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## “An Italian of the Vatican Type”: The Roman Formation of Cardinal Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin

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### *Abstract:*

Paul Cullen was the most influential figure in Ireland between the death of Daniel O’Connell in 1847 and the rise of Charles Stewart Parnell in the late 1870s. As Archbishop of Armagh (1849-52) and then Dublin (1852-78) and Ireland’s first Roman Catholic cardinal (1866), he exercised an unprecedented influence in both Ireland’s dominant Roman Catholic Church and in Irish society. What is less known is the nearly 30 years he spent in Rome, first as a student at the Urban College of the Propaganda Fide and then as rector of the Irish College in the city. His immersion in the multilingual environment of papal Rome was crucial in the shaping of his later career in Ireland. This essay traces the first ten or so years of Cullen’s time in Rome, focusing on the important lessons, experiences, and networks that he developed there. Most importantly, attention is given to Cullen’s relationship with Mauro Cappellari, from 1831 Pope Gregory XVI. Cullen’s academic success drew him into the small network of Cappellari’s protégés and informed the whole of his life, including in Ireland.

*Keywords:* Gregory XVI, Irish Catholicism, Irish College Rome, Irish Nationalism, Paul Cullen

Paul Cullen, archbishop of Armagh (1849-1852) and archbishop of Dublin (1852-78, cardinal archbishop from 1866), was the most powerful man in Ireland for a period of nearly thirty years, between the death of Daniel O’Connell in 1847 and the rise of Charles Stewart Parnell at the end of the 1870s. His influence stretched far beyond the Roman Catholic Church, in which he was unquestionably ‘supreme’, to the political and social life of

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Ireland and its global diaspora (Norman 1965, 5). *The Times* of London (25 October 1878) declared that “no man in the kingdom has exercised a greater personal influence, or wielded more absolute power”, while the *New York Herald* (1870) called him “virtually the Pope of the Western Church”<sup>1</sup>. Yet contemporaries were acutely aware that Cullen had spent the formative years of his life in Rome: even the liberal Swedish-language *Helsingfors Dagblad*, not noted for its coverage of either Ireland or Catholicism, began its obituary by reminding its readers that Cullen “left Dublin and went in his youth to Rome to study” (2 November 1878) and live for 30 years. He remained in many ways as much an Italian as an Irishman, preferring the language, devotions, and architecture of Italy to those of his native land. He worked hard to make the Irish Catholic Church more Roman, and consistently understood Irish politics through an Italian prism. Both did much to shape the development of modern Ireland and the worlds the Irish settled.

Contemporaries and historians alike have emphasised Cullen’s profound Romanità. The lord lieutenant of Ireland, for example, decried the appointment of “an Italian monk” sent by Rome to “Italianize Ireland”<sup>2</sup>. This became a recurring theme of British critics: more than twenty years later, the Scottish doctor James Macaulay informed his readers that Cullen was “a trusty agent of the Vatican, who had lived many years in Rome, and is far more an Italian than an Irishman in spirit” (Macaulay 1873, vii). His Irish opponents took the same tack. Charles Gavan Duffy, who had clashed with the archbishop in the early 1850s, recalled that Cullen had undermined Irish nationalists such as himself because he was “unacquainted with Ireland”. In turn, Duffy continued, his opponents considered him “more of an Italian than an Irishman” (Duffy 1898, II, 82-83). The nationalist journalist and politician A.M. Sullivan flatly declared that Cullen’s “principles ... were formed in an atmosphere quite unlike that of Ireland” (Sullivan 1878 [1877], 226). This portrait spread abroad to countries such as Australia, where Cullen exercised an enormous indirect influence<sup>3</sup>. In 1850, for example, the *Sydney Morning Herald* observed that Cullen “in all but his patrimonial name was an Italian monk” (quoted in Molony 1969, 21).

The Conservative and Protestant *Dublin Evening Mail* declared him a “Roman of the Romans” (25 October 1878), while *The Times* of London summed up the prevailing view in its obituary, remarking that “there can be

<sup>1</sup> An undated clipping from the *Herald* sent to Cullen by Martin J. Spalding, the archbishop of Baltimore, on 22 December 1870, Dublin Diocesan Archives (DDA), Cullen Papers (CP), 321/7/2/56.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Clarendon to Lord John Russell, 8 December, 11 October 1850, Bodleian Library, Ms Clarendon dep. Irish vol.

<sup>3</sup> For the scale of Cullen’s global ambition, see Barr 2008b.

no doubt that his ideas were deeply tinged by the impressions derived from foreign experience" (25 October 1878). For Cullen, the paper added, "Rome was everything" (quoted in Bowen 1983, 283).

Historians have followed this lead. In 1983, Cullen's first (and to date, only) biographer argued that the key to understanding the cardinal's character was to accept that he was not in any material way an Irishman. The secret, Desmond Bowen argued, lay in recalling Cullen's "total oblation to the militant mission of the popes that he served" (Bowen 1983, vii). Although Bowen's portrait was unremittingly hostile and widely criticized, his identification of Cullen as fundamentally Roman and Italian raised few eyebrows. This was certainly true of Australia, where John N. Molony's influential if tendentious thesis that Cullen was responsible for creating a "Roman mould" for Australian Catholicism had first been advanced in the late 1960s. Even before that, T.L. Suttor had described a transition in Australia to what he called a "Cullen Catholicism" led by Irish protégés who were "Romans first, Dubliners second" (Sutton 1965, 5). This became the fixed view in Australia: as T. P. Boland succinctly put it some years later, Cullen was "Roman in all things" (Boland 1997, 105). Recent scholarship both in Ireland and abroad has developed and complicated this picture, but not substantially altered it<sup>4</sup>.

Despite this, Cullen's Roman career has not received sustained attention. As *The Times* (25 October 1878) put it in an otherwise well informed obituary, "little is known" about Cullen's life before he became prominent in the political and ecclesiastical conflicts of the 1840s, and the situation has not significantly improved since 1878. In part this is a consequence of the failure of the Irish historical profession to provide a satisfactory biography. (That of Desmond Bowen, quoted above, was almost universally considered a failure) (Barr 2011, 428-429). But it is also a result of the fact that Cullen came to public prominence only after his appointment to Armagh in late 1849. There are exceptions: Cullen plays a major role in Donal Kerr's magisterial *Peel, Priests, and Politics: Sir Robert Peel's Administration in Ireland, 1841-46* (1982), while Anne O'Connor has examined the centrality of the Italian language in Cullen's career, Christopher Korten has written on his relationship with Mauro Cappellari, later Gregory XVI, and the present author has delineated Cullen's involvement in the ecclesiastical affairs of America, India, South Africa, and British North America in the 1830s and 1840s (Barr 2008c; Korten 2011; O'Connor 2014). Other studies mention his Roman career, but largely in passing<sup>5</sup>. Yet Rome was central to Cul-

<sup>4</sup> For example, see the essays in Keogh, McDonnell 2011. For Australia, see Dowd 2008.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, three studies concerned with Britain's quest to establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See: Buschkühl 1983; Flint 2003; Matsumoto-Best 2003.

len's life, thought, and later actions. This essay tells the story of his first and formative decade there.

Paul Cullen was born in Prospect, Co. Kildare, in 1803, and named after an uncle who had been shot by Crown forces in the wake of the bloody rising of 1798. His own father had been spared only by the intercession of local Quakers, who testified to his political loyalty (Bowen 1983, 3). Partly as a consequence, the young Paul was sent to the Quaker boarding school at Ballitore, which had once educated a young Edmund Burke. In 1816, already intended for the priesthood, he entered Carlow College in the diocese of Kildare & Leighlin. In 1820, it was decided to send him not to the national seminary at Maynooth, where his academic gifts might have been expected to earn him a free place, but to the Urban College of the Propaganda Fide in Rome. There were likely three reasons for this decision, although only two are well attested in the surviving sources. First and likely foremost, his maternal uncle, James Maher, had been trained in Rome. It is likely that Maher recommended that his nephew follow a similar course, and he ultimately introduced him to the Propaganda. It is also likely that Italy represented a financial savings for the Cullen family, despite the significant costs of travel to Rome. As Paul pointed out to his father on his first letter home, the pension of 8 Roman Crowns a month (some £20 a year) included books and clothes, whereas even with a scholarship the living costs at an Irish seminary would be substantially more. Although the Cullens were prosperous farmers, Paul was quick to reassure his father that there was every chance he would be awarded a free place once several older Irish students returned home<sup>6</sup>. Finally, there is a perfectly plausible but unsubstantiated tradition that Hugh Cullen was unwilling to send his son to Maynooth on account of the oath of loyalty required of all entrants.

Whatever the reasons, since its reopening in 1814 the Urban College had become an established choice for ambitious Irish families with clever sons. When Cullen's uncle James was there, four of the college's 12 students were Irish, and the authorities began to consider capping Irish numbers<sup>7</sup>. Another pioneer was Francis Patrick Kenrick, who had arrived in the Urban College from Dublin in 1815 together with another young Irishman. After six years in Rome, he went as a missionary to Kentucky in the United States and eventually became bishop of Philadelphia and then archbishop of Baltimore, the leading American see. When Cullen arrived, Kenrick was one of five Irish-

<sup>6</sup> Cullen to Hugh Cullen, 12 January 1821 (DDA/CP).

<sup>7</sup> Diary of Patrick Francis Moran, 21 June 1871, Archives of the Archdiocese of Sydney (AAS). Moran was Cullen's half-nephew and took a close interest in his family's history with a view to eventually writing a biography of Cullen, which never appeared. He seems to have regularly questioned Cullen about his youth.

men in residence out of a student body of only twenty<sup>8</sup>. The Irish presence remained a constant throughout Cullen's time in the Urban College, usually hovering between 10 and 20 per cent of the *resident* student population (Korten 2011, 38). Unlike the English and Scots, the Irish had no national college in which to reside. There had been an Irish College in Rome – it was founded in 1628 – but it had passed through various vicissitudes before being closed during the French occupation, when it also lost its buildings. It would not reopen until 1826. Thus while the Propaganda's English and Scottish students lived in their own ancient establishments, the Irish resided in Bernini's splendid Palazzo di Propaganda Fide in the Piazza di Spagna.

This physical proximity to the daily workings of the congregation would prove to be the key to Cullen's personal and spiritual development. It would also provide the context for his own rise in the ecclesiastical politics of Rome, and later Ireland. He remained a Propaganda man until his dying day. Founded in 1622, the congregation's task was to inculcate and oversee the Catholic Church in those territories where the Holy See lacked official standing, and where Catholicism was persecuted, prohibited, or only grudgingly tolerated. By the early nineteenth century, these included not only traditional mission fields such as China, the Ottoman lands or the United Kingdom, but also Britain's growing empire and the United States of America. The Propaganda's control was total: under the Pope, it had complete, immediate, and direct authority over the church in a given mission territory; appointed bishops, and sometimes removed them; and reviewed, approved, refused, or altered all formal acts and decisions. As a result, the congregation received a constant stream of correspondence, visitors, petitioners, and students from all corners of the globe. From almost his first day in Rome, Cullen was at the very centre of what has been rightly referred to as the colonial office of the Holy See.

The co-location of the college with the congregation and the small number of students ensured an intimacy with both the low-level *minutanti* who staffed the Propaganda (and in time would lead it) as well as the more senior officials who oversaw it. The students mixed with them on a daily basis, seeing at first hand how the church administered its far-flung domains. They also had the opportunity to forge important relationships with both fellow students and potential patrons. For a young clerical student, study at the Propaganda offered unprecedented access to one of the church's most important power centres and its most influential personnel. No other Roman seminary was so integrated into a major congregation, nor offered such access to the papal bureaucracy. Perhaps just as importantly, it also offered a daily lesson in the universality and global reach of the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>8</sup> Cullen to Hugh Cullen, 12 January 1821 (DDA/CP).

Paul Cullen arrived in Rome on 25 November 1820 after a journey lasting nearly two months and, he calculated, “almost 2000 miles”. It had originally been intended that he should travel from London with a party making its way to the English College in Rome, but he was delayed on the Irish Sea and they left without him. He made his own way to Paris, where the rector of the Irish College there introduced him to an Italian doctor with a little English with whom he could continue his journey to Rome<sup>9</sup>. He enjoyed France, despite regretting his inability to converse or ask questions, and was impressed with the beauty of Lake Geneva – although he did feel it necessary to make a disapproving remark about the city’s history as the favourite residence of “Calvin & afterwards of the impious Rousseau”<sup>10</sup>. Cullen’s first sight of Italy was marred by the sudden death of the Italian, who collapsed at the top of the Alpine pass. The party was then obliged to stop “in this cold & dreary place” until the man could be buried. He was much more impressed with “the beautiful plains of Lombardy”, telling his father that “this part of Italy surpasses every thing you can imagine”. They continued through Milan, admiring the “beautiful cathedral” and visiting the tomb of Charles Borromeo. They entered the Papal States near Bologna – “a fine large town” – before passing into Tuscany, where Florence with “its most magnificent church” unsurprisingly impressed the young man<sup>11</sup>. Although his first impressions of Rome itself are unfortunately unrecorded, this trip marked the beginning of Cullen’s love affair with an Italy where he would live with only short interruptions for the next thirty years, and continue to visit until just a few months before his own death nearly sixty years later.

Somewhat boldly, it seems that Cullen’s family had not secured his place in the Propaganda before he left Ireland. Instead, he relied on a letter of introduction from Archbishop John Thomas Troy of Dublin and the support of his uncle James. It was enough, and ‘a few days’ after his arrival Cullen was admitted as a ‘pensioner’ (that is, a fee paying student) in the Urban College. He was immediately impressed, even allowing for the somewhat formal nature of a first letter home. Every student had their own well-furnished room, he told his father, “and a servant to step in every morning and clean it up”. The food was plentiful, with each student enjoying at lunch “a bottle of good wine, soup, [and] two or three sorts of meat”. He was especially impressed with what he called the ‘raw bacon’ that was served on Sundays and holidays. It was, he assured his family, as easy to eat “raw as the Irish bacon boiled”. Cullen now dressed in the distinctive uniform of the Urban College, a soutane “made of black serge, trimmed all down the front with

<sup>9</sup> Diary of Patrick Francis Moran, 26 August 1861 (AAS).

<sup>10</sup> Cullen to Hugh Cullen, 12 January 1821 (DDA/CP).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

red, buttoned across the breast with red buttons, & a red sash tied round the waist". Inside the palazzo, the students wore what Cullen referred to as "head caps like those at Carlow", while outside the uniform specified "a large three cocked hat". Rome enthralled the young Irishman, although his lifetime habit of epistolary restraint was already in evidence in his early letters home. Even so, he could not conceal his excitement when describing Carnival for his sister not long after he arrived. All along the Corso ("the finest street in Rome"), he told her, "all the inhabitants & strangers assemble the greater part of them masked". There they promenaded until just before nightfall, when a canon shot cleared the street before another signalled the launch of a herd of horses down the street. "You will wonder to hear", Cullen wrote, "the horses have no riders, but to make them go fast they carry leaden balls covered with spikes which serve in the place of spurs". "There is nothing", he concluded, "but amusement in the city till Shrove tuesday evening when they are obliged to lay aside all their sports"<sup>12</sup>.

Rome had become and would remain Cullen's template for best practice in every aspect of ecclesiastical life, from theology to architecture. As he remarked on returning from his first visit home to Ireland in 1834, it was always with "pleasure [that] a traveller must enter this city, where every thing is quiet, and tranquil, where you cannot but be edified by the calm sober and religious conduct of the people, and where the mind is raised above human things and instructed by observing the said ceremonies, and by the greatness of every thing connected with the worship of the Almighty". Ireland paled in comparison, "I have never entered a church since my return to Rome, but the recollection of the poor miserable buildings destined to the purposes of Catholic worship in Ireland forced itself on my mind". One "could not avoid", Cullen somewhat undiplomatically told the archbishop of Dublin, "drawing a contrast between them and the sumptuous churches which adorn almost every town on this side of the Alps, and one is always forced to regret that we have nothing like them in our native country"<sup>13</sup>. He also admired the "perfect peace" consequent on the absence of Protestants, which he contrasted unfavourably to the unrest caused by Ireland's 'biblemen' who sought to "disturb the people's minds, or to persecute them for their religious opinions"<sup>14</sup>.

But what struck him most in Rome was the incredible diversity of the Propaganda, which in addition to the six Irishmen contained students from "every part of Asia and Africa". "Some of them", Cullen wrote home, "are Turks, some Armenians, Persians, Caldeans [*sic*], Greeks, Egyptians, and

<sup>12</sup> Cullen to Margaret Cullen, 5 April 1821 (DDA/CP).

<sup>13</sup> Cullen to Daniel Murray, 13 April 1835 (DDA), Murray Papers (MP), 34/9.

<sup>14</sup> Cullen to Thomas Cullen, 17 January 1828 (DDA/CP).

Arabians". When each spoke his own language, he marvelled, "one would be led to imagine that he was in the town of Babylon & not in a Roman college". This linguistic assemblage was exotic even by Roman standards, and became something of a tourist attraction for the "Romans and foreigners who are always here in great numbers". To gratify their curiosity, the Propaganda organised an "academy of the languages" not long after Cullen arrived. In it, the twenty students spoke in "no less than 20 different languages" for an audience that included cardinals, "the prince of Bavaria, the prince and princess of Denmark, and all the respectable Irishmen and Englishmen in the city"<sup>15</sup>. A similar 'academy' in 1828 saw the students publicly read a "short composition in his own language in praise of the holy Magi". At least 27 languages were represented<sup>16</sup>. It must have all felt a very long way from Prospect.

The mastery of foreign languages was central to the Urban College experience. The Propaganda's global reach meant that linguistic facility was highly prized by the congregation, and that was unsurprisingly reflected in its college. Cullen obviously needed to master Italian to function, but he was both a diligent student and a gifted linguist. Within six months, his uncle James Maher noted that he had already acquired "a good knowledge of Italian" and had set to work on Greek and Hebrew. (He would have had Latin from his schooling at Carlow, and perhaps Ballitore). At Maher's request, the college authorities allowed him to spend his entire first year on languages, delaying the start of his formal seminary training<sup>17</sup>. The significance of Cullen's fluency in Italian has been noted by a number of scholars, and in particular by the late Emmet Larkin<sup>18</sup>. But this has usually been in the context of his later career, when he used the language as a means of maintaining influence at the Propaganda after his departure for Ireland. More recently, the present author has traced how Cullen used his language skills in the 1830s and 1840s to facilitate his dual (and often conflicting) role as Irish agent to the Propaganda and the Propaganda's expert on English-language affairs (Barr 2008b). But to date only Anne O'Connor has specifically examined the importance of Cullen's immersion in what she called the "multilingual environment" of Rome (O'Connor 2014, 451).

Although O'Connor was primarily concerned with Cullen's use of Italian, her phrase catches a crucial point: Cullen was exposed to a bewildering cacophony of tongues, and not simply Italian and ecclesiastical Latin. This exposure was more than passive. Within a year of Cullen's arrival in Rome, James Maher boasted that Paul "will be the master of over eight languages

<sup>15</sup> Cullen to Hugh Cullen, 12 January 1821 (DDA/CP).

<sup>16</sup> Cullen to Thomas Cullen, 17 January 1828 (DDA/CP).

<sup>17</sup> Maher to Margaret Cullen, 5 April 1821 (DDA/CP).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Larkin 1980.



before he returns, for he has got an excellent memory for what he reads”<sup>19</sup>. In 1822, Cullen set himself to remedying the lack of French he had felt on his first journey to Rome<sup>20</sup>. In 1826, he finished top of his class overall and won gold medals in several subjects, including Greek and Hebrew. He also began learning Syriac and Chaldean, and asked his uncle James to forward “a new Syriac Testament, which has been lately printed in London by the bible society”. It would be useful in his studies, he wrote, as the Propaganda’s version was “badly printed with confused characters” while the London text “though being printed by such a diabolical set of men” was reportedly “very correct” and beautifully printed<sup>21</sup>.

This multiplicity and diversity of languages became central to Cullen’s understanding of his faith. As he explained to his brother Thomas in 1828, it was a “fine proof of our Church” to see so many languages spoken in Rome by men “all professing the same creed”. “What we believe in Ireland is believed by inhabitants of Persia, of Chaldea, of Atheopia [*sic*] of Aegypt [*sic*], there is no difference at all between us”<sup>22</sup>. The Propaganda was at the centre of this unity in diversity, hosting students and visitors, housing in its library “books of all these different nations”, and printing scriptural and theological texts in as many languages as possible. Cullen was fascinated by the congregation’s linguistic and geographic reach. He boasted of the Propaganda’s long-standing interest in China, for example, telling Thomas of the “immense collection of Chinese books” and “the types for printing in this language” consisting of some “9000 Chinese letters”<sup>23</sup>. Nor was Chinese the most exotic language Cullen encountered in the Propaganda. In 1845, for example, he helped facilitate the congregation’s publication of the Irish priest John Brady’s descriptive vocabularies of several western Australian languages (Brady 1845).

Cullen’s conflation of linguistic skill and piety was palpable in his description of the arrival in Rome of the famous polyglot Giuseppe Mezzofanti. “He speaks”, he told his sister Margaret, “no less than 35 or 40 languages, and speaks each language as well as the natives of every country” – or, in the case of Irish, much better than the natives. But what impressed him as ‘wonderful’ was that Mezzofanti united linguistic facility to “a great deal of erudition, and what is still better a great fund of Christian piety, and such a profound degree of humility, that he looks upon himself as if he were the last of men”<sup>24</sup>. He was delighted when Mezzofanti took up residence in the

<sup>19</sup> Maher to Margaret Cullen, 17 July 1821 (DDA/CP).

<sup>20</sup> Cullen to Margaret Cullen, 10 August 1822 (DDA/CP).

<sup>21</sup> Cullen to Maher, 4 March 1826 (DDA/CP).

<sup>22</sup> Cullen to Thomas Cullen, 17 January 1828 (DDA/CP).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> Cullen to Margaret Cullen, 12 November 1831 (DDA/CP).

Propaganda and then charge of the Vatican Library. The experience of the Propaganda both encouraged Cullen's talents and taught him to value them as spiritually important.

But Cullen was not simply a gifted linguist. He also excelled academically, although in the Propaganda linguistic and academic achievement were often indistinguishable. While Cullen's letters are largely silent on the detail of his studies, the course appears to have been the standard one for the Roman seminaries. His near contemporary at the Urban College, Francis Patrick Kenrick, who was also clever and linguistically inclined, began his own studies with a course that ranged from rhetoric to formal logic and on to algebra before turning to sacred scripture and patristics. In his later years in the Urban College, Kenrick studied church history and moral theology in the morning and Hebrew and dogma in the afternoon. There was a heavy emphasis on Latin composition, and Kenrick seems to have learned Greek, French, and a working knowledge of Hebrew in addition to Italian (Nolan 1948, 19-27). The training in Latin was particularly effective: Kenrick became a noted Latinist and wrote both private correspondence and lengthy theological works in the language, while many years later Cullen gave two long and widely admired Latin speeches at the First Vatican Council.

If the details of Cullen's studies are obscure, the scale of his success is not. As early as April 1821, his superiors were "well pleased with him"; soon they assessed him as possessing a "superior talent"<sup>25</sup>. His four gold medals in 1826 confirmed their opinion. In 1828, in front of an audience that included Pope Leo XII and two future popes (Gregory XVI and Leo XIII), Cullen concluded his academic career with a doctoral defence of 224 theses drawn from the whole of theology and ecclesiastical history. Leo's presence was a signal honour: as he told his father, "few Italians, less of any other nation, can boast of the Pope's presence on such an occasion; I believe no Irishman was ever honoured in this way". "You may then", he concluded, "boast that your son was the first among Irishmen who attempted to show his skill in theology in the presence of the Vicar of Christ"<sup>26</sup>. At end of the defence the Pope not only congratulated the young man, but confided in him the details of the latest iteration of the British government's long-standing attempt to establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See. As Desmond Bowen pointed out, the encounter marked the beginning of Cullen's career as the Vatican's expert on Irish affairs (Bowen 1983, 9).

The performance also cemented Cullen's reputation as the outstanding student of his generation, not simply in the Urban College but in Rome as a whole. As a fellow student noted, "Paul is the object of praise and adulation" (quoted in Korten 2011, 41). The Propaganda published his text and appointed

<sup>25</sup> Maher to Margaret Cullen, 5 April 1821 (DDA/CP); Korten 2011, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Cullen to Hugh Cullen, 25 January 1829 (DDA/CP).

him professor of Oriental Languages (Cullen 1828). More importantly, Cullen's piety, linguistic facility, and academic brilliance attracted the attention of Mauro Cappellari, since 1826 the cardinal prefect of the Propaganda. Cappellari himself had come to prominence in 1799 with the publication of *Il trionfo della Santa Sede* (The Triumph of the Holy See), an influential work notable for its ultramontanist and hostility to Jansenism. He became the protégé of Cardinal Francesco Fontana, from 1818 the cardinal prefect of the Propaganda. From 1820, Cappellari was a consultor to the congregation in which capacity Cullen seems to have known him reasonably well (Korten 2011, 37). His subsequent appointment as cardinal prefect gave him direct authority over the Urban College and put him into daily contact with Cullen, its top student. In 1829, Cappellari had been among the leading contenders in the conclave that elected the short-lived Pius VIII before emerging as the compromise choice in the extended conclave of 1830-31 (Reinerman 1979, 4-9).

From the late 1810s, and as Fontana had done before him, Cappellari began to deliberately gather a small group of talented protégés. Never more than a handful, they included Antonio Rosmini, who gained prominence as a controversial theologian and founded the Institute of Charity, and the Englishman Nicholas Wiseman, a future cardinal archbishop of Westminster. From at least 1828, Cullen became one of their number. What these men had in common was a combination of personal piety, intellectual precocity, and linguistic facility (Korten 2011). Cappellari was particularly attracted to the last trait, a pattern that continued after he was elected Pope. He patronized the learned Angelo Mai, for example, appointing him secretary to the Propaganda in 1833, and was close to Mezzofanti, elevating the somewhat unworldly linguist to the cardinalate along with Mai in 1838 (Korten 2011, 38-40).

Cullen's elevation from talented student to personal protégé of a rising cardinal had immediate consequences. As he explained to his uncle James Maher in 1829, his Irish bishop, James Doyle, wanted Cullen to come home to take up a chair in Carlow College. Doyle had taught the young man there a decade earlier and had kept the vacancy open awaiting Cullen's return. Cappellari was having none of it, and produced a range of reasons why Cullen could not possibly leave. These included the lateness of the season (it was October), the Irish weather, and Cullen's health. Even Cullen thought that some of his reasons were "not of great weight". More plausibly, Cappellari insisted that the Irishman was necessary to the successful completion of the Propaganda's projected Hebrew Bible. Cullen hoped that Doyle would understand that "the fault if there be any" fell entirely "on the shoulders of the Cardinal prefect of Propaganda"<sup>27</sup>. As Christopher Korten has pointed out, Cappellari's willingness to interfere to keep Cullen in Rome was out

<sup>27</sup> Cullen to Maher, 10 October 1829.

of character; he could identify only one other instance of such favouritism (Korten 2011, 43). The admiration and affection was fully reciprocated. As Cullen told his uncle James Maher after Cappellari's election, the new Pope was "most affable, kind and obliging", while also "very learned, remarkable for his piety", "full of zeal for religion and indefatigable in his labours for the good of the church". Always kind before his elevation, he did not change after it and continued to treat his protégés "with as much humility as if he were one of his own lowest subjects"<sup>28</sup>.

Cappellari's election also marked the apotheosis of the Propaganda within the Vatican bureaucracy. This was signalled by the choice of Gregory as his regnal name – the last Gregory had founded the Propaganda Fide in 1622. Although Gregory XVI was by most (but not all) measures a theological conservative, and certainly a political one, under him the Catholic Church began again to turn its attention to the extra-European world. Within the curia, that change was reflected in a re-balancing of power among the various congregations. Although the secretariat of state remained preminent, the Propaganda could and did resist encroachments, not least because so many of its officials and former students had direct access to the Pope. After a decade in Rome and not long after his ordination, Paul Cullen found himself at the centre of ecclesiastical power. He would remain there for the 15 years of Gregory's reign, an intimate of the Pope and trusted advisor on Irish affairs. By the time Gregory died in 1846, Cullen was embedded in the latter role.

In 1832, Gregory formalized his protégé's position in Rome by 'suggesting' that the Irish bishops appoint him as rector of the revived Irish College, which had tentatively reopened in 1826. Although he had watched its progress, Cullen had had relatively little to do with the College and had been relieved when it was agreed that those Irish students already at the Propaganda would not be compelled to transfer to it. He knew he was "better off" in the Urban College<sup>29</sup>. After Gregory's elevation he took a closer interest, although he continued to see himself as a 'Propagandist' even after his appointment. The Irish College was a means of gratifying his patron and guaranteeing his residence in Rome. As he told his sister, "I was obliged to become Rector of the Irish College some months ago – but still I continue to teach a class of Scripture in Propaganda"<sup>30</sup>. In time he would remake it into something very like the Urban College.

Cullen's first decade in Rome proved formative in several ways. His relationship with Cappellari obviously secured his position both in the curia and within the Irish Church: without that patronage, he would have re-

<sup>28</sup> Cullen to Maher, 30 April 1831 (DDA/CP).

<sup>29</sup> Cullen to Maher, 4 March 1826 (DDA/CP).

<sup>30</sup> Cullen to Margaret Cullen, 20 September 1832 (DDA/CP).

turned to Ireland and a career at Carlow College. Cullen knew this and was properly grateful, remarking in 1831 that he had a “thousand reasons to be obliged to him for his kindnesses towards me”<sup>31</sup>. Cullen also made a wider and enduring network of friends and patrons in the Propaganda; taciturn in Ireland, he had a gift for friendship with Italians. One of Cappellari’s successors as cardinal prefect, Giacomo Fransoni, bequeathed Cullen his episcopal ring; another, Alessandro Barnabò, was so committed to Cullen that he threatened resignation to secure his translation to Dublin in 1852<sup>32</sup>. But the Propaganda’s influence on Cullen was more than simply practical. It shaped his ideas about theology, churchmanship, and politics, while giving him a love of Italian, a global outlook, and a model against which to measure everything from architecture to devotional practice. All of these continued to deepen or develop in the remaining 20 years he spent in Rome, but they were largely fixed by the time he left the Urban College.

That Cullen was shaped by the theology of papal Rome is obvious, but it has been little remarked on. He is not often credited with theological views, only administrative or devotional ones. This is not surprising: Cullen rarely reflected on explicitly theological issues, and his only known theological work was his doctoral defence. But his education was a theological one, and it remained with him to the end of his life. His mentor’s own views set the tone. This occurred directly through increasing contact with Cappellari himself, and indirectly through Placido Zurla, the prefect of studies at the Urban College from 1821 (Korten 2011, 38). Zurla and Cappellari had trained together as Camaldolese monks and remained life-long friends, and Zurla oversaw Cullen’s studies from almost his arrival in Rome. Christopher Korten has pointed out that elements of Cullen’s doctoral defence drew on similar sources and lines of argument as those used by Cappellari to attack liberal doctrines, especially on the scope and nature of Papal Authority (Korten 2011, 42). To Cappellari and those around him (including, in the 1820s, the Frenchman Félicité Lammenais), the papacy was the indispensable source and site of Christian unity and authority.

The importance of the papal office was central to the formation of students at the Urban College. In 1823, for example, Cullen’s near-contemporary Francis Patrick Kenrick clashed with his Dublin-based clerical uncle over a “theological treatise” in which he had rehearsed the arguments in favour of the “infallibility of the Pontiff *ex Cathedra*, and the plenitude of his Spiritual power”. In seeking to make peace, Kenrick reminded his uncle that he had been educated at the Irish national seminary at Maynooth “under French preceptors; I at Rome, whence we might not be expected perfectly to agree in opinions at issue between

<sup>31</sup> Cullen to Maher, 30 April 1831 (DDA/CP).

<sup>32</sup> See Larkin 2011, 20 and Diary of Patrick Francis Moran (AAS).

France and Italy”<sup>33</sup>. In 1837, Kenrick published *The Primacy of the Apostolic See Vindicated*, which subsequently went through numerous editions and translations. Of the seven presentation copies, one went to Gregory XVI, another to the current cardinal prefect of Propaganda, Giacomo Fransoni, two to the scholarly cardinals Mezzofanti and Mai, one to Cullen’s contemporary Nicholas Wiseman, and one to Cullen himself. Only the future Cardinal Acton (the uncle of the historian Lord Acton) was outside the small circle that had formed around Cappellari and the Propaganda in the late 1820s (Nolan 1948, 230).

Kenrick soon expanded on his defence of the papal supremacy in a more formal Latin work, the *Theologia Dogmatica*, which began publication in 1838. Both Cullen and Angelo Mai were closely involved in its drafting, and Cullen reported regularly on its good reception in Rome. He was keen that the book be “introduced into Ireland” in order to counteract the more Gallican texts in use there<sup>34</sup>. In 1870, it fell to Cullen to realise the ambitions of his Roman circle by drafting the definition of papal infallibility that was promulgated by the First Vatican Council. According to Christopher Korten, elements of Cullen’s great speech defending the doctrine “resonated with the ideas found in” Mauro Cappellari’s *Il trionfo della Santa Sede* published more than 70 years before (Korten 2011, 44).

Papal infallibility was not the only theology Cullen learned in Rome. He also absorbed Cappellari’s disdain for Jansenism and the moral rigourism associated with it. Cappellari and his circle were influenced by the moral theology of Alphonsus Liguori, an eighteenth century Italian theologian whose teachings rejected the puritanism of the Jansenists without quite embracing the flexibility of the Jesuits. As Gregory XVI, he canonized the Italian in 1839. Liguori’s influence can also be seen among the products of the Urban College, including Kenrick and Cullen. Long before he had completed his *Dogmatica*, Kenrick had turned his attention to a manual of moral philosophy. Published in three volumes in Philadelphia to 1843, Kenrick’s *Theologia Moralis* was distinctively Liguorian. It was also striking for its enthusiastic endorsement of sexual love: as Peter Gardella put it, Kenrick was the “first American writer to prescribe orgasm” and to insist on a woman’s right to sexual pleasure and a man’s duty to provide it (Gardella 1985, 9). This could not be found in Liguori, but Cullen thought the work “most useful”, urged its “general circulation”, and gave it to the Pope<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Kenrick to Richard Kenrick, 3 March 1823, The American Catholic Research Center and University Archive (ACRCUA), The Catholic University of America, Francis Patrick Kenrick Collection.

<sup>34</sup> Cullen to Kenrick, 28 October 1839, Associated Archives St. Mary’s Seminary and University (AASMSU), Kenrick Papers (KP), 28 R13.

<sup>35</sup> Cullen to Kenrick, 18 January 1845 (AASMSU/KP, 28 S4).

A less surprising Roman lesson was a terror of revolution and a distrust of nationalism. Gregory XVI of course famously denounced freedom of conscience, the press, “bad books”, separation of church and state, sedition, revolution, secret societies, and anything else advanced by “shameless lovers of liberty” in *Mirari Vos*, his thundering encyclical of 1832<sup>36</sup>. Gregory has consequently been seen as an unreflecting reactionary, which in many ways he was. But the encyclical was informed by the Pope’s experience of the unrest that plagued the Papal States in the late 1820s and early 1830s, and these were the same forces that shaped Cullen’s own life-long distrust of violent nationalism.

From the moment he arrived in the Italian peninsula, Cullen was acutely aware of its complicated and often violent politics – on his way to Rome in 1820, his travelling party fell in with Austrian troops marching to Naples<sup>37</sup>. In 1821, he went with friends to look at a “German” army encamped outside Rome. He was impressed, telling his sister that the men seemed “well suited for war, of a fine stature, well made, but ugly black looking countenances”. He thought they would make short work of Piedmont, as “the Italians are such poor soldiers”<sup>38</sup>. But what really agitated him were the secret societies that sought the unity of Italy and the overthrow of the temporal power of the papacy. In 1826, he described for his uncle James the execution of two “of those whom they call carbonari”. The men had murdered an informer and then met their own judicial deaths “in the most frightful manner possible”, being “so imbibed with the most horrible principles respecting natural and revealed religion that they disputed the whole morning before their execution against the truth of the Christian religion and the immortality of the soul”. Cullen – who seems to have watched – reported that one of the condemned refused to repent even as the blade fell<sup>39</sup>.

The French revolution in July 1830 and its aftermath in Belgium, Poland, and elsewhere unsettled the Italian peninsula, while the premature death of Pius VIII in November made the Papal States especially vulnerable to rebellion. As Cullen reported home in December, “a few foreigners” had formed a conspiracy “shortly after the pope’s death” to seize Rome, “create consuls, and turn out the cardinals” who ran the government<sup>40</sup>. Although the conspiracy was discovered in time, the delay in electing a new Pope left a power vacuum that ultimately precipitated (or at least facilitated) the revolution that began in Bologna on 4 February, just two days after Cappellari

<sup>36</sup> *Mirari Vos, On Liberalism and Religious indifferentism*, Encyclical of Pope Gregory XVI, 15 August 1832, at <<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Greg16/g16mirar.htm>> (02/2016).

<sup>37</sup> Diary of Patrick Francis Moran, 18 December 1871 (AAS).

<sup>38</sup> Cullen to Margaret Cullen, 5 April 1821 (DDA/CP).

<sup>39</sup> Cullen to Maher, 4 March 1826 (DDA/CP).

<sup>40</sup> Cullen to Thomas Cullen, 29 December 1830 (DDA/CP). The planned coup, in which several members of the Bonaparte family were implicated, was scheduled for 10 December.

was elected but before the news could reach the city (Reinerman 1979, 10). Unrest quickly spread, and within days most of the Papal States had been lost bar the territory around Rome itself. An attempted rebellion in the city was suppressed, but with difficulty. The papal government was everywhere in chaos, and Gregory himself faced utter ruin within days of his election. As Cullen put it, “Every thing in short was very alarming” until Austria’s intervention temporarily restored order. His family appears to have urged flight, but he was determined not to leave Rome “as long as I can be of any assistance to the Propaganda, or as long as I can render the least service to the Pope”<sup>41</sup>.

Cullen was not alone in thinking all this might have been avoided if internal rivalries had been put aside and Gregory elected earlier (Reinerman 1979, 10)<sup>42</sup>. But he reserved his real animus for those he called ‘liberals’ and the secret societies that he believed they had formed across Italy in the wake of the French revolution. “The maxims of these societies”, he wrote, “are of the worst description”: “Irreligion in its broadest sphere, the vilest hatred against the Catholic religion, and especially its supreme head the Pope, a desire to overturn all established authorities and to destroy all order seem to have been inculcated by them”<sup>43</sup>. He thought that their members were mostly “hungry lawyers, half starved Physicians and surgeons and lazy, ignorant, broken down gentlemen”, who might “pretend to be lovers of liberty” but were in reality were “only thirsting after the posts which are occupied by others better than themselves”. If these “Italian liberals” ever secured power, they would “become the greatest tyrants upon the face of the earth”<sup>44</sup>.

Cullen’s letters home could have been a first draft for *Mirari Vos*, where Gregory complained of both “the terrible conspiracy of impious men” and the “the insolent and factious men who endeavoured to raise the standard of treason”. Gregory cautioned the faithful against “certain societies and assemblages” that made common cause “with the followers of every false religion and cult”. “They feign piety for religion; but they are driven by a passion for promoting novelties and sedition everywhere. They preach liberty of every sort; they stir up disturbances in sacred and civil affairs, and pluck authority to pieces”. He noted the “destruction of public order” and “the fall of principalities” and predicted a coming “overturning of all legitimate power”. This “great mass of calamities”, Gregory wrote, “had its inception in the heretical societies and sects in which all that is sacrilegious, infamous, and blasphemous has gathered as bilge water in a ship’s hold, a congealed mass of all filth”. To Gregory, the only remedy was to fight against license of all kinds,

<sup>41</sup> Cullen to Margaret Cullen, 15 April 1831 (DDA/CP).

<sup>42</sup> See Cullen to Thomas Cullen, 3 March 1831 (DDA/CP).

<sup>43</sup> Cullen to Thomas Cullen, 3 March 1831 (DDA/CP).

<sup>44</sup> Cullen to Margaret Cullen, 11 October 1830 (DDA/CP).



and to insist that “divine and human laws cry out against those who strive by treason and sedition to drive the people from confidence in their princes and force them from their government”<sup>45</sup>.

Writing in 1964, Edward Norman claimed that Cullen had “no political theories, only religious and ecclesiastical ones” (Norman 1964, 10). In fact, Cullen’s most enduring political beliefs can be found in *Mirari Vos* and several other of Gregory’s early encyclicals: an understanding of nationalism as essentially irreligious, the product of secret societies bent on the destruction of the church; a concomitant belief that violent resistance to legitimate authority was illicit, no matter the pretext; a horror of the human consequences of war, which he believed no cause could justify; and a distrust of secular education and its consequences, which both he and Gregory labelled “indifferentism” and which they thought was the root cause of irreligion, treason, and rebellion. Both men agreed on the necessity of keeping priests from complicity in nationalist rebellion: in *Cum Primum*, Gregory rebuked the Polish clergy for their involvement in the 1831 “November Uprising” against tsarist Russia, a decision Eamon Duffy labelled a “great papal failure”; Cullen strove to prevent Ireland’s priests from supporting the Independent Irish Party and later the fenians, a campaign which saw him labelled an anti-national “Castle Bishop” and mocked by James Joyce (Joyce 2004, 33; Barr 2011, 418-20; Korten 2011, 182).

For the rest of his life, Cullen understood events in Ireland in the light of his experiences of 1830-31, and later 1848-1849. As he put it to his brother Thomas in March 1831, “I hope every thing is going quietly in Ireland. It is a dreadful thing to be in the middle of eternal alarms – and any thing should be preferred to a civil war. I hope therefore [Daniel] O’Connell will not drive his agitation too far, though I am anxious that he should obtain the repeal of the union”<sup>46</sup>. In this Cullen never wavered: he was an Irish patriot, but not at any price. The trauma of 1831 was amplified by the experience of the revolution of 1848-49. As I have argued at length elsewhere, Cullen was shocked by the deposition of Pope Pius IX and the behaviour of those who caused it (Barr 2008; 2014). He detected the same forces behind it, blaming murderous, irreligious secret societies for the mayhem, although he also now saw England and Protestantism more generally as being complicit (Barr 2014, 136-137). He also extrapolated from events in Italy to events in Ireland, seeing the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini in the Young Ireland movement and in Irish nationalists such as Charles Gavan Duffy. As he wrote in 1853, the “young Irelanders desire to destroy all the power of the priests – they seem to act just as the Mazzinians did in Italy – Evviva Pio Nono just

<sup>45</sup> *Mirari Vos, On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism*, Encyclical of Pope Gregory XVI, 15 August 1832, at <<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Greg16/g16mirar.htm>> (02/2016).

<sup>46</sup> Cullen to Thomas Cullen, 3 March 1831 (DDA/CP).

as they are going to crucify him"<sup>47</sup>. Cullen's erroneous conflation of Young Ireland, Duffy, and the Independent Irish Party with Italy and Mazzini had profound consequences for Irish political development.

When the Fenians – a genuine secret society – emerged in the early 1860s, Cullen again saw Italy and acted accordingly. In terms that often echoed *Mirari Vos*, he denounced the fenians for both treason and irreligion. They were a secret society; their leaders were 'infidels', and mostly educated in Protestant or godless colleges; they were murderous, "alla Mazziniana"; and because they had no hope of victory, they could only bring death and destruction to Ireland (Barr 2014, 148-149). Pope Gregory would have agreed with Cullen's solution: clerical denunciation and state censorship. Comparing a free press to a 'poison', Gregory had written in 1832 that "Care must be taken lest the people, being deceived, are led away from the straight path"<sup>48</sup>. In the 1860s, the fenians were systematically anathematized and Cullen privately urged the British prime minister, William Gladstone, to suppress "seditious" Fenian newspapers "which preach up treason and sedition from one end of the year to the other". Their "poison", he continued, "is brought home to poor unsuspecting people, and it would be strange if the evils produced were not widely spread". He pleaded with the prime minister to preserve Ireland from "the ravages of an infidel and revolutionary press"<sup>49</sup>.

The extent to which Cullen's views remained those of Gregory XVI and *Mirari Vos* has not often been remarked on. This is for a good reason: Gregory's hysterical denunciations of 'liberals' and 'liberalism', which the young Cullen echoed, sit uneasily with Cullen's mature support for the British Liberal party and his habitually positive use of the term 'liberal' to describe government concessions and 'illiberal' to denounce government intransigence. But the disjunction is more apparent than real: Cullen was and remained a constitutionalist. He was "anxious" to see the repeal of the union, but only by legal means; in 1848, he hoped Sicily would be awarded its own parliament along the lines O'Connell had sought in Ireland (Barr 2014, 136); in Ireland, he worked to secure concessions through the political and legislative process.

Cullen also learned that there was a significant difference between a British and an Italian liberal, and British and Italian liberalism. Where he once would have said liberal, he came to say "Mazzinian", fenian, or "young Irishman" instead. In time Cullen also realised that the Catholic Church fared better in Protestant Britain or secular America than in many formally Catholic states. Many

<sup>47</sup> Cullen to Bernard Smith, 18 December 1853, quoted in Larkin 1980, 220.

<sup>48</sup> *Mirari Vos, On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism*, Encyclical of Pope Gregory XVI, 15 August 1832, at <<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Greg16/g16mirar.htm>> (02/2016).

<sup>49</sup> Cullen to Gladstone, 12 March 1870, British Library, Gladstone Papers, Add. Ms 44,425, f. 243.

other Irish bishops did as well, including Francis Patrick Kenrick. Cullen never fully articulated this view, which would no doubt have been as incomprehensible to Gregory XVI as it was to Pius IX. But it is unlikely that he would have seen it as being inconsistent with their emphasis on the rights of the church or the deference due the state. But he also never retreated from Gregory's denunciations of secret societies, sedition, secular education and indifferentism, nor from the absolute insistence on what *Mirari Vos* called "the trust and submission due to princes"<sup>50</sup>. Cullen never stopped seeing Ireland through a Roman lens. Times changed, and Cullen became a better and subtler politician than his mentor, but the continuities are more striking than the eventual differences.

Cullen took more than politics and theology from his first decade in Rome. In particular, his experience of the national, cultural and linguistic diversity of the Propaganda taught him to think on a global scale. In practical terms, it gave him the skills and connections necessary to create what I have elsewhere described as a Hiberno-Roman spiritual empire (Barr 2008b). As Fontana had created a group of protégés that included Cappellari, and Cappellari in turn a group that had included Cullen, Cullen built a network of his former students, relatives and Dublin diocesan priests who became bishops throughout the British Empire and United States. Many were trained in Rome. Most had excelled academically. All were loyal to Cullen. It was through these men that Cullen's preferences and prejudices, shaped in the Rome of the 1820s and 1830s, were spread throughout the English-speaking world and became normative. Beyond his undoubted importance in Ireland, this was Paul Cullen's most enduring achievement. It was also the most important consequence of his 30 years of residence in Rome. As Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper explained to its readers in 1875, Cullen had been "trained since boyhood in the Propaganda at Rome, [and] he is an Italian of the Vatican type" (quoted in Molony 1969, 21). He would not have disagreed.

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<sup>50</sup> *Mirari Vos*, *On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism*, Encyclical of Pope Gregory XVI, 15 August 1832, at <<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Greg16/g16mirar.htm>> (02/2016).

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