

14 Newman and Maynooth

The following few pages were offered by way of welcome to the Newman Conference on the occasion of its visit to Maynooth on 25 June 1975. It will be obvious that their contribution to Newman studies is slight indeed, and what they have to say about the college in general or even about Charles William Russell in particular consists more in posing questions than in supplying answers. The links between Newman and the college as an institution were not particularly noteworthy. His visits were infrequent, and on the occasion of the most formal of them, made at the beginning of October 1854 as part of a fact-finding mission in connection with the proposed Catholic university, he even succeeded in getting the name of the president wrong. Dr Renehan appears in his notes as "Dr Kenehan".¹

Newman's personal friendship with one member of the college staff, "my dear friend, Dr Russell", who "had, perhaps, more to do with my conversion than anyone else", is known to all readers of the *Apologia*. Recalling their two meetings during his troubled years between 1841 and 1845 Newman wrote:

I do not recollect that he said a word on the subject of religion on either occasion. He sent me at different times several letters; he was always gentle, mild, unobtrusive, uncontroversial. He let me alone.

The importance Newman attached to these letters may be gauged from the fact that he inserted them almost in full into the text of the *Apologia*. The warmth of an enduring friendship may in turn be gauged from the terms in which he dedicated the 1874 edition of *Loss and Gain* to Dr Russell:



The warm and sympathetic interest which you took in Oxford matters thirty years ago, and the benefits which I derived personally from that interest

are, he says, the reasons why

now that at length I take the step of printing my name on the title-page of this volume, I trust I shall not be encroaching on the kindness you have so long shown me if I venture to follow it up by placing yours on the page which comes next, thus associating myself with you, and recommending myself to my readers by the association.

The story of their relations between Russell's first letter to Newman, written on Holy Thursday, 8 April 1841, and Newman's letter to Russell announcing his reception into the Catholic Church, written on 8 October 1845, has already been told in detail by Father Henry Tristram.² What I would propose to do here is to sketch in the background to the growth of this friendship, by asking a few questions and attempting to indicate what might be the shape of the answers. Firstly, what manner of man was Charles William Russell, intellectually and spiritually? Secondly, how representative was he of the Maynooth of his day? Thirdly, to what extent does an understanding of Russell explain the warm and enduring friendship that developed between him and Newman?

The questions come more easily than the answers, which at best must be highly impressionistic, for, not altogether to our credit, not merely does Russell still await his biographer, but the Maynooth of his day still awaits assessment in regard to its learning and spirituality.

Russell's family had deep roots in County Down, reaching back to 1177 when one Robert de Russell, who had come to Ireland with Strongbow, accompanied John de Courcy in his attack on Ulster and was rewarded with a barony, named in 1316 as the barony of Killough. Killough is where Charles William Russell was born. The family lost heavily in the forfeitures of the seventeenth century, but the property of one branch was preserved, as happened more than once under the penal code, by being held in trust by a friendly Protestant. Charles Russell's grandfather was a son of this family. In 1749 he married Elizabeth Norris. His son, Charles, was a prosperous merchant in Killough, and here Charles William Russell was born on 14 May 1812.³

Little
reasonab
Catholic
middle cl
and that
closely f
Sales.⁴ T
well-know
mistrust o
such as I

Russell
postgradu
teaching
ordained

When v
still far fr
teaching s
Some wer
Church of
this would
years since
eighteenth-
Jansenist,⁵
around in
Catholic s
experiences

Bishop Ch
termed Jan

This first
degree Gal
students, w
the next g
indications
Edmund O'
gone to Rom
staff of the
many prejud
change of

athetic interest which you took in Oxford
ago, and the benefits which I derived
interest
why

ake the step of printing my name on the title-
I trust I shall not be encroaching on the
long shown me if I venture to follow it up by
e page which comes next, thus associating
recommending myself to my readers by the

relations between Russell's first letter to
ly Thursday, 8 April 1841, and Newman's
ing his reception into the Catholic Church,
15, has already been told in detail by Father
would propose to do here is to sketch in the
n of this friendship, by asking a few questions
te what might be the shape of the answers.
of man was Charles William Russell,
ully? Secondly, how representative was he of
day? Thirdly, to what extent does an
l explain the warm and enduring friendship
him and Newman?

more easily than the answers, which at best
onistic, for, not altogether to our credit, not
await his biographer, but the Maynooth of his
ent in regard to its learning and spirituality.
eep roots in County Down, reaching back to
de Russell, who had come to Ireland with
d John de Courcy in his attack on Ulster and
barony, named in 1316 as the barony of
ere Charles William Russell was born. The
e forfeitures of the seventeenth century, but
nch was preserved, as happened more than
ode, by being held in trust by a friendly
sell's grandfather was a son of this family. In
th Norris. His son, Charles, was a prosperous
d here Charles William Russell was born on

Little detailed is known of his early education, but we do have a reasonable idea of the spirituality of the English-speaking Irish Catholics at the end of the penal period, especially of the urban middle class. In particular, we know that they were a reading people, and that their favourite spiritual reading was Richard Challoner, closely followed by Challoner's principal master, St Francis de Sales.⁴ The point deserves some emphasis, in the light of Newman's well-known attraction to the "old Catholics" in England, and his mistrust of what he judged to be devotional excesses in new converts such as Faber and Ward.

Russell entered Maynooth at the age of fourteen. He began postgraduate studies at the age of twenty, and was appointed to the teaching staff at the age of twenty-two. That same year he was ordained priest.

When we come to Maynooth we are on firmer ground, though it is still far from being as firm as might be wished. The first generation of teaching staff of the college were emigrés from the French Revolution. Some were French, some Irish, but all had been formed in the French Church of the *ancien régime*. There is really nothing to indicate that this would imply that they were Jansenists. It is indeed over forty years since it was conclusively shown that the Irish establishments in eighteenth-century France were firmly and consistently anti-Jansenist,⁵ but that has not prevented the word still being bandied around in this context. There certainly was a mark of severity in Irish Catholic spirituality at the time, but it must be traced to the experiences of the penal code, which indeed left the same mark on Bishop Challoner, and not to any influence which may be properly termed Jansenist.

This first generation of emigré professors was inevitably to some degree Gallican. They passed this on to the first generation of students, who in turn provided the second generation of professors. In the next generation, to which Charles Russell belongs, there are indications of a shift. In 1839 there is an interesting testimony from Edmund O'Reilly, who had begun his studies in Maynooth but had gone to Rome in 1830. In 1838 he had been appointed to the teaching staff of the college, and re-entered it, on his own admission, with many prejudices. After a year's experience he confessed to a marked change of mind. In particular, he noted that Gallicanism was almost

dead, and that “the papal infallibility is not looked on in any odious light, and is certainly inclined to by many of the professors”.⁶

In the mid-1850s Archbishop Paul Cullen of Dublin, who had been rector in Rome in O’Reilly’s student days, was not prepared to endorse this favourable judgment made fifteen years before. He believed that Gallicanism was still strong in Maynooth. He complained that it was hard to find evidence, because the professors published so little,⁷ but he did regard it as an indication of Gallican leanings that the staff were distinctly cool towards the proposed Catholic university, so strongly recommended by the Holy See. His judgment may be compared with Newman’s, who also noted the reservations of the Maynooth staff, but added that they were shared by the most cultivated and experienced clergy and laity, and that the reason was a widely-held belief that the university, if attempted, would almost certainly fail, and a belief, by no means confined to the laity, that a denominational university was undesirable.⁸ What has been published on the synod of Thurles shows how close the voting was on the university question,⁹ and every new piece of evidence that comes to light confirms the fact that the bishops were almost evenly, and very bitterly, divided.

Cullen’s opportunity to assert his authority in Maynooth came in 1855, with the publication of the report of the Royal Commission set up on 19 September 1853 to enquire into the affairs of the college. The principal issue he chose to raise was Gallicanism. Matters came to a head at a meeting with the staff held in the boardroom on 22 November 1855. By all accounts — and we have them from both sides — it was a tense and painful occasion.¹⁰

I hope to analyse the merits of Cullen’s case elsewhere. Here it might just be noted that he did not single out Russell for personal disapproval, as he did three of his colleagues, Henry Neville, Patrick Murray, and most particularly George Croll, with whom he had already clashed on a number of issues, notably at the synod of Thurles, where Croll had attended as a theologian. As Newman remarked in a letter to Monsell of 19 November 1862, “no one would deny that moderation was just Dr Russell’s characteristic”.¹¹ Yet when he was appointed president of Maynooth in 1857 the evidence is that for Cullen he was a compromise candidate, chosen to exclude another who was judged to be too close to John MacHale for comfort.

fallibility is not looked on in any odious
 ed to by many of the professors".⁶
 hop Paul Cullen of Dublin, who had been
 y's student days, was not prepared to
 dgment made fifteen years before. He
 was still strong in Maynooth. He
 d to find evidence, because the professors
 did regard it as an indication of Gallican
 re distinctly cool towards the proposed
 ngly recommended by the Holy See. His
 ed with Newman's, who also noted the
 oth staff, but added that they were shared
 experienced clergy and laity, and that the
 elief that the university, if attempted, would
 belief, by no means confined to the laity,
 versity was undesirable.⁸ What has been
 Thurles shows how close the voting was on
 d every new piece of evidence that comes
 that the bishops were almost evenly, and

assert his authority in Maynooth came in
 of the report of the Royal Commission set
 to enquire into the affairs of the college.
 se to raise was Gallicanism. Matters came
 ith the staff held in the boardroom on 22
 accounts — and we have them from both
 nd painful occasion.¹⁰
 merits of Cullen's case elsewhere. Here it
 he did not single out Russell for personal
 ee of his colleagues, Henry Neville, Patrick
 ularly George Crolly, with whom he had
 mber of issues, notably at the synod of
 d attended as a theologian. As Newman
 onsell of 19 November 1862, "no one would
 as just Dr Russell's characteristic".¹¹ Yet
 resident of Maynooth in 1857 the evidence is
 compromise candidate, chosen to exclude
 o be too close to John MacHale for comfort.

Cullen would have preferred Matthew Kelly, whom he described —
 pointedly, for Kelly had in fact been educated at Maynooth — as "a
 very good Holy Roman".¹²

There is room for much further research into many aspects of the
 life of Charles William Russell. The published *Letters and Diaries of
 John Henry Newman* afford some evidence for the continuing
 relationships between the two men, though perhaps not as much as
 might be expected if one considers the warmth of Newman's
 dedicatory epistle to the 1874 edition of *Loss and Gain*. Their
 correspondence is not voluminous, and their visits to one another,
 though regular, were not frequent. They were busy men, and
 undemonstrative. To take just one example, there would seem to be
 room for quite a bit of research into Russell's part in the *Rambler*
 controversy. He ended by seeing the *Rambler* go a way which was not
 his and losing his influence in the *Dublin Review* to Ward, appointed
 editor at the end of 1862, to the dismay of some who would regard
 themselves as moderates.

By this stage there may be the outline of an answer to my first two
 questions: what manner of man was Charles William Russell,
 intellectually and spiritually? How representative was he of the
 Maynooth of his day? The answer to the third question — to what
 extent does an understanding of Russell explain the warm and
 enduring friendship that developed between him and Newman? —
 must be very tentative for the present, but a few points might be made.
 In his very first letter, of 8 April 1841, Russell put his finger on the
 precise point then worrying Newman, namely the question of the
 "dominant errors" which he believed were tolerated by the Church of
 Rome (the precise issue at stake was the doctrine of
 transubstantiation). In the same letter he showed himself to be a man
 of deeply and specifically *religious* concern: "He wrote on Holy
 Thursday, his whole letter breathing a deep love of Christ in the
 Eucharist and assuming Newman felt the same. In this way he at once
 reached Newman's heart."¹³ As they came to know one another, they
 discovered deep spiritual affinities, despite their seemingly diverse
 backgrounds. A last point I would make even more tentatively. I do
 feel that Newman, that very sensitive man, was very sensitive, indeed
 over-sensitive, to the fact that he had not been brought up in a
 Catholic theological tradition, that he was not, so to speak, a "born

Catholic". On certain theological points Russell's reactions were very welcome to him. This is especially noticeable in the correspondence concerning the revision of the *Apologia*, when the exchange of letters almost rises to the level of regularity. It might be noted, moreover, that Newman was at times prepared to stick to his guns despite Russell's hesitations. He may have been sensitive almost to a fault, but this only makes his courage the more admirable. Russell's was the more timid spirit.

I do think there is a worthwhile story still to be unfolded of this friendship between two sensitive and intelligent men, who lived at a time of conflict between a "new theology" and an "old theology", when Christians of their kind were beset with uncertainty and worry to an extent we may be inclined to underestimate in our preoccupation with our own very real problems. The story may be expected to be full of reticences, mirroring the heartfelt quality of Newman's tribute to Russell: "He let me alone."

PATRICK J. CORISH

Notes

1. H. Tristram, *Life of Newman*, 1956, p. 100.
2. H. Tristram, *Life of Newman*, Septemb. 1845, p. 12-18, 3.
3. R. Barry, *Life of Newman*, 12-18, 3.
4. See T. W. Higginson, 71-90.
5. R. Clark, *Life of Newman*, 210-19.
6. O'Reilly, *Life of Newman*, P. J. Corish, 1973, p. 197.
7. It does not appear in Murray's *Life of Newman*, and iv 18.
8. *Autobiography of Newman*, 1845, p. 100.
9. P. C. Barry, *Life of Newman*, xxvi, April 1845, the synod of 1845.
10. A memoir of Newman, Maynooth College, Irish College, Dublin, xxxi, 1973, MacSuibhain, 1973.
11. *The Letters of Newman*, 1973.
12. Cullen to Newman, 1845, Corish, art. 1973.
13. The comment on Newman, 1962, p. 2.

Notes

1. H. Tristram (ed.), *John Henry Newman: Autobiographical Writings*, London 1956, p. 23.
2. H. Tristram, "Dr Russell and Newman's conversion", in *I.E.R.* (series 5), lxxvi, September 1945, pp. 189-200.
3. R. Barry O'Brien, *The Life of Lord Russell of Killowen*, London 1901, pp. 12-18. See also the notice of C. W. Russell in *D.N.B.*
4. See T. Wall, *The Sign of Doctor Hay's Head*, Dublin 1958, especially pp. 71-90.
5. R. Clark, *Strangers and Sojourners at Port-Royal*, Cambridge 1932, pp. 210-19.
6. O'Reilly to Kirby, 23 July 1839 (Irish College, Rome, Kirby Papers, no 30); cf. P. J. Corish (ed.), "Irish College, Rome: Kirby Papers" in *Archiv. Hib.* xxxi, 1973, p. 2.
7. It does seem slightly unfair that Cullen should not have adverted to Dr Murray's lengthy theological essays in *The Irish Annual Miscellany* iii, 1852, and iv 1853, which reveal an essentially ultramontane cast of thought.
8. *Autobiographical Writings*, pp. 323-6.
9. P. C. Barry, "The legislation of the synod of Thurles, 1850" in *Ir. Theol. Quart.* xxvi, April 1959, pp. 131-66. See also Cullen's letters to Kirby during and after the synod: P. J. Corish, art. cit. in *Archiv. Hib.* xxxi, 1973, pp. 34-7.
10. A memorandum by Murray, obviously written shortly after the meeting, is in Maynooth College library. See also Cullen to Kirby, 29 November 1855 — Irish College, Rome, Kirby Papers, noted in P. J. Corish, art. cit. in *Archiv. Hib.* xxxi, 1973, p. 57, and printed from a copy in the archives of Propaganda by P. MacSuibhne, *Paul Cullen*, iii, Naas 1965, pp. 212-13.
11. *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* xx, London 1970, p. 357.
12. Cullen to Kirby, 12 July 1857 — Irish College, Rome, Kirby Papers: cf. P. J. Corish, art. cit. in *Archiv. Hib.* xxxi, 1973, p. 92.
13. The comment is by Meriol Trevor, *Newman, the Pillar of the Cloud*, London 1962, p. 253.

PATRICK J. CORISH