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THE BEGINNINGS OF THE
IRISH COLLEGE

ROME

By

Fr. P.J. Corish.

BOOKS — KEEP DRY

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THE BEGINNINGS OF THE IRISH COLLEGE, ROME

PATRICK J. CORISH

ONE of the most effective reform-decrees of the Council of Trent was that which ordered every bishop to establish in his diocese a college for the education and spiritual formation of candidates for the priesthood, "ita ut hoc collegium Dei ministrorum perpetuum seminarium sit."¹ As this decree was put in practice all over the Catholic world, it gradually removed one of the worst abuses of pre-Tridentine times, the lack of any special institutions for the education of the clergy, and the lack of almost all institutions for their spiritual formation. The church in the future was to find in the diocesan seminary a means of ensuring that the clergy should be imbued with the learning, spirituality and discipline so necessary for their mission in a world shocked to a new seriousness by the Protestant revolt and demanding a more personal and interior approach to the traditional spirituality.

It is needless to remark that in the sixteenth century in Ireland conditions were not favourable to the setting up of diocesan seminaries. But there too the tide of the counter-reformation was flooding, encouraged by every Irish contact with Catholic Europe. An interesting sidelight on how things are developing is provided by a letter from the president of Munster to Walsingham, the secretary of state, dated 14 April 1577:

There are a great number of students of this city [Waterford] in Louvain, at the charge of their friends and fathers . . . by whom the proud and undutiful inhabitants of this town are so cankered in Popery . . . that they fear neither God nor man, and hath their altars, painted images, and candlesticks, in derision of the Gospel, every day in their synagogues . . . Masses infinite they have in their several churches every morning, without any fear . . . ²

¹ *Conc. Trid.*, sess. XXIII, cap. XVIII *de reformatione*.

² Sir William Drury to Walsingham, 14 April 1577. *S.P. Ire.*, Eliz., lviii. 2, printed in RONAN, *The Reformation in Ireland under Elizabeth*, pp. 548-9.

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From this it is obvious that the counter-reformation, seminary-trained priests are active in Ireland as early as 1577. As the number of young men seeking seminary training abroad increased, it was a natural development that they should try to establish their own institutions, rather than seek admission to other seminaries as individuals. Towards the end of the sixteenth century the Irish seminaries abroad make their appearance. They were very struggling foundations, usually begun by the enterprise of an individual, who rented—or in very favourable circumstances bought—a house in some town where the students could attend lectures, and then faced a long battle against debt and misrepresentation. We find these seminaries chiefly in the Spanish dominions, notably at Salamanca in Spain and at Douai in the Spanish Netherlands. These years too saw the beginnings of the Irish seminary in Paris, though here, as in most of these modest establishments, it is difficult to assign any precise year as the “date of foundation.”

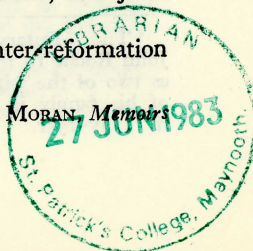
The counter-reformation Papacy was particularly interested in the foundation of national seminaries in Rome, but plans for an Irish seminary went astray. Gregory XIII, that great builder of colleges, had allocated funds for such a project, but the money was diverted to support the war of James Fitzmaurice. This delayed by fifty years the establishment of an Irish college in Rome.

The lack of a Roman seminary had many disadvantages for the Irish church. Church discipline was becoming increasingly centralized, and so a college in Rome would bring the Irish church into the closest possible contact with the counter-reformation, would serve the purpose of representing Rome to Ireland. It would also serve a useful purpose in representing Ireland to Rome, which it would seem was necessary, for among the motives being urged for the foundation of an Irish college was the fact that too many Irish ecclesiastics who made their appearance in Rome were “rude stragglers who excited prejudices against the whole nation by their sad ambition and ignorance.”³

The foundation of the Congregation of Propaganda in 1622 tightened the bonds between countries like Ireland and the Roman see. When Urban VIII became Pope in 1623 he nominated Cardinal Ludovisi protector of Ireland. One of the new protector's first acts was to take steps towards founding an Irish college in Rome. With him were associated two Irish priests, Luke Wadding, a Franciscan, and John Roche, a secular.

Both had very full experience of the life of the counter-reformation

³ See the memorandum from the Barberini archives cited in MORAN, *Memories of Oliver Plunket*, ed. 2, Dublin, 1895, pp. 11-12.



church, and both had already been closely associated with the foundation and administration of colleges. Luke Wadding of Waterford, born of a family which could certainly be classed among the "proud and undutiful inhabitants, cankered in Popery", had gone abroad to begin his ecclesiastical studies in the Irish college at Lisbon. Within six months of his arrival he joined the Franciscan order. He was ordained priest in 1613, and shortly afterwards became a professor in the college of St. Francis at Salamanca. His reputation was such that in 1618 he was chosen by Philip III as theologian to an embassy which was being sent to Rome to urge the promotion of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The embassy was successful to the extent that a commission was set up to study the problem, and Wadding remained in Rome in connexion with this commission. In the event, he remained in Rome until his death in 1657. From the beginning, his talents won him a position of considerable influence, which he used consistently to further the interests of the church in Ireland. In 1625 he founded the college of St. Isidore, planned to be a "seminary" for the Irish Franciscans, on the model of the already-founded St. Anthony's in Louvain. At the same time he was investigating the possibilities of the establishment of a college for Irish secular priests.

John Roche, born in New Ross, grew up also in a house of "cankered Papists", a house where the priest could always be certain of welcome and protection.⁴ As in the case of Luke Wadding, it was very natural that the son of such a household should set out for ecclesiastical studies abroad. John Roche belonged to the first generation of students of the Irish college at Douai. He was ordained priest here about 1600, and for the next six or seven years he was entrusted with the management of the college. In this he got first-hand experience of the difficulties, especially the financial difficulties, of such a precarious foundation. In or about the year 1608 Archbishop Guido Bentivoglio, nuncio in Flanders, took the young Irish priest into his household. Here John Roche remained for the next twenty years, during which he won the full confidence and trust of his patron. He accompanied Bentivoglio to Paris when he was appointed nuncio to France in 1615. Here again he had an opportunity of observing, possibly of helping, the struggles of the Irish college in Paris. In 1621 Bentivoglio was created Cardinal, and returned to Rome. John Roche went with him, and as a senior member of the Cardinal's household was naturally in a rather influential position; so that when in 1622

⁴ The "Datary process" drawn up in connexion with the promotion of John Roche to the episcopate is very informative on his family background, as two of the witnesses examined had personal experience of the hospitality of his family in New Ross. Archivio Vaticano, *Datariae Processus*, vol. 2, ff. 123v-135r.

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⁷ Bentivoglio
II, vol. 99, f.

⁸ Ludovisi
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⁹ *topher Cusack*
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the Irish bishops sought some suitable person to act as their agent in Rome their choice naturally fell on John Roche. In 1624 he was nominated bishop of Ferns and three years later he left Rome to return to his diocese.

When Cardinal Ludovisi decided to make some provision for Irish students in Rome, it was to these two men he turned for advice.⁵ Both could be expected to support the project enthusiastically,⁶ especially as the college in Douai was now in serious difficulties. For the previous ten years, Douai college seems to have been badly disturbed by a very common Irish trouble of the time, which the Roman college was soon to feel, namely dissensions between Old-Irish and Anglo-Irish factions among the students.⁷ While Christopher Cusack, the founder of the college, was in control, it was possible to carry on, but afterwards things disimproved so rapidly that by 1625 the college was in immediate danger of being sold to meet its debts.⁸ This was an additional incentive to an Irishman, especially if he had himself been in charge of Douai college, to urge Cardinal Ludovisi to found a college in Rome.

The Cardinal was in any case persuaded to provide some help for Irish students in Rome. There was a difficulty, in that the formal foundation of a college was expensive, and while the Cardinal's income was princely his benefactions were princely too. He decided that for the moment all he could undertake was to maintain six Irish students in other colleges in Rome. On Wadding's recommendation, six students were chosen. Two were accommodated in the English college, two in the Maronite college, while lodgings for two more were provided somewhere in the city.⁹ The Cardinal was perfectly satisfied with this arrangement, especially as the Irish students attended lectures in the Jesuit Collegio Romano.¹⁰ Cardinal Ludovisi's uncle, Gregory XV,

⁵ So Giunti, Cardinal Ludovisi's almoner. See the document from the Ludovisi archives printed in CLEARY, *Father Luke Wadding and St. Isidore's College, Rome*, Rome, 1925, p. 206.

⁶ See especially chapter vii of Roche's report to Cardinal Ludovisi in Archivio Vaticano, *Nunziatura d'Inghilterra*, vol. 30, ff. 8-42.

⁷ Bentivoglio to Borghese, 12 April 1614, Archivio Vaticano, *Fondo Borghese*, II, vol. 99, f. 135, printed in *Archivium Hibernicum*, iv, 284-6.

⁸ Ludovisi to Guidi di Bagno, internuncio in Flanders, July 1625, Archivio di Propaganda Fide, *Scritture Antiche*, vol. 386, f. 260, cited in BRADY, *Christopher Cusack and the Irish College, Douai*, in *Measgra Mhichíl Uí Chléirigh*, p. 106.

⁹ So Giunti, in CLEARY, *op. cit.*, p. 206. Another document, in *Wadding papers*, p. 168, speaks of two in the English college and two in the Maronite college only, while another, HAROLD, *Vita Waddingi*, cxxvi, speaks of four in the English college and two elsewhere. However, Giunti, the Cardinal's almoner, is more likely to be accurate on a point like this—he paid the bills.

¹⁰ As did all students of the English and Maronite colleges. See VILLOSLADA, *Storia del Collegio Romano*, Rome, 1954, p. 143.

had been the first product of the Jesuit schools to become Pope. During his pontificate he had canonized St. Ignatius Loyola. His nephew was equally devoted to the founder of the Jesuits. Indeed, the chief strain on his purse at the time he was trying to find money for the Irish college was caused by the building of Sant' Ignazio, the church of the Collegio Romano, built at his expense as a memorial of the devotion of the Ludovisi family to the founder of the Jesuits—"alter Ignatium aris admovit, alter aras Ignatio."¹¹

In 1627 Bishop Roche left Rome to return to his diocese in Ireland. From now on Fr Luke Wadding had all the affairs of the Irish students on his hands. There was soon trouble. The Irish, it seemed, were bad mixers. The Jesuit superiors of the English college were forced to expel one of the Irish students for insubordination; from the Maronite college came reports that another was being expelled for drawing a knife on a Maronite student.¹² Wadding decided that it was essential that the Irish students be placed in a house of their own, under Irish superiors.¹³ This decision led to long discussions between Wadding and Giunti, the Cardinal's almoner. There was much totting of figures, but Wadding managed to convince Giunti that no additional money would be required to rent a house near St. Isidore's, where the Irish students could live under an Irish superior. They could attend lectures at St. Isidore's, for which of course no charge would be made.¹⁴ Giunti agreed to put this proposal before the Cardinal.

The Cardinal raised some difficulties. First, he did not like to see the students removed from Jesuit direction. True, he had the highest confidence in Wadding personally, but as yet St. Isidore's had a very uncertain future, and even if it prospered a day must come when Wadding would no longer be in control. Secondly, his finances did not yet allow him to undertake the responsibility of a formal foundation, and what he was now being asked to do looked very like it.¹⁵ Finally, on 24 November 1627, it was agreed that a house be rented opposite St. Isidore's, where the Irish students should live under the superintendence of Fr Luke Wadding. The Cardinal pledged himself to continue his previous subsidy—no more—on condition that he be consulted concerning the admission and dismissal of students, that the rules of the house be presented for his approval, that the Franciscans undertake to maintain six students, a rector and a servant, out of the subsidy he provided, and that the students wear ordinary

¹¹ VILLOSLADA, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-8.

¹² Details from Giunti, in CLEARY, *op. cit.*, p. 206. HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxvi, speaks of troubles, but does not detail them.

¹³ HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxvi.

¹⁴ So Giunti, in CLEARY, *op. cit.*, pp. 206-7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Father Luke Wadding

first product of the Jesuit schools to become Pope. He was canonized St. Ignatius Loyola. His family was devoted to the founder of the Jesuits. Indeed, on his purse at the time he was trying to find money for the building of Sant' Ignazio, the Collegio Romano, built at his expense as a memorial to the Ludovisi family to the founder of the Jesuits—*Ignatius admovit, alter aras Ignatio.*"¹¹

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At this proposal before the Cardinal. Wadding faced some difficulties. First, he did not like to see the Irish students removed from Jesuit direction. True, he had the highest regard for the Irish personally, but as yet St. Isidore's had a very good reputation, and even if it prospered a day must come when it would no longer be in control. Secondly, his finances did not permit him to undertake the responsibility of a formal foundation, and he was being asked to do looked very like it.¹⁵ Finally, in 1617, it was agreed that a house be rented opposite the Irish students should live under the supervision of the superiors. Wadding. The Cardinal pledged himself to provide a subsidy—no more—on condition that he be consulted in the admission and dismissal of students, that he be presented for his approval, that the French maintain six students, a rector and a servant, and that the students wear ordinary

pp. 173-8.
in CLEARY, *op. cit.*, p. 206. HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxvi,
does not detail them.
op. cit., pp. 206-7.

Cominno Amore per i suoi figli.

*Il Nuncio ha fatto una lettera via al Sr. Edmundo, e dice spe-
rar di poterlo v. am., e che non ha ordine di darle
niente per il viaggio o ritorno, anche me dice ho
perso della buona occasione di pagargli, e che a g
hura sarà già in partenza. Il Nuncio di Anagnino
ho meno sav a Narbonne, e le ha fatto in di Ximay
a liene, di liene ad Anagnino, anche parte il tempo lon-
to necessarii per quello che se pretende, e spende il den-
ro che v. am. le faa gratia. V. am. un la sua somma
quondam a daro gli ordini necessarii per quello che molta
se faa, e baccio av. am. a tutti alle lavelle. Don
de v. am. Amore*

*Quando gli ha' per il Sr. v. am.
se comparsa di vederla, e si mol
che la scina in q. conformita. E.
significa il Daga. F. Card. Barbero
J. gli catholici + il Nuncio*

*Quand'è stato per am. con a M. Amore
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*Amore di obbligo
francesco wadding*

Courtesy of the Vatican Library, and the National Library of Ireland.

Letter of Wadding to Francesco Cardinal Barberini
(Vatican Library, Barb. lat. 6483, f. 12v)





*The Immaculate Conception, painted by Wadding's friend Carlo Maratta for
the Lady Chapel in St. Isidore's.*



ion, painted by Wadding's friend Carlo Maratta for
Lady Chapel in St. Isidore's.

clerical dress—the black soutane and *ferraiulo*, until he should order otherwise.¹⁶ The last proviso was not a mere formality. In forbidding the students to wear collegiate dress the Cardinal was emphasizing that he was not, yet at any rate, founding a college.

Wadding accepted these terms, though they were not over-generous, and drew up a set of rules for the government of the house, which were approved by the Cardinal. The supreme authority in the new establishment was to be the Cardinal-protector, under him the guardian of St. Isidore's for the time being, and, in immediate charge, a rector, who was to be a secular priest, though it was added that a religious might be appointed temporarily if no suitable secular priest was available.¹⁷ The remainder of the rules, together with the list of questions a student must answer on admission, and a list of certificates he must produce, which has survived among Wadding's papers,¹⁸ shows that seminary life has not changed in its essentials between the seventeenth and the twentieth century. Finally the house—it cannot have been very prepossessing, for we find it referred to as a *casaccia*¹⁹—was opened to the students on 1 January 1628. Old feuds were apparently forgotten at the English college, for we are told that the English students escorted the six Irishmen in triumph to their new home, and that, unpleasantness forgotten, all sat down together to table and celebrated the occasion.²⁰ There is no mention of the Maronites.

The students settled down under their new rector, Fr Eugene Callanan, a priest of the diocese of Killaloe,²¹ and in discipline and studies showed themselves worthy of their country and their patron.²² The Franciscans stretched the meagre endowment so as to maintain more students than they had contracted for—at one period there were eleven under the roof of the *casaccia*.²³ The news was gratefully received in Ireland. Bishops wrote to thank Cardinal Ludovisi for his assistance and interest,²⁴ and to thank Wadding for his efforts.²⁵

¹⁶ Instrument of agreement, from the Ludovisi archives, in CLEARY, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-5; cf. Giunti, *ibid.*, p. 207.

¹⁷ College rules printed in CLEARY, *op. cit.*, pp. 195 ff., by courtesy of Mgr. Curran. Cf. also HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxvii.

¹⁸ *Wadding papers*, pp. 281-2.

¹⁹ Cf. MAREFOSCHI, *Relazione della visita apostolica del collegio Ibernese*, Rome, 1772, p. 76.

²⁰ HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxvii.

²¹ Giunti, in CLEARY, *op. cit.*, p. 207; *Wadding papers*, p. 249.

²² Giunti, *loc. cit.*; HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxviii.

²³ HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxvii, cxxviii.

²⁴ Archbishop of Dublin and bishops of Ossory and Cork to Ludovisi, 4 April 1627, *Wadding papers*, pp. 246-7.

²⁵ Thomas Strange, O.F.M., to Wadding, Dublin, 5 August 1628, *Wadding papers*, p. 268; archbishop of Cashel to Wadding, Madrid, 20 February 1628, *ibid.*, pp. 257-8; bishop of Ossory to Wadding, 29 July 1629, *ibid.*, p. 303.

"Let there be a holy rivalry between the seminary and St. Isidore's," wrote the archbishop of Cashel, "let suitable young men from all the provinces of Ireland be gathered there." From this he developed a warning, which was also sounded by Bishop Rothe of Ossory more than once:²⁶ "do not let the unruliness of a few ruin another foundation. You know well how near we were this time also to such a mishap had there not been people at hand to warn the Cardinal of what was afoot." The implication, with its reference to the troubles at Douai, is clear. The new Irish foundation is beset not merely by jealousy from the Collegio Romano, but by jealousies of the Anglo-Irish and Old-Irish parties among the students and other Irish ecclesiastics at Rome.

Within a year and a half of its foundation the little community suffered a great loss in the death of the rector, Fr Callanan.²⁷ "Gentle Eugene, God rest his soul," wrote Bishop Roche from Ireland. He went on to suggest to Wadding as rector of "our little college" Fr Michael Galway, "a very good priest" from Cork, who had completed his studies at Douai and was now at Lille. But before this letter had reached him Wadding had appointed Fr Martin Walsh, O.F.M., as rector of the college. Fr Walsh was followed by Fr John Punch, O.F.M.²⁸ These appointments of religious, though in accordance with the college statutes, and certainly having no motive other than the one expressed there, namely the impossibility of finding a suitable secular priest, were unfortunate in that they exposed the fortunes of the college to a controversy now developing in Ireland, which was to be particularly sharp during the next few years, the controversy between regular and secular clergy on points of jurisdiction.

Another premature death brought an even bigger problem. On 18 November 1632 Cardinal Ludovisi died in his episcopal see of Bologna at the age of thirty-seven.²⁹ In his will, dated 11 April 1629,³⁰ he made generous provision for the financial needs of the Irish foundation. He ordered his heirs to buy for the college the house which up to this had been rented, endowed it with funds producing an income almost twice his previous annual grant, and in addition left to the college some landed property in Castelgandolfo. The bombshell was

²⁶ Bishop Rothe to Wadding, *cit.*; same to archbishop Lombard, 17 September 1625, *Wadding papers*, p. 104.

²⁷ HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxvii, says he died within six months of the opening of the house, but this must be a slip, for Wadding sent the news to Bishop Roche in a letter of 28 July 1629. Cf. Roche to Wadding, January 1630, in *Wadding papers*, pp. 332-3.

²⁸ HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxvii.

²⁹ VILLOSLADA, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

³⁰ Relevant clauses of the will printed in MAREFOSCHI, *op. cit.*, p. 76, and cf. HAROLD, *Vita*, cxxviii.

the college and left stranded in Rome without a penny, that he was living in the city in great misery, and could produce numbers of witnesses to his injustices.

From an examination of the available lists of the first students of the college³⁶ it seems clear that the statement is true that four of the students in the college at the time the petition was handed in were in fact from Munster. It is equally clear that there was a heavy Ulster preponderance (four out of six, though two of the four are certainly Anglo-Irish, probably both from Meath) in the original six students of 1628, who were, it will be remembered, chosen on Wadding's recommendation, so that the Munster strength in 1633 seems purely accidental. Among the six students originally chosen by Wadding we find the name "Terentius Kelly, Ultoniensis", and a very little elimination establishes him as the person referred to in this charge against Wadding.

His statement that he had been turned out without a penny was false, and the records of Propaganda could show it to be false, for on 8 May 1628 the Congregation had decided to grant money for their journey to Ireland to all students leaving St. Isidore's or the Irish college, and had made specific grants for this purpose to two students of St. Isidore's, who are not named, and to "Terence Kelly, priest, student of the Irish college."³⁷ As regards the charge of unjust expulsion, it is difficult to be certain if he was in fact expelled. The fact that he is stated to be a priest does not necessarily imply completion of his studies, and his leaving the college a little over four months after its opening seems to suggest a certain irregularity in his departure. All in all, it is difficult to refrain from judging Terence Kelly harshly. It is, of course, not an historical judgment to pronounce on a man's actions in the light of what he is known to have done later, but Terence Kelly's subsequent career, even though he became vicar-general of his native diocese of Derry, does suggest that he was quite capable of spending the money he had received for his journey home and then claiming that he had never got it.

The rights and wrongs of the case, however, were not of primary importance. The complaints against Wadding drew attention to Irish racial dissensions at a time particularly unfortunate for the prospects of the college remaining in Irish hands. An appeal of the seven students of the college, addressed to the Congregation of Propaganda, asking

³⁶ Cf. CLEARY, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-11; *Wadding papers*, pp. 282-3; Archivio di Propaganda Fide, *Scritture Antiche*, vol. 294, f. 428, printed in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xii. 190.

³⁷ Archivio di Propaganda Fide, *Atti*, vol. 6, f. 55, no. 1, printed in CLEARY, *op. cit.*, p. 203, from MAREFOSCHI, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

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³⁸ Archivio
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³⁹ Francis
pp. 78-9.

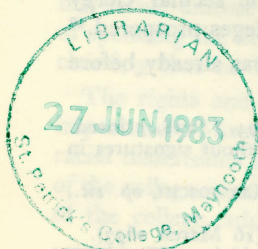
⁴⁰ Archivio
⁴¹ *Ibid.*,
xii. 192-3.

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⁴³ Archivio
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the Rota. It must have seemed to the Roman authorities that considerations of the interests of the Irish church as well as the letter of the law favoured handing the college over to the Jesuits. However, Wadding and Prince Ludovisi contested the case. No full account of the evidence is available, but from a fragment printed by Marefoschi⁴⁴ and the testimony of Giunti, almoner of the late Cardinal, printed by Cleary⁴⁵ from a document in the Ludovisi archives which seems to be a statement prepared in connexion with the case, it is possible to follow the line of argument pursued by the parties. Wadding and Prince Ludovisi tried to show that the Cardinal had taken the initiative in all his actions concerning the college, while their opponents maintained that he was pushed from one step to another by the initiatives of Wadding. This evidence would seem to bear primarily on the question of undue influence being brought to bear on the Cardinal in making his will, and might also be interpreted as a suggestion that what he had done, if not strictly a canonical foundation, might be equated with such a foundation. There were too many weak points in the argument to convince a court which had to decide on the letter of the law. In fact, Wadding could not prove a canonical foundation from which he could claim acquired rights. Taking all the circumstances of the case into account, a decision in favour of the Jesuits was inevitable.

It was given to this effect on 13 November 1634, and published on 19 January 1635.⁴⁶ The Jesuits took possession of the college on 8 February 1635.⁴⁷ The authorities in Rome must have felt well content that the Irish students, who now seemed to have a reasonably secure financial future, would also gain stability under Jesuit discipline and the lectures of the Collegio Romano. They may not have been so well placed to appreciate fully the loss in transferring the college from Irish to Italian supervision.



⁴⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 76-8.

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 205-8.

⁴⁶ Sentence of the Rota in CLEARY, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-10, from MAREFOSCHI, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-2.

⁴⁷ MAREFOSCHI, *op. cit.*, p. 11.