The Irish Colleges in France

Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich

CCB
772

VERITAS

CC 207.44 OF1 CCB 722

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First published 1990 by
Veritas Publications
7-8 Lower Abbey Street
Dublin 1
in association with the
General Humbert Summer School

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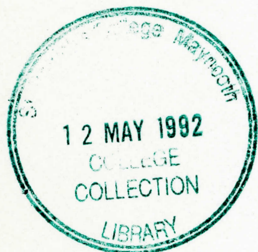
ISBN 1 85390 156 3

The publishers are grateful to the Estate of Pádraic Colum for permission to reproduce his poem 'The Old College of the Irish, Paris'.

Cover design by Eurotext Ltd, Dublin
Typesetting by Printset and Design Ltd, Dublin
Printed in the Republic of Ireland by Fineprint Ltd



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Foreword

This lecture was delivered by His Eminence, the late Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, in Castlebar, County Mayo, during the General Humbert School week in August 1988. With great relish, the Cardinal informed his audience, which included the Minister for the Environment, Mr Pádraig Flynn, that his lecture on 'The Irish Colleges in France' would run the traditional Maynooth length of fifty-five minutes. In reality, the lecture took about an hour and twenty minutes to deliver, showing that the Cardinal's sense of timing had relaxed somewhat since his move in 1977 from St Patrick's College, Maynooth, to Ara Coeli in Armagh as Primate of All Ireland.

However, as the Humbert School attendants listened to the powerful northern cadences of the Cardinal's voice — at times intense and reverential, at other times humorous and detached — there was a growing realisation in the audience that he was presenting a paper of major academic and cultural significance. In effect, the Cardinal was sharing publicly his lifetime's interest in a subject that deserves wider public appreciation.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the enormous effort the Cardinal put into this scholarly address and also for the great support he gave to our activities generally, particularly in Lacken and Killala.

This is also an appropriate place to acknowledge the generous support received by the school from Joe and Kathleen Kennedy which made the lecture possible. As an émigré from Mayo, Joe will appreciate the Cardinal's lecture as a lively and important contribution to the literature of the Irish diaspora.

Thanks are also due to Father Martin Tierney and his staff at Veritas for their enthusiastic and professional presentation of the manuscript in a permanent form that does justice to the quality of the lecture and to the labours in exile of the Irish who emerge as the heroes of the Cardinal's absorbing chronicle.

John Cooney
Director, General Humbert School

1

Beginnings and growth

France was, above all other European countries, the great training-ground of the Irish Catholic clergy during the penal times. This paper will attempt to cover the foundation and growth of the Irish seminaries in France, some set up for the training of diocesan clergy, some instituted by the religious orders. It will confine itself for the most part to the colleges in France, with special reference to the largest and most productive of them, the Irish College in Paris. However, it will have to cast an occasional glance also at some of the Irish seminaries outside France, both in order to place the foundation of the French group of seminaries in its proper context and for purposes of comparison.

The Irish colleges which were set up in France from the end of the sixteenth century on, like their counterparts in Spain and Portugal, in the Spanish Netherlands, in Italy and further afield, owed their origin to the coming together of two factors which emerged from the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I. There was, first of all, the decree passed in the twenty-third session of the Council of Trent in July 1563 that each diocese was to set up, in a house specially chosen by the bishop, a course of training for aspirants to the priesthood. Side by side with this decree, there was, secondly, the prohibition on Catholic schools, not to mention seminaries, in the Queen's dominions from early in Elizabeth's reign. If seminaries had to be set up, and it was impossible to do so in Ireland, there was no way out but to set up Irish seminaries abroad. The Irish colleges on the continent were therefore all set up in the first instance as seminaries to train young Irishmen for the Catholic priesthood.

Of course an occasional Irish student had made his way to one of the continental universities centuries before, and many had studied in Oxford, especially during the middle ages. But from the time that Catholic schooling became impossible over much of Ireland in the sixteenth century, one finds small groups of Irish students beginning to attend some of the universities of Spain or France or the Spanish Netherlands: e.g. Louvain, already during the second quarter of the sixteenth century, Salamanca from the 1570s on (i.e. two decades before it had an Irish college),

Lisbon from around the same time and so on. Usually these groups consisted of only a handful of students, six or seven at most, with a priest in charge to enforce discipline and ensure that they attended classes in a local university or other college.

In 1577 Sir Henry Sidney, Queen Elizabeth's Lord Deputy in Ireland, writes to the Queen from Kilmainham:

> There be some principal gentlemen that have sons in Loain, Doo-e, Rome and other places where Your Majesty is rather hated than honoured.

It was an early warning which is going to be repeated often and in even more forthright language later.

Obviously it's difficult to decide when one of these groups of Irish students in a continental city had enough members and sufficient stability to deserve to be called a seminary.

The fourth centenary of the Irish College in Paris was celebrated in 1978 on the assumption that when Fr John Lee, a Dublin priest, and six clerical students arrived there to attend the Collège de Montaigu in 1578 and called themselves 'The Community of the Irish students in Paris', this marked the birth of the Irish College. But they didn't have the 'little house of their own' which they sought for another twenty years — first in rue St Thomas and later in rue de Sèvres. They were fortunate enough to receive considerable financial support from a generous nobleman, Jean de L'Escalopier, president of the parliament (i.e. high court) of Paris, and by the early seventeenth century they certainly had a college of their own with twenty-four priests and students. Something similar happened under the Clonmel Jesuit, Fr Thomas White, in Salamanca in 1592, under the Wexford man, John Howling, in Lisbon in 1593, and under the Meath secular priest, Fr Christopher Cusack, in Douai in 1594 and in some towns in the modern Belgium later. So far the founders were mainly Anglo-Irish, and townsmen to boot, members of merchant families that had trading links with the continent.

From the birth of the Irish College, Paris, in 1578 on, more than thirty Irish colleges were set up throughout Western Europe before the end of the seventeenth century. No new college was established after 1700 and most of them came to an end during the French Revolutionary Wars or Napoleonic Wars. Six cities or towns in Spain possessed Irish colleges — Salamanca (1592), Compostela (1605), Seville (1612), Madrid (1629), Alcalá (1657) and

Lisbon (which was in Spain when the diocesan college was started in 1593). Nine cities and towns in France had Irish colleges — Paris (1578), Bordeaux (1603), Rouen (1612), Charleville (1620), Poitiers, Sedan, Toulouse (1659), Nantes (1689) and Boulay (1700). Later, for various reasons, the number of individual Irish colleges on French soil reached the record number of fourteen, of which half were for the secular clergy. The Spanish Netherlands originally had five towns with Irish colleges: Louvain, which had three, together with one each in Antwerp (1600), Tournai (1616), Lille (1610) and Douai (1594). Lille and Douai were in the Netherlands until the Wars of Louis XIV in the second half of the seventeenth century, and Douai had three Irish colleges at different times. That made nine Irish colleges in five towns of the Spanish Netherlands during part of the seventeenth century, but the number was reduced by the extension of the borders of France to five colleges in three towns for much of the eighteenth century.

There were five colleges in Italy, four of them in Rome and one in Capranica (1656). The only college in the Empire was in Prague (1631), and for a period of roughly twenty years an Irish Franciscan college was set up at Vielun (1645) in Poland.

Obviously any state which had broken with Rome at the Reformation wouldn't tolerate an Irish seminary. Hence one doesn't expect to find an Irish college in any of the North German or Scandinavian states, but it is surprising that none were established in Lorraine or in any of the Italian states outside Rome. There were also little groups of Irish students in several towns in Southern France — Auch, Agen, Cahors, Condom and Périgueux — but none of them ever developed into a seminary.

In the case of a college for the secular clergy, it was the initiative of some diocesan priest that usually set it up and often kept it going and it was meant for all the Irish dioceses. A college for the regular clergy, on the other hand, was normally set up by the Irish province to train young men of a particular order and its establishment involved close collaboration between Ireland and Rome.

Obviously, a city or town could have more than one Irish college. As already mentioned, Rome had four — the Irish Franciscan college of St Isidore (1625), the Irish College for diocesan clergy (1628), the Augustinian Priory of San Matteo (1656) and the Dominican Priory of Saints Clement and Sixtus (1677). All four have continued, though not always without

interruption and not always on the same site, down to the present day. Louvain had three Irish colleges — St Anthony's for Franciscan students (1607), the Pastoral College for Irish secular students (1623) and Holy Cross for Irish Dominicans (1626). Paris had two Irish colleges during the latter part of the eighteenth century, one for students already ordained and one for younger men proceeding to the priesthood. In addition, about a hundred and fifty Irish students resided during that half-century in the seminary of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet — this is the church in Paris which has been taken over as their headquarters by the followers of Archbishop Lefèbvre. Douai had three colleges for Irish students in the early part of the seventeenth century, all now gone, and Lisbon had two, a diocesan one founded in 1593 and a Dominican one founded in 1659. Only the Dominican one has survived — the diocesan one is now a sad ruin.

Of the sixteen secular colleges which existed at different periods only *one* is now an Irish seminary, i.e. the Irish College, Rome. But others were seminaries for Irish clerical students until comparatively recently. The Irish College, Paris, was in use until the beginning of the Second World War but since the end of the War it has been loaned to the Polish ecclesiastical authorities. The Salamanca college was an Irish seminary until the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s; its fine building was handed back by the Irish bishops to the Spanish authorities in the 1950s and it now serves as a hostel for university students. In lieu of the building the Spanish Government set up two annual scholarships for Irish university students studying in Spain. The Bordeaux college was Irish property until about a century ago, although no Irish students returned to it after the French Revolution. As far as I could make out when I visited it, the old building in the rue du Há is still standing. I think one of the towers belonging to the Irish College in Nantes has survived, though I failed to find it on my last visit there. The college for secular students in Douai was rebuilt about 1750 and is now a garage and courtyard in the rue Hyacinthe Corne. The Pastoral College in Louvain has been replaced by a bank in the rue Vital Decoster.

Of the colleges belonging to the religious orders, far more have survived. St Isidore's and San Clemente in Rome are still under the Irish Franciscans and Dominicans, while St Anthony's, Louvain, which was lost to the Franciscan Province during the French Revolutionary era, was recovered by the Irish Franciscans

in 1926. They still have a small community there but most of the building has now become the Institute for European Affairs. A small group of Irish Dominicans still occupies Corpo Santo in Lisbon and the Irish Augustinians are now in charge of the Irish national church in Rome, St Patrick's, which is my titular church.

2

Priests and clerics

From the latter part of the seventeenth century on, the Irish College, Paris, was by far the most important of the Irish colleges abroad from the point of view of numbers. Before the French Revolution more than two-thirds of all Irish clerical students abroad were in France and more than half of those in France were in Paris. In the mid-seventeenth century they were scattered around various establishments in the city. In 1676 two Irish priests, Malachy Kelly and Patrick Maginn, obtained possession of the old medieval Collège des Lombards and eleven Irish students went into residence there. By 1685 thirty Irish students were living in it, though a majority of Irish students in Paris were still residing in other communities in the city. When clerics as well as priests were permitted to share it in the early eighteenth century, its numbers increased rapidly — 100 in 1736, 165 in 1762. A second building therefore became necessary and in 1769 the present building in what is now called the rue des Irlandais beside the Pantheon was erected for non-ordained students. The two colleges remained in use until the Revolution. The building in the rue des Irlandais was the only one to reopen in the nineteenth century; the old Lombard College was never recovered. Only its church now survives in the rue des Carmes — it is used for Sunday Mass in the Syrian Rite and is now called l'Eglise Saint Ephrem des Syriens. The remainder of the college was knocked down more than forty years ago to provide space for road-widening and for a building scheme. It was a pity it had to go, for it served Ireland well for more than a century. The Great Book of Lecan was preserved there from the beginning of the eighteenth century until 1787. In the crypt under the chapel are the mortal remains of several illustrious Irishmen — Dominic Maguire (1707), the immediate successor of St Oliver Plunkett and my nineteenth predecessor as Archbishop of Armagh; Archbishop James Lynch of Tuam (1713), Michael Moore, the only Catholic Provost of Trinity College and the only Irish Rector of the University of Paris, and Andrew Donlevy, author of the best-known Catechism in Irish.

The Nantes College was the second largest of the Irish continental colleges with a student body usually fifty to sixty strong and sometimes up to eighty. About half of that number were generally to be found in Salamanca, Antwerp, Louvain (Pastoral College), Douai and Bordeaux. At the other end of the scale came very small colleges like Toulouse, Compostela, Alcalá, Seville, Lille, Lisbon (Diocesan College) and a few others, which usually had only eight or twelve students. Strange to say, the Irish Diocesan College in Rome belonged to this category and during the seventeenth century it usually had only eight students, two from each province. Although the college now looks on St Oliver Plunkett as its patron, the saint at one time proposed that the building should be sold and the proceeds used to send Irish students to the College of Propaganda Fide. The Franciscan colleges in Louvain, Rome and Prague usually had about fifty in each community and the Dominican colleges in Louvain, Rome and Lisbon usually had between twenty and thirty. If you tot them all up, the result comes to almost six hundred, which was the total number of priests and clerics in all the Irish colleges abroad on the eve of the French Revolution.

A substantial proportion of the students in the colleges catering for the secular clergy were already ordained before leaving Ireland. This helped to defray the expenses of their education, as each was able to accept Mass stipends or become chaplain to some noble family. They learned enough Latin in Ireland to say Mass and read the Breviary and were then ordained on the understanding that they would go without delay to the Continent. But the system was open to abuses. Some of the priests, once they were ordained, postponed their departure from year to year. When they finally went, they were very hard to discipline, often being men of thirty or more. In 1764 the Armagh Chapter reported that two of the three priests ordained in Armagh in the previous year had not yet gone abroad for studies, and it asked Archbishop Blake to impose an *ipso facto* suspension from the celebration of Mass on all future priests who wouldn't go abroad within a specified period.

On the other hand, many of those who went to France before ordination turned aside from a clerical career and opted for a military one in the Irish Brigade while others joined the medical profession or entered business. As some of them came to France in their early teens, they lost fluency in the Irish language, something which made them all the more reluctant to return. In 1700 the Archbishop of Toulouse forbade the students there to

speak any language except their native tongue and Latin — he didn't wish them to become fluent in French. When a controversy arose between the priests and clerics in the Irish College, Paris, in the mid-eighteenth century, the priests were quick to point out that in forty years only twenty-five students who had come to Paris before ordination had returned to Ireland as priests, whereas fifteen priests returned to Ireland every year from among the priest-seminarians. A memo of 1733 makes an even stronger claim that during the previous twenty-six years Paris had trained over six hundred Irish priests.

3
Geographical spread

The 1704 Registration of the Clergy provides us with much information regarding the seventeenth-century Irish priests who had studied on the continent. Almost a quarter of the secular priests who registered in 1704 had been ordained abroad; the other three-quarters had received the priesthood in Ireland. The proportion of regulars who had studied on the continent would have been much higher. Of a total of 255 seculars on the 1704 list who had been ordained abroad, I estimate that 111 were ordained in France (i.e. nearly half), as against forty-seven in Spain, thirty-four in the Spanish Netherlands, thirty-two in Portugal, eighteen in Italy and twelve in the Empire. In view of France's strong lead among those figures it is rather surprising that the continental centre with the greatest number of Irish ordinations was Lisbon with twenty-four (i.e. one in ten of all secular priests ordained abroad). In France the Gironde area had more ordinations (nineteen in Bazas and six in Bordeaux) than either Paris (fifteen) or Rouen (twelve). Those ordained in the Gironde area were almost all from Munster. But the ordinations in France were widely scattered over more than twenty centres, from St Malo on the Channel coast to Carcassonne near the Spanish frontier.

The practice of ordaining men in Ireland first and then sending them to one of the continental colleges persisted until the end of the eighteenth century and it is noticeable that many of the early students who entered Maynooth after 1795 were already ordained. The newly ordained priests of a particular diocese didn't necessarily all go to the same college abroad to complete their studies. Fr Cathaldus Giblin has done a study of the seventy-three young men who were ordained in the archdiocese of Dublin in the sixteen years between 1769 and 1785 and then went to a college abroad. Twenty-five of them went to Paris, nineteen to Nantes, eight to Bordeaux, six to Antwerp, five to Douai, four to Louvain, one to Lisbon and one to Salamanca, i.e. fifty-seven out of seventy-three went to a college in France.

Students sometimes moved from one Irish college to another. In 1726 four Irishmen arrived in Bordeaux and after completing

four years of philosophy at the University there, they applied to the Chapter at Nantes for help to travel to Paris to begin theology. Most cities and towns in Europe must have witnessed the ordination of an Irishman during the eighteenth century. Again, Fr Giblin has done a count and provides the information that 140 Irish priests were ordained in fifty-one different centres on the continent between 1735 and 1781.

The Irish students brought many of their internal dissensions along with them to the continental colleges; the clash between Old Irish and Anglo-Irish in the seventeenth century, provincial rivalries at all times. While most of the colleges welcomed students from all parts of Ireland, one notices a distinct tendency on the part of students from one province to seek admission to the one college. This was also sometimes encouraged by the college authorities for the sake of peace. Salamanca was only a few years in existence when complaints were being made that Ulster students were being victimised in it. Toulouse catered exclusively for students from Munster, and Bordeaux always had a very high proportion of Munster students. Only Leinster students, particularly those from Meath, were admitted in Lille. On the other hand the Lille authorities insisted on their students speaking only Irish two days per week. Presumably since they came from an area where Irish was weakest, it was necessary to ensure that they did not lose fluency. Ulster students were strongest in the Franciscan colleges of Louvain and Prague, and the two Guardians of the short-lived Irish Franciscan college in Poland were both Ulstermen.

If the Ulster students were strong in the Franciscan colleges, they were weak, during the seventeenth century, in the colleges catering for the secular clergy. Taking the Registration of the Clergy in 1704 as our guide again we immediately notice wide divergencies from one diocese to another. In view of the close relations between the south of Ireland and the continent, it is scarcely surprising that the vast majority of continental-trained priests were from Munster and South Leinster. For instance, twenty-seven of the thirty-six priests in Kerry in 1704 had been ordained abroad, as had twenty-three out of Wexford's thirty-four. Other areas with a high proportion of foreign-ordained priests were Waterford city and county (fifteen out of twenty-eight), Cork city and county (twenty-six out of fifty-nine), Dublin city and county (thirty-two out of seventy), Limerick city and county (twenty-two out of fifty-nine), and Tipperary (twenty-two out of sixty-two). In the same year not a single foreign-ordained priest registered in Counties Derry, Tyrone, Monaghan, Leitrim and Sligo, and only one each in Counties Armagh, Antrim, Cavan, Donegal, Fermanagh, Longford, Laois and Roscommon.

The scarcity of foreign-trained priests among the northern clergy led to the composition of several satires in the seventeenth century on their ignorance, especially of Latin, their boorishness and general lack of culture. Best known is *Comhairle Mhic Clamha ó Achadh na Muilleann*, a satire on a Clogher priest possibly written by an Armagh priest about 1680. He describes in detail the oral examination given by the bishop to the boor's son to see if he's fit for ordination:

> Bp. Quid est sacramentum in nomine Domini?
> St. Qui fecit coelum et terram.
> Bp. Nunquam accedes ad altare Dei.
> St. Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam.
> Bp. Stolide, non fies sacerdos per me in saecula saeculorum.
> St. Amen, Amen.

The bishop then lifts a heavy club and proceeds to hammer the farmer's son until he is crying for mercy. His father thinks it is all part of the ordination ceremony and argues to himself that he'll never again begrudge the clergy their good food as they have paid so dearly for it.

The recent statistical study by Brockliss and Ferté, published by the Royal Irish Academy at the end of 1987, throws a flood of new light on the Irish students in Paris and Toulouse during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The authors have deposited a list of these students, with biographical details, in the library of the RIA, Dublin. It names over 1,500 students, based on the University matriculation and graduation records, of whom more than 1,200 were students of the University of Paris. There may have been a small number of these who were not students for the priesthood — students of medicine or law. But the vast majority certainly were clerics. Brockliss and Ferté indicate, however, that the list of over a thousand names recovered by them is probably only about one-tenth of the total number of Irish students who studied in Paris during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If this is correct it is evidence of the immense debt which the Irish Church owes to France and especially to Paris during that era. It would mean that about eleven thousand Irish students for the priesthood studied in Paris during those two

centuries, i.e. as many as the number of priests ordained in Maynooth during the two centuries of its existence since 1795. Even allowing for the very high drop-out rate in Paris, its contribution to the Irish clergy was incomparable.

Basing ourselves on the 1,214 names available from the records of the University of Paris, we can draw several conclusions with the two authors: 1. the Paris students were almost all diocesan students and not regulars; 2. they were recruited from every diocese in Ireland (unlike recruitment for some of the other colleges in France like Toulouse and Lille); 3. within each diocese there was one student each from a large number of families rather than several students each from a small number of families; and 4. the number of students grew from a trickle in the late sixteenth century to a flood around 1690-1700 which continued until the mid-eighteenth century; then it receded for a while but was beginning to rise again at the time of the Revolution.

Compared with the dearth of Northern students who had studied abroad in the 1704 list, the Brockliss and Ferté list makes it clear that Paris received many students from the weaker dioceses and counties during the eighteenth century. Thus Armagh, which had only one Paris-ordained priest according to the 1704 list, had thirty-one students at the University of Paris during the century from 1690 to 1789. Tuam, whose number of foreign-trained priests was quite low in 1704, jumped to have the highest number of students (fifty) of any Irish diocese in Paris in the century immediately before the Revolution. Down near the bottom of the list comes Killala with only six students in Paris for the two centuries from 1578 to 1789. It beats by a short head Clonmacnois, Kilfenora, Ross and Connor; and of course it is well ahead of Raphoe, which sent only a single solitary student to Paris during the two centuries before the French Revolution.

It is not surprising, given the size of the province, its location in the south of Ireland and its close trading links with France, that Munster predominated as the place of origin of most of the Paris students. It had over 60% of the total in the early decades of the seventeenth century, and still sent about 55% of all students during the second half of the seventeenth century. But the increase in student numbers from the Armagh and Dublin provinces during the eighteenth century brought the Cashel numbers down to about one-third of the total.

4
Dissensions

Occasionally one or other of the Irish colleges in France was convulsed by internal squabbles in which members of staff were often as much involved as the students. I shall give an outline of two of these, one at the beginning of the era and one at its end. A satirical poem had said the Irish students lived 'on Masses and arguments' and Montesquieu had written: 'We have seen an entire nation driven from their native land ... taking nothing with them to meet the bare necessities of life, except a formidable talent for argument'.

From its foundation in 1660, at least until the end of the century Toulouse had a very stormy history. By 1669 the Archbishop had to make a special visitation because of the 'dissolute behaviour of students' and the 'scandalous behaviour of certain Irish priests and scholars'. The students were charged with 'continual disobedience towards their domestic superior, lack of assiduity at evening, morning and meal-time prayers, continual insolence, playing cards, over-indulgence in food and drink, receiving strangers in the seminary as fancy takes them, frequent absences from the college without permission' and so on. The Archbishop interviewed every student and drew up new regulations: he fixed mealtimes at 11.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m., forbade playing cards or dice, the entry of strangers, departures from the college without leave, except for lectures, and the practice of boarders lodging in the town and arranging for friends to take their place in the seminary. He ordered exemplary punishment for four of the students — two were to be imprisoned for a month and placed on bread and water on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays; two others were suspended for a month from saying Mass and were to fast three times a week.

A decade later the president of the college (named MacSwiney) was dismissed by the Archbishop for fomenting mutiny among the students against each other and against the Archbishop. Yet the seminarists, who had the right to elect their superior, re-elected MacSwiney in 1694 and for almost a decade, supported by the Parliament (i.e. the local court) which was quarrelling with the Archbishop, he was able to resist dismissal and arrest. It was

reported that only four seminarians were residing in the college; the others, like MacSwiney, were living in the town. In 1696 a majority of the students elected Florence McCarthy as superior but MacSwiney refused to give up the keys and continued as before. The Archbishop carried out another visitation in 1699 — he couldn't get access to the chapel, superior's room, or to the 'linen, crockery and kitchen utensils' because MacSwiney had all the keys. For several years MacSwiney had appropriated the annual grant of 1,200 livres for himself and had kept his brother living in the seminary, 'dressed like a cavalier with sword and cravate'.

A new election was proclaimed and the seminarists chose an Irish priest named O'Sheehan, then in Paris. Naturally, he was most reluctant to come and it was only in May 1703, when MacSwiney finally decided to hand over and O'Sheehan to accept, that peace was restored.

The most notorious row of the nineteenth century took place in the Irish College, Paris, in the 1850s. The rector was John Miley, who had attended O'Connell on his deathbed in Genoa. But revolution was in the air in Paris since 1848. The walls outside were adorned with *Vive la République* and inside with *à bas l'eau chaude* (down with the hot water, referring to the soup). But Miley succeeded for a few years in holding off the students, who were described by the new Irish Primate, Dr Cullen, after a visit on his way to Armagh in 1850, as 'old rough fellows ... always talking about their rights'.

Into this situation steps Fr Pat Lavelle of the diocese of Tuam, the future friend of the Fenians, who was appointed to the staff of Paris in October 1854. His appointment was resented by Miley from the beginning, as it would add an extra man to the MacHale faction on the staff. When Lavelle arrived at the gate, late on 3 December 1854, he found himself locked out — Miley claimed he received no official information of Lavelle's appointment.

Relations between the two men went from bad to worse and the meeting of the Irish bishops in June 1857 had letters from each of them complaining about the other. The climax came on the morning of 24 March 1858 when Lavelle and another staff member named Rice from Cloyne, returning from saying Mass in neighbouring convents, were confronted by the porter with letters of expulsion from the rector. A scuffle ensued and in a few days the two professors were ordered to leave France.

Each side forwarded its own version to the Irish bishops and

to Rome. Miley spoke of demonstrations against him of between fifteen and twenty students, of the hostility of the two professors who used railroad whistles, shouted, kicked doors, broke bolts, and threw a large bucket into his apartment. He claimed that the stairs were guarded by some of the students armed with clubs; others carried knives from the refectory; others took refuge in the President's apartments where the servants arranged mattresses for them to pass the night. The bishops decided to transfer the running of the college to the Vincentian Fathers. Miley resisted for a while but in 1858 the Vincentian Fathers took over the Irish College, Paris, and its president since then has always been a Vincentian until the recent appointment of Dr Brendan Devlin.

5

Financial situation and future employment

The communities of priests and students in the continental colleges were often living in poverty and had to seek extra funds from all kinds of sources to make ends meet. Some of the colleges in Spain and the Spanish Netherlands had been promised an annual grant from the King, e.g. St Anthony's, Louvain, was endowed by Philip III with an annual grant of 2,750 florins, each priest ordained in Salamanca received 100 ducats from the King to cover the expenses of his return to Ireland and so on. But the grants were often delayed and sometimes left unpaid. Hence some of the colleges would certainly have been forced to close, had it not been for the benefactions of many Spanish and French families and the generosity of Irish people at home and abroad, even soldiers and merchants in exile. In 1607, for instance, the Irish students at Bordeaux (mainly from Munster) were granted permission to carry the dead to the graveyard in order to obtain a fee but this practice was discontinued in 1780 because of abuses which had crept in. The Leinster students at Lille were given the same duty and also allowed to make collections at the church doors. In 1711 the Mayor and Council of Lille forbade anyone except Irish students to accept money for carrying corpses.

Thirty years ago I published in our local historical journal, *Seanchas Ard Mhacha,* three letters from my own parish to St Anthony's, Louvain, complaining that the Friars of Armagh who had a house of refuge in Creggan had received no acknowledgement of the help they were sending to Louvain.

> *Creggan, 21 June 1627*
> You shall understand by these that this house of Armagh hath delivered three score pounds sterling* to the Provincial to be sent to Louvain at this time. I think there is never a house in Ireland which would be so willing to send (or at least more willing to relieve the college of Louvain) as this poor house. Wherefore Louvain should not be so sparing of ink and paper as they have been hither unto, in giving acknowledgment that ye have received so much. This house hath sent £20* to Louvain this last harvest but I think that others will have thanks for both the sums and not the Convent of Armagh.

The colleges were also indebted to Irish people who had settled abroad. Thus the Irish College, Paris, was endowed with burses not only by many of the Irish bishops and priests at home during the eighteenth century (especially those who had been past students) but also by Irish priests and professional people who had remained in France, like David Flynn, chaplain to the Old Pretender at Versailles, and Gerald Moore, Canon of Montpellier, or like Dr Bartholomew Murray, a highly regarded medical man, who gave all his possessions to the College and was buried in the Lombard College in 1767.

The length of the course in continental colleges could vary considerably. If a student went abroad to commence his study of the classics, he could spend as much as ten or even twelve years 'on far foreign fields'. A certain Arthur Magennis, for instance, probably from County Down, arrived in Paris on a Maginn burse in 1761, four years before he made his First Communion. In 1767 he came top of the Humanity Class after studying Latin and Greek for six years. He probably then began philosophy and later theology, for he gained his BD in 1776. In 1780 he obtained his licence in theology and was given his viaticum to cover his return journey to Ireland, almost twenty years after he had left it. For students who were already ordained before leaving Ireland, the course lasted five or six years just like the present-day seminary courses, i.e. two years in philosophy and four years in theology (of which the last might be pastoral). After such a long absence from Ireland it is not surprising that many of the Irish students were reluctant to return home, especially in time of persecution. For that reason some of the colleges, particularly the Roman ones, imposed an oath on all students on entry that they would return to Ireland on the completion of their course. But it was possible to obtain special permission from the college authorities to remain, and even St Oliver Plunkett obtained this after his ordination in 1654. No such oath was imposed in the Irish seminaries in France, except on burse-holders, and great numbers of Irish priests remained there

*The £80 was probably equal to about £5,000 today.

as parish curés and vicaires, chaplains and tutors in the homes of the aristocracy, chaplains to the army and the navy, and professors and teachers in the universities and colleges. It has been estimated that about half of the Paris priests took up positions in France. Fr T.J. Walsh, in a detailed study of south-west France, has discovered the names of nearly two hundred Irish priests working in the Gironde during the eighteenth century.

In spite of temptations to remain and the hardships associated with the return journey to Ireland, usually in the disguise of a sailor, not to mention the life of poverty and outlawry which awaited so many priests there (for after 1695 they had broken the law by going abroad for education), great crowds of the *alumni* of the Irish colleges in France — numbering several thousand in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — did go on the Irish mission. Having received viaticum from the college, or in some cases from the King or even from Rome, they made their way to one of the French ports like Bordeaux or Nantes or Brest and struck a bargain with a friendly captain to take them on board. I think no one has paid a higher tribute to them than the Ulster Protestant patriot John Mitchel:

> Imagine a priest ordained in Seville or Salamanca, a gentleman of high old name, a man of eloquence and genius, who has sustained disputations in the college halls on questions of literature or theology; imagine him on the quays of Brest, treating with the skipper of some vessel to let him work his passage; he wears tarry breeches and a tarpaulin hat (for disguise was generally needful); he flings himself on board, takes his full part in the hard work, scarce feels the cold spray and the fierce tempests; and he knows too that at the end of it all for him may be a row of sugar canes to hoe under the blazing sun of Barbados, overlooked by a broad-hatted agent of a Bristol planter, yet he goes eagerly to meet his fate, for he carries in his hand a sacred deposit, bears in his heart a sacred message and must deliver it or die.

6

Results

Mitchel's moving tribute can serve as a useful introduction to the final question: What were the results for Ireland of these colleges in France and to a lesser extent elsewhere?

The first and most obvious result was that they kept Ireland supplied with a steady and sufficient stream of Catholic priests throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even after the foundation of Maynooth and other colleges at home they topped up the number of priests trained in Ireland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nearly all the colleges in France produced priests who became noted figures in the Irish Church. Under God these priests were one of the greatest influences in preserving the faith in Ireland. Let us look at the most influential of the French colleges, which continued in existence right up to the Revolution.

A. Paris

The Irish College in Paris alone was the Alma Mater of at least fifty-four bishops in Ireland before the French Revolution. In 1734 exactly half of the Irish bishops — twelve out of twenty-four — had been educated in Paris. Yet as far as I know, no past student of Paris was Archbishop of Armagh or Dublin up to the French Revolution. Since then Michael Logue, past member of the staff of the Irish College, Paris, has become Archbishop of Armagh and Armagh's first Cardinal.

Among the distinguished past students of the Irish College, Paris, were Bishop O'Gallagher of Raphoe and Kildare, author of *Seanmóirí Uí Ghallchobhair*, Bishop Patrick O'Donnelly of Dromore, remembered in song as the 'Bard of Armagh', and in the nineteenth century, Bishop John Murphy of Cork, patron of the scribes who copied the Murphy collection of Irish manuscripts now in Maynooth, and Archbishop Croke of Cashel. They also included Father James O'Quigley, who was executed in Maidstone (Kent) in 1798 as an emissary from the United Irishmen to France. Fr Moses Kearns had a similar fate — he was hoisted on a lamp-post in Paris but his weight broke the rope and he escaped, only to be hanged in Wexford in 1798.

A secondary school for boys was set up in the College by the Abbé McDermott during the Revolutionary era and the pupils included Jerome Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother and future King of Westphalia, Eugène Beauharnais, his brother-in-law and future Viceroy of Italy, and the children of Wolfe Tone. The future Empress Josephine often attended its twice-weekly gala balls.

Clerical students from Ireland returned to the College in the 1820s, but while the new French Government paid substantial compensation to Britain for property seized or damaged, nothing of this was passed on to Ireland and some was used to build Marble Arch and other public works.

Yet nothing could take from the role of Paris in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, so well summed up by Dr Brendan Devlin: '*Pendant un siècle et demi, Paris était … la capitale culturelle de la nation irlandaise … de Dublin il ne leur venait que les lois et la peur*'.

B. Nantes

The last President of Nantes College — a former student of the College — was Patrick James O'Byrne, a native of County Tyrone. With staff and students he was imprisoned in the Carmelite Convent in 1793 and all were put on the boat *Peggy* for Cork. He became fourth President of Maynooth from 1807 to 1810 and then PP of Armagh. I pass his grave every time I say Mass in St Malachy's Church. Dr Michael Moore, future Provost of TCD, was another past student. The College buildings remained the property of the Irish bishops until 1857 when they were sold for 100,000 francs by Dr Miley, Rector of the Irish College, Paris, and the money invested in the Fondations Catholiques Irlandaises.

C. Bordeaux

The last Rector of Bordeaux College, Dr Mathew Glynn, a man of sixty-six, was imprisoned when the college was closed in 1793 and was sent to the guillotine for saying Mass in a private house. His Vice-Rector, however, Dr Patrick Everard, narrowly escaped to Ireland when the old soutane he was wearing tore into shreds during his arrest. After being fifth President of Maynooth for only two years, he was Archbishop of Cashel at his death in 1820. Father James Burke, an alumnus and later professor in the Bordeaux college, saved the buildings during the Revolution and their rents went to the Irish College, Paris, in the nineteenth century. The buildings were sold in 1887 and the proceeds

invested in the Fondations Catholiques Irlandaises. I suppose the best known alumnus of Bordeaux is Seathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating), seventeenth-century historian and religious writer; other past students were Bishop Barry of Cloyne, Bishop Comerford of Waterford, Bishop O'Keeffe of Limerick, Bishop Bellew of Killala (in 1798) and Fr Michael Murphy who was killed leading the insurgents at Arklow in the same year.

D. Toulouse

The Toulouse college, like that in Bordeaux, bore the title Ste Anne la Royale, after its foundress, Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV. The King granted an endowment of 1,200 livres per annum to both Bordeaux and Toulouse. Many students studied the humanities in Bordeaux and then proceeded to Toulouse for theology. Its past students included Bishop Moylan of Cork, Bishop O'Keeffe of Limerick, and the Abbé Edgeworth who attended Louis XVI at the guillotine. The buildings were alienated during the Revolutionary period and never recovered. They became private property during the nineteenth century and I cannot say if they still exist.

E. Douai

The Douai diocesan college was confiscated in 1793, the two smaller ones having only lasted for a short period in the seventeenth century. For a time in 1794 it was used as a prison and thirty-two priests and students were incarcerated in it. The buildings were taken over by the state without compensation in 1795. I have visited the street — rue Hyacinthe Corne — a few times and the old buildings seem to be still intact, now occupied by a garage and stores, built around a central courtyard. Some workmen whom I met told me that human bones had been dug up in the courtyard.

This is a far cry from the splendour with which O'Neill and O'Donnell were received in the college on Monday, 22 October 1607. Though many of the students were from the Pale, they were admirers of O'Neill who had appealed to Philip III for a grant for the College. Their sympathies had been indicated to London a few years earlier:

> ….the rebel rout in Ireland whom they call the Catholic army and Tyrone by name is daily prayed for there; they all speak Irish, and it is to be feared that these young gentlemen, the

offspring of the colonies of the English conquest, may become in language and disposition fermented with the ancient hatred of Irish to English ...

Hence O'Neill was received with a strong Latin oration which still survives. On the following day the Earls visited the English College where they were received with an address of welcome, student verses and a banquet.

The last superior of the Irish College, Douai, Dr Edward Dillon, returned to Ireland and became Archbishop of Tuam.

* * *

A second great fruit of the Irish colleges in France and elsewhere on the continent was the cultural bridge they provided between Ireland and Europe. There were of course bridges provided by the thousands of Irish soldiers in the French and other continental armies, and by the ship-owners and sailors and merchants who sailed from many Irish ports to France. But the students of the Irish colleges provided an educated channel through which French literary and cultural influences found their way into Ireland. Many visitors to Ireland in the eighteenth century commented on the high standard of learning of the Catholic clergy, their good manners, refined tastes and wide interests. The TCD historian, Lecky, put this on permanent record when he wrote: 'No subsequent generation of Irish priests has left so good a reputation as the better class of those educated in France.... they brought with them a foreign culture and a foreign grace which did much to embellish Irish life.'

It would be interesting to speculate on the percentage of them who spoke fluent French. A few like Manus Ó Ruairc could write poetry in both Irish and French; others translated French spiritual classics into Irish; and some sermons originally written in French ended up by being preached in Gaelic in the Mass-houses of Penal Ireland. Several of the younger priests trained in France were sympathetic to Humbert's invading forces — Captain Henry O'Kane, Manus Sweeney, James Conroy, Michael Gannon and others. The informer Leonard McNally, former student of the Jesuit College, Bordeaux, wrote: 'Priests are the chief disseminators of French ideas'.

Thirdly, the Irish colleges on the continent, especially Paris and Louvain in the seventeenth century, provided the scholastic centres in which to collect the materials of Irish history and hagiography, to assess their value and publish the results. In France this movement centred on the Irish College, Paris; in the Low Countries it centred on St Anthony's, Louvain. Ultimately, Paris couldn't compare with the latter. Some of the Parisian scholars were of Anglo-Irish descent and they included several Jesuits. The Louvain scholars were mainly of Old Irish ancestry and were all Franciscans.

The first attempt to collect information on the Irish saints was Henry Fitzsimon's *Catalogus Praecipuorum Sanctorum Hiberniae* published in Paris in 1611. The first person to compile an account of Irish sufferers for the faith in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was David Rothe, whose *Analecta Sacra* was published between 1617 and 1619. Though published in Cologne, most of Rothe's writing was carried out in Paris. One of his collaborators there was Thomas Messingham, who succeeded John Lee as rector of the Irish College, and who published in 1624 in Paris the *Florilegium Insulae Sanctorum,* the first printed book to give biographies of some of the Irish saints. Ecclesiastical history and hagiography had just begun to be assiduously cultivated with Baronius's *Annales Ecclesiastici* and the beginnings of the Bollandists' work, hence it was natural that some Irish scholars in the Colleges in France should be inspired to do the same thing for Ireland. But very soon the leadership of the movement clearly passed to the Irish Franciscans of Louvain and Rome — MacAingil and Wadding, Ward, Colgan and O'Clery. The only *alumnus* of a French college who was of the same standard was Geoffrey Keating who, despite his Anglo-Irish ancestry, wrote in Irish. A century later the Abbé MacGeoghegan wrote his three-volume, *Histoire d'Irlande,* in French and dedicated it to the officers of the Irish Brigade in the French service.

Fourthly, Paris in the eighteenth century gave a great impetus to religious and scholarly work in the Irish language. In the publication of texts in Irish the colleges in France couldn't compare at first with Louvain. Throughout the seventeenth century a steady stream of catechisms, religious treatises, grammars, etc., flowed from the Irish Franciscans in the latter, written by Ó hEoghusa, Ó Maolchonaire, MacAingil, Gearnóin, Ó Maolmhuaidh, etc. It was only in the eighteenth century that Paris made a notable response. Aodh Buí Mac Cruitín, who had published an Irish grammar in Louvain in 1727, joined with Fr Conor O'Begley in the publication of the first English-Irish

dictionary in Paris in 1732. This was followed a decade later by what was probably the best-known Gaelic work ever compiled in Paris — Donlevy's catechism, a summary of the Catholic faith, in question and answer form, in both Irish and English. The author, Fr Andrew Donlevy, was prefect of the clerical students (but not of the ordained priests) in the Irish College, Paris. Donlevy's publication was aided by Perrottin, a French benefactor, who set up a fund for the establishment of a school of Irish in the College, for the publication of Irish texts and for the annual award of prizes to promote Irish translation and Irish catechism. The first Irish-English dictionary ever published — compiled by Fr John O'Brien, the future Bishop of Cloyne and Ross — was published in Paris in 1768.

7

Future of Paris

The Irish College, Paris, has now become the heir to all the former Irish seminaries on French soil. In Rome the religious orders — Franciscans and Dominicans and Augustinians — continue to use their historic buildings for their own communities and the Irish diocesan college is full up with students — mainly from Ireland but with some from other countries including Ethiopia. In the Iberian peninsula Salamanca was once in the same situation as Paris, having inherited students, furniture, books and tradition from the other colleges as they closed down one by one in the eighteenth century. Now Salamanca is also gone and we have lost an invaluable link with Spain. Only the Irish Dominican house and church of Corpo Santo in Lisbon remain to provide a tenuous link with Portugal. St Anthony's, Louvain, has a reduced Franciscan presence but one hopes that the new European Institute installed in the historic building will ensure its survival in a new form.

What is to be the fate of the Irish College, Paris? For three and a half centuries it gave sterling service to the Catholics of Ireland. For another forty years it has proved a great boon to the Catholics of Poland. As a seminary for rebuilding the Polish Church after the Second World War, as a house of rest and study for visiting Polish ecclesiastics (including Pope John Paul II as a young priest in 1947), as a secondary school for the children of Polish émigrés, it has already proved its worth. When Cardinal Glemp was in Ireland in January 1988 he very kindly agreed to the proposal that in autumn 1988 a scheme for the refurbishment of part of the college buildings for future use by Irish students would begin. The Irish Government gave its approval and financial backing and FÁS trainees worked together with young apprentices from Northern Ireland. The 'Friends of the Irish College, Paris', headed by Frank O'Reilly, Chairman of the Ulster Bank, had plans prepared by an architectural firm for the refurbishment of a wing, including the chapel, assembly hall, some living accommodation and secretarial office space. They appealed for financial aid to the private and public sectors, both in Ireland and France, and it was intended that the first stage would be completed for the second

centenary of the French Revolution in 1989. It is estimated that it would cost IR£2m to restore the whole building, but the committee intend to proceed stage by stage on a realistic and carefully planned basis. It is hoped that the college will one day house an Irish Cultural Centre with library, language training, student exchanges; in short, be a meeting-place where young Ireland will meet France and through France the wider Europe. But only *we* can ensure — by our moral and even financial support — that its future students will be inspired as strongly as were its past students, so well described by Padraic Colum in his moving poem entitled *The Old College of the Irish, Paris*:

...We strove towards no high reach of speculation
Towards no delivery of gestated dogma,
No resolution of age-long dispute.
Only to have a priest beside the hedges,
Baptizing, marrying,
Offering Mass within some clod-built chapel,
And to the dying the last sacrament
Conveying, no more we strove to do
We, all bare exiles,
soldiers,
scholars,
priests.

In this well-researched booklet, Cardinal Ó Fiaich gives a comprehensive account of the colleges set up in France to educate young Irishmen for the priesthood.

From their foundation in the sixteenth century to the use made of the buildings today, their story is documented in a scholarly and absorbing chronicle. The colleges in France are seen in the context of other Irish colleges in Europe, their contribution to the Irish Church is assessed, the achievements of former students are acknowledged and their troubles and dissensions are recorded — including the internal squabbles which broke out as the Irish brought traditional rivalries across the sea with them.

This brief yet perceptive account bears witness to Cardinal Ó Fiaich's lifelong interest in, and scholarly approach to his subject.

ISBN I 85390 156 3