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# The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75

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EMMET LARKIN

“IF YOU KNEW,” a Waterford priest wrote Tobias Kirby, the new rector of the Irish College in Rome, on January 3, 1850, “all there is to remedy, all the evil there is to check!”<sup>1</sup> “We have not had,” he further explained to Kirby, referring to the decline in clerical discipline after the famine, “a Conference here since the beginning of the distress, four years now probably—& but *one* retreat all that time & everyone doing & thinking & speaking as it listeth him, & no one to prevent it.” The occasion for this lament was the recent and encouraging news from Rome that Paul Cullen, Kirby’s predecessor as rector of the Irish College, had just been appointed archbishop of Armagh and the accompanying rumor that the new primate had also been armed with the power of apostolic delegate by Pius IX and instructed to summon a national synod for the better government and regulation of the Irish Church. More than a quarter of a century after Cullen’s arrival in Ireland, his cousin and protégé, Patrick Francis Moran, the bishop of Ossory, was able to report to Kirby in a matter-of-fact way from Kilkenny during the course of a letter that “we ended two small Missions in two of our city Churches on Sunday last, preparatory for Christmas.”<sup>2</sup> “Nothing,” he further explained, “could be more consoling than the great piety of our poor people. All without exception approached the Holy Sacraments.” “At my Mass on Sunday in the Cathedral,” Moran emphasized in conclusion, “there were about *1000 men* at Holy Communion.” In the nearly thirty years that he faithfully served Rome in Ireland, Paul Cardinal Cullen not only reformed the Irish Church but, what was perhaps even more important, in the process of reforming that Church he spearheaded the consolidation of a devotional revolution. The great mass of the Irish people became practicing Catholics, which they have uniquely and essentially remained both at home and abroad down to the present day.

THE MEASURE OF CULLEN’S ACHIEVEMENT naturally depends on how much had been done to make practicing Catholics of the Irish people before

<sup>1</sup> J. P. Cooke to Kirby, Kirby Papers (hereafter K.), Archives of the Irish College, Rome.

<sup>2</sup> Dec. 19, 1877, K.

his arrival in Ireland in early 1850. What resources, in terms of plant and personnel, had been available to the Church for the encouragement and sustaining of devotional practices? And what was the character of as well as the example given by the Irish clergy to their flocks in promoting such practices? Corporately characterizing some 2,500 priests or even only some thirty bishops over a period of fifty years is obviously as hazardous as it is difficult.<sup>3</sup> And given the still raw state of the available evidence any systematic analysis of the resources of the Irish Church before the famine is as yet virtually impossible.<sup>4</sup> While the evidence is admittedly not in a condition, either quantitatively or qualitatively, to yield a consensus satisfactory to historians, it may be useful to attempt to structure a frame in which that developing body of evidence may be more intelligently researched and analyzed.

Since the quantitative problem of the number of clergy is relatively the easiest to come to terms with, perhaps it would be best to deal with it first. In 1800 there were about 1,850 priests, including some 26 bishops, in Ireland for a Catholic population estimated at 3,900,000, or roughly a ratio of one priest to 2,100 faithful. There were also in 1800 only 122 nuns in Ireland, which if reduced to a ratio divides out at the meaningless proportion of one nun to 32,000.<sup>5</sup> By 1850 the ratio between priests and people was still about one to 2,100, with over 2,500 priests available for something more than 5,000,000 Catholics. The nun population, however, had by 1850 increased thirteenfold, from 122 to over 1,500 in fifty years, and instead of one nun for 32,000 people, there was one nun for every 3,400 Catholics.<sup>6</sup> These figures, of course, in themselves are actually misleading because they mask the effects of the outstanding social tragedy in modern Irish history—the Great Famine. Between 1800 and 1840 the Catholic population had risen to 6,500,000, an increase of about 2,600,000, and probably increased another 250,000 by 1846.<sup>7</sup> By 1850, as a result of

<sup>3</sup> Emmet Larkin, "Church and State in Ireland in the Nineteenth Century," *Church History*, 31 (1962): 295–306.

<sup>4</sup> Emmet Larkin, "Economic Growth, Capital Investment, and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth Century Ireland," *AHR*, 72 (1966–67): 852–84.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Vane, marquess of Londonderry, ed., *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*, 4: 99, 172.

<sup>6</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1851* (Dublin, 1856).

<sup>7</sup> "First Report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland," *Parliamentary Papers*, 1835, vol. 33, no. 45. The estimate of the Catholic population is based on the percentages of the various denominations given in this first religious census taken in Ireland in 1834: Population (total) 7,943,940; Catholic 6,427,712; Church of Ireland 852,064; Presbyterian 642,356; Other 21,808. According to these figures the Catholics made up nearly 81 per cent of the total population, while the combined Protestant total was about 19 per cent. If, therefore, the Catholic population in 1841 is estimated at 80 per cent of the census figure of 8,175,000 for the total population, the round number of Catholics is about 6,500,000. The Catholic populations of 3,900,000 in 1800 and 5,250,000 in 1850 are also based on taking 80 per cent of an estimated total in 1800 and a census total in 1851 respectively of 4,900,000 and 6,554,074, though both in 1800 and 1850 the percentage of Protestants to Catholics was more likely to have been somewhat higher than in 1834, the probable peak year of the Catholic population bulge in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1861, for example, when for the first time the decennial census included figures for religious denominations, the Catholics accounted for some 78 per cent of the total population.

the famine and its aftermath, this population of nearly seven million in 1846 was reduced by some two million in four years.<sup>8</sup>

When it is realized that in 1840 there were only about 2,150 priests for a Catholic population of 6,500,000, or merely one priest for every 3,000 people, and that there were, furthermore, only about 1,000 nuns, or one for every 6,500 faithful, it becomes rather obvious that in the decade of the forties, and especially in the years before 1846, the Church in the face of incredibly adverse economic circumstances responded impressively, even if tardily, to the challenge of growing numbers by increasing the clerical population by some 400 priests and over 500 nuns—a twenty and fifty per cent increase respectively in ten years.<sup>9</sup> After 1840 and before the famine, therefore, the priests were gaining slowly and the nuns rapidly in relation to a population that was still increasing, though at a progressively declining rate. Patently, this relative increase in the clerical population meant little in practical terms before the famine, but when the population was suddenly reduced by nearly two million between 1846 and 1850 the whole clerical-lay numerical relationship was dramatically transformed, and what may have been only a short-term tendency rooted in a heroic institutional effort to increase the clerical population between 1840 and 1846, became in the next one hundred years a basic secular trend in Ireland. What emerges, then, even from this cursory analysis, is simply that before the famine any effective service on the part of the clergy was severely limited by the sheer weight of lay numbers, and that up to 1840, at least, the situation had been getting progressively worse.

But if the shortage of priests was so serious, perhaps the numerical deficiency was compensated for in some measure by the quality of their performance. Without more detailed biographical information about the nearly five thousand priests who served the Irish Church between 1800 and 1845, however, any estimate of their corporate character and conduct must remain largely impressionistic. There is, in fact, a strong bias in the available evidence in favor of extreme presentations. If, for example, one confined oneself only to reading the correspondence between Ireland and Rome in the archives of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*), where nearly all the dirty Irish clerical linen was washed, the clergy might easily be characterized as drunken, disorderly, and immoral, or worse. While it is obviously impossible to present in any meaningful way more than fifty years of evidence from the *Propaganda* archives, perhaps a few examples will not only suffice to show what the nature of the evidence is, but also what the problems are in evaluating it. “I expect to leave this town tomorrow,” Edward Dillon, the archbishop of Tuam, explained from Tuam in County Galway, on January 7, 1805, to John Collins, one of his priests, “and do not intend to return till Lent.”

<sup>8</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1851.*

<sup>9</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1841* (Dublin, 1843).

"Previous to my departure," he warned Collins, "I cannot help reminding you of the advice I gave you when you were last at this house."

I am positively determined not to tolerate any whiskey drinking or other publick irregularities amongst my clergy. . . . Let me observe to you finally that if you wish to continue in Dunmore or to be employed in the ministry in this Diocese you must learn to sett a higher value on the sacred character with which you are invested than you have hitherto done. Particularly you must not be known to associate with such persons as Math<sup>w</sup>. Martin's or Martin's Strumpet's; much less should you church such persons. I often advised Frank Burke and his Co-ajutor he vainly thought that I would confine myself to unavailing advice, beware of meeting the fate of the former the later is tolerated merely thro necessity for a few months.<sup>10</sup>

"A Rev<sup>d</sup>. Mr. Corbett, a priest of my Diocese," James O'Shaughnessy, bishop of Killaloe, reported to his agent in Rome from Ennis in County Clare, on November 27, 1815, "has been charged with adultery, and with having occasioned the separation of man and wife." "The case seemed so clear against him," O'Shaughnessy explained, "that he ought to have submitted and retired, but in place of doing so, he loudly called for a public trial."

During this trial more perjury and wickedness was practiced than in any Civil Court in the world. Some turbulent and disorderly priests made common cause with Mr. Corbett, and I am informed they joined in a remonstrance to the Holy See, alledging that the sentence passed by the pious and learned Dr. Wright was not founded in justice. My own humble opinion is that there was already too much of this shocking business, and that our Holy Religion would be less-wounded, and less scandal given, by not stiring the embers further.

The unfortunate woman seems within one month of her accouchment tho her husband left the country 15 months ago. If with your usual attention you would make known the circumstances to the Sacred Congregation, and put a stop to any further proceedings, it would be rendering an essential service to the Catholic Religion of this poor persecuted country.

"When anything final," O'Shaughnessy suggested, "comes to your knowledge I request to hear from you." "I am sure," he concluded encouragingly, "you will give it every necessary attention, of which I will be *mindful*."<sup>11</sup>

The third and final example of the nature of the evidence in the Propaganda archives concerning the conduct of the clergy is a long letter from James Murphy, bishop of Clogher, to Lorenzo Litta, cardinal prefect of Propaganda, dated Monaghan, April 2, 1818, thanking His Eminence for the news of the appointment of a coadjutor with the right to succeed him in Clogher, but also taking exception to the cardinal's suggestion that he should be less severe regarding several of his priests with whom he was in serious litigation at Rome. "And now permit, My Lord,"

<sup>10</sup> *Scritture riferite nei congressi, Irlanda*, 18, fol. 316.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, fol. 69.

Murphy began his peroration politely, “with the most profound deference, however, for your Eminence and the Sacred Congregation, to say a few words on the treatment I conceive myself to have received from the Sacred Congregation,

Your Eminence may recollect, that in the year 1814, when heavy charges were preferred against me to His Holiness, and two appeals lodged against me, one of them by Priest Maginn, since deceased, on account of having suspended him for *Turpia in Tribunali*; the other by Priest Goodwin having published to the world, and preferred and inscribed to me a *Libellum Accusatorium*, in which he charged a highly respectable and zealous priest with having revealed the confession of his penitent, and in which he also charged two other pastors, the most respectable in the Diocese, with having cooperated in said wicked act. At that time your Eminence sent two commissions to my then metropolitan, the most Rev<sup>d</sup> Richard O’Reilly, the one to examine narrowly into the said charges and report the result to his Holiness; the other to try the appeals and pass a definitive sentence on them—Both these commissions my metropolitan executed, and after a strict scrutiny into the charges against me, he told me, he reported them unfounded and calumnious—relative to the two appeals, he pronounced definitively, as empowered, that my suspensions were just and necessary in both cases—Now what I feel for and consider *severe*, is, that I, or, indeed, any other bishop should be exposed, dragged publicly and shamefully from tribunal to tribunal and tried a second time on matters that were already definitively disposed of: for though my metropolitan erred in not depriving Priest Maginn of his parish, yet, his sentence, which bound that unfortunate man on oath never to hear the confession of a female, not only justified but even proved the necessity of my suspension—to these matters I beg leave to add, that your Eminence sent a commission to my metropolitan in the year 1816, in consequence of an appeal lodged by a Priest Duffy, a curate, and, of course, without any ordinary jurisdiction, against me, for my having interdicted him from exercising certain pastoral functions in despite of his parish priest, and for having suspended him afterwards for his contumacy, in not attending citations I sent him to appear before me, and account for his exercising all and every pastoral function in defiance of my interdict, and for his, besides, raising the people in open rebellion against their lawful pastor—Your Eminence, I say, sent such commission to my metropolitan with orders to cite the parties, and after hearing us, to report the result, together with his own opinion, to your Eminence—I, of course, obeyed the citation though labouring under infirmities and having upwards of sixty Italian miles to make, and having besides to bring necessary witnesses with me at heavy expenses, some thirty, some eighty and some an hundred miles. My metropolitan, after examining me and my witnesses in the presence of the appellant, called on him to rebut what I had proved, when he was answered by the appellant in a highly disrespectful and taunting tone, that he would not, nor would he, he said, answer a single question that he put him—my metropolitan made, of course, his report on this obvious and self evident case, and the Sacred Congregation, notwithstanding, gave it in charge a second time to the Visitor Apostolic—This I confess, I consider also *severe*.<sup>12</sup>

“It has exposed me,” Murphy maintained, “to additional heavy expenses, for the appellant, Priest Duffy, nor indeed any one of the other appellants,

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, fols. 158–59.



though they brought on the suits never paid a single sou of the expenses attendant on the different commissions." "It has, besides," he declared further, "by putting off and prolonging the decision, given them the assurance to expose and villify me and my administration frequently, in one of the most publicly circulating journals in this kingdom, and of threatening me openly and repeatedly with civil suits; so that I may justly say with the Apostle, *Spectaculum Facti Sumus* &c—" "All this publick abuse," Murphy concluded dryly, "I bore without an answer in the hope that God will give me an account for it [in] a better world."

If, on the other hand, one turns from the Propaganda archives to a perusal of the various pious lives of the Irish clergy for the same period, the result is simply a hagiographical headache, or worse.<sup>13</sup> The truth, alas, is not even found by invoking that favorite and prudent device in such circumstances—the *via media*. What happened between 1800 and 1845 is that the character and conduct of the clergy, which certainly left a great deal to be desired at the beginning of the period, was gradually and uniformly improved. By 1830 the worst was over, since the Irish bishops with the help of Rome finally secured the upper hand over their priests.<sup>14</sup> From 1830 the improvement, though still uneven, depending as it did on the character and strength of will of each individual bishop, was at all events steady. The improvement, however, does not appear to have been simply a function of the bishops' authority in time; it seems to have been a reflection of geographical circumstances as well. The improvement was most rapid and sustained in the ecclesiastical province of Dublin, while the deportment of the clergy in Cashel, Armagh, and Tuam was less and less satisfactory from one to the next.

On the occasion of the funeral of the archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray, at the end of February 1852, William Meagher delivered an oration in which he reflected on the practical improvement of the Catholic population of Dublin. He graphically described the conditions prevailing in Dublin some forty-two years earlier when Murray had been raised to the episcopal dignity.

<sup>13</sup> A critical bibliography of the numerous pious lives of Irish bishops, priests, monks, and nuns is also beyond the scope of this article. An honorable exception to this general charge of hagiography, however, must be noted in W. J. Fitz-Patrick's very fine Victorian, two-volume biography, *The Life, Times and Correspondence of the Right Rev. Dr. Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin* (Dublin, 1880). In setting a lower limit in this biographical spectrum, the best example is perhaps Peadar MacSuihbne's more recent three-volume effort, *Paul Cullen and His Contemporaries* (Naas, 1961–65). For a partial list, at least of those biographies that range between the upper and lower limits set above, see the bibliography in T. J. Walsh, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters* (Dublin, 1959).

<sup>14</sup> The milestone in effecting the better conduct of the clergy by increasing the authority of the bishops was the simultaneous holding of diocesan synods in the four dioceses that made up the province of Dublin in the third week of July 1831. For an account of the background to the meetings, see William Meagher, *Notices of the Life and Character of His Grace, Most Rev. Daniel Murray, Late Archbishop of Dublin* (Dublin, 1853), 128–31; for the legislation of synods, see R. T. McGhee, *Diocesan Statutes of the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Province of Leinster* (London, 1837); for an excellent account of a reforming bishop, James Doyle (1819–34), see Fitz-Patrick, *Life, Times*, 1: 101–32.

The morals of the people of Dublin, Catholics among the rest, were hideously corrupted. The riches daily scattered through her streets in handfuls, to purchase the luxuries of an opulent, and profuse, and dissolute aristocracy; the easy and plentiful earnings of flourishing manufacture, and of extensive and successful commerce, were seized every hour, through a series of years, for indulgence of vilest libertinism, and wildest extravagance. Vices, too gross to be more than alluded to, stalked through the streets shamelessly—the drunkard raved without obstruction, and the blasphemer shouted his impiety, and the gambler squandered in nights of dissipation what his days of toil had accumulated. And, strange to say, and suggestive of many a sad and solemn reflection, there was in our city as large an amount of physical wretchedness, particularly among the lower ranks, then as now—as much squalid poverty—as much shivering nakedness—as much famine-stricken emaciation—as many ruined families—as many houseless orphans! Vice did more to fill the town with the agonies of human suffering than famine, and plague, and abject poverty have wrought in these latter days of woe. Flatter not yourselves, My Brethren, that these excesses and their direful effects were confined to sectarians; they were as rife, if not more so, amongst ourselves. Nor, unless by some standing social and religious miracle, could it be otherwise. Amid opportunities so numerous—examples so seductive—temptations so violent—with but a handful of clergy and a dozen small, mean, and incommodious chapels to second the proverbial faith and innate pious tendencies of the people, what wonder that the multitude was hurried away in this torrent of iniquity? And the mortifying truth is, that in Dublin, at the period alluded to, amid many Catholics there were but few practical Christians; very few whose lives supplied that substantial and only unerring proof of profitable attachment to the faith—the constant and regular frequentation of the holy sacraments. As the climax of her griefs religion had to weep for the first time, perhaps, in this land, over the faltering fidelity and submission of many a son, led astray by the phrenzy of recent revolution, and the false liberality of the day, and the desolating philosophism of France.<sup>15</sup>

There appears to be, moreover, a correlation between the conduct of the clergy in these ecclesiastical provinces of Dublin, Cashel, Armagh, and Tuam and their relative wealth as well as the extent to which each was urban and rural in terms of Catholic population. Furthermore, though the evidence is still very sketchy, the clergy appointed to the town parishes appear to have been better educated than those assigned to the country parishes.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Meagher, *Notices*, 11–12.

<sup>16</sup> "Report from the Lords Committees appointed a secret committee to enquire into the State of Ireland," 1825, *PP*, vol. 7, no. 521, pt. 2, Minutes of Evidence, p. 569. Mortimer O'Sullivan, a Church of Ireland clergyman, was asked, "Are you acquainted with the early habits of life, of persons who afterwards become Roman Catholic priests?—Yes. / From what class of life are they generally taken?—I think generally speaking from the lower orders. My connection with an endowed school, gave me an opportunity of knowing more particularly. / Of course you have been acquainted with some who have afterwards gone to Maynooth?—Yes. / Have you had any occasion to observe what have been the effects of a collegiate education upon those persons?—It appeared to me to leave them, with respect to their moral qualities and their political prejudices, just what they were before they had gone there. When I speak of the lower orders, I mean the poorer classes; there are some of a higher order; and that church shows great judgement in disposing of her clergy; those of better manners and better information are generally placed in the towns: and those persons who are from their habits and from their education less fitted to appear in public, are left in the country parts."



But the application of episcopal authority, the relative wealth of the Catholic communities, the extent of urbanization, and the educational level of the clergy were not the only determinants of social behavior. The moral and social values of the community and the pressure the community applied in terms of what it considered to be right or wrong also affected clerical conduct. The principal vices among the clergy were drunkenness, women, and avarice. Interestingly enough, while this seems to be the order of their importance among the bishops in their efforts to impose discipline, it does not appear to be the order of their importance either before or after the famine as far as the laity who cared were concerned. Among a land-hungry and poverty-stricken peasantry avarice was the deadliest of the deadly sins, while lust and drunkenness were viewed with a more understanding, even if disapproving, eye.<sup>17</sup> The seriousness of the problem of clerical avarice vis-à-vis the faithful, for example, was certainly reflected in early nineteenth-century Ireland in the need of the bishops of the province of Dublin to set up by statute a uniform tariff for clerical dues at their diocesan synods in the summer of 1831. The tariff, however, not only gives a comprehensive glimpse of what was thought to be a fair and proper remuneration for the various services rendered by the clergy but also details an interesting summary of the clergy's sources of income.

1. Baptism—shopkeepers and farmers .....	0	5	0
Do. poor labourers .....	0	2	6
2. Marriages—shopkeepers and farmers .....	2	0	0
3. Licenses for do .....	0	10	0
Marriages for poor labourers .....	1	0	0
Licenses for do .....	0	5	0
4. Masses for dead sung, to shopkeepers and farmers—parish priest .....	0	15	0
Every other priest .....	0	10	0
Any other priest who does not officiate .....	0	5	0
5. Masses, not sung .....	0	10	0
Masses for dead, to poor labourers .....	0	5	0
6. Private masses .....	0	2	0
7. Collections after marriages—these must be voluntary according to the stations of the parties, they may vary from £1 to £100, or more.			
8. Dues at stations—these Dr. Murray informs us are the chief support of the priests; they cannot be called voluntary, for custom makes them compulsory; they are contributed by every person who can give anything, and vary from one shilling to five, as the Editor is informed, say the lowest average from the population of Ireland who attend stations and confessions .....	0	1	6

<sup>17</sup> The problem of exorbitant clerical dues and the resistance of the laity to them had been an issue in Ireland from at least the latter part of the eighteenth century. See Robert E. Burns, "Parson, Priests and the People: The Rise of Irish Anti-Clericalism, 1785–89," *Church History*, 31 (1962): 151–63.

9. Fortuitous emoluments—of these, at least one great source of revenue, is masses for delivering the souls from purgatory of those who are dead and buried, left either by will or given by relations of deceased, or, what is very common, given by the poor creatures themselves, for masses before they die, and to benefit their souls when they are gone,—of these it is impossible to calculate the amount.
10. The collecting of corn from the people. This is sometimes commuted for money, and is valued at 1s. 6d. per house, or more.<sup>18</sup>

More particularly, the parishioners from Kilcommen Erris, near Belmullet in County Mayo, in the diocese of Kilalla, petitioned the pope in early 1840 about the abuses to which they were subject from the local clergy. Their petition comprised some fifteen heads of complaint, and like so many other documents in the Propaganda archives it was the product of a fierce local struggle for power, with the contending parties prepared to say and to write the worst about their opponents. The crucial aspect of this document, therefore, is not indeed whether the charges made in it were necessarily true, but rather that the charges made in it are a serious comment on what the mores and values of the person or persons who wrote it actually were.

To Our Most Holy Father in God Pope Gregory the XVI Successor of Saint Peter and Vicar of Jesus Christ upon Earth. . . .

6thly that the poor uneducated peasantry of the parish generally feel not only scandalised but actually horrified at the not merely tyrannical, but unchristian like conduct of the Rev<sup>d</sup> Mr. Conway towards them during the Confessions. When a poor, but pious, humble, contrite penitant presents himself before the altar of reconciliation bewailing his offences, and with devout compunction soliciting to be admitted to the Paschal or Christmas distribution of the Bread of Life—if he has not money to propitiate the avaricious ire of the Rev<sup>d</sup> Mr Conway, he is not quietly dismissed as being too poor and contemptible for enjoying the Celestial benefits; but he is scolded, villified and threatened “D’air Cunnial De Mur Sagart”. “By the obligation of God as a Priest,” he will have revenge, if it were to run for seven, ten, fifteen, or 21 years. . . .

10thly that old Anthony Burke who lives with his daughter and son in law in Muinnaba, and whose aged wife lived with another daughter in Claggeh—did upon the death of his wife offer 2<sup>s</sup>/6<sup>d</sup> to the Rev<sup>d</sup> Mr. Conway to have mass said for the soul of his departed wife;—but that Mr. Conway not only refused the money but in a paroxysm of violence proclaimed Burke from the Altar, did ring the bell with rage—and invoke a horrible imprecation upon him and his worldly substance, for offering him 2<sup>s</sup>/6<sup>d</sup> to say Mass for the poor woman though no priest before Mr. Conway charged more than one shilling. The result was, that the Congregation would have slaughtered him [“him” crossed out] each other were it not for some peaceable characters who mollified the rage of the exasperated people. . . .

<sup>18</sup> McGhee, *Diocesan Statutes*, xli–xlii.

12thly we have had, through the pious zeal of Rev<sup>d</sup> Neal McNulty, the walls of a good chapel 80 feet in length and 30 in breadth built for the last sixteen years, and not withstanding the number of clergymen that passed through this parish during that period, and collected great sums of money from us, for the ostensible purpose of roofing the Chapel, yet they have taken away our money and left us these sixteen years without a temple of worship to put our heads into or to screen us from the inclemency of the weather and although Dr Feeny has been appealed to against these clerical plunders, he has not ordered the money to be refunded to James O'Donel Esq<sup>r</sup> the Treasurer of our Chapel Committee.<sup>19</sup>

In order to sum up here, however, on the subject of clerical avarice, which is yet another subject, a long account of the situation in Ireland by T. Chisholme Anstey, an English Catholic, apparently to the secretary of Propaganda, Giovanni Brunelli, from London on November 17, 1843, is certainly worth our attention. In his account Anstey, who appears to have been well acquainted with the clergy and conditions in the province of Connaught, maintained,

it is well known in every part of Ireland with which he is acquainted, and to the best of his belief also in other parts thereof, that however well disposed a parish priest or curate may be to relieve his parishioners or some of them from grievous and oppressive payments of the kinds specified ["Tithes, church dues, oblates, stock fees, money for repairs of fabric"], the relatives, (often very numerous) of such ecclesiastics are certain to obstruct the concession by clamorous complaints and remonstrances against his unkindness to his own flesh and blood, who by his ill timed liberality he is defrauding of their hopes of succession to his property after his death and of occasional contributions out of the same during his lifetime, and to which succession and contributions they in the popular opinion as well as in their own have a kind of equitable claim, founded upon the consent, which his family is supposed to have given in the first instance to his being withdrawn from field labor and domestic service in order to go to the seminary; and, that the fear of such complaints, remonstrances and appeals to popular opinion hath the effect of making the priests to be watchful and austere in the exact and undeviating levy of their aforesaid dues, is apparent from the greatness of their incomes; that is to say in Connaught, which is the cheapest part of Ireland, and where money is twice as valuable as it is in London, there are very few parish priests, if any, whose incomes are less than 200 sterling per annum although not one farthing of such incomes is appropriated by either priest or proper to any other purpose than the mere support of the priest. But in most parishes the income is very much higher and ranging to £500 and upwards per annum; insomuch that it is a vulgar and proverbial saying throughout Ireland that the best or richest matches are to be had with the kindred of priests and that their farms are certain to be well stocked and furnished.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Scritture riferite nei congressi, Irlanda*, 28, fols. 634–35. The petition is signed by James O'Donel as "Chairman of the Parochial Committee" and Hugh Joseph O'Donel as "Secretary." Three other petitioners signed their names, but nineteen others made their "X" mark and were signed for.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, fols. 121–45.

Anstey then went on to explain that there was a fixed tariff on burials, masses for the dead, churching women, etc., below which an offering might not fall, but might exceed it. Baptisms, he reported, were 2s. 6d., while marriages were a pound or a guinea, in addition to the money collected for the priest at the marriage feast. One such collection, Anstey noted, was £25, though no one there was above the rank of farmer. If the people involved were poor, Anstey admitted, the clergy would perform the required service gratis, but in order to test the truth of their allegations of poverty, the priests were in the habit of announcing in the chapel, church, or meeting house the names of those who had gratuitously received their services. "And, however poor the Irish peasant may be," he added, "he is rarely disposed to accept the exemption upon such humiliating conditions." The result of all of this had been, Anstey continued, that secret societies had been formed, and "by means of such associations they have from time to time endeavoured, and still are endeavouring, to compel the priests to agree to a more moderate tariff of dues and to compel the people to abstain from paying them any dues except according to the tariff appointed or proposed." Anstey then turned to the bad Irish habit of "stations," where the priest would designate the houses of various parishioners who were relatively well off as the place where he would hear confessions and say mass that week for all those in the immediate area. He complained that mass was being offered in "cabins" rather than in "chapels" because the fees were greater. The "station," moreover, he pointed out, was obliged to offer hospitality and had to cater to the priest's choice of tradesmen and victuallers. The Irish priests, Anstey further complained, not only did not keep to the rubric and practice of Rome in the Mass, but their sermons were of poor quality, and "the ignorance of the people in matters of Religion is frightful, and, in particular, that the doctrine of the Trinity is rarely known or ever heard of among them, much less the doctrine of the Real Presence and other articles of Faith." After all this and a good deal more Anstey finally concluded by advising the Propaganda that the only hope for religion in Ireland was for the pope to send a legate with power to correct the many abuses. Clerical avarice, however, legate or no, whether in terms of the clergy farming or grazing large tracts of land in their brothers's or nephews's names or in squeezing the people for alms and dues was, after drunkenness, the most difficult of the deadly sins for either the bishops or the laity to check.

BUT HOW MANY of the laity really cared? The best way to begin to answer that question is to determine how many people actually attended church. While it is certainly true that all those who attended mass religiously were not necessarily active in the concerns of their church, knowledge of

the numbers who attended is at least helpful for setting an upper limit on those who were concerned. The figures on church attendance in pre-famine Ireland indicate that only thirty-three per cent of the Catholic population went to mass.<sup>21</sup> This is all the more remarkable in that in something less than fifty years church attendance would increase to over ninety per cent, and so it has continued down to the present day.<sup>22</sup> Why attendance was relatively so low in pre-famine Ireland is obvious. There were not enough priests and there were not enough churches, or, more particularly, not enough seating space in the existing churches to accommodate those who might be inclined to attend to their religious duties. If, for example, all the priests in Ireland celebrated the two masses they were allowed on a given Sunday in 1840 there would have been 4,300 masses for 6,500,000 people, or one mass for every 1,500 people in attendance, and there were no chapels and very few churches in pre-famine Ireland that would accommodate a thousand worshippers.

This deficiency was offset to some degree before the famine by the widespread practice of "stations." Baptism and marriage were also frequently celebrated in private houses rather than in churches. These practices were generally frowned on by those who were attempting to reform both clergy and laity and increase devotional zeal. The complaints of the reformers, who were concerned about the abuses attendant on the system, had mainly to do with the exorbitant "offerings" extracted by the clergy for the administration of the sacraments and the undignified if not unholy celebration of sacred rites in profane places. James Maher, writing from Carlow to his nephew Paul Cullen in Rome in early January 1842, asked "Could not Rome do something to stimulate the zeal and watchfulness of the Bishops: the holding of Stations for Mass and Confession at private houses is the very worst system. Wretched filthy cabins have been lately honored with stations." "The people," he explained,

cannot be instructed. The Priest no matter how zealous cannot do his duty. The young clergyman is brought into contact with his female penitents. The result is confessions are often invalid or sacrilegious. It is almost impossible that the poor country people in the circumstances could disclose their sins. Struggling with their natural reluctance to avow their guilt, and fearing at the same time to be overheard by those who are pressing around the Priest, who cannot utter a word of encouragement to the sinner, except in the lowest and therefore intelligible [*sic*] whisper that can be expected.

"Could not Rome," Maher suggested again, "induce the Bishops to change the system? Stations in the chapels have been recommended in the Statutes

<sup>21</sup> David W. Miller, "Religion and Social Change in Pre-Famine Ireland," unpublished paper, p. 3. Since the writing of his paper Professor Miller has revised his estimate of church attendance by Roman Catholics upward to about 40 per cent, but he is still "prepared to state flatly that the prevalence of extraordinary religious devotion evidenced by extremely regular church attendance is a post-Famine phenomenon."

<sup>22</sup> Jean Blanchard, *The Church in Contemporary Ireland* (Dublin, 1963), 29-31.

for this province. But the recommendation has proved a dead letter.” “We owe much to Rome,” he assured Cullen in conclusion, “and if she would help us to this reform, we would be more deeply her debtor.”<sup>23</sup> Nearly all the synods, provincial and national, between 1830 and 1875 had statutes disapproving of “stations,” and even though Rome eventually added her proscription as requested by Father Maher, the practice died very hard, especially in the south and west where it still survives in some places.<sup>24</sup>

Before the famine, then, despite severe limitations in plant and personnel, there was a small but perceptible change and increase in devotional practices in Ireland. Why this was so had a great deal to do with the enthusiasm and hope generated by the moral and political reform movements of Father Mathew and Daniel O’Connell. Both the Total Abstinence Society and the Repeal Association grew up in a period heavy with gloomy forebodings of impending disaster as bad harvest succeeded bad harvest, prices for foodstuffs continued to fall rapidly, and emigration mounted. Literally millions took Father Mathew’s temperance pledge as the production of Irish whisky fell from 12,296,000 gallons in 1839 to 5,546,283 gallons in 1844. As Daniel O’Connell enrolled the “nation” in his Repeal Association his “monster meetings” numbered in the hundreds of thousands of people.<sup>25</sup> Essentially these were both revival movements, which created not only an enormous enthusiasm but, because of the underlying anxieties created by population pressure and land hunger, also contributed greatly to an already heavily charged emotional atmosphere. In the early 1840s, therefore, there already were manifest signs of that devotional revolution, which Paul Cullen would proceed to help make and consolidate some ten years later when he would arrive in Ireland as archbishop of Armagh and apostolic delegate.

On the occasion of a papal jubilee in 1842, for example, when the penitents were offered special indulgences if they would but confess their sins and come to Christ, the bishop of Cork wrote to Cullen in Rome asking the rector of the Irish College to secure for him additional faculties to dispense in terms of sins especially reserved to the pope. “Sinners,” John Murphy explained to Cullen in May 1842, “who have for years lived in fornication, adultery, incest & have recourse to the tribunal of penance” are coming in in droves. “I have a melancholy list of 64 couples,” he added sadly,

who in obedience to my commands have separated *a thora*; for where there is abject poverty, with a numerous brood we cannot insist on separation *a mensa*. The Jubilee is open in only one Parish, how numerous will be the blacklist before the conclusion of it in the whole diocese—it would be endless to enter into the minute details of every case.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Jan. 2, 1842, Cullen Papers (hereafter C.), Archives of the Irish College, Rome.

<sup>24</sup> Blanchard, *Church in Contemporary Ireland*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Sir James O’Connor, *History of Ireland, 1798–1924* (London, 1925), 1: 301; L. J. McCaffrey, *Daniel O’Connell and the Repeal Year* (Lexington, 1966).

<sup>26</sup> May 29, 1842, C.



Some nine months later James Maher again reported to his nephew in Rome from Carlow. "I forgot, tho I intended it to tell you of the wonderful success of the Missionaries in Athy." "A visit from Father Mathew," he explained, "would not have put a greater number in motion. Hundreds remained all night in the Chapel, and many remained in town away from their homes from 5 and six days waiting an opportunity of confessing." "This extraordinary movement," Maher further noted, "has confirmed an old opinion of mine that we do not always afford the people an opportunity of general confession when required. In fact we have not half Priests for the wants of the Mission, and a very considerable proportion of the Parrochi leave the confessional almost entirely to the curates." The following August Cullen's sister Margaret informed him that they had had the "Missioners" in Carlow town for the last five weeks, and that it "would be impossible for me to describe the enthusiasm of the people." If the missioners were angels from heaven, she added, they could not be more venerated. Work was at a standstill, while people followed them around all day and crowded "in *hundreds* to the Confessionals, many very many who had never before been there." The missioners preached three times a day in the chapel, which was "crowded to suffocation." "What a pity," she finally concluded, "we have not more Priests in the Parish. I fear a great deal of their labours will go for nothing. Where is the opportunity for the *bulk* of the parish to approach the Holy sacraments."<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, the "bulk" of the Irish people in the 1840s never did have the opportunity to approach the sacraments. In writing his customary annual letter in October 1851 to the cardinal prefect of Propaganda, for example, Michael Jones, a former student of the Propaganda's Urban College in Rome, complained about "an almost general neglect in giving the People the necessary knowledge of the Faith, the Commandments and the Sacraments." "The Irish People," Jones explained to Cardinal Fransoni, "are very good, but much neglected in every way by both the Civil and Ecclesiastical Government, more by the latter than the former." It was time "for the Ecclesiastical authority to put an end to the present state of things." The priests who received training at the National Seminary at Maynooth, did "not receive in the College any notion how things should be. The old system of the days of Persecution, the Catacombs, and the Caves is all that they know."<sup>28</sup> That the Irish people were receptive and might

<sup>27</sup> Feb. 21, Aug. 30, 1843, C.

<sup>28</sup> Michele Jones to Giacomo Cardinale Fransoni, Oct. 9, 1851, *Scritture riferite nei congressi, Irlanda*, 30, fols. 720–21, Archives of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Rome. The original letter is in Italian. See also K., Feb. 28, 1858, for a letter from John Kyne, chaplain at Alum Bagh, Lucknow, Oude, East India, to Thomas Grant, bishop of Southwark (London) and Catholic chaplain-general, regarding Kyne's work among the British troops, who were mainly Irish and presumably Catholic. "I am anxious first of all to communicate to your Lordship the pleasing fact that even here in India I can bear testimony from personal experience, to the good effect produced by the Mission given last year to the soldiers at Chatham. In fact the recruits, who arrived here last month from Chatham are the *only* persons of whom it can be

have made excellent evangelical material to work with is certainly given credence by the unusual success of the sporadic attempts made, but the resources available for a religious and moral revival on a national scale were too slender in the face of the number of people.

What achievement there was before the famine, then, was largely confined to that “respectable” class of Catholics, typified by the Cullens and the Mahers in Carlow, who were economically better off. Since this class generally survived the famine intact, while the “bulk” of the cottiers, laborers, and paupers were swept away by starvation, disease, and emigration, the Church actually had a stronger devotional nucleus relative to absolute numbers in 1850 than in 1840.<sup>29</sup> This nucleus, furthermore, would come to count for more with every succeeding year because the remaining subsistence population was gradually liquidated by a continuing emigration sparked periodically by the fear of starvation. When Paul Cullen arrived in Ireland he therefore had a potentially more favorable situation than has been generally supposed. He also patently derived very great advantage from the psychological impact the famine had on those who remained in Ireland. The growing awareness of a sense of sin already apparent in the 1840s was certainly deepened as God’s wrath was made manifest in a great natural disaster that destroyed and scattered his people. Psychologically and socially, therefore, the Irish people were ready for a great evangelical revival, while economically and organizationally the Church was now correspondingly ready after the famine to meet their religious and emotional needs.

THE PROBLEM OF CHARACTERIZING the making and consolidating of this devotional revolution is somewhat simplified by the fact that the period begins with the first National Synod of Thurles in 1850 and ends with the second National Synod of Maynooth in 1875. The first Synod of Thurles was primarily concerned with the proper administration of the sacraments

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said, that they complied with the Easter obligation. With this exception, the rest of the poor soldiers were in a most pitiable state. The vast majority had never in their lives received the Holy Sacraments. And their ignorance of even the first principles of religion was truly astonishing with all my experience I was never in my life so taken by surprize. If I had heard it from others, I could not have believed it possible. Yet with all that they are not bad materials to work upon—I believe, notwithstanding the general impression to the contrary, that on the whole as much may be made of them as of any other class of Christians.” By way of proof Kyne explained that in three months he had brought upward of a thousand to the sacraments and that every morning he had between thirty to fifty communicants, while every evening he recited the rosary and gave religious instruction.

<sup>29</sup> John Kepple to Kirby, Sept. 2, 1852, K. Writing from Ballyhea, Charleville, where he was parish priest, Kepple noted, “There is not in the County of Cork a finer country than this. The population of my parish is not very large, the poorer portion of it (as everywhere else through out Ireland) has been swept away by the Famine fever emigration &c &c. The farmers tho’ not numerous are very respectable, and comfortable but in consequence of the failure of crops, and the thinness of the people our emoluments here are inconsiderable, however I don’t complain.”

and regulating more closely the lives of the parish clergy.<sup>30</sup> In the statutes the clergy were exhorted to administer the sacraments more often and only in church, except where it was impossible, and to encourage the laity to better lives by the clergy's own good example. The bishops were assigned the responsibility by the synod of seeing that these reforms were carried out in their respective dioceses. Twenty-five years later the Synod of Maynooth reiterated mainly what had already been decreed in 1850 and in enlarging upon the statutes further increased episcopal control and authority.<sup>31</sup> The making of the law, however, proved to be one thing, and the enforcing of it quite another. The first Synod of Thurles had made it quite clear that the Church was to be reformed from the top down and that the responsibility for enforcing that reform should fall to the bishops. As apostolic delegate, however, Cullen had very real difficulties in keeping the Irish bishops up to the mark. The problem was not only that a large number of bishops were set in their ways and naturally averse to reform, but that the bishops also had serious differences with regard to educational and political matters, and their quarrels in these areas seriously inhibited their efforts at pastoral reform.

Cullen, however, was not only a reformer but a very effective ecclesiastical politician, and with the support of Rome, especially in episcopal appointments, the Irish Church was reformed by him in his generation. His method was to deal with one principal issue at a time, while trying to contain the worst effects of the other issues. His fellow archbishops of Dublin, Tuam, and Cashel, for example, each respectively represented educational, political, and pastoral problems for Cullen. He mobilized Tuam and Cashel against the educational policies concerning the Queen's Colleges, advocated by the venerable archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray, who was strongly supported by a minority of the bishops. When Murray died in the winter of 1852 Cullen was translated by Rome from Armagh to Dublin and his nominee appointed to replace him in Armagh. The opposition among the bishops, without the effective leadership of Murray, was quickly isolated and eventually crushed. Cullen then turned to the problem posed by the archbishop of Tuam, John MacHale, and the involvement of the clergy in secular politics, particularly the Tenant League. Supported by Armagh and Cashel, and with Rome's aid, MacHale was also eventually isolated, and if not crushed, he was at least effectively contained. Finally Cullen tackled the problem of pastoral reform in the province of Cashel, which was most difficult because most of the bishops of that province strongly supported the custom of "stations." Cullen once again undermined the opposition to him by having only those who agreed

<sup>30</sup> *Decreta, Synodi Nationalis Totius Hiberniae Thurlesiae Habitae Anno MDCCCL* (Dublin, 1851).

<sup>31</sup> *Decreta, Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae, Habitae Apud Maynutium, An. 1875* (Dublin, 1877).

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## THE APPARITION AT KNOCK CO MAYO.

AS SEEN ON AUGT 21ST 1879. ( EVE OF THE OCTAVE OF THE ASSUMPTION. )

MANY MIRACULOUS CURES HAVE BEEN EFFECTED THERE SINCE THE ABOVE OCCURRENCE.

THIS VIEW WAS TAKEN ON THE SPOT BY W. COLLINS.

AND SUBMITTED TO, AND APPROVED OF BY THE SEVERAL PERSONS WHO SAW THE ABOVE.

About 7:30 on the evening of the 21st of August, 1879, the vigil of the octave day of the Feast of the Assumption at the parish church of Knock, Co. Mayo, "an apparition of Our Blessed Lady, wearing a large brilliant crown and clothes in white garments was distinctly seen by some fifteen persons at the south gable wall of the church. Our Lady is described as having her hands raised as if in prayer and her eyes turned towards heaven. On her right hand was St. Joseph, his head inclined towards her, and on her left was St. John the Evangelist, attired as a bishop, his left hand holding a book and his right hand raised as if in preaching. To the left of St. John was an altar on which stood a cross and a Lamb, about 8 weeks old. . . . The gable wall where this manifestation was seen was covered with a cloud of light and the vision lasted for fully two hours." Liam Ua Cadain, *Venerable Arch-Deacon Cavanagh, Pastor of Knock, 1867-1897* (Dublin, 1955), 69. Illustration courtesy of National Library of Ireland.



with his reform principles succeed to bishoprics in that province, and gradually but relentlessly those bishops who were reluctant to change their ways in the rest of Ireland were replaced by Cullen's more energetic and aggressive nominees. By 1875, therefore, there was hardly a bishop in Ireland, except MacHale, who did not zealously promote pastoral reform in his diocese, whatever his educational and political views were. Actually this resolution of the distribution of power in the Irish Church in favor of Cullen was not nearly as smooth or inevitable as it may appear from this oversimplified account, but what is most important to understand is that this resolution of power was absolutely necessary to the making and consolidation of the devotional revolution that took place.

In the twenty years following Cullen's arrival in Ireland the number of priests was increased by some seven hundred, or nearly twenty-five per cent, to a total of about 3,200, while the Catholic population declined from five to four million, or a ratio increase of one priest to 2,000 people to one priest to 1,250 people in 1870. The nun population increased even more rapidly over the same period. In 1850, for example, there were only some 1,500 nuns in Ireland, while in 1870 there were more than 3,700, or an absolute increase of 2,200, and a ratio increase of 1:3,300 in 1850 to 1:1,100 in 1870.<sup>32</sup> Not only were the numbers of clergy relative to the population rapidly appreciating, but it also appears that their quality was improving over the same period. The amount of dirty clerical linen washed in Rome appears to have decreased, as did the volume of litigation between the bishops and their priests. The improving quality of the clergy, moreover, is not only testified to by their really prodigious energy in building churches, schools, seminaries, convents, and parochial houses, but their conduct and learning was certainly improved by conferences, retreats, synods, and the erection of cathedral chapters, as well as by the annual or triennial visitations by their bishops depending on the size of their dioceses.

In extending their increasing zeal and piety to the laity the clergy centered their attention on the sacraments, and especially on the sacraments of penance and Holy Eucharist. Confession and communion, which usually had been associated with a practicing Catholic's Easter duty in pre-famine Ireland, now became much more frequent. To encourage the laity, missions were held in nearly every parish in Ireland in the decade of the fifties. Pastoral gains thus made were consolidated by the introduction of a whole series of devotional exercises designed not only to encourage more frequent participation in the sacraments but to instill veneration by an appreciation of their ritual beauty and intrinsic mystery. The spiritual rewards, of course, for these devotional exercises were the various indulgences, which shortened either the sinner's or the sinner's loved one's time of torment in purgatory. The new devotions were mainly of Roman

<sup>32</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1871* (Dublin, 1875).

origin and included the rosary, forty hours, perpetual adoration, novenas, blessed altars, *Via Crucis*, benediction, vespers, devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Conception, jubilees, triduum, pilgrimages, shrines, processions, and retreats. These devotional exercises, moreover, were organized in order to communalize and regularize practice under a spiritual director and included sodalities, confraternities such as the various purgatorian societies, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and Peter's Pence as well as temperance and altar societies. These public exercises were also reinforced by the use of devotional tools and aids: beads, scapulars, medals, missals, prayer books, catechisms, holy pictures, and *Agnus Dei*, all blessed by priests who had recently acquired that privilege from Rome through the intercession of their bishops. Furthermore, this was the period when the whole world of the senses was explored in these devotional exercises, and especially in the Mass, through music, singing, candles, vestments, and incense.

THE EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT of this vast social change, of course, is too diversified and complicated to be presented coherently here. Still, in order to acquire perhaps at least the flavor of that phenomenon, if not its extent, it might be useful to follow selectively the career of the man who spearheaded that change in the initial years. "I was in Armagh," Cullen reported shortly after his arrival in Ireland to Tobias Kirby in Rome, "and saw nearly all the clergy." "The old Cathedral," he explained, obviously scandalized, "is awfully bad—the priests use only *one* tallow candle on the altars at mass in the Cathedral. Imagine what it must be elsewhere." Three months later Laurence Forde, Cullen's master of ceremonies at the Synod of Thurles, reported to Kirby that the opening day's solemnities were a grand Roman success with high mass being celebrated *alla* Palestrina, complete with assistant priest, deacon, and subdeacons. "I gave the seventh candlestick," Forde assured Kirby,

to Dr. Cullen at the Mass. I was not quite certain if it should be so, but I acted on your advice. It is not without its effect—I think it useful to go in some things even a little beyond strict practice for the sake of letting the bishops and clergy see the full solemnities of the Church.<sup>33</sup>

Some two years later, when he had been translated to Dublin, the richest and most influential diocese in Ireland, Cullen still was concerned about setting the proper tone. "We commenced the Jubilee here yesterday," he reported to Kirby in October 1852, "I *sang* more meo high mass attended by all the Chapter and dignitaries of Dublin." Mr. Faber, the celebrated English priest, "preached a magnificent sermon by far the most eloquent I ever heard," giving "a new tone and a Catholic one to Dublin." "We have

<sup>33</sup> May 21, Aug. 22, 1850, K.

the *40 ore*,” he noted further, referring to his pro-Cathedral, “at Marlboro St. with great pomp and magnificence. The Church is ornamented with damask, a great machine erected and what is better crowds of people are attending. Deo Gratias. The devotion will be continued through the entire three months of the jubilee.” He finally assured Kirby in Italian that he would soon see “the fruits of our preaching.” Two months later, on December 8, in a letter headed “Evviva Maria,” Cullen again reported to Kirby that the jubilee, the forty hours, and the novena in process were all very successful. “Here,” he added even more significantly, “we are trying to enrol a large missionary body before next summer to wipe out the proselytizers everywhere.” “It is necessary to see,” Cullen concluded prudently in Italian, “if it will be successful, and then I will write to Propaganda. The Jesuits, Dominicans, Carmelites, Vincentians, Redemptorists, secular Priests will all join together—but.”<sup>34</sup>

“The Jubilee,” Cullen again assured Kirby less than two weeks later, on December 20, 1852, “has succeeded beyond all hope. All the churches are crowded with people trying to go to confession. Were the priests ten times as many as they are they could not hear them all.” “I have done nothing lately,” he added, breaking into Italian,

but to cure invalid marriages and remedy similar impediments. We must beg of the Pope to give a Jubilee of one month next May. It will put down all heresies—and set things right. . . . The priests are greatly fatigued with the Jubilee otherwise I wd apply at present to have it prolonged.

“Some of the people here,” Cullen then noted, indicating that devotional practices were becoming contagious, “are anxious I should establish in the schools and convents the ‘Child of Mary’ such as they have in Waterford convent. Will you get me faculties to do this, and to establish every other sodality. I wd require to know what the indulgences are and what the rules.”<sup>35</sup>

Early in the new year Cullen again wrote Kirby complaining that all was not well in the various parts of the Irish Church. “I wrote some days ago to Propaganda regarding the diocese of Ardagh,” he explained in Italian in January 1853. “It seems to me,” Cullen noted, “that it would be well to appoint a bishop quickly.” “Father John Kilduff,” he suggested, referring to a Vincentian on the Dublin mission, “a native of the diocese would be the saving of it.” “He is a good preacher,” Cullen continued, giving an interesting example of what he thought was important in a bishop, “a good theologian, full of zeal, and yet courageous enough. Such a man would be required to reform the diocese. He is about 33 years of age.” “In the diocese of Cashel,” Cullen then informed Kirby, turning to another trouble spot, “there is a parish called Doon, where I have heard

<sup>34</sup> Oct. 9, Dec. 8, 1852, K.

<sup>35</sup> Dec. 20, 1852, K.

there are seven or eight hundred apostates.” “The Archbishop of Cashel, however,” he reported, “does not want any noise made about it. Father Dowley, Superior of the Vincentians recently offered to give a mission but so far the offer has not been acknowledged.” “The poor Archbishop,” he added, “is very timid, and believes that he is always on the verge of death, even though he is in good health.” “He is almost the only bishop,” Cullen complained, “that has done nothing about what was prescribed in the Synod of Thurles.” “Baptisms and confessions remain as they formerly were, and they also celebrate marriages in private houses. In almost all the other dioceses something at least has been done.” “In this diocese of Dublin,” he then explained,

all marriages and baptisms are celebrated in the churches. In the city and in the towns all the confessions are heard in the churches. In all the mountainous places where there are no churches nearby, if the distance is not too great, I told the priest to find every means of transporting the people to those distant churches—but if that were not possible to hear the confessions in private houses (except in case of illness), if the church is not more than two miles away.<sup>36</sup>

“*Evviva S. Patrizio*,” Cullen greeted Kirby again some two months later on March 17, 1853, and continued in Italian, “I have already convened a provincial synod to be held in Dublin at Pentecost. The Bishops are not pleased.” “Now it is necessary to see,” Cullen explained, “*quid agendum*. There are things enough to be done—but it is difficult to put them in order and I must do all myself. There is no one who knows how to draw up a decree or write a line of Latin.” “Monsignor Dixon,” Cullen then reported, referring to the new archbishop of Armagh, “has already visited Ardagh and has promised to write in favor of Kilduff.” It is Kilduff, Cullen added tenaciously in conclusion, who would be “the salvation of that unfortunate diocese.”<sup>37</sup> Kilduff “will be consecrated here by me on S. Peters day.” Dr. Dawson, the popular candidate among the Ardagh priests, “has written him a most foolishly impolite letter, which shows he was never fit to be a Bishop.” Every attempt had been made “to get up some agitation against Kilduff by Dawsons friends—protests I believe have been sent to Rome—but the people are delighted, and the greatest part of the clergy—the appointment was absolutely necessary.” “I have been told,” Cullen added, referring to the archbishop of Tuam and the bishop of Clogher, “that Dr. McHale and Dr. McNally spoke against it—but this is only a report.” “There is no doubt however,” he assured Kirby again, “that K. [Kilduff] will be a blessing to the diocese—tho’ he will have to carry his cross with the opp. of Dawson & Co.” “I send you the acts and decrees of the Council in a day or two with a letter to the Pope,” Cullen then noted, referring to his recently concluded provincial synod. “In Cashel,” he then complained again of the archbishop, “I hear,

<sup>36</sup> Jan. 28, 1853, K.

<sup>37</sup> Mar. 17, 1853, K.

Dr. Slattery has not made a single change as yet. Marriages, baptisms, confessions still, as formerly in private houses. The same in several dioceses and I believe in Tuam." "It will be necessary," he advised darkly, "to do something in these matters." "But," he concluded characteristically, and appropriately breaking into Italian, "little by little all will be accomplished."<sup>38</sup>

This brief account of Cullen's early attempt at reforming the Irish Church in the interests of making and consolidating a devotional revolution is useful as a model, though a somewhat imperfect one, of his own continuing attempts, and those of his protégés, at reform over the next twenty-five years. In general Cullen preferred to promote men like Kilduff who were made in his own image and likeness. They were not only good preachers, adequate theologians, zealous, courageous enough, and young, but they were also generally strangers to the diocese and, therefore, they did not have any of the personal ties or loyalties that might inhibit them in their zeal for reform. If they were not recruited from the regular clergy, moreover, the new bishops were usually rectors or vice-rectors of seminaries—strict, stern, austere men who had both the experience of, and a proven talent for, efficient administration. They were also well aware that the new discipline they represented would not be popular among their priests, but if these bishops were ever to make their wills effective with their clergy, the bishops would have to depend on their patron's continued exertions on their behalf at Rome. They all tended, therefore, to be ultramontanes, because Rome was not only the theoretical but the actual source of their own and Cullen's real power in the Irish Church.

WHILE ALL OF THE FOREGOING may tell one something about what this devotional revolution consisted of and, at least partially, how it was made, the crucial question still remains—why did the Irish people respond so readily to the reform of their Church and become virtually practicing Catholics within a generation? The Great Famine was truly a gigantic psychological shock, and it certainly would be both neat and convenient to be able to assign so impressive a cause for so remarkable an effect. A guilt-ridden and frightened people turning more formally and fervently to their God in their hour of need makes more, indeed, than a good deal of superficial sense. The problem, of course, is that the devotional need appears to have been increasingly present before the famine, and only the adverse circumstances of population growth and the lack of money and personnel on the part of the Church prevented that need from being realized. The famine, therefore, was as much the occasion for as it was a cause of the devotional revolution being made and consolidated in Ireland, and one must probe more deeply if one is to understand why as well as how this remarkable historical phenomenon took place.

<sup>38</sup> [June 1853], K.

What I would like to suggest is that the devotional revolution which took place after the famine satisfied more than the negative factors of guilt and fear induced by that great catastrophe. There may indeed be something worse than the simple fear of being destroyed—the mounting terror in the growing awareness that one is being destroyed. The Irish, after all, had been gradually losing their language, their culture, and their way of life for nearly a hundred years before the famine. Education, business, politics, and communication in the written word, even more than in the spoken word, were all increasingly geared to English as the Irish were being effectively Anglicized, or, perhaps more appropriately, West Britonized. There has been so much concern, for example, in the study of Irish history in the nineteenth century with the geography of emigration that it has hardly been noticed that the Irish before the famine had nearly all become cultural emigrants, that they had in fact moved in their minds before a good many of them had actually to move in space.<sup>39</sup> In a word, then, Irishmen who were aware of being Irish were losing their identity, and this accounts in large part for their becoming practicing Catholics. The devotional revolution, I would argue further, provided the Irish with a substitute symbolic language and offered them a new cultural heritage with which they could identify and be identified and through which they could identify with one another. This is why, for example, Irish and Catholic have become almost interchangeable terms in Ireland, despite the attempts of Nationalists to make Irish rather than Catholic the inclusive term. “Take an average Irishman,” the celebrated Irish Dominican preacher, Father Tom Burke, said in 1872, “—I don’t care where you find him—and you will find that the very first principle in his mind is, ‘I am not an Englishman, because I am a Catholic! Take an Irishman wherever he is found, all over the earth, and any casual observer will at once come to the conclusion, ‘Oh; he is an Irishman, he is a Catholic!’ The two go together.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Francis O’Neill to Kirby, Plymouth, July 13, 1853. K. O’Neill was a native of Waterford, but when he was ordained after his studies in the Irish College in Rome he had to go on the English mission, because there was no place available for him in the diocese of Waterford. Though the following passage is both interesting and illustrative in many ways, the important point is that the Irish speakers in Plymouth wanted to remain psychologically whole in revealing the secrets of their hearts. “Please God I hope to have a place in Waterford next year; as one can effect more where there are good hearts. Here the English Catholics never look at an Irish priest, but we have the poor Paddies who are the support of this mission and without whom the Bishop, would have to leave this place. The Irish here are about three or four hundred. Some of them cannot be got to make their confessions in English, at this the Bishop is most indignant. He says that it is pride, and also because they make more of the priest than the Sacrament. He has to keep a priest who can speak Irish. I cannot put two words of it together so in that point I am no help. Were I sure of having this good Bishop always I would not think of returning to Ireland but as this is not at all likely especially as he is an old man I shall get my Exeat. He finds many faults with the Irish but they are the ones that we cannot deny. He speaks frequently about the way the priests in Ireland demand money for the Sacraments. This is no false charge against them for all whoever had any experience of the system even in our own Diocese and also of it even since the Thurles Synod will acknowledge that too much cannot be said against it.”

<sup>40</sup> Thomas H. Burke, O.P., “The Supernatural Life of the Irish People,” in *Lectures on Faith and Fatherland* (London, n.d.), 117. Father Burke lectured extensively in the United States in 1872.



Finally it is necessary to observe that the making and consolidating of this devotional revolution had a wider and deeper significance than even making practicing Catholics of the Irish people in a generation. One can argue that the cause and effect relationship between what may be popularly called in the best current sociological jargon a group "identity crisis," and the resolution of it in what was fundamentally a religious revival has some very serious implications for, as well as allowing for some very interesting insights into, the history of the Irish people both at home and abroad in the nineteenth century. Daniel O'Connell, for example, if viewed as the bridge between the old and the new Ireland rather than as the divide between Old and Young Ireland, becomes not only more important but more understandable as the great transitional figure in modern Irish history.<sup>41</sup> Further, the devotional revolution and its general and particular causes are crucial to understanding the development of Irish nationalism and the cultural importance of Irish Catholicism in that development.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the cultural revivals of Young Ireland in the middle of the century and the Gaelic movement at the end appear less ludicrous in the light of the identity crisis that had been taking place since the turn of the century, and Daniel Corkery and the other archpriests of the language movement in more recent times may indeed yet come into their own.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Sean O'Faolain, *King of the Beggars* (London, 1938), 367–68. In summing up the significance of O'Connell, O'Faolain wrote, "In whatever way one might try to define the ideal life of the Irish people, his image is likely to rise before the mind—always remembering that he came at the beginning and was only following his instinct in a groping use of the material to his hand. Lecky said that he studied men, not books; in studying men he found himself, and in finding himself he presented to his people a mirror of their reality. He is interesting in a hundred ways, but in no way more interesting than in this—that he was the greatest of all Irish realists who knew that if he could but once define, he would thereby create. He did define, and he did create. He thought a democracy and it rose. He defined himself, and his people became him. He imagined a future and the road appeared. He left his successors nothing to do but to follow him. They have added precision to his definition, but his definition is not altered; they have added to his methods, but his methods remain. You may break gold but it is gold still, fashion wood but it is wood still. The content of Irish life is the content of the Irish character, the dregs and the lees and the pure wine of this one man's recipe—to be purified indeed, to grow more rich in the wood with time, but never to lose the flavour of his reality, the composition of his mind."

<sup>42</sup> The author is at present engaged in writing the third volume—"The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–1878"—of his projected *History of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland in the Nineteenth Century, 1780–1918*, in which he hopes to deal *in extenso* with this crucial relationship between nationalism and Catholicism as well as with many of the other themes only touched upon in this article.

<sup>43</sup> "The truth is, the Gaelic people of that century were not a mob, as every picture given of them, whether by historian or novelist, would lead one to think. They were mob-like in externals; and one forgives the historians if those externals threw them out, but how forgive the novelists? If not a mob what then were they? They were the residuary legatees of a civilisation that was more than a thousand years old. And this they knew; it was indeed the very pivot of all they did know, and the insult that followed on their poverty wounded them not only as human beings but as 'Children of Kings, Sons of Milesius!' ('Clanna righththe maca Mileadh'). With that civilisation they were still in living contact, acquainted with its history; and such of its forms as had not become quite impossible in their way of life, they still piously practised, gradually changing the old moulds into new shapes, and, whether new or old, filling them with a content that was all of the passing day and their own fields. What of art they did create in their cabins is poor and meagre if compared with what their fathers had created in the Duns of Kings and Grianans of Queens; yet the hem matches the garment and the clasp the book. Here hinted, then, what these historians scanted; and scanting the soul and the spirit of a people, what of that people have they profitably to speak? But history has belied the historians,

Last but not least in this necessarily less than complete catalog of what was significant in the devotional revolution is its importance for understanding the great Diaspora of the Irish people in the nineteenth century, as more than four million of them found new homes in a new world. Most of the two million Irish who emigrated between 1847 and 1860 were part of the pre-famine generation of nonpracticing Catholics, if indeed they were Catholics at all. They congregated in the ghettos of English, American, and Canadian cities where they acquired a fearful reputation for ignorance, drunkenness, vice, and violence. What the famine Irish actually represented, therefore, was a culture of poverty that had been in the making in Ireland since the late eighteenth century because of the pressure of population on the means of subsistence. That culture produced all the circumstances and most of the values that the British and the Americans were to find most repugnant in the Irish. The crucial point here, however, is that after the famine that culture of poverty was broken up in Ireland by emigration, and the new circumstances created by that breakup allowed for the emergence of other values.

Of the four million Irish, for example, who immigrated to the United States between 1845 and 1900, some 2,300,000 came after 1860. By 1860 there already were in Ireland 3,000 priests and 2,600 nuns for a Catholic population of 4,500,000, or one priest for every 1,500 people and one nun for every 1,700. In 1900 there were 3,700 priests and 8,000 nuns for a further reduced Catholic population of 3,300,000, or a ratio of one priest for every 900 and one nun for about every 400 people.<sup>44</sup> Besides this remarkable improvement in the clerical population vis-à-vis the Catholic population in Ireland, the Irish Church during this period exported a very large number of priests and nuns to help staff churches in the United States and the rest of the English-speaking world.<sup>45</sup> What these crude figures suggest is that the Irish were transformed as a people—men and women alike—into practicing Catholics. The succeeding waves of these recently created

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for that people, if they were but a mob, had died, and their nationality died with them: instead of which that nationality is vigorous today, not only at home, but in many lands abroad—'translated, passed from the grave.'" Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1925), 28–29.

<sup>44</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1861* (Dublin, 1863); *Census of Ireland, 1901* (Dublin, 1903).

<sup>45</sup> "Ireland has not only done a great deal during the past century for the Propagation of the Faith so that her missionaries and nuns and faithful people are now to be found foremost in everything good going on in the various missions of the old and new world but at present the whole country may be regarded as a vast recruiting field for sustaining these distant missions. We have in Kilkenny at present (to mention one instance) an American Christian Brother seeking for young men to join that order in the United States. They have at present 500 Irishmen among the Xtian Brothers of the United States and only 200 of all other nationalities. They have seven Colleges in the United States and the Superiors of them all are Irish. Nevertheless they are called the 'French Xtian Brothers.' At present they desire at least 50 more Irish postulants, as they find that none labour so zealously and efficiently in the American schools, as the Irish Brothers. The Brother has been only a few days in Ireland still he has already got twenty postulants. We have also Nuns of the Holy Cross who is seeking postulants in like manner. She told me that when she was over here two years ago she succeeded in getting *twenty-five* young ladies for her order in the United States, and that they all persevered. She now desires 25 more and has come over to search for them." Patrick Francis Moran to Kirby, Apr. 28, 1876, K.

devotional Catholics brought their cultural and religious needs and corresponding values with them when they emigrated, and in doing so they helped to reclaim those lapsed and nonpracticing "shanty" Irish. The newer, "lace-curtain" Irish found it progressively easier to assimilate to their new environment, because they were objectively less objectionable.

In a word, then, the Irish immigrants in this country in 1900 were a vast improvement over the generation of famine Irish who had arrived before 1860, and that improvement was not evident simply in terms of social behavior. Not only were later immigrants less drunken and less prone to violence, they also had acquired basic educational skills and were actually less poor. Average daily attendance in the Irish National System of Education increased from 100,000 in 1840 to nearly 500,000 in 1900, and this in spite of the fact that the population had been reduced by one-half over that period of time.<sup>46</sup> The literacy figures reveal that in 1861 45.8 per cent of Roman Catholics were unable to read and write, but by 1901 the figure had dropped to 16.4 per cent, a decline that was reflected in comparative literacy figures for various immigrant groups in the United States after the turn of the century.<sup>47</sup> Economic conditions in Ireland, furthermore, improved between 1840 and 1900, though the economy was certainly a very sick one, and the culture of poverty that was broken at the famine was liquidated partly by that improvement and partly by the continuing emigration, leaving the remaining population relatively less poor. No factor, then, was more important in the moral and social improvement of the Irish people either at home or abroad in the nineteenth century than the devotional revolution between 1850 and 1875; yet no aspect of recent Irish history has received less attention.

<sup>46</sup> Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1970), 140, 346. There are no average daily attendance figures before 1852. In 1852 the number of children on the rolls was 544,604, and average daily attendance was 282,575; the number of children on the rolls in 1840 had been 232,560. I have, therefore, assuming there was improvement, calculated average daily attendance at something less than half of 232,560.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 377. These percentages, of course, are for that portion of the population over five years of age. See also William D. P. Bliss, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York, 1908), 598. "The total illiteracy of immigrants [to the United States] over fourteen years of age, in 1905, was 26.2 per cent. The females are, in general, more illiterate than the males." The study then cites figures for "the illiteracy of the races contributing more than 2,000 immigrants . . . for the same year." The statistics, presented under the heading "Northern and Western Europe (Chiefly Teutonic and Celtic)," are as follows: Scandinavian 0.6; Scotch 0.7; English 1.3; Bohemian and Moravian 1.7; Finnish 1.8; French 2.7; Irish 3.8; German 4.2; Dutch and Flemish 5.3; Italian (North) 14.0; Average 3.7.