality which may have justified the bitter folkloric recollection that he had taken 'farms which some less prosperous people were unable to hold ... and from the proceeds financed his schools'.¹⁰ To start Edmund sold his provisioning business to his friend Thomas Quan, who from 1790 had been a fellow member of the Jesuit inspired confraternity in Waterford. The proceeds from this sale financed the purchase of a three-acre site at Ballybricken and part of the £3,000 spent on the construction of a new school.

In theory, at least, the penal restrictions on Catholic education had been repealed by the time Edmund Rice began his great project. In practice however, there were still obstacles and prejudices to be overcome. The Relief Act of 1782 declared Catholic schoolmasters legally free to teach on the condition that they took an oath of allegiance and obtained a licence from the local Protestant bishop. Hercules Langrishe's Relief Act of 1792 made the latter requirement unnecessary, but the benefits of this concession were removed in 1799 by the imposition of a hefty window tax from which non-licensed schools were not to be exempt. It seems likely that Edmund Rice received a licence for his new school. In many cases application was a mere formality, but attitudes varied. In 1799 Anastasia Tobin foundress of the Ursuline convent in Thurles was granted a licence. In the same year the Presentation Sisters of Waterford made a successful application to Bishop Marley, but as late as 1814 a licence was refused to Fr Peter Kenney S.J. for his school at Clongowes Wood.¹¹

⁹ Carroll, 'Charism to Mission', p. 23.

¹⁰ M. C. Normoyle (ed.), *Memories*, p. 253.

¹¹ M. C. Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 268.

Further complications threatened Edmund's project. Since 1782 the endowment of Catholic schools was forbidden by law, while the third clause of the 1791 Relief Act forbade the foundation of any association or society bound by religious or monastic vows. The latter restriction, like so many of its kind, was more than likely a dead letter from its enactment. It may indeed have been included simply to placate the bitter opposition to Catholic relief from the ultra-loyalist faction within the Irish parliament. The question of endowment was a more serious obstacle, which was further complicated by the 1793 Relief Bill which forbade the establishment of schools and colleges *exclusively* for Catholic education. In the short term Edmund could afford to ignore these impediments. He had not yet considered religious consecration and the schools would be financed from his own purse.

Without waiting for the completion of a permanent school, Edmund began teaching in an old stable in New Street. This building, known for many years as 'Elliott's Yard', may have been inherited from his wife 'Mary Elliott' — if so, no location could have been more appropriate for his mission to begin. Edmund moved from the comfort of Arundel Place, and his step-sister Mary returned to Callan, along with his daughter Mary, who was by then possibly in her late teens. Edmund lived above the stable, where below three rooms were fitted out for school. Conditions were primitive; furniture was sparse and benches were borrowed each day from Buggy's pub in Barrack Street.¹² The historian of the Christian Brothers has left us with an idealised description of the master and his first pupils in 1802:

Very soon the rooms were filled with boys, poor lads utterly ignorant of even the first notions of religious or secular knowledge. They were rude and rough in manner and not all amenable to the salutary restraints of school discipline. But Edmund Rice, joining to a commanding presence an agreeable and winning manner, gained the confidence of the most wayward, and soon established regularity and discipline in the school.¹³

¹² M.C. Normoyle, Memories, p. 197.

¹³ [McCarthy], Edmund Ignatius Rice, p. 80.

Initially Edmund was assisted by two paid assistants, but tradition asserts that these soon abandoned the project. He began on a modest scale — perhaps teaching a group of six pupils in a night school — but before long the rooms were thronged to the extent that he was forced to open a second school in Stephen Street nearby. Gradually Edmund assembled strips of land at Ballybricken where he intended to build a school. Through the influence of friends in the Wyse Trustees, he was able to acquire the site of the old Faha chapel and, in a reflection of his close bonds with the Presentation Sisters, he purchased a small passageway leading to their convent on Hennessy's Road where he could attend Mass.

From the beginning Bishop Hussey was an ardent supporter of Edmund Rice's plan. His controversial pastoral had prompted Rice to take the great step and he laid the foundation stone of the new school in June 1802. During that year, however, a strange coolness developed between the two; the bishop lost interest in the school and appears to have become quite hostile. The explanation for this unexpected change is unclear, but it may be attributed to two factors which surfaced frequently in Edmund Rice's life; human jealousy and the vexed question of episcopal authority.

Jealousy needs no explanation, but the latter proved a thorny issue. A combination of his own character and fortunate circumstances made Rice's venture extraordinarily independent and open to resentment and misunderstanding. He had supplied both the initiative and the finance and in this way was answerable to no one, least of all the local bishop. This was complicated further by the fact that the Faha site had previously been ecclesiastical property, which had been leased to Rice by Dean Hearn acting for the diocese in the absence of the bishop.¹⁴ Thomas Hussey was a prickly individual; his service in the Spanish Embassy in London had made him extremely conscious of protocol and he jealously guarded what he regarded

¹⁴ Registry of Deeds, No. 553-315-368721, Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 46.

as the episcopal prerogative. Unwittingly, Edmund Rice may have offended the bishop's sensitivities; he had stepped beyond the acceptable limit, establishing a Catholic school free from clerical supervision. This was perhaps, not unlike the conflict between Bishop Francis Moylan and Nano Nagle following her initial foundation at Cove Lane, in Cork. Fr John Power, one of Rice's oldest friends, suggested a way out of this delicate situation.¹⁵ He advised Edmund to draw up a deed of assignment handing the site over to the bishop, reserving only a life interest for himself. In this way, Power believed, he would 'prove [his] submission to his Lordship and the baseless character of the stories he has been told, as well as the vileness of the motives ascribed to [him]'.¹⁶

It is perhaps idle to speculate on the nature of 'the stories' and the 'vileness of the motives' attributed to Edmund Rice, but his character would be called into question again twenty years later, in the course of a bitter dispute with Bishop Robert Walsh of Waterford and Lismore. In the short term, there is little doubt there were many in the city who remained cynical about Rice's conversion, especially if suspicions of his being engaged in money lending and aggressive property speculation were true. In any event, Bishop Hussey was content with Edmund's gesture. This was a very significant move on Rice's part, since the bishop could make no claim, either civil or ecclesiastical, on the property.¹⁷ By this offer he had become not only a tenant of the bishop, but his submission to Dr Hussey was a very public and legally binding statement of his new departure. The deed was duly registered and an important milestone had been passed. Rice had brought his mission under episcopal supervision, and secured a generous benefactor in the process. Ironically, just as Francis Moylan 'acquired immense credit' on account of his Presentation Sisters, so too, Hussey's agent in Rome

¹⁵ Walsh, Nano Nagle, pp 95-6.

¹⁶ CBER, (Dublin, 1891), p. 447.

¹⁷ J.D. Fitzpatrick, 'The Greatness of Edmund Rice as a Founder of a Religious Congregation', CBER (1953), pp 13-14.

would 'applaud in the extreme [the Bishop of Waterford's] notion of doing like for the benefit of poor male children'.¹⁸

Thomas Hussey blessed the completed residence at Ballybricken in June 1803. The story is told that it was he who gave it the name which would become famous. Commenting on the raised site outside the city, Hussey alluded to the Holy City; 'all things considered, I think a very appropriate name would be Mount Sion, and so I name it'.¹⁹ One month later, on 11 July, the bishop died suddenly at Tramore, having taken a fit while swimming there. Even in death Hussey managed to rouse strong feelings and his funeral became the scene of a violent protest. As his remains were being brought to Waterford for burial, the funeral procession was interrupted by a group of drunken soldiers returning from an Orange meeting who tried to throw his remains into the river Suir. Thomas Hearn later described for Lord Donoughmore how this mob had 'uttered the most abusive threats to cut up his remains and his friends'.²⁰ Amongst those friends was Edmund Rice to whom Thomas Hussey left the greater part of his estate; apart from a bequest of £2,000, five masters were each to be paid £20 per annum, Rice was to receive a salary for life and funds were provided to clothe poor boys.²¹

III

For Edmund Rice, however, the provision of education was simply an apostolate; his desire was to live the life of a religious life. Others shared his vision and within months of opening his school in New Street he was joined by two Callan men, Thomas Grosvenor and Patrick Finn. Together they formed a religious community. They prayed together, attended daily Mass

¹⁸ Luke Concanen, Rome, to Thomas Hussey, 26 Jan. 1803, Waterford Diocesan Archive.

¹⁹ *CBER* (1891), p. 447.

²⁰ T. Hearn to Lord Donoughmore, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, T3459/D34/1.

²¹ Will of Thomas Hussey in *Arch. Hib.*, lii (1914), p. 201: 'Memo of the funds of the founder', Jan. 1842, CBGA, Rome, 0006/51.

and devoted time to spiritual reading. Bishop Hussey's last report to Rome in June 1803 gave a description of their position:

some few men have been formed into a society who eagerly desire to bind themselves by the three solemn vows of chastity, poverty and obedience under the rules similar to those of the [Presentation] Sisters, and already a convent has been built where four holy men reside who seek approbation of their rules whenever it will be deemed advisable by the Holy See.²²

In his will, too, Hussey referred to Edmund Rice not by location but, 'of the Society of the Presentation', even though the Brothers had no canonical status.²³

From the beginning then, Rice and his companions followed the vision which would later be enshrined in the first chapter of the constitutions of his society:

The end of the Institute is that all its members labour in the first place for their own perfection and in the second for that of their neighbour by a serious application to the instruction of male children, especially the poor, in the principles of religion and Christian piety.²⁴

The annals of the Christian Brothers' in Thurles, county Tipperary, expressed the purpose of the founding group more colloquially, although it distorts Catholic teaching by relegating 'love' to second place behind the Brothers' own salvation.²⁵ Nevertheless, both reflect the Tridentine imperative of 'faith and good works', which also inspired Ignatius Loyola, Angela Merici and the great religious founders in the early-modern period:

²² Thomas Hussey, *Relatio Status*, 29 June 1803, S.C.R.I., 1802-1810, vol. 18, fol. 125.

²³ Will of Thomas Hussey in *Arch. Hib.*, iii (1914), p. 201.

²⁴ *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers* (Dublin, 1832).

²⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A history of the Development of Doctrine*, iv (Chicago, 1984), pp 284-7.

Their chief object was to sanctify themselves, to give good example, to encourage others, especially the young and to teach and keep alive in the latter the principles and practice of the Catholic religion.²⁶

The school at Mount Sion opened its doors and was blessed by Hussey's successor and Rice's old friend, John Power, on 1 May 1804. There were over three hundred boys on the roll and before long the accommodation proved inadequate. Additional rooms were secured and the Brothers opened a night school to educate the illiterate and instruct them in the catechism.

The Brothers' charity extended beyond the provision of education.²⁷ Just as the proselytizing schools provided what Hussey had called 'specious pretexts' to attract the children of the poor, so Edmund's school at Mount Sion attended to the physical needs of the boys.²⁸ A small bake house was built to provide the poorer pupils with a daily meal of bread and milk. For many years, too, a tailor was employed at Mount Sion repairing tattered clothes and distributing suits to the poor.²⁹ The plight of prisoners, too, remained a priority for Edmund. Many of the Memories recall Edmund's visits to the cells; how he interceded for debtors and often escorted condemned men to the gallows:

This was a special privilege extended to Br Rice as he was credited with having a wonderful power of moving to repentance some of those hardened people who seemed callous when appealed to by the clergy even.³⁰

²⁶ Br J. Nugent, 'The Annals of Thurles' (1888), CBGA, Rome, 006/49; see R. Po-Chia Hsia, The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770 (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 26-43; Richard L. DeMolen (ed.), Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation: Essays in Honor of John C. Olin on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday (Fordham, 1994); Querciolo Mazzonis, 'A Female idea of religious perfection; Angela Merici and the Company of St Ursula (1535-1540)', Renaissance Studies, Vol. 18, no. 3, (2004), pp 392-411.

²⁷ See D.S. Blake, 'John Austin Grace (1800-86) Educator' (PhD, University of Hull, 1986), pp 36-8.

²⁸ T. Hussey, Pastoral, p. 3.

²⁹ J.D. Fitzpatrick, Edmund Rice, p. 151.

³⁰ M.C. Normoyle (ed), Memories, p. 13.

Contemporary reports highlight the misery of the prisons, but the Brothers were 'ever to be found' administering to prisoners and alleviating their sufferings.³¹ Edmund's generosity to prisoners was expansive; surviving account books record that on one visit to the gaol, at Christmas 1808, he distributed 42 half-crowns to the poor inmates.³² In the great humanitarian disasters of the age, too, the Brothers were prominent in their attempts to relieve the sufferings of the poor. In the Asiatic cholera pandemic of 1832, which claimed 25,000 Irish lives, the Brothers made their monasteries and schools available as temporary hospitals. Edmund was particularly concerned at the plight of 'the very poorest class', but derived comfort from the heroic efforts of his confreres, particularly in Limerick where the annals record the death of 525 patients in the makeshift hospital established at the Brothers' school at Clare Street. During the same crisis, the Monastery was given up to accommodate the doctors and priests who attended the sick.³³ In the Great Famine (1845-50), too, the Brothers responded to the misery around them. The annals of the North Monastery record Br John Baptist Leonard feeding three hundred starving children daily in Cork, during 'Black '47', while in Dublin Brothers from Francis Street attended to the fever patients in the hospital at Kilmainham.³⁴

While Thomas Hussey had informed the Roman authorities, in 1803, of the Brothers' desire to be bound by the solemn vows, no moves were made towards a formal recognition of the 'monks', as they were called, until 1808.³⁵ In this sense, for the first years of their existence there was little to separate Edmund's group from the pious teaching communities of laymen, or 'monks',

³¹ The Dublin Pilot, 23 March 1836.

³² D.S. Blake, 'John Austin Grace', p. 37.

³³ Edmund Rice to Superior General of De La Salle Brothers, 4 May 1832, De La Salle Archives, Rome, cited in Normoyle, Companion, p. 398; Edmund Rice to Mother Austin M.C.Grath, Dungarvan, 12 June 1832, CBGA, Rome; Limerick House Registry, CBGA, Rome, 040/0458; M.C. Normoyle, Companion, p. 403; see H. Fenning, 'Cholera Epidemic in Ireland 1832-33', in Arch. Hib (2003), pp 77-125.

³⁴ Manuscript biography of Br Baptist Leonard, CBGA, Rome, 006/48; North Richmond Street Annals, April 1849, p. 111; Cork Examiner, 12 March 1847.

³⁵ Hussey to Propaganda Fide, 29 June 1803, SRCI, 1802-10, Vol. 18, F. 125 in M.C. Normoyle (ed.), The Roman Correspondence (Dublin, 1978), p. 3.

which had been formed in Cork, Thurles, Kilkenny and other towns in the south east. These groups, rather like the medieval Beghards, lived a semi-religious, austere lifestyle, but they were not bound by formal religious vows.

Edmund 'pressed' and 'begged' Bishop Power to admit his Brothers to vows.³⁶ His anxiety was fuelled by religious motives, but it is certain, too, that a public profession would afford his little group ecclesiastical recognition and the projection of permanence. Episcopal approval would also serve to dispel any lingering disquiet about Rice's character and 'the motives ascribed to [him]'.³⁷ Various reasons have been given for the bishop's delay: the penal prohibition on the formation of new religious orders, the question of exclusively Catholic schools, the issue of endowments, and the continuation of the war with France. None of these explanations are particularly convincing.³⁸ Similarly, the timing of Rice's eventual profession in 1808 has been attributed to changing political circumstances which suggested 'the dawn of [Catholic] emancipation was on the horizon'.³⁹ Neither is this explanation satisfactory; the duke of Portland's administration was not only ready to shelve the emancipation issue, but had fought the 1807 general election successfully on a 'no popery' platform. In these circumstances Henry Grattan's petition for emancipation had little hope of success and the emergence of a divisive controversy on the proposed royal veto on episcopal nominations blighted future prospects.⁴⁰

The decision to allow religious profession was more likely due to practical rather than political considerations. It was eight years since Edmund had begun his mission in Elliott's yard; nine Brothers were by then living the life of Christian educators in three communities, at Waterford, Carrick-on-Suir

³⁶ John Power to Francis Moylan, 26 June 1804, *Collectanea Hibernica*, no. 15 (1972), p. 69.

³⁷ *CBER*, (Dublin, 1891), p. 447.

³⁸ J.D. Fitzpatrick, *Edmund Rice*, p. 160.

³⁹ M.C. Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 70.

⁴⁰ Bartlett, *Fall and Rise*, p. 289 ff.

and Dungarvan. Within the diocese, too, Edmund enjoyed the support of the clergy and Bishop John Power had been among his closest friends and supporters. The Presentation nuns in Waterford had made their solemn vows according to their new rule on 15 August 1806, while in the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, Bishop Daniel Delaney had received the first four members into the Patrician Brothers in February 1808.⁴¹ All of these factors indicated that the opportune moment had arrived.

Bishop Power welcomed Edmund's request for profession and it was agreed that the three communities would assemble at Mount Sion on the feast of the Assumption to make their commitment in common. On 15 August 1808 eight brothers made annual vows according to the rule and constitution of the Presentation Order.⁴² One of Edmund's earliest followers, Thomas Brien of the Carrick community, chose not to proceed. Despite his well-intentioned zeal, the grueling of the schools had proved too much for the sixty-year-old who returned to Waterford where he resumed his wine merchant's business.

The brothers were now religious living in temporary vows under episcopal 'authority and jurisdiction', but all concerned were anxious that the congregation would be placed on a secure footing.⁴³ With this in mind, Bishop Power submitted a petition to the Holy See requesting Apostolic approval of the new institute. This appeal met with a favourable response from Propaganda Fide which granted provisional approval, pending the submission of a rule and constitutions.⁴⁴ Encouraged by this development, the bishop agreed to admit the brothers to perpetual vows in 1809. Once more, however, it saddened Edmund that not all his companions would make this long hoped for profession. John Power returned home, while

⁴¹ M.A. Connolly, The Story of Edmund Rice (Rome, 1996), p. 8.

⁴² 'Origin', p. 9.

⁴³ 'Presentation Rule', p. 182.

⁴⁴ Memorial to Holy See in Favour of the Institute founded by Edmund Rice, 21 Jan. 1809, SRCI, 1808-09, Vol. 18, F. 495 Propaganda Fide to Dr Power, 21 Jan. 1809, LDSC, 1806-13, Vol. 294, F. 94-5; Normoyle, Roman Correspondence, pp 4-8.

Edmund's first disciple, Patrick Finn, left to join the Cistercian monastery at Melleray in France. He returned to Ireland in 1833 and was among the founding members of the community at Mount Melleray, county Waterford.

III

The young congregation lived an austere and regimented lifestyle according to an adaptation of the Presentation Rule, written for the sisters by Laurence Callanan OFM, the pious friar of Rice's conversion story.⁴⁵ At his first profession Edmund chose 'Ignatius' as his name in religion and afterwards it became the practice for novices to choose the names of saints whose spirituality or heroic virtue inspired them. That choice, in preference, for example, to Kieran, patron of Ossory, or Declan of Ardmore, illustrated the extent to which his spirituality was that of the European Catholic Reformation, rather than of a native tradition. The original Presentation Rule embodied that spirituality, too, with its echoes of St Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and focus upon diligence in prayer, self-improvement and good works.⁴⁶ Moreover, the Rule reflected Nano Nagle's enthusiasm for the reformed devotions of the early-modern Church: the Passion, the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Virgin Mary.⁴⁷ Edmund accentuated that culture by his addition of John the Baptist, Theresa of Avila and Ignatius of Loyola to the litany of sixteen saints to whom the Rule urged particular devotion.⁴⁸

John the Baptist, 'whose panegyric was pronounced by the Redeemer', was included as an exemplar for religious, who had attained 'the most eminent degrees of poverty, chastity and obedience'.⁴⁹ Rice's spiritual biographer

⁴⁵ F.R. Hickey (ed.), 'The Presentation Rule', in *CBER* (1981), pp 180-98.

⁴⁶ H. Outram Evannet, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation* (Notre Dame, 1968), pp 23-43.

⁴⁷ *Positio of Nano Nagle* (Rome, 1994), I, p. 556.

⁴⁸ O'Toole, *A Spiritual Profile of Edmund Rice*, i, p. 164.

⁴⁹ 'Presentation Rule', p. 196.

described St John as an unusual model for religious, but notes the traditional devotion to him within Gaelic society.⁵⁰ Such devotion, however, was ambiguous since St John's Eve was commemorated not so much in honour of the Baptist, but as the pagan festival of the summer solstice, a celebration fiercely opposed by John Troy and the reforming bishops of Rice's generation. There was no such ambiguity about St Theresa, whose insertion in the Rule reflected Edmund's special affection for the saint, whose writings inspired his mature years. One of his early companions, Austin Grace, had a very intimate recollection of Edmund's remarkable devotion to St Teresa:

He kept a picture of the saint in his room, and often he would be seen pressing his lips to it. His devotion to the great saint became more remarkable as his life drew to a close, but as might be expected his devotion to the Holy Mother of God was most intense.⁵¹

The influence of St Ignatius was reflected throughout the Rule, not least by the banner, Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam, at its head. Unlike traditional religious orders, the Jesuits did not recite or chant the liturgical hours, or office, in common in order to free them for the exercise of their dynamic apostolate. In a similar way, the Brothers were obliged only to recite the short Office of Our Blessed Lady, which the early Jesuits had prayed and promoted amongst the literate laity. In addition, the Presentation Rule commended 'Mental Prayer', meditation and contemplation, to 'imprint on the mind the sublime truths of religion, to elevate the soul, and enflame the heart with the love of God and of heavenly things'.⁵² The inclusion of this injunction reflected the influence of the Catholic Reformation, which had seen meditation refined in the writings of Lorenzo Scoupli, author of Edmund's prized Spiritual Combat, and St Ignatius, whose successor as General of the

⁵⁰ O'Toole, A Spiritual Profile of Edmund Rice, i, p. 165.

⁵¹ History of the Institute, i, p. 392.

⁵² 'Presentation Rule', p. 170.

Jesuits, Diego Laínez prized 'mental prayer' above the recitation of the Office or other formulaic prayers.⁵³ The Ignatian thrust was evident, too, in Chapter 9 of the Rule which advocated the 'Spiritual exercises', annual retreats, at summer and Christmas, and monthly days of recollection.⁵⁴

Edmund's spirituality, like that of his great patron, was Christocentric with a strong Marian aspect. Love of God and love of neighbour, as expressed in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, animated the life of the early Brothers, but they were particularly devoted to the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Eucharistic Devotion became the hallmark of the Brothers' spirituality. From the first day at Mount Sion they reserved the Blessed Sacrament in their oratory, and their Rule encapsulated the Council of Trent's teaching on the Eucharist (Session XIII, 1551):

The most holy Eucharist having been instituted by Jesus Christ for the nourishment of our souls as well as for our sacrifice, and as in it he imparts to us the most precious pledge of his love, the Brethren shall cherish the tenderest and most affectionate devotion towards this adorable Sacrament.⁵⁵

The daily routine was punctuated by regular visits to the oratory and while the Brothers attended Mass daily, they were obliged to receive the Sacrament only on Sundays and holidays. In a further reflection of early-modern practice, the Brothers were forbidden from going to Communion three days in succession without the permission of the superior. The Rule also reflected Trent's emphasis upon the sacrament of Confession (Session XIV, 1551).⁵⁶ The bishop was to appoint a confessor to each community and the Brothers were to approach the sacrament each Saturday and on 'the

⁵³ J.W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, p. 162.

⁵⁴ 'Presentation Rule', pp 171-2.

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp 172-3; David C. Steinmetz, 'The Council of Trent', in David Bagchi and D.C. Steinmetz (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge, 2004), pp 233-48; Denzinger, H. and Schonmetzer, A., *Enchiridion Symbolorum: definitonum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (Rome, 1976), pp 387-90.

⁵⁶ Denzinger and Schonmetzer, *ibid*, p. 401.

eves of great feasts'. In this sense the lives of the Presentation communities reflected the trend within the Church towards frequent Communion and Confession. This was a radical departure from traditional Irish practice, where the sacrament of Confession was often merely an annual preparation for the reception of Easter Communion.⁵⁷

Since 'idleness ... "teacheth much evil"', every hour of the day was regulated so as to ensure that the Brothers 'shall never be found giddily losing their precious time'.⁵⁸ Chapter twenty of the Rule, which established the horarium of the community, contains not simply an account of the lifestyle of the brothers, but a succinct résumé of their spirituality and purpose:

1. The Brethren of this Congregation shall rise, every morning, winter and summer, at five o'clock, making the sign of the Cross on themselves and giving their first thoughts to God. They shall dress themselves with dignity and modesty, take the holy water, and on their knees offer themselves and all the actions of the day to Almighty God.
2. At a quarter after five, they shall assemble in the chapel for common prayer and meditation, which shall continue until six o'clock. They shall finish with the Angelus Domini, the litany of the Holy Name of Jesus, and a few prayers for particular intentions, such as the exaltation of the holy Catholic Church, for His Holiness the Pope, the Bishops and clergy, the conversion of sinners, and perseverance of the just; and a Pater Noster, and Ave Maria, in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Then they shall recite together the small Hours of Prime, Tierce, Sext and None, after which they shall retire to make their beds and clear up their cells.
3. At seven o'clock they shall attend at Mass, and after it, they shall say the De profundis, with three orations, Deus qui inter Apostolicos Sacerdotes, Deus veniae largitor, Fidelium Deus, etc.
4. At eight o'clock breakfast, in common; spiritual lecture if time permits. Then preparation for schools, which shall open at nine o'clock and hold till twelve.
5. At a quarter before twelve, particular examen (excepting the Brothers, who give the spiritual instructions at that time) which they shall close

⁵⁷ H. Outram Evennett, The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation, p. 37.

⁵⁸ 'Presentation Rule', p. 173.

- with the Angelus Domini, and the Acts of Contrition, Faith, Hope and Charity, with devotional prayers for such intentions as the Father Superior may judge proper, not exceeding five Paters and Aves.
6. At a quarter after three, dinner, before and after which they shall say the usual prayers. They shall go after dinner in procession, two by two, to the chapel to say the Psalms, Miserere, and the oration, Respice, quaesumus Domine super hanc familiam tuam, etc. Then recreation until five o'clock.
 7. At five o'clock Vespers and Compline, after which they shall offer devotional prayers for such intentions as the exigencies of the time, or particular circumstances may require, and for this purpose, shall recite five Paters and Aves, in honour of the passion and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. At six, the Angelus Domini with devotional prayers for the Bishop and priests of the diocese, and a spiritual lecture for a quarter of an hour.
 8. At seven o'clock, meditation for half an hour, after which they shall recite Matins and Lauds. At eight o'clock, supper or collation, after which they shall say the usual prayers and go, as after dinner, to chapel to say the Magnificat, the verse, Ora pro nobis, and the oration Concede.
 9. At nine o'clock, they shall assemble in the chapel for night prayers, to make their examen and to read or hear the subject of next morning's meditation. After which they shall retire in silence to their respective cells, and be in bed by ten o'clock.⁵⁹

This was, in essence, a monastic regime. The Brothers had renounced the world, and their rule regulated the various communities accordingly, so as 'to cut away as much as possible what might tend to introduce its spirit'.⁶⁰ They observed a spirit of enclosure, in which the school was their cloister, and were forbidden from 'going beyond the limits marked out for them, except with the express leave' of the superior, who they were to obey, 'as having authority from God'.⁶¹ Within the community, too, they were to observe the rule of silence, 'the ornament of religious souls and the faithful guardian of

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp 180-81.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 168.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp 166-8.

interior recollection'.⁶² They were to have minimal contact with the world; restrictions on 'intercourse with seculars' would become a feature of later regulations, but in the original rule the injunctions on chastity urged the brothers to adopt the 'most guarded reserve' when 'spoken to by women of any state or profession'.⁶³ This desire to shun the world was also behind successive attempts to banish newspapers from the various monasteries.⁶⁴ The Christian Brothers' chapter of 1829, restricted papers to the professed brothers, and advocated instead 'the study of historical, educational and religious periodicals'.⁶⁵ Three years later, during his reconnaissance of the De La Salle system in Paris, Br Bernard Dunphy noted that the French General had severely rebuked some of his brothers 'who had taken the liberty of reading newspapers, a practice which he declares to be very pernicious'.⁶⁶

In their vow of poverty, the community had renounced 'all property in earthly things'.⁶⁷ Their clothes were to be 'modest and grave'; their cells were simple and nothing about the monastery was 'superfluous, costly or rich'.⁶⁸ The Brothers' meals were frugal. Edmund prescribed the Lenten fasts in the Rule and throughout the year there were at least two meatless days per week. Yet in recognition of the 'arduous and laborious functions of instructing poor children', the Brothers were obliged to fast only on the days of fast and abstinence ordered by the Church.⁶⁹ Breakfast, at eight o'clock, consisted of porridge with bread, butter and milk. Nothing more was eaten until they returned from school; dinner, at 3.15 pm, consisted of 'boiled meat, (rarely roast), with vegetables; no bread except on fast days' and water.⁷⁰ This was

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁶⁵ 'History of the Institute', *CBER* (1895), p. 102.

⁶⁶ Br Bernard Dunphy, *Notebook* (1832), CBGA, Rome, 003/0021.

⁶⁷ 'Presentation Rule', p. 165.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁷⁰ Br Joseph Leonard to Superior Sup. Gen. De La Salle, Paris, 14 Dec. 1829, Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 286.

the last meal of the day, until the Christian Brothers' general chapter of 1829 added a simple supper of four ounces of bread and milk. Yet, despite the modesty of the change, Edmund was angered by this innovation, and attempted to reverse the decision by way of a circular letter which he addressed to the directors of the various houses.⁷¹ Explaining his controversial action, he informed the Superior General of the De La Salle Brothers, in Paris, that 'hitherto the quantity and quality of our food and beverages ... was both wholesome and sufficient'.⁷² Yet, while he was anxious about the trend of such reforms, his principal concern appears to have been the extravagance of the change, within a context where postulants were being turned away, and the Order's novitiate remained unfinished for want of funds.⁷³

Even in his advanced years, Rice made great demands of himself. The Annals of the Christian Brothers recall that he was 'a mortified man, he denied himself in a variety of ways, but made no display of the acts of his virtue'.⁷⁴ Amongst the very few anecdotes about him, there is one dramatic recollection of his self denial:

For many years he had been a great snuff-taker. In one of his annual retreats he resolved to give up the habit completely. As if to signalise his renunciation of this luxury, he threw his snuff box into the fire and never after took snuff.⁷⁵

According to another tradition, he was offered punch for medicinal purposes, but refused unless it was made with salt rather than sugar.⁷⁶ At the Chapter of 1829, too, he made an unsuccessful attempt to have included in the Rule

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 229.

⁷² Edmund Rice to Sup. Gen. De La Salle, Paris, 16 Oct. 1829, Normoyle, Companion, p. 273.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ CBER (1901), p. 532.

⁷⁵ J.D. Fitzpatrick, Edmund Rice, p. 292.

⁷⁶ W.B. Cullen, 'The Spirit of Our Founder', Edmund Ignatius Rice (Cork, 1969), p. 16.

a paragraph encouraging the use of hair shirts and other disciplines.⁷⁷ Yet while this legislative attempt failed, and ironically it was opposed by 'several of the older Brothers', the communities continued to practice various corporal austerities, including the use of hair shirts, chains and other disciplines which were an accepted part of contemporary mortification.⁷⁸

Austin Dunphy's 'Origin', the earliest history of the Congregation, described the purpose of Edmund Rice's little band in classical terms:

Their motives, in ... associating together, were, in the first place to withdraw from the dangers of a sinful world: and ... to sanctify themselves by frequenting the Holy Sacraments, by prayer ... and the works of mercy, especially that of instructing poor ignorant boys in the principles of Religion and Christian piety.⁷⁹

The Presentation Rule provided the first brothers with the framework in which to live this life. Their fidelity to its aspirations won them great esteem and it was arguably the quality of their lives that caused their work to be successful.⁸⁰ Indeed, the Manual of School Management (1845) reminded the Brothers that their efforts as educators would bear fruit proportionate to the pursuit of their own sanctification.⁸¹

This founding group was in the vanguard of the Catholic revival which characterized the age. The process had begun as an episcopal initiative, but in the early years of the new century the baton passed to the religious orders, who represented not just a prophetic leaven within the Church, but a vital component of reformed-Catholicism in Ireland. Within that context, the Christian Brothers were to the fore. Yet, while they are celebrated principally for their work within the schools, in the heated 'Bible Wars' of the 1820s they

⁷⁷ Normoyle, A Tree is Planted, p. 88.

⁷⁸ Br Joseph Leonard, to Superior General, De La Salle, Paris, 14 Sept. 1829, M.C. Normoyle, Companion, p. 268.

⁷⁹ 'Origin', p. 8.

⁸⁰ John Kent, 'The Educational ideals', p. 8.

⁸¹ Christian Brothers, Manual of School Government (Dublin, 1845), p. 7.

became champions of the Counter-Reformation, not merely arresting the advance of biblical Protestantism, but contributing to the militant character of nineteenth century Irish Catholicism. This is perhaps the most neglected aspect of the Brothers' history, especially amongst contemporary commentators who strive to suggest an anachronistic ecumenism on the part of Edmund Rice.⁸²

⁸² Denis McLaughlin, 'The Founding of the Christian Brothers', Australian EJournal of Theology, no. 5 (Aug. 2005), pp 1-41.

VI

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

In 1820 the status of the Rice's Brothers changed when they were recognized by Pope Pius VII as a 'Pontifical Institute'. Seven communities of Brothers merged to form a single religious congregation; they were no longer subject to diocesan authority, but as 'Christian Brothers' they were under the jurisdiction of Edmund Rice, their first Superior General. The Cork Brothers chose to remain as they were; subject to Bishop Murphy they continued as the 'Society of the Presentation'. The timing of this sanction is particularly significant and, placed within the context of the 'Second Reformation', it demonstrates the renewed confidence and the combative nature of Irish Catholicism. Within those challenging circumstances, the Brothers did not merely advance the 'Tridentine surge', but were synonymous with the Counter-Reformationary zeal which became the hallmark of nineteenth century Irish Catholicism. Like his patron, Rice saw education as critical to the process of renewal in the Church, but like Ignatius of Loyola, too, circumstances combined to give the efforts of his companions a militant character. Indeed, in that role he was celebrated by contemporaries as a second Ignatius, called 'to confront the hydra-headed Reformation and its spawn of ten thousand sects'.¹

I

¹ Obituary for Br Thomas Bernard Aylward, Kilkenny Journal, Nov. 1861, cited in John Shelly, Edmund Ignatius Rice, p. 127.

The excesses of the 1798 rebellion inevitably revived sectarian tensions in Ireland. In the aftermath of the rebellion a concerted effort was made to represent the bloody events of that summer as a 'popish plot'. Yet despite the efforts of Richard Musgrave, the 'Orange Baronet', and loyalist historians to restore sectarian memories of 1641 and other atrocities, a surprising degree of religious toleration and co-operation characterized the first decades of the nineteenth-century. There were many manifestations of this spirit. In a celebrated pastoral of 1822, James Warren Doyle ('J.K.L'), the Augustinian bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, reminded his flock that the Orangemen were their brethren in Christ. A few years later the Catholic bishop and clergy of Limerick walked in the funeral procession of the Protestant vicar general of the diocese. When William Crolly was appointed to the bishopric of Down and Connor in 1825 he entertained a group of about two hundred men to dinner in Belfast and a reporter who was present calculated that the majority of those present were Protestant. During this meal toasts were drunk to Richard Mant, the controversial Anglican bishop, his clergy, the Synod of Ulster and the Presbyterians of Antrim.² In Waterford, this same spirit found practical expression in the ecumenical co-operation in various charitable ventures, such as the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity (1820), established to relieve poverty in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. Its predominantly Protestant board included Edmund Rice, who in 1826 became its chairman.³

As the 1820s progressed, however, the practice of ecumenism became more and more difficult. While 'JKL' famously called for a reunion of the creeds, Bishop Oliver Kelly of Tuam thought that basic Christian charity

² Dublin Evening Post, 7 May 1825; Ignatius Murphy, 'Some attitudes to religious freedom and ecumenism in pre-emancipation Ireland', in Irish Ecclesiastical Record (1966), pp 97-9.

³ Daire Keogh, Edmund Rice, 1762-1844, p. 60; M.C. Normoyle, 'Edmund Rice: Benefactor', in CBER (1976), p. 18.

would be a good start.⁴ Sean Connolly has attributed this increased sectarianism to three factors: the launch of the so-called 'Second Reformation', the emergence of a new style of popular politics under O'Connell and the more combative outlook of the Catholic Church.⁵ The confidence of the Catholic cause was also buoyed by the rise of millenarianism: the expectations created by the miracles of a German priest, Alexander Emmerich, prince of Hohenlohe, which appeared to reinforce the moral authority of the Church, and the prophecies of 'Pastorini', which in an Irish context predicted the extermination of all protestants by 1825, the year of the papal jubilee.⁶

The combination of these factors destroyed the spirit of toleration and resulted in a transformation of the Catholic mind to the extent that, by the middle of the century, liberal Catholicism had given way to ultramontanism. This process has become synonymous with Archbishop Paul Cullen of Dublin, who once boasted he had never dined with a Protestant. On another occasion, while still rector of the Irish College, Rome, the future cardinal rebuked the 'Apostle of Temperance', Fr Theobald Mathew, for his misguided sentiments:

In some of the sermons preached by you, or attributed to you in the public papers, you appear to entertain sentiments too liberal towards Protestants in matter of religion. I suppose there is no real foundation for this complaint ... However, it is well to be cautious. We should entertain most expansive sentiments of charity towards Protestants but at the same time we should let them know there is but one true Church and that they are strayed sheep from the one fold. We should let them

⁴ Oliver Kelly, Tuam, to Eneas McDonnell, 23 May 1824, Murphy, *IER*, p. 102

⁵ S.J. Connolly, *Religion and Society in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Dundalk, 1985), pp 25-30.

⁶ Thomas McGrath, *Politics, Interdenominational Relations and Education in the Public Ministry of Bishop James Doyle ...* (Dublin, 1999), pp 109-15; J. D. Donnelly, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock: Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821-4', in Samuel Clark and J. S. Donnelly (eds), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Madison, 1983), pp 102-39.

know this; otherwise we might lull them into a false sense of security in their errors and by doing so we would really violate charity.⁷

Yet, while a great deal of attention has been focused upon the changes in the fortunes of Irish Catholicism which produced such confidence, it is vital to recall that the religious revival that characterized the early years of the nineteenth-century was not confined to the Catholic Church. Nor indeed was it simply an Irish phenomenon. This was part of a wider renewal which had swept Great Britain and Ireland, dramatically transforming the religious landscape in the process.⁸

One consequence of this so-called 'Second Reformation' was a renewed interest in missionary activity, and the Catholics of Ireland were as attractive a target for evangelization as the heathens of Africa or India.⁹ With this task in mind a plethora of missionary societies were formed in Ireland, the more important of which included the Hibernian Bible Society (1806), the Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their own Language (Irish Society) (1818) and the Scripture Readers' Society (1822). These societies embarked on a vigorous campaign to convert Irish Catholics *en masse*, and they were successful to the extent that, by 1829, an apologist argued that 'the Reformation has progressed more in Ireland since the Union than in any period of her former history'.¹⁰

Preachers were dispatched to Ireland laden down with Bibles and tracts, which they distributed to the poor. Many of these early missionaries were fluent Irish speakers and regarded this skill as a crucial part of their armory.

⁷ Paul Cullen to Theobald Mathew, cited in J. Murphy, 'Some attitudes to religious freedom', p. 104.

⁸ Cf D. W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London, 1989).

⁹ Joseph Leichty, 'The popular reformation comes to Ireland; the case of John Walker and the foundation of the Church of God '1804'', in R.V. Comerford (ed.), Religion, Conflict and Co-existence in Ireland (Dublin, 1990), pp 159-87.

¹⁰ H. Newland, An Apology for the Established Church in Ireland (Dublin, 1829), p. 82, cited in Nigel Yates, Religious Condition, p. 167.

This represented a novel development, especially from the perspective of the Church of Ireland which had previously been hostile towards the language. Although hardly representative, in 1787, Bishop Woodward of Cloyne had argued that Irish 'obstructs religion; embarrasses civil intercourse ... [and] prevents cordial union'.¹¹ Yet within the context of a missionary crusade the distinguished Ulster Methodist, Adam Clarke, declared: 'the Irish language is with the natives a sacred language ... they allow themselves to feel from that tongue, what they do not consider themselves obliged to feel from another'.¹² The British and Foreign Bible Society, which supplied these missionaries, considered making an Irish translation of the Bible, but were initially advised against the move on the grounds that the few Irish peasants, who could read, read in English. In time, particularly after the formation of the Irish Society, they were persuaded of the value of such a translation.

The Methodists were among the first to enter the great crusade and the most successful. John Wesley made his first of twenty-one visits to Ireland in 1747, but Methodist efforts gained considerable momentum in the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion. In 1799 a nationwide mission to Irish Catholics was begun; in 1809 there were twelve Methodist missionaries working in six areas, while ten years later twenty-one missionaries worked in fourteen stations dotted around the country. One of their missionaries, George Taylor, who had been held captive by the rebels at Gorey, County Wexford, published a history of the rebellion in 1800. This account, depicting the rebellion as a religious campaign, was subsequently serialized in the Methodist Magazine. At one point, Taylor claimed that 'none of the rebels

¹¹ Richard Woodward, The Present State of the Church of Ireland (Dublin, 1787), p. 53 cited in Nigel Yates, Religious Condition, p. 141.

¹² Cited in D. Hempton and Myrtle Hill, Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society 1740-1890 (London, 1992), p. 53.

were so bloodthirsty, as those who were most regular attendants at the popish ordinances'.¹³

The Methodists, like many of the other missionaries, believed their task in Ireland was not simply one of conversion. This was an opportunity to civilize Ireland, to bring the gospel to the deluded Irish peasantry and in so doing the problems of the island, drunkenness, lawlessness and rebellion could be solved. In 1811, for instance, the satirical Irish Magazine, edited by the former United Irishman Watty Cox, published a skit entitled 'Essay on the Irish Crusade for the extirpation of Popery and Pike Making'.¹⁴ Desmond Bowen has highlighted this connection between evangelicalism and imperialism; he cites Earl Grey who in 1853 described the British crown as:

the most powerful instrument under Providence, of maintaining peace and order in many extensive regions of the earth, and thereby assists in diffusing among millions of the human race the blessings of Christianity and civilization.¹⁵

More than this, many Methodists, fuelled by millenarianism, looked upon Ireland as the centre of a world-wide conflict between heretical Catholicism and biblical Protestantism.¹⁶ More specifically, Stewart Brown has recently highlighted the intent of the proselytizers to secure the Protestant United Kingdom through conformity to the Established Church.¹⁷

From the outset, the Methodist campaign was marked by a militant anti-Catholicism.¹⁸ Yet, as the historian of Irish Methodism, David Hempton, comments, 'for some peculiar reason Wesley and his followers have been

¹³ George Taylor, A history of the rise, progress and suppression of the rebellion in the county of Wexford in the year 1798 (Dublin, 1800), p. 99.

¹⁴ Irish Magazine, May 1811.

¹⁵ Earl Grey, Colonial Policy of Lord John Russell's Administration (London, 1853), ii, pp 13-14, cited in Desmond Bowen, The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800-70 (Dublin, 1978), xii.

¹⁶ David Hempton, 'The Methodist Crusade in Ireland, 1795-1845', in IHS (1980), p. 36.

¹⁷ Stuart Brown, 'The New Reformation Movement in the Church of Ireland, 1801-29' in Stuart Brown and David W. Miller (eds), Piety and Power in Ireland, 1760-1960: essays in honour of Emmet Larkin (Notre Dame, 2000), pp 180-208.

¹⁸ Nigel Yates, Religious Condition, p. 262.

treated with ecumenical kid gloves by a spectrum of twentieth-century writers'.¹⁹ Little of this spirit of tolerance, however, could be found amongst contemporary Catholic commentators who universally identified Methodism with intolerance and opposition. Writing in 1866, the Jesuit W. J. Amherst reflected these sentiments:

The Wesleyan Methodists have always been amongst the most bitter enemies of the church. Their founder was not only an enthusiast, but a firebrand. One of his first principles was, no toleration to Catholics; he inculcated it in his followers, and he urged it by actual persecution.²⁰

Such bitterness destroyed the liberal spirit of co-operation which had existed between the churches. Rivalry and conflict increasingly became the norm as resurgent Catholicism clashed headlong with evangelical Protestantism, often in highly choreographed public disputes. In January 1827 at Cavan, one meeting was told that 'Popery and slavery [are] twin sisters', while in Limerick, Bishop Tuohy felt it necessary to refute the calumny directed against the priesthood which had 'become the fashion ... even from the Christian pulpits of our Dissenting brethren'.²¹ The Catholic clergy, however, were not above such behaviour. As early as 1812, Fr. Burke of Rosscarberry, County Cork, compared English rulers unfavourably with the pagan Romans, while Fr. Hayes in Cork condemned reformers such as Wycliff, Luther and Zwingli, by accusing them of intercourse with the devil.²²

Much of the religious rivalry was centred on the education question. Since their first arrival, the provision of schools had formed a vital part of the evangelical crusade: as Thomas Wyse, one of O'Connell's lieutenants in the

¹⁹ Hempton, 'Methodist Crusade', p. 33.

²⁰ W.J. Amherst, The History of Catholic Emancipation 1771-1820 (London, 1886), I, p. 147, cited in Hempton, 'Methodist Crusade', p. 33.

²¹ Report of the proceedings of a meeting in Cavan ... January 1827 to form a society for promoting the Reformation in Ireland (Cork, 1827), p. 17; Dublin Evening Post, 3 July 1824.

²² Fr Burke to Edward Hay, 10 January 1812 (DDA, Catholic Board Papers, 390/1/file vii); 'A protestant citizen of Cork to _____', 13 March 1816 (Home Office 100/189/229), cited in Thomas Bartlett, Fall and Rise, p. 320.

Emancipation campaign put it, 'the era witnessed 'a battle fought in every school, under every hedge for the minds and feelings of the country'.²³ The Bible societies established schools in which free education was offered to all those who were prepared to accept religious instruction. These bodies, in many cases with financial assistance from the Treasury, established free schools in places which had previously lacked educational facilities and very often they enticed pupils away from nearby pay schools. The Societies appear to have been most active in poorer counties, such as Cavan or Mayo, where the Catholic revival had not been so pronounced.²⁴ This trend was particularly evident in County Clare where the London Hibernian Society had over eighty schools with one thousand Catholic children on their rolls. According to Bishop James O'Shaughnessy these Bible Schools had been; 'the cause of diminishing considerably the mutual harmony and friendship between Catholics and Protestants that had subsisted till the unfortunate period of their existence'.²⁵ Similar concern was expressed by the bishops of Tuam, Ardfert and Galway.²⁶

At the heart of the controversy was the use of scriptural texts in schools, since the Bible itself had become a weapon in the war. For Protestants the Word of God alone would be sufficient to convert. Indeed, in his evidence before the Commission of Irish Education Inquiry (1825), James Edward Gordon, of the London Hibernian Society, stated that 'a great many instances have occurred in which children from reading the Scriptures have left the Roman Catholic Communion'.²⁷ Catholic ecclesiastics were, therefore, determined to prevent the exposure of children to scripture without adequate interpretation and opposed the use of the Authorised Version

²³ Thomas Wyse, Education Reform of the necessity of a National System of Education (London, 1836), p. 18.

²⁴ Mary Daly, 'The development of the National Schools system', in A. Cosgrove and D. McCartney (eds), Studies in Irish History presented to R. Dudley Edwards (Dublin, 1979), p. 154.

²⁵ Dublin Evening Post, 27 April 1824.

²⁶ Murphy, 'Attitudes', p. 101.

²⁷ First Report of the Commission of Irish Education Inquiry; H. C. 1825 (400), XII.i, 716.

rather than the Douai Bible, which contained notes relating to the interpretation of the Eucharist, the Blessed Virgin, the Supremacy of Saint Peter and other doctrines. As Archbishop Troy remarked in 1818:

Since the days of Luther the Catholic Church condemns the indiscriminate use of Scripture in vulgar tones without note or comment and permits it only to the learned or lettered laity.²⁸

Such sentiments were not unreasonable within an environment where scripture had become highly politicized to the extent that, as Irene Whehan observes, the 'Bible without note or comment' had entered political culture, not just as a symbol of the triumph of Protestant Christianity, but 'as the standard under which British Protestantism would conquer the world'.²⁹ In the following decade, within this context, the reactionary pope, Leo XII, reiterated Catholic teaching and delivered an aggressive broadside to the Biblical societies, whom he accused of attempting through 'a perverse interpretation of the Gospel of Christ' to turn the Bible into a 'human Gospel, or, worse, into a Gospel of the Devil'.³⁰

On the ground, these convictions were often manifest in crude proclamations from the pulpit, as the Catholic clergy became more assertive in the face of evangelical opposition. One witness before the 1825 Education Inquiry spoke of threats of excommunication and 'warnings from the Altar that if they read the bible or took it into their houses, they should be damned; that the Devil was in the Bible'.³¹ In relation to schooling, too, the clergy used all their influence to force parents to withdraw their children from the objectionable 'biblical schools'. They not merely refused the sacraments, but were known to have cursed recalcitrant parishioners as well. Yet while 'JKL' denied all

²⁸ John Troy to Dr Trench, 28 January 1818, cited in First Report of the Commission of Irish Education Inquiry; H.C. 1825 (400), XII.I, 47.

²⁹ Irene Whehan, The Bible War, p. 135.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 298; Atkin and Tallett, Priests, Prelates and People, pp 102-03.

³¹ First Report of the Commission of Irish Education Inquiry; H.C. 1825 (400), XII.I, 51.

knowledge of the 'priest's curse', witnesses before various enquiries attested to its power. J.E. Gordon believed that:

In many parts of Munster and Connaught, they believe that the priest is armed with powers of life and death; that he could strike them dead ... in other parts they believe that he could afflict them with sickness, make their hair fall off, kill their cattle and blight their crops.³²

Another witness, a Catholic Inspector with the KPS, confirmed such notions, referring to popular fear that such curses could 'bring down the vengeance of Heaven', in which event the victim would have 'neither Luck nor Grace'.³³

II

It was at this point that the Irish hierarchy turned to Rice's band of brothers for support. Crucially, Archbishop Troy, in his quest for an alteration in the Brothers' canonical status, assured the Sacred Congregation that they were most useful in the conflict against the evangelicals. 'As regards the Bible Schools', he wrote, 'the bishops and clergy ... zealously ... work against these by establishing Catholic schools under the direction of the Brother Monks'.³⁴ Propaganda was clearly moved by their labours to 'preserve the youth', and sanctioned the changes requested by Rice in an exceptionally short period of just two years.³⁵ Such speed, unusual for the Roman Curia, reflected not merely the critical nature of the Irish situation, but Pius VII's contempt for the evangelical cause. 'These [bible] societies', he informed Poland's Archbishop Ignatius Raczyński, 'are abhorrent to me, they tend to the subversion of the Christian religion, even to its very foundation; it is a

³² Ibid, 718.

³³ Ibid, 50.

³⁴ John Troy to Cardinal Fontana, 10 January 1820, APF, SCR, vol. 23, Irlanda, 182-23, f. 66-7.

³⁵ Propaganda Fide to John Troy, 22 Apr. 1820, APF, SCR, vol 301, f 301.

plague which must be arrested by all possible means'.³⁶ In an Irish context, the Christian Brothers were such an instrument.

Of course, Edmund Rice and his Christian Brothers were well disposed to join in this battle. The congregation had been conceived amid the controversy of a passionate debate, provoked by Thomas Hussey's pastoral address, which called priests to 'stand firm against all attempts ... to withdraw [their] flocks from the belief and practice of the Catholic religion', especially in 'those places of education where ... religious faith or morals are likely to be perverted'.³⁷ Rice's response to the pastoral, however, was not simply reactionary as it might be interpreted. His intention was not to undermine or counter the proselytizing schools, but rather, in a proactive way, to provide an alternative, Catholic education, for children in Waterford. That said, the decision of the early Brothers to open schools in Dungarvan and Carrick on Suir, where the Methodist 'swadlers' had been active since 1794, have been attributed to an attempt to forestall the establishment of biblical schools there.³⁸ Certainly, once the 'Second Reformation' began in the 1820s, the Brothers were not slow to defend the Catholic cause. It is essential, however, to recall that for all its social and political ramifications, the battles of the 'Bible Wars' were about the vital issue of the salvation of souls. On the evangelical side, there was the belief that 'papists' must be converted to Protestantism for their salvation, while from a Catholic perspective, Paul Cullen, in evidence before the Powis Commission (1869), compared proselytism to murder since it deprived the soul of life by killing its faith. Quoting Jesus, he asked, 'what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his soul'.³⁹

³⁶ Pius VII cited in Irene Whelan, *The Bible Wars*, p. 134.

³⁷ Thomas Hussey, *Pastoral Address*, p. 3.

³⁸ B.M. Coidrey, 'The Charism of Edmund Rice; Opposition to Protestant Proselytism', *CBER* (1989), p. 14; P. Power (ed.), 'Carrickman's Diary' (1913), p. 23.

³⁹ Jennifer Ridden, 'The Forgotten History of the Protestant Crusade: Religious Liberalism in Ireland', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (March 2007), p. 95; Royal Commission of Enquiry into Primary Education, *Minutes of Evidence*, 25 Feb. 1869, p. 1177.

The Brothers' *raison d'être* was the salvation of souls; as Br T. J. Hearn paraphrased the Rule and *Manual*, 'the object of their vocation was, the greater glory of God, the sanctification of their own soul and the salvation of those little ones whom the Redeemer has conferred to their care'.⁴⁰ However, since the terms of the Papal Brief, which committed the Brothers to the provision of gratuitous education, limited the scope of that mission, Edmund petitioned Rome for its amendment. That request contained striking echoes of Hussey's pastoral, written twenty years earlier, which give the lie to revisionist attempts to reject the Bishop's influence upon the Waterford merchant. Referring to his previous unsuccessful appeal, Rice reminded Pope Leo XII that:

The Petitioners in the first instance drew attention to the rapid progress which irreligion was making every year because of non-Catholic education which the unfortunate children receive because of the efforts made by the Heretics to induce the parents to send their children to schools recognized by the Bible Societies, which schools are well paid by the Government, the sum this year amounting to the huge sum of £32,000, not one penny of which is given to our Christian Schools because these teachers use the Catholic Bible quite differently and in a diametrically opposite sense to that used by the Bible Schools ...

Therefore the Petitioners are fully persuaded that when such permission [to charge fees] is given to them ... they will be able to extend the Christian education of the Poor and even to face the horrible destruction which the Bible Society threatens, the sad consequences of which have already been experienced.⁴¹

These sentiments were reflected in the correspondence of the leadership of the Christian Brothers. In 1826, Edmund's deputy, Austin Dunphy, informed the assistant superior general of the De La Salle Brothers, in Paris, that:

Great efforts have been made by the English Government to pervert the Catholic youth of this country. Vast sums of money have been given by

⁴⁰ T. J. Hearn Notebook (1841-51), CBGA, Rome, 05/0041; Christian Brothers, *Manual* (1845), p. 7.

⁴¹ Edmund Rice to Pope Leo XII, 22 May 1824, Propaganda Fide Archive, SC Irlanda, 1825-27, v. 24, f. 101.

the British Parliament to various Protestant Associations for the Education of the poor Catholic children of Ireland ... This money is all put into the hands of Protestants in order to bribe the poor children, to seduce them from the Catholic faith. The country is infested with Protestant schools ... We must rest our success on the assistance of Almighty God and on the excellence of our schools above theirs.⁴²

And the leader of the Cork faction of the Brothers expressed bitter resentment at the 'vicious' proselytism of the state supported 'Protestant Churchmen', but took solace in the Catholic response:

In the midst of this poverty, of these injustices and insults, we have the consolation of holding on to the faith of our ancestors and seeing it grow everyday, while the religion which they try to spread by means of money and the sword, like that of Mahomet, is growing less day by day and has split into a thousand sects which slander one another: but when the question is of something Catholic, they unite to strip us of our goods and our character. The large sums of money at the disposal of the department of education enable them to seduce some of the Catholic children; and although these poor little ones do not become Protestants, they become bad Catholics. Wherever the Brothers open schools they arrest the progress of these departments.⁴³

Leonard's reference to the effects of proselytism, and the creation of 'bad Catholics', reflected the experience of his contemporaries, not merely Catholic clerics, but Protestant evangelists. In evidence before the Commissioners of Irish Education, for instance, one witness made a distinction between 'converts' and those who were not Protestants in a formal sense.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he argued that there were 'a great number of Roman Catholics who had received enough light to discover a discrepancy between ... the Scriptures and the tenets of their own Church'. These were lingering in 'the Pale' of the Catholic Church, but had not yet entered into any

⁴² Austin Dunphy to Second Assistant, to the Superior General, De La Salle, Paris, 8 May 1826, De La Salle General Archive, Rome, cited in M.C. Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 138.

⁴³ Joseph Leonard to De La Salle Superior General, Paris, 15 Feb. 1827, De La Salle General Archive, Rome, cited in M.C. Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 167.

⁴⁴ Evidence of J. E. Gordon, London Society, *First Report of the Commission of Irish Education Inquiry*: H. C. 1825 (400), XII.I, 714.

other communion. Such alienation created a category which one Commissioner described as 'quasi converts'.⁴⁵

Of course, with their geographic restrictions lifted, the Brothers were frequently called on to stem such leakages, and to defend the interests of the Catholic community against militant Protestantism. In a battle which contemporaries characterised as 'a war of extermination', they became the cutting edge of the Counter-Reformation sword in Ireland.⁴⁶ Indeed, the Brothers became synonymous with that struggle. Frederick Lucas, journalist, Member of Parliament and convert to Catholicism, believed that in the face of 'fanatical proselytism' the establishment of a Brothers' school was 'the first means which occurs to a Catholic mind ... [as] a bulwark against assault'. This he declared was the 'signal test' of the esteem in which the Christian Brothers of Ireland were held.⁴⁷

III

The urgency of the issue is clearly illustrated in the case of Clare, one of the poorest and most densely populated counties in Ireland. There, too, the early years of the new century were marked by religious tolerance and a spirit of coexistence between the different faiths. This was reflected, not least, in the support which Bishop O'Shaughnessy gave to the establishment of a Lancastrian School in Ennis in 1812.⁴⁸ Relations, however, were tested by the activities of Gideon Ouseley (1762–1839), an exotic Methodist who preached and sang in Irish, to large crowds gathered at fairs and funerals across the county.⁴⁹ From his first appearance at Ennis in 1809, the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Blackwoods Magazine*, May 1827, p. 582.

⁴⁷ Frederick Lucas, *The Tablet*, Sept. 1854.

⁴⁸ Ignatius Murphy, *The Diocese of Killaloe 1800-1850* (Dublin, 1992), pp 37-8.

⁴⁹ David Hempton, 'Gideon Ouseley: rural revivalist, 1791–1839', *The religion of the people* (1996), pp 130–39.

preacher provoked violence and was pelted with stones and brickbats, but as an eccentric individual he posed little threat to the Catholic Church. Neither was the foundation of a branch of the Hibernian Bible Society in the town, in March 1813, considered particularly significant, nor indeed was the expansion of the number of schools in the diocese enjoying financial support from the Kildare Place Society, which insisted on the use of Scripture 'without note or comment'.⁵⁰

The decisive change in ecumenical relations in the county occurred in 1820, with the appointment of Richard Mant as Church of Ireland bishop of Killaloe and Kilfenora. This signaled the beginning of the 'Second Reformation' in earnest, particularly the publication of his *Charge* to the clergy of the diocese which put the 'Bible War' on an official footing in the region. Mant called the clergy to remove 'the errors of the Romish Church' and to take their mission to the cabin door.⁵¹ This, he argued, was their sacred duty to which their ordination had committed them: to 'abolish Roman superstitions ... [to] rescue our deluded people from their blind teachers ... delivering them from the arrogant domination of the Church of Rome'.⁵²

The address aroused immediate outrage in Clare, where several attempts were made on the bishop's life. He removed his family, first to Dublin and then to England, but was forced to return by his patron, the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, who chastised him for fomenting such commotion.⁵³ Ironically, Mant was not an evangelical, and later in the decade he opposed evangelicalism in the Church of Ireland. Indeed, by the 1840s, while bishop of Down and Connor, he was being described as a crypto-papist because he was

⁵⁰ Ignatius Murphy, *The Diocese of Killaloe 1800-1850*, pp 38-9.

⁵¹ Richard Mant, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of Kilaloe* (Dublin, 1820), pp 25-26, 34-37 cited in Jennifer Ridden, 'The Forgotten History', p. 83.

⁵² Richard Mant, *Charge*, p. 43.

⁵³ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant Crusade*, pp 85-6.

considered too sympathetic to both ecclesiology and Tractarianism.⁵⁴ Essentially his initial charge betrayed his inexperience of Ireland rather than evangelical conviction. Yet, while Mant avoided controversial issues in his subsequent charges in Killaloe, the tenor of his initial address heightened sectarianism in the diocese, particularly within the realm of education, which the bishop identified as critical to the 'correction of error and diffusing knowledge of true religion';

Education is so powerful an engine in its operation on the human mind ... [and] if we be faithful in our ministry, it may please Him to open to our instructions the hearts of His now deluded people and to render us the blessed instruments of bringing into the way of truth many of those who have erred and are deceived ... The education of the poor ... ought to ... be regarded as an instrument, not of political or civil, or merely moral improvement, but of religious improvement: our great and ultimate object in the furtherance of their education should be to establish our poor brethren in the knowledge, profession and practice of the Christian religion, pure and undefiled.⁵⁵

Such assertions increased Catholic opposition to the London Hibernian Society, which by 1823 had twenty three schools in the county.⁵⁶ Moreover, the provocative *Charge* appeared to confirm Daniel O'Connell's and Professor John MacHale's criticism of the Kildare Place Society, which subsidized forty-two schools in the diocese of Killaloe. The Catholic clergy had previously no difficulty in accepting grants from the Society, in spite of the requirement that scripture be read 'without note or comment'. Yet, in the radically changed environment, the KPS became synonymous with proselytism and their genuine attempt to provide nondenominational education foundered in the face of opposition from an increasingly assertive clergy.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ I am grateful to Nigel Yates for these insights.

⁵⁵ Richard Mant, *Charge*, p. 40.

⁵⁶ Ignatius Murphy, *The Diocese of Killaloe 1800-1850*, p. 40.

⁵⁷ Harold Hislop, 'The 1806-12 Board of Education and Non-Denominational Education in Ireland', *Oideas*, 40 (Spring, 1993), pp 48-60.

This was the context in which the Christian Brothers began their school at Ennistymon, in the diocese of Kilfenora.⁵⁸ The parish priest, Peter O'Loughlin, hoped to establish a school in a disused chapel and received a consignment of furniture from the Kildare Place Society for this purpose. It is unclear who was intended to teach the school, but the initial appeal confirmed that Scripture would be used without 'note or comment', and that 'no catechism ... or any book inculcating peculiar religious opinion' would be used in class.⁵⁹ However, before the school opened in the summer of 1824, O'Loughlin made a radical reversal and appealed to Edmund Rice, assuring him of the support of Bishop Edmund French, for two Brothers.⁶⁰ Rice's response was immediate and, given the critical nature of the mission, he dispensed with the usual financial preconditions upon which foundations were established. Instead, he offered the school a subvention of £30 a year for the first two years.⁶¹ Moreover, Rice chose the community carefully, sending two of his most trusted companions: Austin Grace, a fluent Irish speaker, and Francis Manifold, a convert and former major in the Wicklow Yeomanry. They possessed the requisite zeal and experience for the task.

In his correspondence with Kildare Place, however, the parish priest remained vague about the management of his school, but withdrew his earlier commitments and expressed opposition to the indiscriminate use of scripture as 'a common school-book' in the hands of 'the rude and illiterate'. In preference, he suggested that use be made of a 'select portion of the Douay [sic] ... New Testament', to be read under his own inspection.⁶² Significantly, too, he stated his absolute refusal to 'relinquish to any society or individual, except [his] bishop', the exclusive rights of appointing

⁵⁸ Monastery Boys; Celebrating 175 years Ennistymon CBS 1824-1999 (Ennistymon, 1999), p. 15.

⁵⁹ Peter O'Loughlin to Secretary, KPS, [n.d.], First Report of the Commission of Irish Education Inquiry: H.C. 1825 (400), XII.I, 590

⁶⁰ D. S. Blake, 'John Austin Grace', p. 59.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁶² Peter O'Loughlin to Secretary, KPS, 7 July 1824, First Report of the Commission of Irish Education Inquiry: H.C. 1825 (400), XII.I, 590.

managers, teachers or pupils. 'These alone', he declared, 'are the conditions in which I would consider myself justified in receiving aid from any society'.⁶³ Such deviations were clearly unacceptable to the KPS and, in August 1824, the parish priest severed all connections with the Society.⁶⁴

Before long, the Brothers had three hundred boys in their thriving school. Beyond the classroom, their ministry included the promotion of new devotions through catechesis and the introduction of various confraternities to the town. In this regard, Br Austin Grace was particularly useful and each Sunday he would stand at the rear of the chapel, translating sermons for those who understood no English.⁶⁵ Yet, in spite of their achievement, relations between the clergy and the 'monks' were fraught. The project was dogged by financial difficulties, and the parish priest resented the Brothers' insistence on the 'exclusive superintendence' of the school which was at odds with his own ambition.⁶⁶ The future of the venture was clearly in doubt. In June 1826, Francis Manifold informed Rice of the crisis in Clare:

We have no school here but ours at present, thronged to excess, and as for the adults, they are still increasing. It is going so well now, to stop this great good would be a great evil.⁶⁷

Rumours spread that the Brothers were about to quit, but several of the laity intervened and appealed to Edmund Rice directly. Attempting to compensate for what they described as a 'lack of support and encouragement from another quarter', they offered £42 towards the expense of the school.⁶⁸ The crisis, however, was not averted until the following year

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Peter O'Loughlin to Secretary, KPS, 26 Aug. 1824, *ibid.*

⁶⁵ M. C. Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 181.

⁶⁶ D. S. Blake, 'John Austin Grace', p. 66.

⁶⁷ Francis Manifold to Edmund Rice, 3 June 1826, CBGA, Rome, Rice Correspondence, no. 69.

⁶⁸ Frank Daly, Ennistymon, to Edmund Rice, 10 July 1826, CBGA, Rome, Rice Correspondence, no. 72.

when the appointment of a new parish priest, Fr John Sheehan, brought a radical improvement in relations.

That the foundation at Ennis was plagued with similar opposition is ironic given the critical circumstances in which the school was established. From the outset, the parish priest of the town, Dean Terence O'Shaughnessy, and his uncle, Bishop James O'Shaughnessy, were uncompromising opponents of the 'biblical schools' in the county. The dean, who had publicly burned proselytizing literature, did not confine his energy to opposition, but sought to offer alternative education to the poor of the town.⁶⁹ In 1821, he established a free school for boys, and within three years he had three schools catering for over four hundred pupils.⁷⁰ Yet as the evangelical effort intensified, and the numbers attending the 'bible schools' rose to 400, the dean and his uncle called on the Brothers for assistance.⁷¹ In March 1826, the bishop made a series of deferential requests to Edmund Rice for a community of 'monks':

My Dear Sir,

I am requested by the very Rev. Dean O'Shaughnessy, P.P. of Ennis, to solicit at your hands as a most particular favour, in which I join myself, that you may have the goodness to send to the town ... two competent men of your Brethren, qualified for Religious and literary instruction. There is no town in all Ireland where two Gentlemen of this description could be of more utility, in every point of view ... I beg to hear from you by return of post and hope your answer will be as such as I anxiously wish it. The sooner they may with convenience arrive the better.⁷²

Br Rice responded favourably to this appeal and by December preparations were well under way to welcome the Brothers to Ennis. In that month the parish priest, Dean O'Shaughnessy, addressed two letters to Edmund. These demonstrate the urgency which characterized the 'Bible Wars', the

⁶⁹ [McCarthy], *Edmund Ignatius Rice*, p. 249.

⁷⁰ Ignatius Murphy, *The Diocese of Killaloe 1800-1850*, p. 41.

⁷¹ *Clare Journal*, 31 Oct. 1833.

⁷² James O'Shaughnessy to Edmund Rice, 31 March 1826, Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 136.

deference shown to Br Rice, and the sense in which his Brothers were perceived as the first line of defense against the evangelical crusade:

... I shall expect them in the first week of the New Year, lest the Biblicals who are endeavouring to make another effort may be in the field before me. Nothing will be left undone to make the place agreeable to whoever you send & both laity and clergy will feel ever grateful for your condescension in accommodating this town in preference to so many others equally anxious & entitled to your attention.⁷³

And again, 16 January 1827: 'The Biblicals are alarmed and fast at work but all to no purpose'.⁷⁴

When they arrived, the Brothers assumed responsibility for the dean's preexisting school in Murray's lane, further illustrating Rice's determination not just to offer schooling where none existed, but to provide an alternative Catholic education.⁷⁵ In this instance, too, the Brothers chosen by Rice had considerable experience, especially Jerome O'Connor, who had been a member of Bishop Moylan's Education Society and a founder of the North Monastery in Cork.⁷⁶ In Ennis, he taught alongside Br Ignatius Barry in a disused grain store. Approached through filthy laneways, conditions were totally inadequate if not lethal, given the prevalence of cholera in the region. In 1832, a local physician described the thronged conditions of the 'school', which could not accommodate the boys, for whom the choice was to return home or spend the day standing with their backs against cold, damp walls.⁷⁷ Yet despite these challenges, the influence of the Brother's brought a considerable transformation to conditions in the town, as they had at other centres across Munster. The dean credited their school with instilling an unknown discipline in the boys, who had previously been notorious for their

⁷³ Dean Shaughnessy, Ennis, to Edmund Rice, 26 December 1826, in Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 164.

⁷⁴ Dean Shaughnessy to Edmund Rice, 16 January 1826, in Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 165.

⁷⁵ John E. Kent, 'The Educational Ideals of Edmund Rice', p. 56.

⁷⁶ [McCarthy], *Edmund Ignatius Rice*, pp 248-9.

⁷⁷ Dr Silver quoted in Ignatius Murphy, *Diocese of Killaloe 1800-1850*, p. 141.

pitched battles on the street. More specifically, he rejoiced that by 1833 the biblical schools were 'eradicated out of the town of Ennis'.⁷⁸

Yet, for all the effusion and flattery of the initial invitation to the town, once that danger had lifted, the dean's interest in the Brothers declined.⁷⁹ Just as in Ennistymon, the priests resented the arrogant independence of the Brothers, which it must be acknowledged the superior chose to flaunt, to a point where his presence jeopardized the establishment, and necessitated his eventual removal to Cork.⁸⁰ In many respects, however, the crisis which faced the Brothers was a consequence of the rapid pace at which the dean pushed the process of ecclesiastical renewal, particularly the pressures created by the campaign to build a cathedral at Ennis. This bitterly divided the town and resulted in a rampant anti-clericalism and animosity which was vented at chapel meetings in the autumn of 1833. Bishop McMahon described the rancorous gathering as 'disgraceful to any parish', yet the Clare Journal attributed the prelate's anger, not just to his wounded pride, but because the meeting had exposed the painful reality:

That the laity are beginning to check the domineering arrogancy [sic] of the priesthood and are not willing to be longer under the reproach of being the only slaves in the land of freedom.⁸¹

At the chapel meetings, sections of the laity, politicized in the O'Connellite campaign, directed vicious criticism at what they perceived as clerical avarice as well as the costs of maintaining the dean, his curates, two Franciscan friars and a community of 'monks' in the town.⁸² Within this debate, the expenditure involved in erecting a monastery for the Brothers, a 'cottage', at a cost of £47, 3s, 2 ½ d was queried, in a manner which forced the dean to justify the 'greatest advantage' which the Brothers had brought

⁷⁸ Clare Journal, 31 Oct. 1833.

⁷⁹ M.C. Normoyle, A Tree is Planted, pp 205-08.

⁸⁰ Bishop Patrick Kennedy, Ennis, to Edmund Rice, 16 Nov. 1836, M.C. Normoyle, Companion, p. 482.

⁸¹ Clare Journal, 31 Oct. 1833.

⁸² Ibid.

to the town, by 'preventing the youth ... from murdering each other with stones'.⁸³ Yet while there was ardent opposition to the clergy and their adjutants, the bishop assured Edmund that while 'there are restless spirits in the world, whom it is impossible to satisfy', he should take no notice of any complaint he should hear about the 'professors at Ennis'.⁸⁴

As it happened the Brothers' presence in the town was prolonged by the influence of the bishop, Patrick MacMahon (1829), and the bounty drawn down from the National Board of Education (1831) which must have appeared as an answer to prayer. Nevertheless, so concerned was Edmund Rice for the future of the establishment, that he had over one thousand Masses offered for the intentions of the Ennis community in the twelve months from October 1829.⁸⁵ At another level, of course, clerical opposition in Clare augured badly for the future of his fledgling Institute. While the two communities, at Ennis and Ennistymon, were the first to be established since the Brothers secured papal recognition, it is clear that the invitations were made in a moment crisis rather than from any great admiration for the Institute. It is apparent, too, in the case of Killaloe that the bishop and clergy lacked enthusiasm for religious orders *per se*, as was evidenced in the opposition to the Franciscan decision to open a chapel at Ennis in 1830, and indeed, the dean's shabby treatment of both the Presentation Sisters and the Ursulines.⁸⁶ If this was so, the Brothers' pontifical status and the independence it afforded them, made them less attractive still. The Christian Brothers would not open another house in Killaloe diocese until 1874, when they began a school in Kilrush. Significantly, in the neighbouring diocese of Kilfenora and Kilmacduagh, Bishop Edmund French, who had welcomed the Brothers' to the 'Bible War' at Ennistymon, chose the Patricians, a diocesan congregation, to open a school in Galway in 1826.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Dr MacMahon to Edmund Rice, 2 Nov. 1831, cited in *CBER* (1895), p. 105.

⁸⁵ M.C. Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, p. 206.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

IV

Edmund Rice's antipathy towards the evangelical assault of the 'Second Reformation' was driven not merely by second hand accounts, but by his immediate experience in Waterford. Great emphasis has been laid on the extent of Rice's friendship and collaboration with the Protestants of Waterford.⁸⁷ It may well be that he enjoyed good relations with citizens of 'all classes and creeds', but Waterford was a liberal county and moderate Protestants were as incensed by the 'biblicals' as Catholics were. Indeed, recent scholarship has suggested that the traditional focus on the polarization of the period has obscured the extent to which the bitterness of the 'Bible Wars' led to the emergence of a liberal middle ground.⁸⁸ Moreover, even amongst Anglicans who were not opposed to the notion of converting Catholics, there was a sense that the conflict had set this prospect back by placing Catholics on the defensive.⁸⁹ John Jebb, Church of Ireland bishop of Limerick, for one, condemned Richard Mant's Charge as:

breathing theological warfare against the papists ... [which] may involve the south of Ireland in flames, and at the same time stop any quiet progress that has been making towards an unsuspecting influence in the minds of our Roman Catholic population.⁹⁰

Certainly, in the case of Waterford, the challenge of proselytism placed the city's Catholics on a defensive footing. By 1820 an Auxilliary Bible Society, affiliated to the London Hibernian Society, had been founded in Waterford to promote the use of scripture 'without note or comment'. It operated a book depository at Georges Street, but it appeared to enjoy little support.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Denis McLaughlin, 'The Founding of the Irish Christian Brothers', pp 27-28.

⁸⁸ Jennifer Ridden, 'The Forgotten History', pp. 80-81.

⁸⁹ Nigel Yates, *Religious Condition*, p. 256.

⁹⁰ John Jebb to Archbishop Broderick, 16 Oct. 1820, cited in Ridden, 'The Forgotten History', p. 86.

⁹¹ Eugene Broderick, 'Waterford's Anglicans: Religion and Politics, 1819-1872' (PhD, NUI, Cork, 2000), pp 84-5.

Before long, however, the situation had changed dramatically. In 1824, six hundred attended the Society's annual general meeting, which was chaired by the Dean of Waterford, Usher Lee. The presence of the dean, in itself, was an indication of the extent to which the crusade had been embraced by elements within the leadership of the Church. And in the following year, Rev William Frazer, curate of St Patrick's, delivered a stirring exhortation to the clergy of Waterford which contained local echoes of both Mant and Archbishop William Magee of Dublin:

If ever there was a period which imperatively called for the exertions of the Established Church, the present assuredly was the period, and while the Bible went forward ... divested of notes and comments, it behoves the clergy ... to follow it to the remotest recesses of the poorest possessor, teaching and expounding its sublime doctrines, bearing in their hands the most excellent liturgy of the Church, the articles, the homilies, the catechism; thus guarding against all perversion of sacred and pure doctrine.⁹²

A Waterford auxiliary of the Church Missionary Society was founded, in 1824, and, in the same year, Dean Lee established a Sunday school in the city.

The Catholic clergy in the diocese had defended their interests in the crusade; the parish priest of Passage East was particularly effective in preventing the establishment of a Kildare Place School, which he characterized as 'a snare laid for the faith of the child'.⁹³ But the catalyst which galvanized the Counter-Reformation in Waterford was a proposal to establish a school of the London Hibernian Society in the city. In September 1824, two members of the Society, Captain George Gordon and Rev. Mr. Noel, called a meeting in the City Hall to outline their proposals for the education of the lower orders. A large gathering of Catholics and

⁹² Waterford Mail, 13 December 1826, cited in Eugene Broderick, 'Waterford's Anglicans', p. 86.

⁹³ Dean Hearn to the Secretary, Kildare Place Society, 8 May 1822, Waterford and Lismore Diocesan Archive, cited in Eugene Broderick, 'Waterford's Anglicans', pp 91-92.

Protestants assembled; admission was by ticket only for fear of disorder.⁹⁴ When the two visitors had finished their address, Fr. John Sheehan, the parish priest of St Patrick's with whom Rice has collaborated in the Bishop Walsh debacle, replied from the floor:

Catholics were charged with being benighted and ignorant but we disproved the assertion, if desired, by sending for any three or four of the humble children educated in Mr Rice's extensive school, and he would fearlessly assert that any one of them would be found as fully informed of the nature of his duties towards God, his neighbour and himself as even the Hon. Gentlemen.⁹⁵

These bitter exchanges at City Hall were a prelude to an assembly of the Catholics of Waterford, held at the 'Great Chapel' in the city. At the end of that meeting a vigilance committee, composed of the bishop, some clergy and leading Catholics, was formed to present a petition to parliament, calling for full emancipation and denying the malicious allegations made against Catholic schools. Edmund Rice was unanimously elected to this committee, an acknowledgement not just of his status within the community, but of his well-known antipathy towards the proselytizing schools.⁹⁶ These city meetings, however, were merely the opening salvos of a bitter struggle, which marked what Broderick has described as a decisive 'turning point in Protestant-Catholic relations in Waterford'.⁹⁷

The Brothers were ideally placed to oppose the Second Reformation. They were particularly effective in the cities, where their innovative system of popular education was applied with very satisfactory results in their big schools which had an enrolment the equivalent to ten or twelve smaller schools.⁹⁸ In Archbishop Murray's Dublin parish there were no fewer than

⁹⁴ Waterford Mail, 25 Sept. 1826.

⁹⁵ Cited in M.C. Normoyle, A Tree is Planted, p. 61.

⁹⁶ J.D. Fitzpatrick, 'Our Venerable Founder's Practice of the Virtue of the Faith', CBER, (1961), p. 56.

⁹⁷ Eugene Broderick, 'Waterford's Anglicans', p. 93.

⁹⁸ B.M. Coldrey, 'The Charism of Edmund Rice; Opposition to Protestant Proselytism', CBER, (1989), p. 15.

thirty-six Protestant free schools attended by upwards of one thousand Catholic children. To counteract these, Rice opened a temporary school in Jervis Street in 1828, which was the precursor to the celebrated O'Connell's Schools.⁹⁹ A similar role, of course, was performed by the teaching sisters in their inner city schools, and there is evidence of practical collaboration between the male and female religious orders. By the 1820s the Brothers had 'perfected' their system of education, but in Dublin the Sisters of Charity faced a daunting task at their new school in Gardiner Street, where the 'children were first subdued before they were taught'.¹⁰⁰ Towards that end, Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the Irish Sisters of Charity, sought assistance from Edmund Rice who sent Br Bernard Duggan, from North Richmond Street, to offer 'inservice' support to the Sisters. The convent annals record his efforts and present a vivid account of his action in the classroom, which were perhaps more accurate than the impressions formed from a reading of the Christian Brothers' Manual (1845), with its emphasis upon the essential silence of the master. The annalist remarked that Br Duggan 'had to whistle and shout to secure' silence in the classroom, but that he soon took charge. By the time he withdrew from the school, several months later, the Sisters had secured 'perfect order'.¹⁰¹

Almost a century later, the Sisters of Charity appealed to the Brothers for assistance once more. This time, Sister Agnes Morrogh-Bernard, foundress of the celebrated Foxford Woolen Mills, was appealing for a community of Brothers to teach the mill workers. In her application she appealed to the historic memory of the Brothers:

[In 1866, Sister Mary Xavier Hennessey, foundress of Gardiner Street], often told me of all we owed to the Christian Brothers for the admirable

⁹⁹ D.V. Kelleher, 'A timely restorer of faith and hope in Ireland', in S. Carroll (ed.), A Man raised up, p. 108.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Peckham Magray, Transforming Power, p. 97.

¹⁰¹ Annals of the Congregation, 1828-30, SOC/M, cited in Mary Peckham Magray, Transforming Power, p. 97.

service they rendered to our Sisters in 1830 when Mary Aikenhead opened her first school. Our poor Sisters had no control over the children, who had been attending proselytizing schools and got strict injunctions from their parents to eat all they could get and take the clothes that were going, but to be sure to give plenty of trouble to the teachers. They did so, not knowing how to distinguish between the Sisters of Charity and Mrs Smiley's [proselytizing] crowd, until Br Duggan came to the rescue and brought them to their senses.¹⁰²

The humour of this Foxford application, however, illustrates the extent to which the intensity of the 'Bible Wars' had been lost in the popular memory of the period. More specifically, it reveals the way in which triumphant Catholicism chose to ignore the scale of the defections to the 'biblicals', and the very real threat which the crusade posed to the Church.

There are, regrettably, few reliable statistics to illustrate the extent of the conversions, but it is clear that the evangelicals enjoyed greatest success amongst the poor.¹⁰³ Not surprisingly, therefore, the threat of conversion was most keenly felt during the Great Famine (1845-50). In that context, the Brothers were particularly active in opposition to 'souperism' in the urban ghettos which became the refuge of the hungry poor from the countryside. The decision to establish a foundation at Francis Street, Dublin, in 1846 was a direct response to the machinations of 'perverters' who 'with meal and money bags ... tempt[ed] the poor to forfeit their glorious birthright in Heaven for a mess of pottage'.¹⁰⁴ Similar motives brought the Christian Brothers to Dingle (1848), where the 'demon of heresy', in the words of the Vincentian superior, had induced 'hundreds of the ignorant poor' to sell their souls 'to the devil by outwardly renouncing the faith of their Fathers'.¹⁰⁵ There the Brothers worked not just in the school, but they accompanied the

¹⁰² Sr Agnes Murrough-Bernard to Br P. J. Hennessy, 29 Sept. 1923, CBGA, Rome, 189/2111.

¹⁰³ Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role*, p. 215.

¹⁰⁴ *Syngé Street Annual, 1946-7* (Dublin, 1947), p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ 'Proselytism in Dingle - Measures to counteract it', Undated Broadsheet [1849?], CBGA, Rome, 035/0406.

'missioners' to the remote parts of the county, assisting at their missions and seeking out apostates.¹⁰⁶ During the celebrations to mark the centenary of Rice's death, a preacher at Tralee recalled the context of their mission in florid terms:

The Great Famine had brought the threat and the opportunity for proselytism [to Kerry] ... weaklings went down for the bribe and the faithless failed; the selfish sold their souls for gold and the hungry pawned their bodies for bread hoping to redeem it again when the potatoes grew again.

The temptation was terrible and souperism had a local triumph for a while. A breach was made in the lines of the Church and the Christian Brothers were rushed to the front. The breach was sealed with their aid and the line has never been broken in Kerry.¹⁰⁷

All too often, however, the poorest of the Irish were to be found not on the island, but in burgeoning English slums. Yet, while the institutional history of the Brothers perpetuates the notion that 'loyalty to the Catholic faith was of the highest importance' to the Irish diaspora, many immigrants seemed unduly concerned about the faith of their fathers, at a formal level at least.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the alienation from the institutional church, which was prevalent amongst the poor in Ireland, transferred across the water. In 1842, for example, Paul Cullen informed Tobias Kirby, vice-rector of the Irish College in Rome, of the terrible specter at Liverpool where a mere forty thousand of over one hundred thousand Catholics in the city were hearing Mass on Sundays.¹⁰⁹ The Brothers established a reputation for their action in these migrant conditions, branching out from their first foundation at Preston (1825) to Manchester (1826), London (1826), Sunderland (1836), Liverpool (1837), Leeds (1843), Salford (1844), Bolton (1844) and Birmingham (1845). Perhaps the most overtly 'Counter-Reformationary' of

¹⁰⁶ Br P.J. Murphy to Tobias Kirby, ICAR, Kirby Papers/721; Philip Dowley CM, 30 Nov. 1846, cited in Emmet Larkin, 'The Parish Mission Movement, 1850-1880', in B. Bradshaw and D. Keogh (eds), *Christianity in Ireland*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁷ Sermon of Mgr Donal Reidy, St John's Tralee, 29 August 1944, CBGA, Rome, 192/2139.

¹⁰⁸ William Gillespie, *The Christian Brothers in England*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Cullen to Tobias Kirby, 25 June 1842, ICAR, Kirby Papers/ 98.

the schools opened in Br Rice's lifetime, however, was the foundation in Gibraltar. Founded in 1835, the school on the Rock was established for the express purpose of eliminating the Methodist's English language schools which had attracted large numbers of Spanish students.¹¹⁰ Their success in such circumstances was eulogised by Frederick William Faber (1814-1863), himself a convert member of the Oxford Movement. In a sermon entitled 'The Apostolic Character of the destiny allotted by Providence to the Irish Nation', he condemned the 'horrors of proselytism', but noted anecdotal evidence that amongst immigrants, 'those who were educated either by the Christian Brothers or the Presentation Nuns never abandoned their faith'.¹¹¹

With such a reputation, the proselytizers characterized the Christian Brothers as a 'fraternity ... as mischievous as it is well possible to conceive'.¹¹² It was not surprising, therefore, that the apostasy of one of their number became a *cause celebre* which delighted evangelicals on both sides of the Irish Sea. Br Philip Halley, a native of Waterford, was thirty-three years old when he renounced the Catholic faith at Preston Anglican church at Easter 1827. The excitement of the press reflects the joy of Protestants at so public a defection, while the private correspondence of the Brothers indicates their dismay at such a loss and scandal.¹¹³ The Preston Pilot, an anti-Catholic print, gave a full account of the Brother's conversion to the Established Church:

It is quite impossible for us adequately to express the feelings of gratification we experience in being able to announce that ... an event has occurred in this town which affords well grounded hope for believing that the Reformation which it has pleased the Divine Will should prosper so signally in Ireland, is already shedding its hallowed rays upon the benighted in this quarter of the Empire.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ J.D. Fitzpatrick, Edmund Rice, p. 336.

¹¹¹ F.W. Faber, Charity Sermon for O'Connell's Schools, 19 Sept 1852, North Richmond Street Annals, CBGA, Rome.

¹¹² J. E. Gordon, cited in Normoyle, A Tree is Planted, p. 62.

¹¹³ William Gillespie, The Christian Brothers in England, pp 49-54.

¹¹⁴ Preston Pilot, 14 Apr. 1827.

The Irish papers also reported the news, and Waterford's evangelical Mail, which had carried extensive coverage of Catholic conversions, delighted in Halley's abjuration.¹¹⁵ For his part, Br Austin Grace, superior of the Preston community, was shattered:

It is quite impossible [he wrote] to describe the sensations of astonishment which this wretched act of apostasy excited throughout the country, but particularly in this town where he had been so well known and remarked for his religious and edifying appearance.¹¹⁶

Quite clearly, too, Edmund Rice was distressed by the departure of Halley in whom he had placed considerable confidence, as demonstrated not just in his selection for the mission to Lancashire, but by his inclusion in several legal deeds, which included, ironically, those of the 'Counter-Reformationary' foundation at Ennistymon.¹¹⁷ By coincidence, Rice was in Manchester when the Brother conformed to the Established Church, and although his instincts were to intervene, priests and other friends advised him not to become involved in so public a scandal.¹¹⁸ Instead, he transferred Br Stephen Phelan from Dublin to Preston, with expectations that he might be able to reason with his friend. As it happened, Phelan found Halley 'quite hardened in the evil choice he had adopted', and held out little hope for his return. Significantly, he noted that the former Brother, dressed like 'a *dandy*', was being feted by the 'most inveterate enemies of the civil and religious rights of the Catholics'.¹¹⁹ Clearly, within the context of the struggle for Emancipation, the spectacle of the Brother's apostasy was of great utility to the opponents of the cause, but Halley's spectacular return to Rome within ten weeks deprived the crisis of its political potential.

¹¹⁵ Waterford Mail, 25 Apr. 1826.

¹¹⁶ Preston House Annals, 1827, cited in D.S. Blake, 'John Austin Grace', p. 100.

¹¹⁷ M.C. Normoyle, A Tree is Planted, p. 181.

¹¹⁸ Br Austin Dunphy to Br Patrick Corbett, 29 Apr. 1827, M.C. Normoyle, Companion, pp 173-4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Rice welcomed the 'unfortunate Apostate' back but his description of Halley's recantation, where he 'was exhibited publicly on the Altar', suggests a comical conclusion to the episode.¹²⁰ If only the issues concerned were not so critical. The *Preston Pilot* sought to minimize the damage to the evangelical crusade by the dramatic reversal, expressing pity for any 'idiot' who could 'triumph in the return of such a subject as Mr Halley'.¹²¹ The Brothers, however, had no illusions about the scale of the crisis which had been averted, and the potential of the defection to devastate the reputation of the Institute, and indeed the Catholic cause in the 'Bible War'. From this perspective, the Assistant General, Br Patrick Ellis, not merely welcomed 'poor Halley's return to the only saving faith', but crucially noted that his withdrawal from 'the biblicals' was 'in itself a great point gained for truth'.¹²²

The Second Reformation effected a polarization in Irish society, but within the Catholic community, too, it brought a radical transformation.¹²³ The church of the penal era had given way to the confidence of the mid century, but perhaps more significantly, the liberal Catholicism of Troy, Murray and O'Connell had yielded the ultramontaniam associated with Cardinal Cullen and his peers. Moreover, the Second Reformation brought about a further change, as the defensive instincts of the penal church galvanized an alliance of priest and people to create a combative response in the face of protestant opposition, which has been described as 'an evangelical blitzkrieg'.¹²⁴ The Christian Brothers played a vital part in this process; they were the Jesuits of Ireland's Counter-Reformation.

In a very real sense, the Brothers were both agents of reaction and affected by it. Edmund Rice's impetus had been to provide education for the poor, but

¹²⁰ Edmund Rice to Br Patrick Corbett, 4 July 1827, M.C. Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 179.

¹²¹ *Preston Pilot*, 30 June 1827.

¹²² Patrick Ellis to Patrick Corbett, 1 July 1827; same to same, 4 July 1827, M.C. Normoyle, *Companion*, pp 175-6.

¹²³ Desmond Bowen, *Protestant Crusade*, p. xii.

¹²⁴ Irene Whelan, *The Bible War*, p. 86.

his association with Bishop Hussey's condemnation of proselytism in Waterford pre-disposed his congregation towards reaction. In that contest, Rice's first biographer believed the Brothers were 'raised ... to meet the terrible crisis ... and baffle the last effort ... to seduce and pervert the children of St Patrick'.¹²⁵ So just as Ignatius' Compagnia became synonymous with Counter-Reformation and reaction, so too, Edmund's Brothers became champions of 'Faith and Fatherland', but not without cost to their initial vocation.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Kilkenny Journal, Nov. 1861, cited in John Shelly, Edmund Ignatius Rice, p. 127.

¹²⁶ See John O'Malley, The First Jesuits.

Conclusion

The new religious orders of the Catholic Reformation displayed two defining characteristics at their inception: their origins in the genius of a charismatic founder and their dedication to serve the Lord in the world.¹ The Irish Christian Brothers possessed both of these attributes, but their inclusion amongst the ranks of the early-modern religious congregations rests not on these alone. Indeed, at his death in 1844, their founder Edmund Rice was acclaimed by contemporaries not just as Ireland's Jean Baptiste De La Salle, but as 'another Ignatius' of Loyola.² Such eulogies captured the character and contribution of Edmund Rice, who is best understood not simply as a benefactor of schools, but as an educator in the tradition of the European Catholic Reformation.

Rice's spirituality was rooted in the theology and piety of the Council of Trent, as it had been mediated to him by the Jesuits in Waterford. From his first encounter with the small confraternity at St Patrick's chapel, Edmund was initiated into Jesuit patterns of piety, which included practice of the corporal works of mercy. Furthermore, in the Spiritual Exercises he discovered a programme to direct a process of discernment which culminated in a decision to embrace the religious life. And while his first instincts were to give that vocation a medieval expression, in a monastery or perhaps a friary, he chose instead the early-modern hybrid lifestyle of an apostolic religious. Within an Irish context, of course, that lifestyle had been pioneered by his near contemporary Nano Nagle, who also enjoyed the

¹ Paul F. Grendler, 'The Piarists of the Pious Schools', in R. DeMolen (ed.), Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation, p. 271.

² John Shelly, Edmund Ignatius Rice, pp 2-3.

counsel of a Jesuit spiritual director, Fr Patrick Doran, as did Theresa Ball, foundress of the Irish Loreto Sisters who shared Edmund Rice's mentor Peter Kenney SJ.³ Rice's adaptation of the Presentation rule, too, reflected his debt to the Jesuits by the insertion of the banner Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam at its head, a sentiment which Ignatius had expressed no less than 376 times in the constitutions of his own order.⁴

The comparison with De La Salle is instructive, too, not least because St Jean Baptiste had pioneered the religious vocation of the brother within the Catholic Church. This was a significant innovation, since the formation of an institute of men bound by vows, but not aspiring to the priesthood, provided the modern Church with an institution of remarkable idealism and immense utility.⁵ Moreover, from the outset, De La Salle (1651-1719) demanded from his Brothers an intensive spirituality along the lines advocated by St Ignatius. Of course, in drawing the analogy with De La Salle the eulogies for Rice were perhaps more consciously alluding to his role as champion of Catholic education.

Edmund Rice brought these great traditions of early-modern Catholicism together when he established the Presentation and Christian Brothers. In their lifestyle they mirrored the innovations of St Ignatius, but in the schools they adapted to Ireland the distinctly Catholic pedagogy which reflected the Jesuit dictum that 'the well being of Christianity and of the whole world depends on the proper education of youth.'⁶ In contrast to the spirit of the Reformation, which emphasised the relationship of the individual with God, it rooted man within an ecclesial context. Such sentiments were at the heart of the mission of Edmund Rice who was not simply concerned with the

³ Thomas Morrissey, As One Sent - Peter Kenney SJ, 1779-1841 (Dublin, 1996).

⁴ Avery Dulles, 'What distinguishes the Jesuits? The Ignatian charism at the dawn of the 21st century', Jesuit Journeys, vol. 15, no. 2 (Spring, 2007), pp 10-16.

⁵ H. Outram Evennett, The Spirit of the Counter Reformation, p. 86.

⁶ Pedro de Ribadeneira to Philip II, 14 Feb. 1556, cited in J. W. O'Malley, The First Jesuits, p. 209.

provision of education, but rather of Catholic education, as an alternative to the schooling on offer in the city.⁷

These priorities were expressed in the opening chapter of his Rule, which identified amongst the ends of the institute 'the instruction of poor boys in the principles of religion and Christian piety'.⁸ The Brothers sought to instil in their charges a devotion to the church and its practices. This was no mean task, because contrary to the popular notion that Catholicism embraced the Irish of all classes, the poor were often alienated from the institutional Church. If, in Magray's phrase, 'Catholicism had to be taught aggressively to the majority of the population', the Brother's system was designed to meet that challenge.⁹ The Presentation Rule laid down that the Brothers should accustom the children to 'think and speak reverently of God and holy things'; they were not to be over-curious in their questioning, but rather to 'captivate their understanding in obedience to faith'.¹⁰ In the course of the 'Protestant Crusade' the Brothers', too, contributed to the ultimate defeat of the Reformation in Ireland. In the aftermath of that struggle, their efforts were directed towards completing the plan of regeneration dreamed of by the reforming prelates of the previous century. In Cardinal Cullen's words:

[they taught boys] how to examine their consciences, how to prepare for confession and communion, how to assist at Mass, and to discharge all the other duties of good Catholics.¹¹

In addition, the Brothers' emphasised the manners, diligence and behaviour expected by employers. 'Good habits' had been a constant theme of educational discourse of the eighteenth-century, but in the reforming agenda of Rice's contemporary devotees of the 'ideology of the schools' it assumed a novel importance. Yet, as the bishop of Cloyne observed in his oration for

⁷ J.E. Kent, 'The Educational Ideas of Edmund Rice', p. 46.

⁸ F.R. Hickey (ed.), 'The Presentation Rule', *CBER* (1981), p. 161.

⁹ Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming power of the Nuns*, p. 3.

¹⁰ 'Presentation Rule', p. 162.

¹¹ Cardinal Cullen, 'Address to the Metropolitan and neighbouring parishes of the City of Dublin', 27 Aug. 1869, in *Testimonies in Favour of the Christian Brothers and their Schools* (Dublin, 1877), p. 3.

Nano Nagle (1794), for Christian educators the task had an added religious significance which was of paramount importance:

Early Christian education will make men honest, sober, temperate, and regular, it will in a great degree make Jails, Hospitals, and Poor-houses unnecessary. In one word ... without an early virtuous education, it is morally impossible to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, and under the influences of such an education there are the best grounded hopes of arriving at a blessed immortality.¹²

Their ambition, therefore, was not simply to shape the behavioural traits of students, but rather to develop the boys' character, or infuse internalised moral regulation and self-discipline, which would do for moral education what mechanical power had done for the industrial revolution.¹³ Just as the Methodists in England and Wales transformed society, so the Brothers in Ireland instilled in their pupils the virtues of discipline, hard-work and sobriety.

These values were at the core of the Brother's programme and were celebrated by contemporary commentators. Richard Ryland, Church of Ireland dean of Waterford, in spite of his hostility to the 'unhappy' Catholic ethos of the schools, praised for the work of the Christian Brothers:

They have already impressed upon the lower classes a character which hitherto was unknown to them: and in the number of intelligent and respectable tradesmen, clerks and servants which they have sent forth, bear the most unquestionable testimony to the public services of Edmund Rice.¹⁴

And the Waterford Chronicle, too, in June 1816, hailed their work at Mount Sion for its success in withdrawing 'multitudes from the dangers of idleness

¹² W. Coppinger, Nano Nagle, p. 29.

¹³ David Hogan, 'The Market Revolution and Disciplinary Power: Joseph Lancaster and the Psychology of the Early Classroom System', in History of Education Quarterly, vol. 29, No. 3, (1989), p. 408.

¹⁴ Ryland, History, pp 187-8.

and vice'. Instead, the paper credited the Brothers for having 'reared them in the pursuit of useful knowledge and in the habits of virtuous and honourable industry'.¹⁵

Such was the contribution of Edmund Rice, Ireland's Ignatius, De La Salle, if not John Wesley. It was with justification, then, that referring to the opening of Mount Sion, Edmund's biographer claimed that 'the good work initiated on that first day ... coincided with the dawn of the moral, intellectual and religious regeneration of the youth of Ireland'.¹⁶

¹⁵ Waterford Chronicle, 29 June 1816.

¹⁶ McCarthy, Edmund Ignatius Rice, p. 88.

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