

## NEWMAN AND THE IRISH BISHOPS

MARVIN R. O'CONNELL

*What was the background to Newman's rectorship of the Catholic University in Dublin? In 1845 the British government proposed to establish three non-denominational colleges in Ireland; some of the Irish bishops felt that it would be possible to work out a *modus vivendi* with the government. A slight majority of the bishops, however, opposed these so-called "godless" colleges and voted at the Synod of Thurles in 1850, to found a Catholic University in Ireland—a country that had been repeatedly decimated by poverty and oppression, and a few years earlier the potato famine (1845-48).*

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The town of Thurles lies in the center of what its inhabitants for untold centuries have proudly called the Golden Vale, the heart of County Tipperary, an inland county which contains some of the most fertile and picturesque countryside in all of Ireland. Perhaps 130,000 people live there today, about 8000 of them in Thurles. The contemporary reputation of this market town rests largely on its boast to have been, more than a century ago, the birthplace of the Gaelic Athletic Association. This organization has been a prime promoter of those traditional Irish sports, Gaelic football—a variant of conventional soccer—and Hurling, a rougher variety of team-encounter which uses a smaller ball and which arms the players with a bat like a hockey stick or—not to put too fine a point on it—like a club, the result of which is not infrequently bruised and temporarily dazed contestants.

It seems likely that on Thursday, August 22, 1850—more than thirty years before their Gaelic sport assumed its organized form—young men who lived in Thurles and its environs, in the late afternoon, after the day's work on farm and in shop was over, gathered in a field adjacent to the town to test their skills and stamina in a game of what may well have been a primitive form of football or hurling. But in the morning of that day, upwards of 10,000 of their neighbors congregated to witness the procession of the clerics that made its way from St. Patrick's College to the co-cathedral nearby. Twenty-seven bishops, attended by the usual collection of acolytes, a riot of black and white and purple, and at the end, vested and mitered, the primate of Ireland, Archbishop Paul Cullen of Armagh, who, once the assembly had settled into their places in the church, sang pontifical Mass. A close associate of Cullen present at the ceremony observed approvingly that the liturgy was carried out "with full solemnity, all the arrangements modeled as far as possible on the plan of the papal chapels, including the music quite in the Palestrina style." This very Roman pomp and circumstance, however, prompted uneasy grimaces among some of the more rough-hewn prelates crowded into the sanctuary; the strains of Palestrina's polyphony sharply reminded them that Dr. Cullen had just come from Rome, bringing with him the pope's special favor. Such was the solemn beginning of the national council of the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Ireland, the celebrated Synod of Thurles.

The bishops met in formal session off and on for some three weeks. Their discussions at first covered a conventional gamut of administrative concerns and aroused little if any contention. Routine decrees about such matters as the demeanor

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of the clergy and the alienation of ecclesiastical property were duly promulgated. Then in the first days of September a debate opened on the question of higher education. Cullen, in his capacity as primate and apostolic delegate of the pope, presided at the meetings, and now he pushed his colleagues hard to approve the founding of a Catholic university. The earlier harmony and unanimity quickly gave way to sharp disagreement and harsh exchanges, testified to by the votes of the several resolutions involved, fifteen to twelve in several instances. A similarly small majority in the end endorsed the project, but the clear division of opinion manifested among those charged to launch such an institution was a dire omen indeed.

Historians are often, and justly, accused of desiring to start every narrative with Adam and Eve. Indeed, sometimes they seem to become so obsessed with “background” that they never get to the point at all. Nevertheless, I think I must inflict on you at least a perfunctory look back from 1850 in order to see why Ireland was the way it was when the bishops were debating at Thurles the feasibility of a Catholic university.

English aggression against Ireland moved by fits and starts across the course of the middle ages. By Henry VIII’s time, in the early sixteenth century, the English presence had been pretty firmly established in Dublin and its environs, so much so that that the six times married monarch, established the distinct Kingdom of Ireland. This entity, operating under what was called the Statute of Drogheda, established an Irish parliament which, however, remained entirely subservient to the king. Of course it was this same Henry who broke with Rome and set up of the Church of England; not surprisingly he did the same in the parts of Ireland he controlled, and so came into being the Church of Ireland, Anglicanism garbed in green. The great difference between the two countries was that while the English were weaned—gradually, to be sure—from the old religion, the Irish held to it with a tenacity which was as much an assertion of their Celtic separateness and their nascent nationalism in the face of an aggressor as it was born of a genuinely religious conviction. The Church of Ireland was never more than a foreign antibody that sucked up the blood and treasure of a conquered people.

Henry VIII’s daughter, the first Elizabeth, commissioned a series of bloody campaigns that little by little expanded English sovereignty beyond the pale of Dublin, until it enveloped virtually the whole island. During the century that followed, the subjugation and degradation of Ireland became complete. First a calculated policy was adopted whereby colonists, mostly from Scotland, were settled on lands seized from the natives, especially in the six counties in the northeast. These people were so-called non-conformists, Presbyterians most of them, and so looked upon askance by those who belonged to the Anglican Church of Ireland. But the mutual antipathy of these two groups was mild compared to their common disdain and hatred for popery and the backward natives who stubbornly adhered to it. There emerged a two pronged Protestant ruling class: the hard-headed Calvinist oligarchs around Belfast, and the landed Anglo aristocracy and gentry. Any resistance by the disenfranchised and exploited masses was put down with prompt barbarity. In 1649, the ruthless and fanatical Oliver Cromwell, who had already beheaded an anointed king, came personally to Ireland, and left behind him a trail of massacre and mayhem and smoking ruins. And forty years later, when the Catholic king James II had been driven from the English throne, he tried to recoup his fortunes with the support of the hapless Irish,

only to be defeated in the decisive battle of the Boyne by his usurping son-in-law, William III. William hailed from Holland and belonged to the ancient noble house of Orange. Behind his back he was often called “Dutch Billy,” but to his face glasses were often lifted in the famous, or infamous, Orange toast: “To the immortal memory of good King William III, who saved us from popery, slavery, and wooden shoes.” That last phrase has always puzzled me, since I assumed that wooden shoes had been the common footgear of Hans Brinker and the other Netherlanders I had heard about in my boyhood. However that may be, Dutch Billy sought to pacify the Irish masses with considerable concessions to their religious and civic aspirations, but to no avail: the Protestant parliament in Dublin imposed instead draconian anti-Catholic legislation upon the ill-starred majority in Ireland, the wicked penal laws, to which the king weakly acquiesced. So perhaps it may be said that the bigoted Orange Lodges that flourish to this day in the Six Counties near Belfast are the descendants not so much of William of Orange as of the minority of Anglo- and Scotch-Irish who wanted above all to secure the permanence of their political and economic domination over the natives.

Indeed, the anti-Catholic legislation in England itself was harsh enough, but there it was directed at a tiny minority of the population. In Ireland, by contrast, the engines of persecution and discrimination were stoked up by ten or twelve percent against the rest. And just across the narrow waters lay an imperial power ready to dispatch another Cromwell if need be. The seventeen hundreds therefore ushered in a dreary and dangerous time for Irish Catholics. The penal laws bore down upon every facet of their lives. Their property was routinely confiscated, they were forbidden to pass on their patrimony to their heirs, their children were denied education altogether except in Protestant schools where they were constantly harassed by proseletyzers, their priests were hunted down, they were evicted from their pathetic little plots at the whim of an Anglo-Protestant landlord, their places of worship could not have a steeple—they were always called chapels to distinguish them from the Church of Ireland’s churches—their language was proscribed, they could not enter any of the professions, they could not even own a horse worth more than a few pounds, and, needless to say, they could not vote or hold any office in their own country, because a condition of doing so was the swearing of an oath that explicitly denied the ludicrous doctrines and practices of popery, like the Real Presence in the Eucharist and veneration of the Virgin Mary. Meanwhile the Protestant landowners, many of them absentee, batted fat, as did the northern businessmen. They owed nothing to the tenants who labored on their estates or worked in their shipyards and who sought what consolation they could in song and ancient legend—

The minstrel boy to the wars has gone, in the ranks of death you’ll find  
him. His father’s sword he hath girded on and his wild harp slung behind  
him. Land of song, said the warrior-bard, though all the world betray thee,

One sword at least thy right shall guard, One faithful harp shall praise thee

—consolation in such stirring words and memories, but, alas, the despair was assuaged more commonly in a glass of whiskey. Thus it was that the proper people in Dublin and Cork and Limerick—and more importantly in London—could argue that the Irish Celts were a perverse race, given to drunkenness and superstition. And consistent with what had happened before, what little bursts of resistance to this depraved regime

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may have emerged were put down with the éclat appropriate to a genuinely imperialist mastery. For the next verse to Thomas Moore's ballad begins: "The minstrel fell."

Even so, as the eighteenth century wore on, the widespread philosophical Enlightenment, with its commitment to a more liberal view of human nature, began to have an effect within the Irish ruling class. Among the better elements of the Protestant ascendancy a kind of crisis of conscience occurred as they soberly analyzed—in the best style of Enlightenment mathematical reasoning—the absurdity and injustice of maintaining a system which oppressed eighty-five percent of the population. Their brothers and cousins, perhaps not so sensitive or so intellectually sophisticated, nevertheless recognized that the sullen masses remained as potentially dangerous to their privileged status as ever. Moreover, the century of the Enlightenment had stoked down the confessional fires that had motivated the likes of Cromwell and William III. Nor did the revolution of the American colonies in 1776, successful in the end, fail to make a strong impression on the mandarins at Westminster and Dublin. Even more so did the Revolution of 1789 in France, which appeared to demonstrate the fearful power involved when a whole disgruntled people were mobilized against their traditional rulers, the awesome *levée en masse*. It was therefore not altogether coincidental that in Paris on January 21, 1793, King Louis XVI was sent to the guillotine, and a few months later the Protestant parliament in Dublin passed a Catholic Relief Act by a two to one margin. The new law enabled the huge majority of Irishmen to bear arms, to become members of corporations, to hold minor offices, to matriculate at Dublin University (but not take a degree), and to enter the professions, including the officer corps in the army. Even a seminary was provided for, and so for the first time prospective priests need not sneak abroad for their training. But some of the old prejudice remained enshrined: for instance, a Catholic soldier could indeed wield an officer's baton but he could not be promoted to the rank of general. Yet in the long run the most important provision in the new legislation was the granting of the franchise to modestly landed and tax-paying Catholics. To be sure, they could not take seats in parliament or accept government jobs—the obnoxious oath remained in force—but many of them now had the vote which, as things turned out, proved the ascendancy's crucial miscalculation.

John F. Kennedy once referred to "the revolution of rising expectations" as a way of explaining how civic or political improvement often sparked demands for quicker and more radical amelioration. Perhaps something of the sort accounts for the rebellion that broke out in County Wexford only five years after the passage of the Catholic Relief Act. The rebels had counted on aid from revolutionary France, but that aid never came, and British troops—under the command of the same General Cornwallis who had surrendered to Washington at Yorktown seventeen years before—easily put the insurrection down. So the heroes of '98, including Lord Edward Fitzgerald and the fighting priests Fathers Michael Murphy and John Murphy, joined the pantheon of failed warriors and minstrels who had fought in vain to set Ireland free and about whom songs were sung and stories told around a thousand Irish peat-fires. Wolfe Tone, the rebellion's organizer, was captured and sentenced to death by hanging, but before the noose could be fitted he slashed his own throat. His message had been simple: "The truth is," he said, "I hate the very name of England, and I will hate her always."

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One direct result of the Rising of '98 was a decision, long contemplated by British statesmen, to put an end to the separate Irish entity, as had been done with regard to Scotland a century earlier. By virtue of the Act of Union of 1800 the Kingdom of Ireland was no more, absorbed now into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Dublin parliament was suppressed, and instead a hundred seats in the House of Commons in London, out of a total of 600, were assigned to Irish constituencies. The reasoning seems to have been that closer political ties between the two islands might promote better order in Ireland and perhaps mitigate some of the hatred Wolfe Tone preached to the day of his self-inflicted death. What it certainly did accomplish was to enmesh Irish politicians and, inevitably, Irish ecclesiastical leaders in the large arena of British partisan politics.

In accord with the limited franchise then in effect in both Britain and Ireland, the fact that, since the relief act of 1793, more than 30,000 Irish Catholic men could vote in parliamentary elections was significant in itself. At first, however, the impact of these numbers was little felt. There was no secret ballot in those days, and the old ascendancy landlords had no difficulty in overawing their tenants into voting as they, the landlords, directed. And then the burly figure of Daniel O'Connell strode on to the scene. This eloquent lawyer's achievement was to mobilize a whole people who had no resources except their own brutish poverty and their hope for a better life. Through twenty years of agitation which stopped just sort of rebellion, through many mistakes made and lessons learned, O'Connell forged a series of Catholic Associations into a tough, efficient political machine. He was the soul of it himself. His bulky, floridly handsome figure, dressed in a blue coat with a black velvet collar, yellow waistcoat, and white trousers appeared everywhere in Ireland during these years. His powerful voice thundered out from thousands of platforms that the Irish must become men, they must stand and fight—not with guns, indeed, for then they would be shot down as the heroes of '98 had been—but with their unity, their numbers, and the justice of their cause. For financial support he turned to them, the people, and they responded with their pennies, which swelled into thousands of pounds a year. This was the famous Catholic Rent, collected after Mass on Sunday under the supervision of the parish priest, from the poorest people in Europe.

In 1828 O'Connell was ready to challenge the establishment, Irish and British. He declared himself a candidate for parliament at a by-election in County Clare:

I am qualified to be elected and to be your representative. It is true that as a Catholic I cannot and never will take the oath required of members of parliament. Of course I will never stain my soul with such an oath. I leave that to my honorable opponent. He has often taken that horrible oath; he is ready to take it again. I would be rather torn limb from limb than take it. Return me to Parliament and it is probable such blasphemous oath will be abolished forever.

The election was no contest. The enfranchised Catholics, so timid up till now, turned out in their legions, and O'Connell, on his way to claim the seat in the Commons that would be refused him, paused long enough in Dublin to tell the cheering crowds: "What I now say I wish to reach England, and I ask: What is to be done with Ireland? What is to be done with the Catholics? They must either crush us or conciliate us. There

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is no going on as we are; there is nothing so dangerous as going on as we are." Sure enough, at the bar of the House of Commons O'Connell refused the oath and was denied his seat. But the battle had been won. The British politicians understood that if this "King of the Beggars," as they had derisively labeled him, was an apostle of non-violence—in which conviction O'Connell was a precursor of Martin Luther King and Gandhi—not all his compatriots were similarly irenic. The following spring, 1829, the Emancipation Act, granting Catholics in the United Kingdom full civil rights received the royal assent. "O'Connell!" muttered King George IV as he affixed his signature. "God damn the scoundrel!"

To a degree the rest of Daniel O'Connell's career was a prolonged anti-climax. He took his seat, to be sure, in the Commons, as did, thanks to him, many other Irish Catholics. His oratory there livened that stodgy place to say the least. (During one debate he described an opponent as having "descended in a direct line from the impenitent thief upon the cross.") He took up a new crusade, the Repeal of the Union and the restoration of an independent parliament to Dublin, which, of course, could be dominated by emancipated Catholics. But, though still hailed as the beloved Liberator and still capable of arousing to delirium the enormous crowds he addressed at his rallies, the cause of Repeal never quite gained the level of popular excitement or commitment as had that for Emancipation. This may have been due to the fact that, although the old Protestant ascendancy had been checkmated by a new Catholic professional and middle class elite, the lot of the ordinary Irish man and woman had remained as before: poor, nasty, brutish, and short, in Hobbes's famous aphorism. Moreover, within the strictly political sphere, O'Connell, as he grew older and frailer, was confronted by a younger, more aggressively nationalistic generation of leaders who, though they took care not openly to profane the icon O'Connell had become, nonetheless assumed a more belligerent stance toward public affairs than he did. Indeed, at the extremities of this Young Ireland movement, as it was called, were many who disliked O'Connell's close relations with the Catholic clergy and some who advocated violence.

Daniel O'Connell died at Genoa in 1847, famously directing on his deathbed that his body should be buried in Ireland and his heart in Rome. Two years before that, however, a calamity had befallen his country with scarcely a parallel in modern history, a disaster that would push aside all other concerns into the shade. Disquieting news that blight had appeared in the potato crop came first out of Wexford and Waterford. Soon the disease turned up in other counties where severe shortages quickly developed. There was considerable anxiety about this visitation, though most people learned of it with stoical acceptance; the Irish, cruelly dependent upon the potato, not as a staple but as the exclusive element in their diet, were all too accustomed to local failure of a crop and the resultant suffering. Indeed, a government commission estimated that one-third of the population lived in semi-starvation every summer before the new crop came in, even in years when the potatoes were abundant. And hardly anyone was sophisticated enough to understand the worried agronomists who pointed out that the partial blight of 1845 represented a strain of plant disease unknown before and who puzzled over how to treat it.

The summer of 1846 was damp and the hottest in memory. The blight struck the potatoes again, but this time it ravaged the crop all over Ireland. Fields green and

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luxuriant were transformed in a day into black stubble. The cost of potatoes went from two shillings a hundredweight to seven and then to twelve, until they were unavailable at any price. And without potatoes to eat there was nothing to eat. A starving people awaited the harvests of 1847 with foreboding. The disease duly reappeared but not universally, and some dared to hope that the worst was over. The year 1848, however, was a repetition of 1846: the whole potato crop rotted in the fields, and an affliction of unprecedented proportions descended upon unhappy Ireland. A second apocalyptic horseman followed close upon the first. Typhus in various forms was not a stranger to Ireland, but in the midst of pervasive hunger it became a raging pestilence. Its easy victims were a people chronically ill-nourished and now literally starving, whose sanitary conditions, primitive to begin with, had deteriorated to the vanishing point, who wore the same filthy, louse-infested rags day after day and huddled together in any warm place, thus infecting each other. In its more virulent form the disease caused profuse bleeding from the nose and other hemorrhaging; scurvy-like, it was often complicated by jaundice, so that the whole body assumed an eerie orange-brown color and was caked in dried blood.

The intensity of suffering during the Great Famine reached a level that beggared the imagination. Listen to one local magistrate, located near Cork, who described in a letter to the Times of London the scene in one rural area with which he was familiar. Finding a village apparently deserted, he entered a hovel where he saw "six famished and ghastly skeletons, to all appearances dead, huddled in a corner on some filthy straw, their sole covering what seemed a ragged horse cloth and their wretched legs hanging about naked above the knees." On closer inspection they proved to be alive, four children, a woman, "and what once had been a man." Soon two hundred "such phantoms" surrounded the magistrate, most of whom were delirious from hunger or fever: "Their demoniac yells are still ringing in my ears, and their horrible images are fixed upon my brain." In a cabin nearby he found two frozen corpses, half devoured by rats. In another there were seven people lying together, one of them dead, the others without sufficient strength to move themselves or the corpse. He saw a woman, crazed by fever, drag out of her cabin the naked body of her dead daughter, aged about twelve, and leave it in the yard, half covered with stones.

Such accounts could be multiplied many times over. But cold statistics also tell the tale. At least a million Irish died during the famine years 1845-1848, and another million or more suffered permanent disability. During the decade that followed other millions fled their pestiferous homeland for America and Australia and indeed anywhere that could offer any solace. And many of them died too as typhus inexorably followed them and raged through the ships' steerage where they were crowded together. When the Famine struck in 1845 the population of Ireland stood at just under eight million. Today the figure for the Republic in the south and the six counties in the northeast still part of the United Kingdom totals just over four and a half million. No other country in the western world has experienced a decline in population since the mid-nineteenth century; Britain, by contrast, has grown by nearly 400 percent. And what did the English-dominated government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland do in the face of this catastrophe endured by one of its constituent parts? Very little, it would seem, or rather in fairness, I should say, very little given its free trade principles. Private

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relief agencies, notably the Quakers, did yeoman work in behalf of the anguished Irish, but the government, committed to laissez-faire principles, decreed that the global market would solve the problem. Does not that policy have a contemporary ring? One of the most bitter spectacles of the Famine was the embarkation of ships, loaded to the gunnels with Irish grain, sailing out of Irish ports while crowds of starving people watched from dockside. Although the word “genocide” had not yet been invented, there were those, especially among the Young Irelanders, who would have considered it perfectly appropriate. In 1848 some of them tried to mount still another rebellion, but it fared no better than any of the others.

Less than two years elapsed between the pathetic and bungled insurrection of Young Ireland and the gathering of the hierarchy at the national synod of Thurles. The prelates there were all heirs of the centuries of tragedy endured by their country and their faith. All of them presided over jurisdictions ravaged so recently by the Famine, the horrible effects of which still lingered. And, be it recalled, they were sharply divided over the feasibility or desirability of founding a Catholic university. Their debate over this subject had begun five years before, in 1845, when the government proposed to set up three nondenominational colleges in Cork, Belfast, and Galway to serve the needs of young Irishmen, who were prevented by reason of their religion from attending the only university in Ireland, the staunchly Anglican Trinity College, Dublin. Eventually, these so-called Queen’s Colleges would coalesce to form a national university. The proposal made rough political sense as a gesture to the Catholics and to the Presbyterians in the northeast, though a niggardly one at best. Philosophically, however, it challenged the traditional view that a university, for its integrity’s sake, must have theology as an essential element in its curriculum and constitution, as Newman was to demonstrate so eloquently in his opening Dublin discourses of 1852. Daniel O’Connell, a far less subtle man, spoke dismissively of “the godless colleges,” a cachet that caught on with most Catholics, without whose cooperation, the government recognized, the plan could not prosper. Nonetheless, a considerable minority among the bishops favored the idea and sought with some success to secure modifications in the legislation’s final form. Both sides took their case to Rome, where, after the long deliberation characteristic of the Vatican bureaucracy, the Queen’s Colleges were declared out of bounds for Catholics.

Despite this prohibition, the government’s colleges were instituted, though they never flourished during their brief existence. Meanwhile, the bishops at Thurles wrestled with Rome’s strong recommendation that they begin a university of their own. The hierarchy was organized into the four ecclesiastical provinces of Armagh, Dublin, Cashel, and Tuam. Michael Slattery, whom Newman was to find the most courteous and friendly of all the Irish bishops, was archbishop of Cashel and a man known for his moderate ways. Daniel Murray as coadjutor and then archbishop of Dublin for nearly forty years should have been, as head of the diocese encompassing the only real metropolitan area in the country, the leading figure among his colleagues. But he was old and ailing and a notorious Gallican, one, that is, who resisted the centralizing tendencies of the contemporary papacy. The Roman curia’s refusal to endorse the Queen’s Colleges was a stern rebuff to Murray, who had lobbied hard for their acceptance. It was no surprise that when Newman, newly named rector of the Catholic University paid a courtesy call on him, the archbishop of Dublin contrived to be unavailable. During the meetings at

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Thurles, and for many years afterward, the other two archbishops proved to possess the genuinely formidable personalities and the dominant voices.

John MacHale, son of an innkeeper in a remote corner of County Mayo, was seven years old when he witnessed the hanging of his parish priest who had been involved in the Rising of 1798. That grisly event remained fixed in his mind into his old age. He may have tempered the kind of hatred expressed by Wolfe Tone with Christian charity, but he never ceased to be suspicious of perfidious Albion and never relaxed his vigilance against what he perceived to be England's habitual predisposition to treat Ireland unjustly. Educated in the traditional hedge schools, then at a small preparatory academy near his home, and finally at Maynooth, the seminary that was allowed to open by virtue of the Relief Act of 1793, MacHale was the first bishop to be educated entirely in Ireland since the Reformation. He was a man of great, if uneven, intellectual powers, a good classical and Hebrew scholar, fluent in French and Italian as well as in his native Gaelic, in which he published translations of the *Iliad* and the Pentateuch. Till the end of his life he regularly preached one Sunday sermon in Gaelic. Ordained in 1814 he taught theology at Maynooth until, ten years later, he was made bishop of Killala on the rugged and stormy Atlantic coast. Ten years after that he was promoted to the archdiocesan see of Tuam. By then his nationalist sympathies and activities—particularly during O'Connell's emancipation campaign—had earned him the antipathy of the British government, which tried in vain to persuade the pope to revoke the appointment. Those same sympathies, and the forceful way he expressed them, brought him the unparalleled admiration of his compatriots, who happily dubbed him "the Lion of the West." He was an elegant looking man, slender but muscular and athletic, a superb horseman, a figure that exuded authority and command. And he was autocratic, and very hard to work with. Even Daniel O'Connell, who esteemed him, decried MacHale's stubbornness, his proclivity to adhere to a position, once arrived at, even if overwhelming evidence to the contrary were put before him.

Paul Cullen, of County Kildare, was cut out of the same nationalist cloth as MacHale, twelve years his senior. His uncle had been executed for his participation in the Rising of '98, and his father imprisoned and only saved from death through the intercession of a Quaker neighbor. But the crucial moment in the young Cullen's development occurred in 1820 when, at age seventeen, he was sent to Rome to study for the priesthood. He stayed there for nearly three decades. Ordained in 1830, he was assigned to teach Greek and Oriental languages in a papal university, and then became successively vice-rector and then rector of the Irish College. In this latter capacity, the bishops in Ireland increasingly looked to him as their informal agent in Rome, and, since Gregory XVI took a special shine to him—as did the next pope, Pius IX—his services were deemed exceedingly valuable. Among the prelates who kept in constant and cordial touch with Cullen during these years was John MacHale. Like MacHale, he was a slender man and dark-haired, but rather stooped in stature, as though the weight of his responsibilities had borne him down; he had the face of an ascetic and a wary look in his eyes. He suffered from chronic insomnia.

His Roman experience affected Paul Cullen in several interrelated ways. He developed, first of all, into an undeviating ultramontane, holding views of church governance, that is, directly opposed to Daniel Murray's gallicanism. For Cullen that

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assertion of papal prerogatives which marked the mid-nineteenth century was almost an article of faith, the only system that Catholicism could adopt in order to survive in an increasingly hostile world. This conviction was reflected in matters great and small, including the papal flavor that characterized the Mass opening the Synod of Thurles. Along with this intellectual commitment went a propensity on Cullen's part to appropriate the administrative procedures of the Roman curia, at once secretive, authoritarian, and reluctant ever to commit anything to paper. A rather more elevated consequence of his dedication to *Romanità*, however, in all fairness needs to be stressed: Paul Cullen was ever the priest. For him the goal of all his work was spiritual. His ultramontanist had little to do with politics and everything to do with introducing into Ireland a sacramental, devotional, and disciplinary regularity which, as he saw it, was the whole point of the papal revival. And according to his lights he succeeded brilliantly over his thirty years at Armagh and then at Dublin. The remarkable conformity that characterized Irish post-Famine Catholicism until recently, and as notably lacking before that calamitous event as it is today, has been justly dubbed by historians the "Cullenization" of Irish Catholicism.

But in this vale of tears even virtue and the highest aspirations have unintended and negative repercussions. When the archbishop of Armagh died in 1849, Pope Pius IX ignored the recommendations that came to him from Ireland and appointed Cullen to the primatial see—the see founded by St. Patrick himself. The new primate, as Newman shrewdly observed, "was a stranger in Ireland, and the bishops looked at his coming from Rome with jealousy and apprehension." More than that, although unequivocally devoted to the interests of his native land, Cullen, after his long residence in Rome, was in his head, if not in his heart, an Italian. A defining moment for him happened immediately before he came to Armagh, in 1848, the year that popular revolutions broke out across Europe from Paris to Prague to Berlin. In Rome the anticlerical forces led by Giuseppe Mazzini rose against the papal civil government and drove Pius IX briefly into exile. The pope was restored to his sovereignty a year later, but the events he witnessed during that dreadful and anarchic interval left a permanent imprint upon Paul Cullen's mind and imagination. When he learned that Young Ireland had attempted to mount a rebellion at roughly the same time, he concluded—and from this judgment he never swerved—that it was his first duty to resist any movement that fomented civil disorder. Out in the west of Ireland, John MacHale, while he disdained the puerile methods of the youthful rebels, was hardly ready to subscribe to any policy that granted automatic tranquillity to the British and Irish ascendancy.

The Synod of Thurles voted to proceed with the founding of a Catholic university, though, it may be recalled, the ratification of Rome's directive in this regard was far from unanimous. MacHale, however, was among those who supported the measure, even if he did so more to discomfit the British government and its Queen's Colleges than for any more positive reason. And so it was that Archbishop Cullen turned to the most prominent Catholic convert in the English-speaking world. "I first knew Dr. Cullen at Rome in 1847," Newman wrote long after the events, "when he was very civil to me. . . . After he came to Ireland as Archbishop of Armagh, he showed his recollection of me by asking me to preach in the summer of 1850 at the dedication of a church in his diocese." This invitation Newman had had to decline. But "when a

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university was to be founded for Catholics in Ireland, he wrote to consult me on the subject....On April 15, 1851, he wrote to ask me to advise on the best way of setting about it, and invited me to deliver a set of lectures in Dublin against mixed education. He called on me in Birmingham in July of that year, and stayed with us till next day." The upshot was that at the end of 1851 Newman accepted an appointment as rector of the new university and, the following spring, he delivered the memorable lectures Cullen had asked for in the Rotunda on O'Connell Street, the *Discourses* that form the opening section of *The Idea of a University*.

The frustrations began immediately, and the tale of them has been told many times. Distracted first by the Achilli trial and then by the growing discord between his Oratories in Birmingham and London, Newman found the Irish scene gave him little solace. He was treated courteously and even deferentially by most of those he came into contact with. When he first met MacHale, the Lion wrapped his paw around Newman's hand with such vigor that the Englishman was seen to wince. The meeting with the bishop of Cork, however, proved more telling in the long run. "He greeted me with civility to my person," Newman recalled, "but with cold indifference to the project that had brought me to Ireland." The fact was, of course, that not one of the twenty-seven bishops had experienced a university education or had more than a vague notion of what it entailed; seminaries are very different institutions from universities. Many of their lordships, led by MacHale, favored the undertaking only because it provided a means to smite the British government and the "godless colleges." Another party, led by Daniel Murray, had by contrast supported the Queen's Colleges, and, though at the pope's insistence they had agreed to the founding of a distinctly Catholic institution, they had done so with ill-grace. To be sure, one obstacle appeared to have been removed when Murray died in 1852 and Paul Cullen was translated to the prestigious see of Dublin. But Cullen proved to be obstacle enough.

It was not a lack of zeal of office that hampered Cullen's relations with Newman and thus the progress of the university. On the surface the problem appeared to be rooted in the archbishop's mode of administration. To employ not quite respectable contemporary colloquialisms, he was a workaholic and a control-freak. He refused to delegate meaningful authority to any but his own minions. Having spent thirty years working the corridors of power at the Vatican, he had learned to keep his own counsel, to proceed with caution, to take care before committing himself on paper. These were not bad lessons in themselves, but in a driven man like Cullen they assumed paranoid proportions. His secretiveness and procrastination were maddening. Literally months would pass and Newman would receive no reply to communications on matters of pressing concern he had dispatched to archbishop's house. "Of course," he recorded bitterly much later, "I was offended by Dr. Cullen. I could not act because I could not get him to say yes or no to questions which I asked him, and if I acted without asking, then I displeased him." When the suggestion was made publicly—and apparently endorsed by the pope—that Newman should be made a titular bishop as a sign of the importance of the university project, Cullen at first acquiesced and then changed his mind and vetoed the proposal. Newman, who had had nothing to do with the idea, was meanwhile left to writhe in embarrassment as friends sent him gifts of pectoral crosses and other episcopal regalia. No explanation was ever given him or anyone else.

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But debilitating as these traits may have been, they do not of themselves explain why Paul Cullen's policies did more harm than good to a project he had initiated. In fact the archbishop did not want a real university. He wanted a mechanism to manage the unruly Irish Catholic laity, who, in his view, needed constant clerical supervision. When Newman proposed that prominent laymen serve on the university's finance board, Cullen refused, knowing full well that he who pays the piper calls the tune. And so the budget was left to depend on an annual collection taken up in the parishes—from poor people who had not a hope of a university education—and thus controlled by the clerical chancery office. The laymen for their part—specifically the lawyers, other professionals and the small number of country gentlemen, Irish Catholics of influence in other words—not only hesitated to send their sons to the new university but also refused to be associated in any way with an institution so utterly under the sway of the clergy. Even in hiring lay lecturers and professors Newman encountered obstruction from the bishops. Anybody even vaguely associated with Young Ireland was, for Cullen, the wicked Mazzini wearing a shamrock in his lapel. And out in the west, MacHale, the firm handshake quickly forgotten, fretted increasingly that the English rector insisted on putting on staff English intellectuals—actually, there were relatively few—and, even worse, kept describing the university as an institution that would furnish higher education for the English speaking peoples of the British Empire and America. As the old Lion's nationalist juices flowed more hotly and his Gallican suspicions of Cullen matured, his interest in the university dwindled.

During the debate on papal infallibility during the First Vatican Council, the Irish bishops—including Cullen and MacHale—declared their unanimous opinion that the pope was indeed an infallible teacher of faith and morals. Then Jean-Pierre Verot, the French-born bishop of Savannah, Georgia, notable at the council as something of a comedian, rose and said that it came as no surprise that his brethren of Ireland should confess the infallibility of the Holy Father, since it was common knowledge that every parish priest in Ireland was infallible. It was a clever sally, though not altogether fair.

Nor would it be fair to forget the crushing burdens the Irish bishops carried at the moment the onetime Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, came into their midst. When one considers, particularly in this setting, the bittersweet results of Newman's noble experiment in Dublin, one might well be tempted to heap scorn on the heads of the prelates who invited him. And surely they deserve a good measure of scorn. But, even so, one would do well to beware presumption. Most of what is known about the events of 1851-1858 is known through Newman's memoranda and correspondence. For him Ireland during those years meant the university, and so we might be persuaded to conclude from these documents that the rest of Ireland was similarly preoccupied. But that was hardly the case. The Irish bishops, along with the ordinary duties of their office, had to deal with the vestiges of the Famine, a rising tide of evictions, a good deal of political unrest, a surprisingly strong proselytizing campaign by well-heeled English Protestant Bible Associations. Even Cullen, more absorbed in the university project than any of his colleagues, still had to supervise a large archdiocese and maintain careful relations with Dublin Castle, where the English Viceroy, despite the trappings of democracy, wielded virtually absolute power. And all of them had to keep one eye carefully cocked on Rome. They were a rough lot, these Irish bishops, unreconstructed

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clericalists and limited in sophistication, but they were neither stupid nor lazy nor without compassion. It would be presumptuous to conclude that they did not do the best they could to serve their faith and their people or that they were ignorant about the needs and conditions of their own country.

Newman knew nothing of Ireland, or rather what he knew was of the kind he would later designate as notional rather than real. He set foot there for the first time when he was fifty years old, a Victorian gentleman to his fingertips. He was a notoriously poor traveler; any time spent away from Birmingham was a purgatory to him; whether during sojourns in the country houses of wealthy friends or cabined up on his rare visits to the continent in some slovenly hostel, he suffered regularly from boredom, ague, and overall melancholy. Indeed, later he almost rejected the offer of a cardinal's hat for fear of being removed from his home in England. In Ireland it was no different; always uneasy in large companies, he was criticized in the name of public relations for a failure to dine out more often, but when he did he discovered, to use his own words, "I cannot take pleasure in large legs of coarse veal, boiled mutton as bleeding red as in the slaughterhouse, and blood-shot kidneys." He could not sleep on the soft featherbeds provided him: "I am weakened beyond description," he cried in a letter home.

These discomforts were in the long run trivialities, and Newman acknowledged them as such. But in this discussion a larger issue must be addressed. Of course Newman acknowledged in an abstract sort of way the centuries of injustice and persecution visited upon the Irish, mostly by his own countrymen. Certainly he sympathized that millions of the subjects of Queen Victoria, who by right and act of Parliament belonged to the wealthiest and most powerful political confederation in the world, should continue to endure, because of their race and religion, a discrimination as pervasive and a poverty as brutal as that experienced in the outlands of despotic Tsarist Russia. But John Henry Newman of the Oratory could not feel these things in his bones like John MacHale did; he could not imagine that God has chosen him to set all these things aright as Paul Cullen did, through one sleepless night after another.

While in Ireland Newman gained many friends and admirers, some of whom stayed in touch with him even after 1882, when what was left of the Catholic University merged into University College. And well they should have, for Newman left behind not only a literary and philosophical testament with which any discussion about higher education, after a century and half, still has to begin, but also, under the most difficult circumstances, a record of shrewd and enlightened administration of which any university president today could be proud. But those difficulties, between him and the Irish bishops, were perhaps unavoidable, given the time and place and personalities. Kipling's famous aphorism, that "East is east and west is west, and never the twain shall meet," had reference to the immense cultural chasm between European and Asian cultures. But may it not also be confined in this present context within a narrower ambit, to that body of water called the Irish Sea, which, Newman recorded, he crossed fifty-six times during his tenure as rector of the Catholic University of Dublin. Despite so many trips, and so much seasickness, the twain never quite managed to meet.