

## Towards the Invention of the Irish Catholic *Natio*:<sup>1</sup> Thomas Messingham's *Florilegium* (1624)

*Influenced by contemporary developments in Church and State, the Irish émigré priest based in Paris, Thomas Messingham, used hagiography for the purpose, inter alia, of establishing Ireland's claim to be not only a nation in her own right but a nation by divine election – defined precisely by its Catholicism. [Editor]*

Europe emerged from the sixteenth century with divided Churches but strengthened States. In France, the Bourbon monarchy had begun to enjoy the fruits of its internal religious settlement and was capable of challenging Spain's position as the principal Catholic power. England had won its naval struggle with Spain and was now joined in dynastic alliance with Scotland. In Ireland, a peace of sorts had come with the end of the Nine Years War but there was no satisfactory solution to the problem of the religious and political loyalty of the king's Irish subjects. The early decades of the seventeenth century saw a determined effort by the Dublin government to impose the State religion. Gaelic and Old English Catholic communities resisted, enduring severe civil disadvantages.

Among the important consequences of civil disability was the lack of a modern Catholic education system in Ireland, obliging members of the Irish Catholic intellectual élite to travel abroad to the universities of the Spanish Netherlands, France and Iberia. By the 1620s, with a generation of continental experience behind them, members of this élite, following the example of their early seventeenth-century European peers, began to address the political and religious situation in Ireland using language and concepts learned in the European universities. Firstly, they tried to explain the continued attachment of the Irish to Catholicism even in the face of determined government opposition. Secondly, they used Ireland's Catholicism to help demonstrate the kingdom's status as a distinct *Natio* in the European family of States.

Thomas Messingham (c. 1575-1638?), a Douai-educated priest, resident

1. Messingham uses the terms *Natio* and *Patria* when speaking of *Hibernia*. *Natio* usually refers to Ireland as a place of origin or to the individuals or communities originating there, *Patria* usually refers to Ireland as the object of sentiment or action. See, for instance, Messingham's letter to the Faculty of Theology, Paris, in Archives Nationales, Paris, MS, M 71 no. 77 ('ut non vos deterreant quorundam particularium ex eadem natione obiectionum') and *Florilegium*, praefatio, p. 2 ('sanctorum igitur et patriae zelo commotus ...').

in Paris, was among the first of the Irish Catholic élite to attempt to understand Ireland's adhesion to Catholicism and to represent the country to European audiences. He did this by applying the science of modern hagiography to the problems of cultural and political identity. He is principally known for his contribution to the early stages of the Irish hagiographical revival, thanks to his publication of a collection of Irish saints' lives in Paris in 1624 entitled *Florilegium Insulae Sanctorum*. His hagiographical activities provide a valuable insight into the complex of concerns and aspirations which motivated early modern Irish Catholic intellectuals in their attempts to understand Ireland's political and religious situation and to represent the country to a European readership. Working on the Irish *Vitae* provided them with a forum for the expression of a range of religious, political, and cultural sentiments whose influence proved durable.

### I. Messingham's Background

Messingham was of Old English stock and a priest of the diocese of Meath.<sup>2</sup> Little is known of his family background.<sup>3</sup> It appears that the Messingham family was prominent in Meath in the early modern period,<sup>4</sup> and a Messingham married into the Ussher-Loftus family in the sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> It is possible that Thomas Messingham received his early academic formation, like so many Meath ecclesiastical students, in Dublin.<sup>6</sup> He was sent abroad for further education, probably during the 1590s, and entered the Irish College at Douai, founded in 1594 by fellow Meathman, Christopher Cusack.<sup>7</sup> At Douai he joined a number of Meath students, including Luke Rochford (died c. 1631) and the future Bishop of Meath, Thomas Dease (c. 1568-1652).<sup>8</sup> He also made the acquaintance of

2. For his birthday, see L.W. C. Brockliss and P. Ferté, *A Prosopography of Irish Clerics who Studied in France in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, in *Particular at the Universities of Paris and Toulouse*, (R.I.A., Dublin, 1987), 70, no. 203.

3. See Alphons Bellesheim, *Geschichte der Katholischen Kirche in Irland* (3 vols, Mainz, 1880), ii, 737. John Brady traced one Messingham family reference in Ireland. See John Brady, 'Luke Rochford and his Circle' in *Repertorium Novum*, iii, I (1962), 108-120, n.84. The family name is commoner in England, see *Historical Manuscripts Commission Report*, 11, app 2 (1887), 244, and A.B. Emden, *Biographical Register of Oxford to 1500* (2 vols, Oxford, 1958), ii, 1269.

4. See John O'Hart, *Irish Pedigree* (2 vols, New York, 1915), ii, 694.

5. Trinity College, Dublin, MS 1217, 4. This is a Belew-Dillon family tree. A daughter, Anna Belew, married a Sarsfield whose offspring married a Messingham.

6. The Meath Old English were closely connected with their Dublin neighbours. It is likely that Dublin grammar schools were frequented by Meath students. On the education of the Counter-Reformation episcopacy, see Donal F. Cregan, 'The Social and Cultural Background of a Counter-Reformation Episcopate, 1618-60', in Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartney (ed.), *Studies in Irish History Presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin, 1979), 85-117.

7. On the Irish College in Douai, see John Brady, 'Father Christopher Cusack and the Irish College of Douai 1594-1624', in Sylvester O'Brien (ed.), *Measgra i gCúimhne Mhichíl Uí Chléirigh* (Dublin, 1944), 98-107.

8. John Brady (ed.), 'The Irish Colleges in the Low Countries', in *Archivium Hibernicum*, 14 (1949), 66-91, 76.

David Rothe (1572-1650) and John Roche (c. 1574-1636), future Bishops of Ossory and Ferns respectively.<sup>9</sup>

Douai was a key institution in the very early stages of the reorganisation of the Catholic Church in early seventeenth-century Ireland. It brought together a significant number of Irish students, lay and clerical from both Gaelic and Old English Catholic communities, and exposed them to the energy of the Counter-Reformation in its Jesuit form. In 1600 it was reported that 60 young gentlemen, eldest sons of the principal gentleman of the Pale, were in residence there, Messingham probably among them.<sup>10</sup> Beginnings were humble and haphazard but students there did have the experience of a seminary-style regime, adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the emigrant Irish.<sup>11</sup> The Jesuit influence was strong.<sup>12</sup> It is not unreasonable to suspect that Irish students at Douai were exposed to Jesuit political thought, though Messingham may have already moved to Paris before this influence asserted itself fully.<sup>13</sup> However, Jesuit theological influence was strong in early seventeenth-century Paris too, and we know that in the 1610s Paris-educated students returning to Ireland were examined by Etienne Binet SJ (1569-1639).<sup>14</sup> Francisco de Suarez SJ, whose political thought followed that of Cardinal Robert Bellarmine SJ, was well represented in the libraries of the Irish continental colleges. Through Suarez and his disciples, Irish clerical and lay students had access to modern Catholic political thought and found a language to express their commitment to both their inherited religion and their loyalty to the Crown.<sup>15</sup>

Messingham's years in Douai were dominated by the Nine Years War. An informant claimed that O'Neill was prayed for there, and that Irish, as well as English, was spoken by all the students. This informant feared that Douai might instil in the young gentlemen that ancient hatred of Irish to English.<sup>16</sup> However, Kinsale and the Stuart accession shrank the range of political options, and Douai students, like Irish students every-

9. Rothe was prefect of the college in 1601, and in that capacity travelled to Spain to seek royal funding for the institution. See Brady, *Christopher Cusack*, 102. On John Roche, see Patrick Corish, 'An Irish Counter-Reformation Bishop' in *ITQ*, 25 (1958), 14-32, 101-123; 26 (1959), 101-116, 313-330.

10. Brady, *loc.cit.*, (note 7 *supra*), 101.

11. Dr Matthew Kelleston, the Rector of the English College, reported in 1622 that the Irish students used to wear secular dress, and that many did not advance to theological studies. This points to the presence of secular students in the Douai community. See Brady, *ibid.*, 103.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Cregan, *loc. cit.*, 111-117.

14. Messingham mentions Binet in his *Florilegium insulae sanctorum* (Paris, 1624) on page three of the dedication. Binet's main publications were in the domain of spiritual direction and personal piety.

15. Dr Kelleston says that, while the Irish College was governed by seculars, the students were sent for their lectures to the Jesuits. Brady, *ibid.*, 103. On the political debates in their English context see W. B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge, 1997).

16. Brady, *ibid.*, 101.

where, trimmed their political sails accordingly.<sup>17</sup> In any case, students of Old English stock, like Messingham, while they may have been tempted to support O'Neill in the euphoric 1590s, were more firmly rooted in traditional Palesmen loyalties. Later on, we discover Messingham airing classic Old English political views, accepting the Stuart title and being content with limited toleration for Catholics.<sup>18</sup> In fact, his criticism of what he regarded as extravagant Catholic claims in Ireland echoes those levelled by French commentators against Huguenots at the same time.

As Messingham began his studies in Douai, efforts to organise Irish clerical students and priests into an Irish College were afoot in Paris. An Irish lay and clerical population was already in Paris prior to the recent phase of the Wars of Religion and had maintained a presence there even during the upheaval of the Catholic League in the late 1580s and early 1590s. John Lee, Henry Segrave, Dominik Roche, Richard Fleming, Dominik O'Colin and Henry Fitzsimons were all in Paris in the late 1580s, where they experienced first hand the popular, militant version of reformed Catholicism.<sup>19</sup> The relative peace following the Edict of Nantes made Paris a more attractive gathering point for emigrant Irish, and there is evidence that some Irish, including Messingham, drew lessons for the Catholics' political situation in Ireland from the Huguenots' position in France. It is impossible to say if the incompatibility of religious liberty with the Huguenots' affirmation of loyalty to the king (after the mid 1580s) convinced him that the writing was on the wall for analogous efforts to reconcile religious liberty for Catholics with loyalty to the Stuarts.<sup>20</sup> His political activities on behalf of Rothe and others in the 1610s and 1620s suggest that, if he had this insight, he did not push it to its logical, rather depressing, conclusion.

At some date before 1600, Dease, encouraged by John Lee, moved to Paris.<sup>21</sup> Messingham appears to have followed him and joined the staff there.<sup>22</sup> He took his masters in 1613 and a doctorate some time later.<sup>23</sup> In Paris, his activities were not entirely academic. Already in 1611, Henry

17. See for example, Anthony J. Sheenan, 'The Recusancy Revolt of 1603: a Reinterpretation' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, 28 (1983), 3-13.

18. Brendan Jennings, *Wadding Papers*, (Dublin, 1953), 380.

19. On Fitzsimon, Lee and the Catholic League, see *IER*, 8 (1873), 270-1. According to this source, Fitzsimon experienced a miracle during Mass in St. Severin which copperfastened his return to Catholicism. The miracle was witnessed by Henry Segrave, John Lea, Dominik Roche and Thomas Darbyshire. For a general account of the Catholic League see Jean-Marie Constant, *La Ligue* (Paris, 1996).

20. See Michael Wolfe, 'Protestant Reactions to the Conversion of Henry IV' in Michael Wolfe, (ed.), *Changing Identities in Early Modern France*, (Durham and London) 1997, 371-390.

21. John Lynch, *De Praesulibus Hiberniae*, ed. J. F. O'Doherty, 2 vols, (Dublin, 1944), i, 168. On Dease's academic career in Paris, see Brockliss, *op. cit.*, 68, no.176. He took a masters in 1601, a licence in 1612, and was professor of theology at the College of Navarre about 1612.

22. Lynch, *op. cit.*, 168.

23. Brockliss, *op. cit.*, 70, no. 203. Messingham, like Dease, was an active member of the German Nation of the University between 1613-19 and again between 1627-37.

Fitzsimon SJ praised him for his service on his country's behalf.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that Messingham was already politically active in the 1610s. In 1615, David Rothe, already six years back in Ireland, addressed material to Messingham concerning elections to the recently held Parliament and the campaign for the relaxation of anti-recusant legislation.<sup>25</sup> Rothe does not address Messingham by his ecclesiastical title, a detail indicative, perhaps, of the latter's political activities.<sup>26</sup> It is likely that Messingham processed information from Ireland before passing it on to Rome and the Catholic monarchs. He probably benefited from the good fortune of his Douai classmate, John Roche.<sup>27</sup> Roche had joined the household of the internuncio to Brussels, Guido Bentivoglio and accompanied him to Paris when he was appointed nuncio there in 1616. In 1621 Bentivoglio moved back to Rome, accompanied by Roche, who in 1624 was appointed Bishop of Ferns. The Bentivoglio-Roche connection may help explain why so many priests in Messingham's circle enjoyed preferment in Dublin and Meath in the 1620s.<sup>28</sup>

According to some sources, Messingham was entrusted with the direction of the Irish College in Paris about 1608, but we know that Thomas Dease was still superior in 1621.<sup>29</sup> Messingham was probably second in command before his appointment as Rector, after Dease's nomination as Bishop of Meath in 1621.<sup>30</sup> He was still Rector in 1632.<sup>31</sup> Until sufficient patronage was secured, the life of the Irish clerical community was difficult. Messingham himself writes of '[a community] exiled for faith and religion, lacking means, living in obscure places, unknown because of lack of students ...'<sup>32</sup> Under his stewardship that situation changed for the better, at least temporarily, thanks in no small part to the support he enjoyed both among the Irish bishops and among patrons in France and

24. *The Justification and Exposition of the Divine Sacrifice of the Masse ...* s.l., 1611, introduction.

25. See *Historical Manuscripts Commission Report on Franciscan Manuscripts*, (Dublin, 1906), 60-69.

26. Paul Grosjean, 'Un soldat de fortune irlandais au service des "Acta sanctorum" Philippe O'Sullivan Beare et Jean Bolland (1634)' in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 81 fasc. I-II (Brussels, 1963), 418-446, 418, n. 2. Grosjean wonders if Messingham was even present in Paris in 1633. He believes he may have been at large somewhere in the British Isles.

27. See Patrick Corish, loc. cit., (1958), 32.

28. See Gerard Rice, 'Thomas Dease, Bishop of Meath and Some Questions Concerned with the Rights to Ecclesiastical Property Alienated at the Reformation' in *Ríocht na Mídhie* 6, i, (1975), 69-89.

29. Bellesheim, *Geschichte*, ii, 217. Luke Rockford, a priest of Meath diocese, published his *The Genealogy of Protestants ...* (Paris, 1621) with the approbation of several Parisian clerics, including Dease, Richard Stephens, Christopher Bagshaw and Gabriel de S Maria.

30. Dease's provision dates from April-May 1621, his consecration from May 1622. See D. F. Cregan, 'The Social and Cultural Background of a Counter-Reformation Episcopate', 87. Cregan informs us that Dease probably received part of his early education in local bardic school in Meath, studied philosophy in Douai and Paris, theology in Paris and held a doctorate from the University there; see *Ríocht na Mídhie*, 3 (1964), 99-104; 5, (1972), 56-62; 6 (1975), 69-89.

31. Bellesheim, *Geschichte*, ii, 737.

32. *Florilegium*, Dedicatoria, 3.

Rome, like Jean Lescalopier.<sup>33</sup> Messingham proved himself a staunch defender of the Irish College community's claims against other Irish communities in Paris in the 1620s.<sup>34</sup> Towards the end of his career, Messingham may have relinquished control of the Irish College to act as a full-time agent of the Irish Church.<sup>35</sup> Certainly in 1634 he was in contact with Propaganda concerning the future of the Irish College in Rome, recommending that it remain under the control of the secular clergy.<sup>36</sup>

## II. Messingham's hagiographical enterprise

Messingham was among the first of the Irish Counter-Reformation clergy to recognise the political and pastoral usefulness of a modernised, native Irish hagiography.<sup>37</sup> He believed that the cult of the saints would be a useful weapon against proselytism which, in the early part of the century, had made significant progress in Meath and Leinster.<sup>38</sup> In view of his concern for proselytism, it is curious that Messingham's primary hagiographical interest was not in the promotion of the cult of recent Irish martyrs but rather in the revival of devotion to ancient saints. Perhaps this was because the recent martyrs had already received attention from his friend and collaborator, David Rothe.<sup>39</sup> Messingham had worked in close association with Rothe since their shared time in Douai and doubtless sympathised with the latter's aspirations for the Irish mission as

33. *Spicilegium Ossoriense*, i, 133-135. Ossory, Emly, Meath, Limerick and the Vicar Apostolic of Killaloe praise Messingham. '... et ipsius superiorem seu Praesidem R D Thomam Messingham virum spectatae integritatis et fidei, cujus summo labore, sedulitate, industria et prudentia regebatur hactenus et nunc regitur cum magna laude ipsius et totius patriae nostrae commodo similiter velint in suam tutelam suscipere, eumque animare sua benignitate et benevolentia ut tam pie susceptum opus regiminis illius Seminarii pergat constanter exsequi, nostrisque necessitatibus subvenire per bonorum operariorum continuam subministracionem, prout in singulas Provincias hujus Regni antehac missi inde venerunt probi Pastores et cooperatores qui nobis opitulantur in hac animarum vindemia pro honore Dei et matris Ecclesiae apud nos afflictissimae solatio ... 134-5: see also Bellesheim, *Geschichte*, ii, 219.

34. Messingham to the Faculty of Theology, Paris, undated (probably late 1620s) in Archives Nationales, Paris, MS M 71, no. 77 (L 10-3-2). The author is indebted to Dr Marian Lyons for bringing this documentation to his attention.

35. Grosjean, loc. cit., 418.

36. Messingham to the Secretary of Propaganda, Paris, 1 August 1634 in *Archivum Hibernicum*, 12 (1946), 192-3, 195-6. See Patrick J. Corish, 'The Beginnings of the Irish College, Rome', in Franciscan Fathers (eds), *Father Luke Wadding: Commemorative Volume* (Dublin, 1957), 284-94, 293.

37. He may have been familiar with William Therry's *Discursus Panegyrici de nominibus, tribulationibus et miraculis S. Patricii, Ibernorum Apostoli*, (Douai, 1617). These were discourses delivered at the Irish College, Douai, in the previous year. See Brady, loc.cit., 102, n.37. Messingham may also have been familiar with Henry Fitzsimon SJ's edition of Richard Fleming SJ's calendar of Irish saints, published in Anvers in 1621, in G. F. Verdicus, *Hiberniae, sive antiquioris Scotiae vindiciae*, 83-121.

38. *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 4.

39. For an example, see David Rothe's *Analecta nova, sancta, mira ...*, (Cologne, 1617-9). The first edition, containing part one, was published in Cologne in 1616. The second edition, published in Cologne 1617-19, contained two additional parts.

expressed in his *Brigida Thaumaturga*.<sup>40</sup> This tripartite work included a sermon on St Brigid delivered to Irish seminarians studying in Paris in 1620.<sup>41</sup> For Rothe, seminarists' knowledge of the lives of the saints was the best defence against despair in the present, difficult circumstances in Ireland and the surest hope of successfully rebuilding the Church there in the future. In the final pages, Rothe prays fervently for the protection of the Irish *Natio*, the restoration of the Church, the free profession of the faith and the prosperity of patrons of the Irish College in Paris.<sup>42</sup> In 1621, Rothe published *Hibernia Resurgens* in response to Thomas Dempster's claims regarding the origins of certain Irish saints. From similarities in style and expression, it is likely that Messingham had both Rothe's books on his desk as he prepared the *Florilegium*.

Messingham's hagiographical interest was probably influenced by trends in Rome. There the procedures for the recognition and canonisation of saints were being streamlined and centralised.<sup>43</sup> The Roman Breviary was undergoing revision and Messingham was anxious that the Irish saints achieve representation in the new calendar.<sup>44</sup> This concern motivated him to retrieve and gloss ancient Irish *Vitae* so that they might pass muster with the ever more demanding Roman authorities. The first fruit of his efforts came in 1619 when he published the Office of St Patrick.<sup>45</sup> Demand for this liturgical work encouraged him, in 1620, to publish an expanded, corrected version. To this he added the Offices of St Brigid, St Columcille, St Finian and St Canice.<sup>46</sup> The work is dedicated to the clergy of Ireland. His purpose in publishing the liturgical work is clearly stated in the notice to the reader. He wishes to increase the devotion of the faithful, to spur the diligent to greater effort, and to comfort those enduring persecution with the pious memory of past generations.<sup>47</sup> In the same piece, he invites his readers, both in France and in Ireland, to communicate to him any manuscripts they may know of which pertain

40. Paris, 1620.

41. There is an explicit reference to Messingham and to the Meath students towards the conclusion of the sermon.

42. *Ibid.*, 149-50.

43. The teaching on the veneration of saints had been set forth in the profession of faith of the Council of Trent. Pope Sixtus V's *Immensa Aeterni Dei* (1588) had contained guidelines for the division of labour in the Curia, and entrusted to the Congregation of Rites the responsibility of preparing papal canonisations.

44. For an overview see Pierre Salmon, *The Breviary through the Centuries* (Collegeville, 1962).

45. Messingham refers to this office in a later work. The present author has been unable to locate a copy of the first edition of *Officium S Patricii*.

46. *Officia SS Patricii, Columbae, Brigidae et aliorum quorundam Hiberniae sanctorum ex manuscriptis Breviariis desumpta atque ad normam officii Romani repurgata* (Paris, 1620). See *Florilegium*, 140. In 1625, Robert Rochford, OFM, son of Robert Rochford of Kilbride, Co Meath, and brother of Luke Rochford, published *Life of the Glorious Bishop St Patrick, St Brigid and St. Columb, Patrons of Ireland* (St Omer). Robert may have been part of Messingham's circle of contacts. He was a Louvain Franciscan from 1616.

47. '... piorum devotio augeri et sedulorum excitari industria simul commiseratio praesentium temporum ex praeteritorum recordatione gigni possit.' *Officia*, notice to the reader.

to the Irish saints and their Offices. It is obvious, therefore, that Messingham was actively engaged in collecting and publishing Irish saints' material from at least the late 1610s.

The work of collection and publishing brought him into contact with the wider Catholic enterprise of recording the saints, an enterprise which focused on the mammoth project of Heribert Rosweyde<sup>48</sup> (1569-1629) and, later, Jean Bolland (1596-1665).<sup>49</sup> Some slight evidence exists that Messingham was directly involved in Bolland's work. It has been conjectured that he was *Domine Thoma*, the shadowy intermediary for the letter and enclosures sent by Philip O'Sullivan Beare, then in Spain, to Bolland at Anvers with a view to contributing to the *Acta Sanctorum*.<sup>50</sup> However, too much should not be read into this putative association. Messingham's early hagiographical work probably owes its European inspiration less to the Bollandists, whom it predated, than to the school of Catholic historical writing founded by Caesar Baronius (1538-1607).<sup>51</sup> He published his *Annales ecclesiastici* in Rome between 1598 and 1607 as part of the Catholic propaganda counter-offensive against Protestant historical criticism of Catholic practices, including the veneration of saints.<sup>52</sup> Messingham was familiar with Baronius's work and included selections in his *Florilegium*.<sup>53</sup>

Messingham, with his firsthand French experience, was aware of the political significance of religious identity and recognised the political usefulness of native hagiographical work in the presentation of Ireland to European Catholics. The demonstration of Ireland's possession of a properly authenticated saintly pantheon was part of a broader public-relations enterprise. Its objective was to portray Ireland as an ancient, autonomous nation, which from the dawn of time had close links with Europe and from apostolic times was linked to Rome. This necessitated not only the construction of a saintly hall of fame but also its defence against cultural plunderers like the Scotsman, Thomas Dempster, who, along with a number of Scots contemporaries, was claiming for his nation the glories of the *Scoti* of old. Messingham addresses this threat repeatedly throughout the *Florilegium*, echoing Rothe's arguments published in his 1621 *Hibernia Resurgens*.<sup>54</sup> For both these scholars, the construction and defence of the saintly pantheon were essential to enable the European Catholic élite

48. Rosweyde was anxious to purge the lives of the saints of all unreliable material. See his *Fastes des saints* (1607) and *Vitae Patrum* (1615).

49. Bolland broadened Rosweyde's original project to include all the saints in the Church's calendar. In 1635 he was joined by Gottfried Henschen SJ and, in 1659, by Daniel Van Papenbroek SJ. The Bollandists fell foul of the Carmelites and the Spanish Inquisition.

50. Jean Grosjean, 'Hibernia e Schedis Bollandianis' in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 50 (1932), 139-146, 140.

51. According to Cregan, loc. cit., 115, all early seventeenth century Irish College libraries contained copies of the early folio volumes of Baronius.

52. See Paul Walsh, *Irish Men of Learning* (Dublin, 1947), 247.

53. Messingham included in his *Florilegium* Baronius's account of St Laurence O'Toole.

54. Rouen, 1621.



identify, and identify with, Ireland. Once brought outside, they might be persuaded to exercise their influence on James I for the better treatment of his Irish Catholic subjects.<sup>55</sup> David Rothe, even more than Messingham, was anxious to inform the European Catholic élite of the recent religious persecutions in Ireland. The revised preface to the 1617-19 edition of the *Analecta* contains a strongly worded plea to European crowned heads to intercede with their English peers for the toleration of Catholics.<sup>56</sup>

Messingham had other, more pressing and practical, reasons for venturing into print with his work on the *Vitae*. As the Rector of a struggling seminary, he was constantly strapped for cash and on the look-out for new ways of attracting wealthy patrons and their support. The publication of the Irish *Vitae* had possibilities as a fund-raiser, which he, like many of his contemporaries, was obliged to employ.<sup>57</sup> Messingham's fund-raising efforts concentrated on Jean Lescalopier, the Parisian jurist whom Rothe had already praised in his *Brigida Thaumaturga* (1620). He died in 1620 and Messingham's dedication in his *Florilegium* was addressed to his sons Bathazar and Raymond, in the hope, no doubt, of retaining the family's patronage. Money had been set aside for the seminary, Messingham reminds the young Lescalopiers, but their saintly father's untimely death prevented payment.<sup>58</sup> The Lescalopier link was important not only in a financial sense but also because it gave the Irish access to the favour of the Cardinal de Retz and also the support of the Paris Jesuits in the person of Etienne Binet.

### III. The *Florilegium* (1624)<sup>59</sup>

Messingham's *magnum opus* was the collection and publication of a selection of Irish saints' *Vitae* in his *Florilegium* which appeared in Paris in

55. The preface of Rothe's *Analecta* (Cologne, 1617-19) is an excellent example of the genre.

56. It would be interesting to discover to what extent Rothe's idea of toleration was influenced by the slow process of the imposition of the articles of the Edict of Nantes in France. On the history of the imposition of the edict, see Bernard Cottret, *L'édit de Nantes* (Paris, 1998).

57. Paul Sherlock SJ was engaged in similar activity in Salamanca. See Grosjean, 'Un soldat de fortune', 422. So too was Patrick Fleming OFM in Prague in 1631. See Brendan Jennings, *Michael O Cleirigh* (Dublin, 1936), 110. A later example is Nicoleaus Vernulaeus, *De Propagatione Fidei Christianae in Belgio per sanctos ex Hibernia viros liber* (Louvain, 1639).

58. *Florilegium*, Dedicatoria, 3; 'annisque redditibus assignandis (quod et re ipsa dudum praestitisset, nisi morte praeoccupatus fuisset) aliisque id genus efferebat.'

59. On the significance of the work in the history of Irish hagiography, see Felim O Briain, 'Irish Hagiography: Historiography and Method', in Sylvester O'Brien (ed.), *Measgra i gCuimhne Mhichil Uí Chléirigh*, (Dublin, 1944), 119-131, 124 and Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: an introduction to the Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1991), 41ff.

1624.<sup>60</sup> It knew no subsequent editions,<sup>61</sup> though in 1718 an English translation of the chapter on St Patrick's Purgatory was published.<sup>62</sup> It is interesting that, in his introduction to the *Florilegium*, Messingham mentions Lescalopier's vast collection of saints' relics.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps familiarity with this collection, and the owner's encouragement, led him to research seriously into the lives of the Irish saints. In any case, resident in Paris, and perhaps travelling about on political missions, he was in an ideal position to establish and maintain the contact with Irish and European scholars necessary for the pursuit of such a project. He worked hard to build up contacts in Europe and at home, and appears to have amassed a collection of manuscripts, since dispersed.<sup>64</sup> We know that he entered into contact with three Franciscans in Paris to discuss scholarly co-operation on the project. In March 1623, he met Hugh MacCaughwell (1571-1626), Patrick Fleming (1599-1631) and Hugh Ward (1593-1635).<sup>65</sup> Paris was attracting the Irish Franciscans who were interested in setting up a house there.<sup>66</sup> Hugh Ward, who joined the Franciscans in Salamanca in 1616, was already in Paris, having accompanied Fr Francis de Arriba, confessor to the French Queen. Ward and Fleming agreed to undertake research work themselves, and to send Messingham any material they should collect, on the understanding that he would publish it with due acknowledgement. The arrangement later fell through, but some material was exchanged.<sup>67</sup> In Bobbio, Fleming found the Rule of Columbanus which he sent to Messingham. In Rome, with Luke Wadding's help, he made several fur-

60. *Florilegium insulae sanctorum seu vitae et acta sanctorum Hiberniae quibus accesserunt non vulgaria monumenta hoc est Sancti Patricii Purgatorium, S. Malachiae Prophetia de summis Pontificibus, aliaque nonnulla quorum elenchus post praefationem habetur*, (Paris, 1624). Messingham was also responsible for the engravings which illustrate the text. His name appears on that of St Patrick facing the first page. Archbishop Ussher's annotated copy of the work is preserved in Trinity College Dublin.

61. A French translation of the dedication to the Lescalopier family was published in the eighteenth century. See *Bouquet de l'isle des Saints*, s.l. n.d. A copy is held in the *Bibliothèque Mazarine*, Paris, 42996(9).

62. Probably the work of Cornelius Nary. The copy listed in the catalogue of the National Library, Dublin, is missing. Its full title is *Florilegium Insulae sanctorum: a brief history of St Patrick's Purgatory and its pilgrimage. Collected out of ancient historians, written in Latin by Rev Thomas Messingham and now made English in favour of those curious to know of that famous place* (Paris, 1718). This tract is found on pages 86-109 of the *Florilegium*: see F. Blom, J. Blom, F. Korsten and G. Scott, *English Catholic Books 1701-1800* (London, 1996). One of the Brocas family produced an engraving of St Patrick after the original by Messingham from Leonard Gaultier in 1809: see National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Brocas 2129 TX 55.

63. *Florilegium*, Dedicatoria, 3.

64. See for example Trinity College Dublin, MS 584, p. 75. This manuscript is recorded as having been presented 'to my very loving friend Mr Thomas Messingham, President of Boncourt College, Paris.

65. Brendan Jennings, *Michael O Cleirigh* (Dublin, 1936), 27 and Sharpe, *op. cit.*, 46-51.

66. See Ruth Clarke, *Strangers and Sojourners at Port Royal* (Cambridge, 1932), 2.

67. Fleming's letters to Ward on this matter have been preserved, the rest is lost. See Brendan Jennings (ed.) 'Documents from the Archives of St Isidore's College, Rome', in *Analecta Hibernica*, 6, (1934), 203-47; Edmund Hogan, 'Irish Historical Studies in the Seventeenth century, II: Hugh Ward', in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 2nd ser., 7 (1870-1), 193-216.

ther important discoveries. Ward, however, proved the weak link in the new research chain. Due to weight of work, he failed to maintain a regular correspondence with Messingham, a fact which irritated the latter who needed material to complete his *Florilegium* which was about to go to press.<sup>68</sup> Relations cooled. When one of Messingham's associates, Fr Eugene Sweeney, wrote to Fleming asking for material, Fleming, on Ward's instruction, broke off the contact with Paris.

In the general introduction, Messingham explains his *Florilegium* project. He betrays a classical formation in his first citation, from Cicero's *De oratione*, where the author praises history as 'the witness of ages, the light of truth, the life of memory, the teacher of life and the herald of antiquity.'<sup>69</sup> For Cicero, the lessons of history languish uselessly in obscurity, if not brought to life by historians.<sup>70</sup> Messingham has no intention of failing in his historical duty, arguing for the special status of hagiography in the overall historical enterprise and in the life and history of the Church. What Cicero says of secular history, Messingham applies to ecclesiastical history, which he believes to be more deserving of praise and interest than any secular exploits.<sup>71</sup> No part of ecclesiastical history is more useful to the faithful or more beneficial for the soul than that of the saints' lives and deeds. Messingham hammers home the point with copious citations from both the Old and New Testaments. Trawling the Fathers, Messingham finds that both Jerome and Augustine accorded particular importance to the lives of the saints. For the former, the interpretation of the lives of the saints was nothing less than the interpretation of Sacred Scripture. For the latter, when any doubt arose concerning the interpretation of divine precepts, the lives of the saints provided the illumination and instruction necessary for a solution. Further, God himself, in order to identify his saints for his people and hence preserve them from error, permitted his saints to work miracles.<sup>72</sup> Their wonderful deeds, far from being mere prestidigitations are, in fact, visible marks of divine approval.

To the scriptural, historical, and patristic arguments for reading the *Vitae*, Messingham adds the pastoral. He stresses the advantages of the cult of the saints in the lives of ordinary Christians. Regardless of age, sex, condition or wealth, people find in the saints, far more effectively than they would in any form of words, the flower of virtue, the testimony of penitence, the example of sanctity. Messingham is particularly impressed by the saints' proven record in bringing back to the full fervour of the

68. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, 49.

69. '... disciplinarum quae ad humanos usus quidquam adferunt emoluenti, prudentiorum iudicio non postrema est historia.' Cicero, *De oratione* 2.

70. '... exempla omnia iacerent in tenebris nisi literarum lumen accederet.' Cicero, *Oratio pro Archia*.

71. '... longe magis ecclesiasticae convenire censendum est, cum haec tanto praestantior sit illa, quantum res divinae humanas antecellent', *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 1.

72. This is an important argument not only against Protestant theologians but also against rationalising tendencies within the Catholic tradition itself.

faith those who have lapsed. He stresses too the militant value of the saints' lives in the fight against heresy, especially the error that faith is sufficient for salvation which leads heretics to reject the efficacy of penance, fasting, and pilgrimages. The best means of refuting these errors is to present the lives of the saints to the public and allow them to speak for themselves. In this way they act not only as a bulwark against heretics but also as a means of correcting their errors. The saints' lives have a pivotal role to play in preserving Ireland for Catholicism.

Messingham is unashamedly chauvinistic in his praise of the Irish saints. God, he says, is glorified by the lives and works of all the saints, but he is even more honoured by the exceptional quality of the Irish, who with their fastings, vigils and mortifications excelled all other holy people.<sup>73</sup> Further, the Irish saints attributed the exceptional quality of their prophecies, revelations and apparitions not to their own prowess but to God's. In acting thus they added to the greatness of their miracles by giving greater glory to God.<sup>74</sup> Some contemporaries might express distaste for the extravagance and profusion of miracles in the Irish *Vitae*, but Messingham assures them that these miracles, precisely by their extravagance, demonstrate the seriousness of the divine purpose. As for those who claim to prefer Scripture to extravagant wonders, they are hoist with their own petard. Are they going to reject then the miracles which pepper the pages of Sacred Scripture?

The unique service rendered the Church universal by the Irish saints is underlined by Messingham. Indeed, Ireland's island fastness has been akin to the Trojan horse from whose belly cohorts of brave warriors swarmed to do battle with the forces of evil. Such was their spiritual prowess that already in ancient times they had earned Ireland the title of 'Island of Saints.'<sup>75</sup> Their fidelity to Rome was legendary and Messingham compares it with that of Achates to Aeneas.<sup>76</sup> This encomium of Ireland's historic sanctity serves a practical purpose, introducing Messingham's argument for the particular utility of the example of local saints in encouraging indigenous religious fervour. Contemporaries, he explains, often complain of the rigours which the true faith imposes. Rather than whine about the hardships, they should take heart from the example of their own local Irish saints, men and women like them.<sup>77</sup> Messingham cannot

73. Interestingly, this is one of the reasons why later generations of Bollandists were wary of Irish material, see Sharpe, *op. cit.*, 73, n.131.

74. He cites Acts 3:12, 20:35, Ps 150, and Matt 9:8 in corroboration.

75. '... ex qua velut equo Troiano egregii bellatores et victores isti proderunt...ut olim Hibernia insula Sanctorum ubique terrarum iure nominatur.' He cites Jocelin, c. 174. See *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 3.

76. Baronius, Ionas, Sanderus, Bozius, and an unnamed Jesuit author, are cited in support of this assertion.

77. '... et ne ullam Sanctos imitandi impossibilitatis aut nimiae difficultatis calvam praetextere possent excusationem; animadvertant Sanctos hosce ipsis non natura superiores, sub eodem climate natos, eadem regione educatos, sexu pares, conditione haud dissimiles.' *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 4.

hide his disappointment with those of his countrymen who had chosen to ignore the example of their forefathers and were following, what he calls, the way of *Epicurus*.

This brings him to the subject of the anti-Catholic legislation current in Ireland at the time of publication.<sup>78</sup> While many are willing to follow the example of the saints individually and in the privacy of their own homes, in public they prefer to imitate devils (*sanctos viritum, diabolos catervatim homines sequuntur*). He shows an appreciation for the dilemma of his countrymen at home, who are torn between a private religious conviction which is Catholic and a public obligation to worship according to the rites of the State Church. While appreciating the dilemma of divided loyalties, Messingham can not condone the practical equivocation that it entails. He excoriates those who seek temporary material advantage to the detriment of their immortal souls. Indeed, he finds the current apostasy something of a puzzle. He suggests that Irish people can fall into heresy only by doing violence to their own nature and by silencing the voice of their own consciences.<sup>79</sup> Those who do so deny themselves salvation for the paltry reward of earthly treasure, worldly honour and the friendship of 'English and Scots.' Apostates, he believes, can only blush on reading of the great antiquity of the Irish Church and the fidelity of its saints. He pleads with Irish Catholics that, although they can never surpass the saints in holiness, it behoves them to avoid the parvenu temples of the new religion. Given all this evidence, Messingham is dismayed that anyone can leave the true Church to attach himself to assemblies whose novelty and divisiveness betray the shallowness of their doctrine. In an ever more rhetorical style, Messingham claims that, 'We believe what our Fathers and Patrons believed, the testimony of Patrick, Columba and Brigid; what they taught we teach too, what they preached we now preach.'<sup>80</sup> He concludes that '... this Catholic doctrine is founded in divine precept, consecrated by apostolic practice, and the gift of the Church Fathers.' He prays that Catholics may have at their disposal the keen weapons of sound doctrine to wage manly war against heretics.<sup>81</sup>

#### IV. Content

With this rhetorical flourish, Messingham proceeds to present the bouquet of *Vitae* he has retrieved from various manuscript and printed

78. On Messingham's knowledge of home affairs see *Historical Manuscripts Commission Report on Franciscan Papers* (Dublin, 1906), 61-2.

79. He gives a reference to the first part of Rothe's *Analecta*, 68: see *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 4. 80. 'Quod crediderint Patres et Patroni nostri ... credimus; quod docuerunt, docemus; quod praedicaverunt praedicamus.' *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 6.

81. '... haec Catholicorum doctrina est in praecepto Dei fundata, ab Apostolis usurpata, a patribus per manus ad nos usque tradita. Haec et similia praeacuta iacula, quae in sectarios viriliter torqueant, in promptu habeant catholici, quibus illi icti et graviter sauciati, confusi discedent, nec amplius ad nuperas synagogas invitare catholicos audebunt.' *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 7.

sources. The *Florilegium* is a complex work. At its core is a collection of already published *Vitae* of the Irish saints, to which Messingham adds a selection of writings by the saints and a number of contemporary seventeenth-century historical tracts. The *Vitae* are presented in the order they appear in the calendar, but pride of place goes to the primary patrons, Patrick, Columba and Brigid.<sup>82</sup> As all-Ireland patrons these three have a special unifying role to play in drawing together the disparate elements of early seventeenth-century Irish Catholicism. They can be realistically presented as commanding the loyalty of all Irish Catholics, and thus help add coherence to the picture of a united Catholic *Natio* which Messingham wishes to present to his European readers. All are prefaced by short introductory passages in which Messingham cites sources and also indicates the particular significance of the piece in question in his overall hagiographical scheme. For instance, before presenting the first Life, Jocelin's Patrick, Messingham inserts David Rothe's treatise on the historical names for Ireland<sup>83</sup> in order to refute the claim that Ireland's greatest saints were, in fact, Scots by nation. In other words, the presentation of the Patrician corpus in the *Florilegium* serves to distinguish Ireland from Scotland for European readers. Messingham uses Rothe's text to take up the intellectual row, sparked off by Thomas Dempster (1579?-1625), over which nation, the Irish or the Scottish had rights to the heritage of the *Scoti*. Rothe was already a veteran of this war. In his 1620 *Brigida Thaumaturga*, Rothe had claimed the name *Scoti* uniquely for the inhabitants of Ireland. This had drawn a furious riposte from Dempster.<sup>84</sup> In his *Hibernia Resurgens* (1621), Rothe revisited the controversy and in Messingham's *Florilegium*, Rothe avails of the opportunity to deal with Dempster's charge in two movements. In the first, he writes of the different names for Ireland in historical texts, outlining Ireland's historical claim to the title 'Island of Saints', commenting on its role in civilising the Anglo-Saxons and on the welcome her saints received at the hands of Charles the Bald in Gaul. In the second part, he examines all the texts he can find which spoke of Ireland as *Scotia* ranging from Jerome's commentary on Jeremiah to Lombard, MacCaughell, Fitzsimon, Stanyhurst and George Buchanan.

Only after Rothe has demonstrated Ireland's historical claim to the name *Scotia* does Messingham turn to the *Vitae* themselves. The first Life presented is from the Norman tradition, Jocelin's twelfth-century Life of

82. Following the calendar was in line with Bolland's revision of Roseweyde's original plan. See Messingham's own calendar plan, *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 9.

83. This tract, though unsigned, is Rothe's. In Archbishop Ussher's annotated copy of the *Florilegium* (TCD, DD.d.22), a marginal note identifies him as the author.

84. He published *Scotia Illustrior* in 1623. In a rather intemperate outburst he calls Rothe "diabolus rabiosus exiens orco". Dempster's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Scotorum* was published in 1627.

St Patrick.<sup>85</sup> This Life had been specially commissioned at a time of renewed hagiographical production consequent on the erection of new dioceses in Ireland.<sup>86</sup> Jocelin's account teems with miracle stories, whose number and nature cause the editor no embarrassment at all. On the contrary, Messingham is positively encouraged by the challenge of explaining them to both sceptical Catholics and hostile Protestants. He is confident enough about his explanatory capacities, and convinced enough of the evangelical opportunities such explanations offer, to raise the stakes by introducing, immediately after Jocelin's life, an aspect of the Patrician tradition which Jocelin himself passed over in silence – St Patrick's Purgatory.<sup>87</sup> A number of historical and contemporary texts from authors as diverse as David Rothe, Henry of Salteriensus, Matthew Paris and Messingham himself, are conflated, all featuring miracles and wonders aplenty. Messingham's plan is to turn their very profusion and extravagance to his and the reader's advantage, vindicating the tradition and edifying the faithful. He will thereby defend the Catholic doctrine of purgatory and the Catholic practice of pilgrimages.<sup>88</sup>

His strategy unfolds slowly in the introduction to the Purgatory texts. Messingham wonders why Jocelin failed to mention this part of the tradition.<sup>89</sup> It is not, he contends, because the site is spurious. Rather it has to do with the ordinary omissions characteristic of biographers overawed by the great achievements of their subjects. Messingham, chiding those who confine Christ's works to what is recounted in Scripture, explains that just as there is more to the life of Christ than the Scriptures reveal so there is more to Patrick than the written accounts contain.<sup>90</sup> Jocelin, relying on the testimony of others, may have been misled to believe that

85. *Florilegium*, 1-85. See Socii Bollandiani, *Hagiographic Latina* (2 vols, Bruxelles, 1898-99), ii, 941. An edition had been published in Antwerp in 1514. For an English translation, see *The Life and Acts of Saint Patrick, the Archbishop, Primate and Apostle of Ireland; now first Translated from the Original Latin of Jocelin, the Cistercian Monk of Furnes, who Flourished in the Early Part of the Twelfth Century: with the Elucidations of David Rothe, Bishop of Ossory* (Philadelphia, Atkinson and Alexander, 1823).

86. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, 33.

87. *Florilegium*, 89-109. See *Hag. Latina*, ii, 941; here Messingham's offering is described as a hotchpotch of old and new texts, put together pell-mell '... est farrago ex scriptoribus tum antiquis tum recentioribus utcumque.'

88. Messingham's defence of St Patrick's Purgatory was still cited in Protestant polemics against the site well into the eighteenth century, see, for example, John Richardson, *The Great Folly, Superstition and Idolatry of Pilgrimages in Ireland* (Dublin 1727), 33.

89. The site had been closed by papal order early in the sixteenth century. It was condemned and destroyed on the order of James Spottiswodde, Anglican Bishop of Clogher, in October 1632.

90. He writes: '... vel quod probabilius videtur, ne quis existimaret non fuisse facta a Christo plura miracula, quam quae ipse, caeterique Evangelistae commemorarunt, ibique fidei terminum figeret, nihil amplius credens, quod aut alibi legeret, aut aliunde factum a Christo audiret. *Florilegium*, Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii, Ad lectorem, 86.

the Purgatory was discovered by another Patrick, an opinion the editor believes will be corrected by the texts which follow.<sup>91</sup>

The integrity of the Purgatory tradition having been vindicated, Messingham proceeds to explain what some readers might judge extravagant in miracle stories which Jocelin's Life includes. This is done with the aid of a set of short tracts commenting on those sections of Jocelin's Life which contain the most extravagant stories. Most of these are by his friend and collaborator David Rothe. In his *Praeloquium de conversione Hibernorum*, Rothe introduces his seven *Elucidationes in Iocelinum*.<sup>92</sup> The *Praeloquium* begins with the praise of Patrick, who was chosen by God to bring to completion the work of the conversion of the Irish begun before him. God saw fit to crown and confirm his efforts with miracles and wonders.<sup>93</sup> He does not dismiss those who claim that Ireland was first evangelised by the apostles Peter and James, but comments that their efforts did not produce the fruit expected, a commentary not on the futility of their efforts but on the unfathomable ways of God. It was his will that Patrick be endowed with the power of wonders and miracles to confound the magicians and pagan sages, and to level those heights of pride raised against the orthodox truth. The greatness of the miracles worked was the measure of the depravity of the evil and error encountered. Therefore, when contemporaries confront these wonders, it behoves them to praise their agent, God, rather than 'to stick up their noses and sneer at them' (*adunco naso irridere*). The Scriptures, the ancient classics as well as the saints' Lives provide ample examples of miracles stories and wonders, whose good faith cannot be denied. It is the purpose of these texts, says Rothe, to counter those who scandalise the inherited faith of the simple with their criticism of miracles and wonders by so presenting the life and times of Ireland's apostle that it may, with the appropriate explanations, be acceptable to the fair-minded reader.

Rothe's *Elucidationes* take up the most extravagant Patrician miracles reported by Jocelin in order to explain their real significance. The first *Elucidatio* concerns the miracle of the floating altar, the second, the curing of Gormas, the third, Patrick's miraculously melting a mass of ice, the fourth, the forty-day fast endured by Patrick, the fifth, the expulsion of the serpents,<sup>94</sup> the sixth, the staff of Christ<sup>95</sup> and, finally, the seventh, disagreements concerning the age, burial and ordination of Patrick.

91. *Florilegium*, Tractatus de Purgatorio, Ad lectorem, 87: 'Et sane nisi veritati indagandae studuissemus, non est quod tantopere de huius Purgatorii auctore altercaremus. An non sat nobis foret, illud ab aliquo, quisquis tandem ille sit, inventum esse, tam singulari Dei privilegio nostram patriam gaudere, tamque salutari beneficio nostrates frui?'

92. In introducing these treatises, Messingham is lavish in his praise of his Kilkenny colleague. He draws particular attention to Rothe's role in organising peace among Religious in 1620.

93. *Praeloquium*, 110. Rothe enjoys word play. He writes of Palladius, 'nam perpusillo tempore moratus in gente non morata.'

94. It is wrongly numbered the 4th elucidation in Messingham's text. *Florilegium*, 127.

95. This is wrongly numbered the 5th elucidation in the text. *Florilegium*, 134.



Explaining the incidents mentioned by Jocelin, Rothe establishes their purpose in the broader evangelical mission of Patrick and backs up the wonders with corroborative evidence from the Scriptures and history.<sup>96</sup>

Messingham adopts a similar method in the eight *Elucidatio* which concerns Chapters 105, 165 and 166 of Jocelin and is entitled *De antiquitate Christianae Religionis, et dignitatis Archiepiscopalis in Hibernia*.<sup>97</sup> He seeks to explain the true significance of three deeds of St Patrick mentioned by Jocelin but not sufficiently explained by him. Jocelin had spoken of the old chalices unearthed at St Patrick's behest, his erection of an Archiepiscopal See in Armagh and his angelically inspired journey to Rome to obtain archiepiscopal privileges for the city and endow it with relics of the martyrs Peter, Paul, and Stephen. Messingham is especially concerned to gloss Jocelin in order to provide his readers with a clearer picture of the antiquity and authenticity of Patrick's archiepiscopal dignity and of the extent of pre-Patrician Christianity in Ireland.

Given his purpose he is naturally attracted to the idea of an apostolic evangelisation of Ireland and repeats the tradition that Christianity was brought, perhaps, by St Peter or St James. He claims that traces of this first evangelisation were discovered by Patrick himself when he arrived in the fifth century as when, for instance, the Bishop Albius came to greet him. Messingham bases these arguments on tradition, and on Stanyhurst and Rothe, but particularly on a Life of St Cathaldus, recently authenticated from manuscript sources and published with papal authority in 1614. This Life relates that Cathaldus, in Ireland in the second century, constructed a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary for worshippers of the true God. There is no need to have recourse to a miraculous explanation of such an early manifestation of Christian faith in Ireland, comments Messingham. The story points, rather, to the presence of other Christians in Ireland at that time. He hesitates to affirm, with Bartholomew Moronus, that all the Irish were converted then, preferring to suggest that whether all accepted the faith or not, there were Christians in Ireland from this very early date. Cathaldus's testimony permits him to infer that Ireland's pre-Patrician kings were generous patrons of the Church, and that her early churchmen were exemplary followers of Jesus Christ.

Jocelin's testimony also points, continues Messingham, to the existence of the Archiepiscopal See of Armagh in St Patrick's time, *pace* Gerald of Wales who writes that there were none before 1148 when Papiro came as Legate. Messingham holds that Patrick erected the

96. *Prima Elucidatio in cap. 27*, 112. 'Et quo minor apparet miraculi necessitas, eo maior est mirandi proclivitas, ut prodigia quodammodo prodigantur, quando sine gravi causa, et veluti ad ostentationem eduntur, sed videamus quid de altaris enatatione, et leprosi in gravi ac duro marmore transfretatione referat ipse Jocelinus...'

97. *Florilegium*, 138-140. On Messingham's authorship, see Ussher's copy of *Florilegium*, TCD, 138. The three chapters in Jocelin are entitled *De altari et quatuor calicibus sub terra repertis*, *De civitate Ardmachana et duodecim eius civibus*, and *Quod Angelo monente sanctus Patricius Romam adierit*.

Archiepiscopal See *monitis angelorum*, had the erection confirmed by the Pope, who appointed him Legate to confirm Armagh's dignity on his return to Ireland. The pallia were brought by Papiro not because there were no Archbishoprics in Ireland previously but because, following the Viking persecutions, the practice of conferring the pallium had been interrupted. This occurred in the case of the See of Canterbury too, claims Messingham. He concludes that Armagh was certainly an Archiepiscopal See in the fifth century and that it is likely that there were Archiepiscopal Sees in Ireland in the second century at the time of Cathaldus. Finally, he draws attention to the chalices mentioned in Chapter 105 of Jocelin, which may have been hidden by Palladius or one of the earlier Christian communities during a persecution. Again, this evidence tends to confirm the great antiquity of Archbishoprics in Ireland.<sup>98</sup> Messingham stresses not only the antiquity and dignity of Irish Christianity but also its close links, *ab initio*, with the Papacy.

Messingham's eight *Elucidation* completes the Patrician material in the *Florilegium*. He then presents material on the country's secondary patrons, Columcille and Brigid. Like Patrick, they provide the opportunity to talk of Ireland as a distinct religious and cultural entity, united by allegiance to 'national' patrons. The Columban corpus is represented by Adomnán's Life, taken from Canisius.<sup>99</sup> This has the added significance of indicating an Irish presence in Scotland from the sixth century. Two Lives of St Brigid are included,<sup>100</sup> and Messingham takes the opportunity to revisit the Rothe-Dempster debate, mentioning how Ferrarius, the author of the new *Martrologium Romanum Topographia* expressed amazement that, though Brigid was born in Ireland, she was claimed by the modern Scots as one of their own. Messingham explains the paradox, recounting how the ancient Irish invaded Britain and named the northern Pictish part after their own native country, *Scotia*. In subsequent years, that name came to be applied exclusively to the northern part of Britain, the ancient land of *Scotia* taking the name *Hibernia*.

In the remainder of the *Florilegium*, Messingham deals with Irish saints who journeyed further afield, providing his European readership with ample evidence of Irish evangelical activity in their native lands. He follows a clear geographical scheme, dealing with saints who travelled to Ireland's nearest neighbours first. He begins with St Fingar, St Pila and companions who travelled to martyrdom in Britain.<sup>101</sup> Messingham then

98. Messingham concludes his *Elucidatio* by explaining how Rothe had his prepared originally for the *Officium* of St Patrick. In reproducing them here Messingham has not followed the original order.

99. *Florilegium*, 144-82. See *Hagiographia Latina*, i, 284. For numerous comments on Messingham's presentation of Canisius's text, itself published in 1604, see William Reeves *The Life of St Columba Founder of Hy written by Adamnan* (Dublin, 1857).

100. *Florilegium*, 191-202. *Hag. Lat.*, i, 217. An edition of this life was in print since 1486, at Milan.

101. *Florilegium*, 211-18. *Hag. Lat.*, i, 448.

crosses the Channel to talk of Columbanus<sup>102</sup> and a number of his miracles.<sup>103</sup> His rule, taken from a manuscript in the library at Bobbio, is reproduced much later in the collection, possibly because it did not arrive on time for inclusion with the main text.<sup>104</sup> The reader is taken further east and south with the Lives of St Gall,<sup>105</sup> St Magnus<sup>106</sup> and St Killian, the apostle of Franconia.<sup>107</sup> Messingham crosses into Austria with a Life of St Feargal (=Virgilius), taken from Eberhardus.<sup>108</sup> Virgilius's companion Dobdagreus, who was mistaken by some for a Greek, is reclaimed for Ireland in a marginal note.<sup>109</sup> A Life of Dymrna takes us to the Low Countries.<sup>110</sup> Messingham then moves on to the twelfth century and back to France with St Bernard's Life of Malachy.<sup>111</sup> Staying in the twelfth century, he reproduces Baronius's Life of St Laurence O'Toole<sup>112</sup> and a version of the canonisation of Laurence. A very short Life of St Fiakra follows.<sup>113</sup> St Fursey's Life<sup>114</sup> is accompanied by a verse Life of St Blaitmaic by Walfridus Strabonus.<sup>115</sup> The *Florilegium* closes with miscellaneous texts, including a sermon of St Gall. Messingham completes his European odyssey with a sermon attributed to St Patrick taken from Stanyhurst's Life of St Patrick.<sup>116</sup> The *Florilegium* ends at it began, under the patronage of Ireland's undisputed national apostle.

## V. Conclusion

Messingham emerges from the *Florilegium* as one of the first Irish intellectuals sufficiently self-aware and adequately equipped to undertake the invention of the Irish *Natio* according to the criteria of seventeenth century Catholic *ancien régimes*. This entailed the presentation of Ireland to a European audience as a distinct historical and political entity whose Christian identity could be traced back to apostolic times. The central defining characteristic of the Irish *Natio*, as Messingham conceives it, is Catholicism. However, Catholicism in Messingham's scheme is rather narrowly conceived. At its core is the example of remarkable men and

102. *Florilegium*, 239-52. *Hag. Lat.*, i, 287.

103. This anonymous document is taken from the library of *domini Tuani*, described as President of the Parlement of Paris. This is probably Jean Lescalopier who was also Baron St. Just.

104. *Florilegium*, 403-408.

105. *Florilegium*, 255-94. *Hag. Lat.*, i, 486.

106. *Florilegium*, 298-317. *Hag. Lat.*, i, 767.

107. *Florilegium*, 318-24. *Hag. Lat.*, ii, 696.

108. *Florilegium*, 330-41. *Hag. Lat.*, ii, 1253. It was already produced by Canisius.

109. *Florilegium*, 342.

110. *Florilegium*, 343-49. *Hag. Lat.*, i, 355.

111. *Florilegium*, 376.

112. *Florilegium*, 379-87. *Hag. Lat.*, ii, 707.

113. *Florilegium*, 391-92. *Hag. Lat.*, i, 440.

114. *Florilegium*, 393-96. *Hag. Lat.*, i, 480-2.

115. *Florilegium*, 399-402. *Hag. Lat.*, i, 203-4.

116. *Florilegium*, 437-441.

women who, by their faith and with God's visible approval, expressed through miracles, can be identified as saints. The primary role of the saints' example in the early seventeenth century Irish context is that of inspiring the persecuted and recalling the lapsed and apostate. The *Vitae* fulfill the double function of inspiration and conversion, and stand at the heart of the regeneration of the Irish *Natio* for the new era. They also serve as the backbone of the politically motivated presentation of Ireland as a Catholic *Natio* to European audiences. The Tudor and Stuart conquests had made Ireland, for the first time, a distinct, coherent, political entity whose identity now needed to be formed. Messingham and Rothe were adamant that the recently defeated, but thereby newly united, Irish resist the temptation to identify themselves as Protestants. They were also anxious that a Catholic image of Ireland be circulated among powerful Catholic neighbours. Both ends, the pastoral and the political, were to be achieved through use of the Irish saints' *Vitae*.

Messingham's argument for Catholicity as the defining characteristic of the Irish is not based on the superior truth of that religion, though he never, of course, denies that. Rather it rests on the proven example of the Irish saints who by their lives and teachings display the natural aptness of Catholicism for the Irish. However, Catholicism, as Messingham understands it, is not exclusive. Indeed, as a defining characteristic, it is powerful and penetrating enough to cancel out differences of geographical or racial origin. He makes this clear in the introduction to the *Florilegium* where he asks his reader not be wonder that Patrick, a Briton, is included in the list of Irish saints. Patrick is to be considered not with regard to his origins but to his title of Apostle and Patron. Indeed Messingham would go further. Just as Gregory the Great is called the Apostle of England because he sent the first missionaries, so Pope Celestine might be called the Apostle of Ireland because of his solicitude in sending Palladius and Patrick. The quality of Irishness for Messingham is not associated with blood or ancestry but with solicitude for the faith.<sup>117</sup> Shades of Henry IV's conversion to Catholicism in 1593.<sup>118</sup> Religious allegiance is less about personal conviction than about solicitude for the *Natio*. With this definition of Catholicism and *Natio*, Messingham can broaden the Irish *Natio* historically to include desirable figures such as Patrick and Pope Celestine, while narrowing it in the contemporary context to exclude modern heretics. He also safeguards its integrity against troublesome,

117. *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 7-8. Here Messingham says: '...nec miretur quispiam quod S Patricium, origine Britannum inter Hiberniae sanctos numeraverim: nam non originis titulo sed Apostoli et Patroni, nostratibus eum vendico. Nec ipsum modo sed et S Coelestinum Papam primum nostratibus assumere possem; ut pote qui tantam curam et sollicitudinem erga nostrae gentis salutem habuit, ut et S Patricium, et ante illum Palladium ad Hibernorum conversionem destinaverit, et reapse miserit.' Drawing an example from English ecclesiastical history, he continues: 'sicut enim S Gregorius Magnus Angliae Apostolus nominatur, quod fidei precones in Angliam miserit, singularemque curam erga eam gesserit, ita parti iure S Celestinus primus Hibernorum Apostolus dici potest.'

118. See Michael Wolfe, *The Conversion of Henry IV* (Harvard, 1993).

predatory Scots like Dempster! Ireland's adhesion to Catholicism from the dawn of Christianity is the source of its unique identifying historical experience which serves both to distinguish it from certain neighbours, such as Scotland while at the same time linking it to others, such as France and Rome.

The *Florilegium* presents a certain image of Ireland to continental readers. It is also aimed at Irish readers, at Catholics in need of reassurance and encouragement and heretics in need of re-education and conversion. Reassurance and re-education are both to be effected through the example of the saints rather than by any dogmatic programme. The *Vitae*, therefore, can assist all manner of men in the fulfilment of their religious duties, spurring the lukewarm to express their faith in acts of charity,<sup>119</sup> encouraging the already fervent to persevere in good works,<sup>120</sup> leading the strays back to the right path. Messingham creates the impression that the future extension of the Irish *Natio* is possible on several levels. Firstly, by the revival of lukewarm Catholics, secondly by the return of apostate Catholics, and thirdly by the conversion of heretics. In Messingham's version of *Natio*, all the significant communities resident in early seventeenth-century Ireland, lukewarm Old Irish and Old English, apostate Old English, and heretic English and Scot, have the opportunity to reintegrate the *Natio* by conforming themselves to the example of the ancient Irish saints. The chimerical quality of this scheme as a workable political plan takes nothing from its aspirational coherence especially for its European target audience. After all, a similar sort of scheme seemed to be working, for the moment at least, in France.

In conclusion, it ought to be pointed out that Messingham's vision of *Natio* had a transcendental dimension. Certainly, he was aware of the usefulness of enlisting European Catholics to support the Irish Catholics' cause before James I. He uses the *Vitae* to carve out a place for Ireland on the new political map of Europe and in the history of Christianity. Quite naturally, he also recognised a dimension of religion beyond politics and history, a dimension to which he believed the saints' earthly lives pointed. The Irish *Natio* comprised not just a place on the map of Europe and an era in the history of Christianity, but also a position in the heavenly hierarchy.<sup>121</sup> A *Natio* at home, a state on the map of Europe and an assured place in heaven: these were the ambitious aspirations which early seventeenth century Irish intellectuals could entertain in their continental refuges as they reimagined Ireland for the Iron Century.

119. '... ad christinae pietatis officia excitentur ii qui hactenus fide quidem coniuncti moribus autem disiuncti, a sanctis fuere.' *Florilegium*, Ad lectorem, 8.

120. '... ad profectum in virtutibus ac perseverantiam bonis operibus extimentur hi qui fide et actione cum Sanctis concordarunt.' *Ibid.*

121. '... ne densissima caligine, et ingloriis tenebris Hiberniae fama, et maiorum nostrorum, caelestiumque civium laus et memoria ulterius delitescat.' *Ibid.*