

The Lion of St. Jarlath



**John MacHale -
Catholic prelate and Irish nationalist**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the cand. philol. degree

by

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In our green isle of old renown,
From many a by-gone age,
Full pure and clear the fame comes down
Of soldier, saint, and sage;
But high amidst those glories bright
That shine on Innisfail,
'Tis ours to write in lines of light,
The name of John Mac Hale.

Tribute to John MacHale by T. Sullivan,
St. Patrick's Day, 1876.

Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| Preface | iii |
| Maps | iv |
| Chapter 1 - Introduction | 1 |
| Why write a biography? | 3 |
| Sources | 4 |
| Historiography | 5 |
| Chapter 2 – Childhood and education, 1791-1820 | 9 |
| Mayo – the Celtic Fringe..... | 9 |
| Primary education | 12 |
| From rebellion to union..... | 16 |
| Higher education..... | 21 |
| Chapter 3 – The struggle for Catholic rights, 1820-1834 | 27 |
| The advance of undenominational primary education..... | 27 |
| Famine in the west | 33 |
| Second Reformation..... | 35 |
| The rise of a National Education System..... | 39 |
| Catholic Emancipation | 40 |
| Church of Ireland or Irish Church?..... | 43 |
| Land and establishment..... | 46 |
| A radical bishop? | 48 |
| A plea for repeal of the Union | 50 |
| Debated and elevated | 51 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Chapter 4 – Politics and dissension, 1834-1850..... | 52 |
| Tithes..... | 52 |
| Poor Law | 54 |
| The fight on the National Education System..... | 56 |
| The Irish language – a national heritage?..... | 60 |
| The Repeal Association..... | 63 |
| Charitable Bequests Act..... | 68 |
| Queen’s Colleges | 69 |
| The Great Famine | 71 |
| The dawning of new times | 75 |
| | |
| Chapter 5 – Land and nation, 1850-1881 | 76 |
| A Catholic University..... | 77 |
| The Catholic Defence Association..... | 79 |
| The Irish Tenant League..... | 81 |
| Independent Parliamentary Representation..... | 83 |
| National Education and the Irish language..... | 88 |
| The National Association | 90 |
| Fenian times..... | 92 |
| Church reforms | 94 |
| Home Rule..... | 96 |
| Parliamentary efforts on higher education | 98 |
| Land and nation | 99 |
| The end of an era..... | 101 |
| | |
| Chapter 6 - Conclusion | 104 |
| | |
| Sources and Bibliography | 109 |

Preface

A long process is now over.
It has been hard work and it has been a lot of fun!

I would like to thank some people, without whom, this process would have been far less inspiring:

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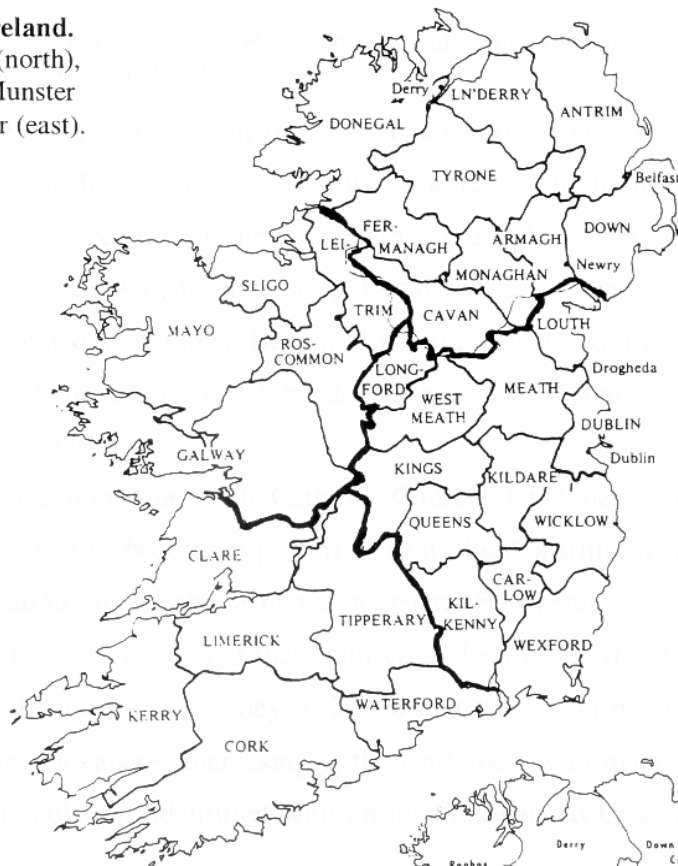
Thank you, Veronika, for walking through stormy weather to read my manuscript, and thank you, Irene, for being the technical wizard that you are.

Feelings of gratitude also go to my mother, who has the unique quality of always asking the right question.

And last, but far from least, I want to thank you, Tom, for support and sympathy. Without you by my side, this would have been a far more exhausting process!

Bergen, May 15, 2002
Mari Janne Solbø Zahl

Political map of Ireland.
 Counties of Ulster (north),
 Connacht (west), Munster
 (south) and Leinster (east).



Religious map of Ireland. Map
 showing provinces and
 dioceses.



Source: Flo 1997.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The State recognises the special position of the Holy Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of its citizens.¹

Thus reads article 44 of the Irish Constitution of 1937. It confirmed the close alliance between the Catholic Church and Irish nationality that was implicit in the founding of the Irish Republic.² This alliance emerged during the nineteenth century. For centuries Ireland had been subjected to strong English and British political influence, and in 1801 a legislative Union between Ireland and Great Britain was established. At the time the Catholic Church and Catholic believers were still burdened by penal legislation issued to keep the ‘papists’ in an inferior position.

During the nineteenth century the Irish Catholic Church developed from being badly organised and decentralised to become a powerful, centralised institution with vast influence in Irish society. In addition, and this is part of a general European trend, the Irish people became more politically self-aware, and they realised and criticised that the Union State did not promote the Irish cause; in fact, they reckoned that the Union itself in many ways was the reason for Irish grievances. Increasingly, the Catholics, who made up some eighty per cent of the Irish population, identified with an institutionalised Church and an Irish nationhood.

The Church’s increasing political power gave it an important role in Irish nationalism. And the Irish Church was truly concerned with Irish affairs, although the Roman Catholic Church has a very international perspective. The main reasons for this feature are probably that the Irish people were governed, and governed badly, the Church thought, by a Protestant State. Not only were Catholics penalised by the law, but the State Church in primarily Catholic Ireland was Protestant. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church in general did not adhere wholeheartedly to the national cause until the 1880s. Especially the holder of the important office of Archbishop of Dublin had checked such attachment. By custom and practicality, the Archbishop of Dublin was the true Primate among the four archbishops in the country and was generally the mouthpiece of the official opinions of the Church.³

¹ *The 1937 Constitution*. Quoted in O’Day and Stevenson 1992: 196.

² The Republic was given international recognition in 1949.

³ The Archbishopric of Armagh was the apostolic see of St. Patrick, founder of the Irish Catholic Church. Therefore, the Archbishop of Armagh is given the title Primate of All Ireland. The Archbishop of Dublin is correspondingly given the title Primate of Ireland. However, by custom the Archbishop of Dublin is the head of the four archbishops.

But the Catholic Church was not as uniform as it might appear to have been. Behind this official unity emerged dissenting voices, one of which belonged to John MacHale. MacHale was Archbishop of Tuam, the westernmost province in Ireland, between 1834 and 1881. He was a high-profile prelate who challenged the position of the Church on many areas. Most importantly, he was a fervent nationalist. Throughout his priestly life, MacHale worked on the edge of official hierarchical opinion and behaviour; he was a truly political prelate, defending a consistent belief in the need of an Irish nation state. He was the essence of the typical nationalist prelate emerging after his time; it was only after he died that one could find a similar national-political zeal in the Catholic prelacy in general. MacHale, with his firm confidence and never-yielding conviction, was a pivotal vehicle in this development.⁴

The Catholic Church, Irish nationalism and the British State were the most significant institutions in the development of Irish society and politics in the nineteenth century. Their agendas were different and often opposing; whereas the Church worked to achieve a higher degree of internal institutionalisation and at the same time worked to advance its dominant political concerns, especially within education, the nationalists tried to gain support from many quarters to be able to increase Irish political autonomy. The State tried to oppose both of these developments and keep its political power in the country. The biography of a nationalist Catholic prelate such as MacHale functions to encapsulate important parts of the development of these three institutions, and his biography can hence be seen as a point of intersection between the three institutions in nineteenth-century Ireland.

It is thus logical to make John MacHale the primary subject of a thesis on the Irish Catholic Church and nationalism in the nineteenth century. The fact that he was an archbishop is an important element. Thus he was something more than a radical countryside priest. In a Church that put much emphasis on hierarchy, MacHale was one of the four foremost prelates and hence a central religious leader. MacHale also lived to be a very old man and thus participated in and had first-hand experience with a wide range of questions of Irish religious and political interest. His length of office also made him the contemporary of numerous religious and political leaders. The development of nineteenth-century Ireland is thus in many aspects encapsulated in the biography of John MacHale.

⁴ Because of his strong position and towering personality, MacHale was called the Lion of St. Jarlath. St. Jarlath is the patron of the Archdiocese of Tuam.

My contention in this thesis is that John MacHale, all the way from the 1820s, represents the nationalist prelate who came to the fore around the turn of the nineteenth century. I further claim that MacHale is important not just as a representative of times to come, but as a significant force in his own time that contributed to such a development. By constantly focusing on national questions, MacHale forced the rest of the hierarchy to do the same. And after his death, the reward came in form of an Irish nation state in coalition with his Catholic Church.

Since the Archbishop of Dublin was the mouthpiece of official and general Catholic opinion, I will often present MacHale in opposition to the holders of this office. The Archbishopric of Dublin was very important because its headquarters was situated in the Capitol City of the country. Dublin was the hub of communication with England and within Ireland. Dublin was also the political centre of Ireland. The persons chosen for the office of Archbishop of Dublin were generally in harmony with Roman (or papal) opinions, as they because of the See's geographical position would have to relate to the political leaders of the country.

Why write a biography?

A historical analysis can be presented in a number of ways, and a historian may choose to write a biography for one of two reasons: The person portrayed either had vast influence on his surroundings or can be seen as a representative of a larger environment.⁵ As indicated, MacHale was not representative of the official opinions of the Irish Catholic Church in his time. Neither did he have enough influence on the majority of the hierarchy to impose his views on his fellow prelates. However, MacHale proved to be a representative of the position taken by the Catholic Church after his death, when his views and activity became a model for priests and prelates in their work for an Irish nation. The effect of his influence hence became visible post mortem. MacHale is also a favourable subject for a thesis as his life encapsulates the development of all three institutions of Church, State and Nation. Because he was so politically active, his biography gives a good insight into nineteenth-century Ireland.

A biography is a very good narrative tool. To structure a theme around one person and one chronology can make very good reading. The American historian Barbara Tuchman states that:

As a prism of history, biography attracts and holds the reader's interest in the larger subject. People are interested in other people, in the fortunes of the individual. If I seem to stress the reader's interest rather more than the pure urge of the writer, it is because, for me, the reader is the essential other half of the writer. Between them is an indissoluble connection.⁶

So, in the quest to create good reading, she finds the biography to be a good tool. Obviously, when a plot is focused around agents and not structures, different aspects of history appear, as different questions are asked. But the individual is not presented merely in its own right; biography also puts an informing focus on the time in which the person lived. The circumstances have an impact on the individual, just as the individual has an impact on his or her circumstances.

A biography is also a good structural tool. Tuchman stresses this function when she states that:

Secondly, biography is useful because it encompasses the universal in the particular. It is a focus that allows both the writer to narrow his field to manageable dimensions and the reader to more easily comprehend the subject. Given too wide a scope, the central theme wanders, becomes diffuse, and loses shape.⁷

To structure a plot around a particular person is very orderly; problems arise only when the author makes his or her subject the main character of any and every event, without having justification for such an act.

To date, not much research has focused on differences within the Irish Catholic Church in its relationship to nineteenth-century nationalism. To focus on a divergent agent makes a good tool for the purpose of emphasising these internal differences. As Tuchman says, it will encompass the universal in the particular and also, hopefully, hold the reader's interest.

Sources

Being a man of his time, MacHale was a man of writing. Much of his work on the religious and political arena was done by written correspondence, some of which was public and some of which was of a more private kind. Unfortunately, much of the source material after John MacHale is lost. Therefore the material available today is not large. I have still found it to be extensive enough to act as a foundation for an analytical thesis on his work. I made use of the archives in the National Library of Ireland in Dublin and received much help there to trace my source material.

⁵ Kjeldstadli 1992: 29.

⁶ Tuchman 1983: 81.

⁷ Tuchman 1983: 81.

The period from 1820 to 1834 is the one best covered in my collection of sources. From later periods of his life, more material, it seems, has been lost. In addition, he most likely wrote less later in his life. This is not to say that he hardly wrote. Enough single letters and pastorals from later periods of his life do exist as to enable me to make a comprehensive analysis. But the fewer direct sources is not really a problem, because MacHale spelled out many of his opinions in the early days, only to affirm them throughout his career. Loyalty to his own opinions and resolutions was a characteristic trait in him, and it is hence reasonable to assume that he followed his principles throughout his lifetime.

In addition to my own collection of sources, I have found much source material in the central published works mentioned below. This latter circumstance can arguably present a problem, as these works not necessarily present a balanced version of MacHale's life and activities. However, the biographical products written on MacHale are extensive. In addition, the fact that I have several biographies to draw from, reduces the danger of unfounded bias.

MacHale did not keep any diaries, at least none that have survived to present times. Most of his letters are written for public reading or written as part of his office as a priest. Therefore, I have had few possibilities to enter MacHale's mind, and I am thus left to interpret his public actions and his official letters. However, the central published works I have read, some of which was written by acquaintances of MacHale's, have helped me look, by proxy, into his thoughts.

Historiography

Four authors have dedicated a work solely to John MacHale. These are Hilary Andrews, Ulick Bourke, Nuala Costello and Bernard O'Reilly. The books of Bourke and O'Reilly were published around the turn of the nineteenth century, and both authors were hence contemporaries of MacHale. Costello wrote her biography in 1939 and after decades of nothing, Hilary Andrew wrote her biography on the archbishop last year.

The biographies all give a detailed and interesting insight into the life and, to some extent, the times of John MacHale. However, they mainly discuss MacHale as an individual. To some extent the biographies bear resemblance to the ancient tradition of the hagiography and tend to glorify their subject.⁸ Yet, in contrast to the hagiographies, these

⁸ See Egeland 2001.

biographies are not built on any legends; the authors have had access to much source material, and Ulick Bourke even knew MacHale.

None of these biographies, however, are to any great extent analytical or even academic. They to a small extent present socio-economic perspectives. Clearly the objective of the biographers has been the exaltation of a man rather than a discussion of the influence of man and society on each other; they are presentations of a *life* rather than additionally a *time*. I should, however, be careful to stress that these biographies were probably never intended to be but what they are. The biographies are focused on the man, not on any larger historical theme.

Since Andrews's book was published only last year, I have been fortunate enough to have access to biographies written both contemporary to MacHale and contemporary to myself. Whereas Bourke and O'Reilly had the opportunity to experience his time and, in Bourke's case, to experience also the man himself, Andrews provides a perspective that is far-removed in time.

The two biographers of which I have the most knowledge are Bourke and O'Reilly. Like MacHale, Ulick Bourke was born in County Mayo and he was even a relative of MacHale's.⁹ Like MacHale he studied at St. Patrick's College at Maynooth and was ordained a priest in 1858 by Archbishop MacHale in Tuam. For a period of time Bourke was the private secretary of MacHale, and this provided insight into MacHale's personal activities and his psychology. Bourke had many of the same political views and priorities as MacHale; among other things he put much of his efforts into the advance of the Irish language. As we will see, this was also an issue of priority for MacHale. Bourke was a professor of Irish at St. Jarlath's College and a member of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language. He published an Irish catechism and made sure that all the Irish writings of MacHale were published and re-published.

Bernard O'Reilly was also born in Mayo.¹⁰ He had less direct experience with Irish conditions, because he emigrated to Canada early in his life. He was ordained there in 1843. He also lived for quite some time in Rome, and got to learn much about the heart of the Roman Catholic Church. O'Reilly has written the most comprehensive of the biographies on MacHale. His product spans over 1,400 pages.

Nuala Costello wrote her biography in 1939 and was then part of a generation that had lived to see the dawning of the New Ireland. But after her, no one asked the question

⁹ The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/16011c.htm>

¹⁰ The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11293b.htm>

of John MacHale until recently. To my utter surprise I discovered a few months ago the biography written by Hilary Andrews, which was published in late 2001. After decades of seemingly no attention on the achievements of MacHale, suddenly a new book devoted to his life and accomplishments had been written. Andrews's book is published by Veritas Publications, a publication house wholly owned by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.¹¹ It was a source of great satisfaction to discover that I was not the only writer fascinated by the Lion of the West, as Andrews describes him. On account of the late arrival of Andrews's biography, I have not used it actively in my analysis; my work had progressed far too far by the time of its publication. Andrews's work, moreover, is clearly intended for the lay Catholic reader. It contains neither introduction nor conclusion and aims to write "the story of John MacHale" as the inspirational life of a prominent Irish archbishop. Her perspective has hence been very different from mine. It was nevertheless a source of satisfaction that her work and mine agree on an over-all impression of MacHale, considering we had access to the same source material.

In addition to these four biographies, two books have been written on the archbishopric of Tuam, in each of which a section has been dedicated to MacHale. Oliver Burke was a contemporary of MacHale's, whereas E. D'Alton published his book in 1928. These two books obviously focus on MacHale's adult life and chiefly on his time as archbishop. They both present MacHale as one of the most competent archbishops in the history of the archdiocese.

Much literature has concentrated both on the development of the Irish Catholic Church and on the development of Irish nationalism in nineteenth-century Ireland. Historians have acknowledged the importance of religion within Irish nationalism, and there is also a general acknowledgement of the growing alliance between the two institutions of nation and the Catholic Church. D. George Boyce states in his *Nationalism in Ireland* that in Ireland, "the nationalist movements enjoyed the support and leadership of the clergy (...)"¹² However, neither he nor Robert Kee, another major writer on Irish nationalism, have given the connection between the two primary focus.¹³ The Catholic Church is merely presented as one of many contributors to the development of nineteenth-century Ireland. Politicians and revolutionaries remain the protagonists of most such analyses. There are obviously exceptions from this rule. Emmet Larkin has produced

¹¹ Veritas Publishing: <http://www.veritas.ie/cgi-bin/aboutus.exe?/CountryCode=Ie&cartid=&ProductID=&BookTitle=>

¹² Boyce 1995: 16f.

weighty works on the Catholic Church in Irish politics. However, his focus has been on the period of major Church institutionalisation, from the 1850s onwards, and he has especially focused on the time after 1870. Larkin has also, as most other authors writing on this theme, concentrated on the main lines of Church opinion. The picture was not, as I have claimed, that simple within the Irish Church. This Larkin obviously knows. He presents MacHale in his literature as the foremost representative of divergence: “For more than thirty years MacHale had proved to be a very heavy cross to the Roman authorities and the pope”.¹⁴

In academic literature on the Catholic Church and nationalism in nineteenth-century Ireland, MacHale has generally been mentioned as the foremost antagonistic prelate and then dropped. John MacHale challenged much of contemporary ecclesiastical behaviour and opinions. Thus he represents a different perspective on the nineteenth-century Catholic prelate. As I have stressed, a work focusing on a, to a large degree, divergent prelate has an important purpose in underlining the fact that the history of the majority or the official representatives of the Church is not the whole story.

There are numerous academic books written on general Irish history. The bulk of historians agree on the main lines of development. For this thesis I have selected some of these. Hence, unless otherwise cited, general factual knowledge on Irish history has been taken from the following two standard textbooks: Mike Cronin’s *A History of Ireland* and T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin’s *The Course of Irish History*.

¹³ Kee 1972.

¹⁴ Larkin 1996: xix.

Chapter 2 – Childhood and education, 1791-1820

John MacHale was born on Sunday, March 6, 1791.¹ He was born in Tubbernavine in the barony of Tirawley, which is situated in County Mayo in the province of Connacht in the westernmost part of Ireland.² John was the sixth of eight children in the MacHale family, one of six sons of Patrick MacHale and Mary Mulkieran. Ireland was at this time a chiefly rural, and in many ways a backward, country where industry in only a very small scale had made its appearance. Subsistence farming was the most prevalent form of economic activity. The country was governed from Dublin – and ultimately London – in what can only be called a colonial manner. Although more than eighty per cent of the country's inhabitants were Catholics, Protestants occupied most important positions in Irish society. The Protestants were mainly English Anglicans or their descendants, and their presence was the basic force behind English authority in Ireland. Predominantly, the Protestants had settled in Ireland from the early seventeenth century in conjunction with the conflicts between King and Parliament that led to and accompanied the Civil War in England. The victory of the English Protestant Party in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 also had deep consequences for Ireland. Following the defeat of the armies of the Catholic James II by the armies of the Protestant William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, Catholics in Ireland were degraded to second-class subjects in their own country for more than a century. The degradation was initiated in 1695 by the parliamentary passage of the first of several 'penal laws' issued on the ground that Catholics were seen as less loyal subjects to the Protestant King and Parliament. The laws severely restricted the rights of Catholics in the country with regard to education, land-owning, political office, and so on, and constituted what was later to be called the Protestant Ascendancy.

Mayo – the Celtic Fringe

The western part of Ireland was the poorest and most backward part of the country. It was predominantly rural and dominated by subsistence farming. Nearly the entire population, except for Anglo-Irish landlords, who as a general rule did not live there, was Catholic.

¹ There exists some disagreement as to the year of MacHale's birth, both 1789 and 1790 being mentioned, but the majority of my sources insist on 1791.

² Connacht is the westernmost of the four provinces of Ireland. The remaining three are Ulster in the north, Leinster in the east and Munster in the south.

After the English Civil War of the 1640s and Cromwell's conquest of Ireland, a major resettlement of the country began. In 1652, the Cromwellian government passed the Act of Settlement, which was designed to punish the rebellious Irish and credit the soldiers who had fought Cromwell's battles and the people who had paid for these battles. The scores were to be settled in property. In 1653 it was decided that the government's debts should be paid with land in Ulster, Leinster and Munster provinces. The Irish and Catholic inhabitants of these provinces were to be moved to Connacht and to County Clare in the north of Munster.³ This operation in consequence made the western part of Ireland a stronghold for Irish-speaking Catholics. Since there was not enough land in the three other provinces to satisfy Cromwell's creditors, the Connacht counties Leitrim and Sligo and also the barony of Tirawley in Mayo were set aside for soldiers.⁴ Since the transplantation of people to Connacht was relatively extensive, most of the grants given were comparatively small. The grants in Connacht were, despite the intention, not always accepted. Many soldiers sold the land, as a cash reward suited them better, and some transplantees managed to stay in their original district. Nevertheless, a major change had taken place in the land ownership of County Mayo. The majority of landowners were now Protestants, even though Catholics owned a larger portion of the land here than elsewhere in Ireland. It has been estimated that Catholics owned 39 per cent of the land in Connacht in 1703, in contrast to 88 per cent in 1641.⁵

The western part of Ireland was not very accessible to the rest of the country. In addition to the remote location from Dublin, the roads were bad and few, and the landscape was very mountainous and barren. This latter point was also one of the reasons for the dominance of subsistence farming; the land was not very fertile. County Mayo's relative prosperity during the last half of the eighteenth century and up until the end of the Napoleonic war in 1815 was always considerably lower than that of the more prosperous eastern and northern parts of the country. It was also lower than that of most other counties within its own province. The county was not, however, truly uniform in its topography. It was divided into two distinct regions: the so-called central corridor and the periphery of the east and west. The central corridor had some of the richest land in all of Connacht, even though this was, as mentioned, incomparable with the more prosperous parts of the

³ Jordan 1994: 28f.

⁴ Jordan 1994: 29.

⁵ The estimates are made by Nollag O'Muraile. See Jordan 1994: 35.

country.⁶ These internal variances set aside, most Mayo peasants still worked small plots and subdivided the land between them.

Such was the time and place in which John MacHale was born. The MacHale family lived in Tirawley situated in the central corridor of Mayo. John's father, Patrick, kept a rather large farming business. In addition he managed an inn, and he also traded in linen.⁷ The linen industry arrived in western Ireland in the early decades of the eighteenth century; by then, Ulster's weavers were unable to produce sufficient quantities of linen, and the business spread to northern Connacht.⁸ At the end of the century the linen industry was the most dynamic sector of the Mayo economy, and Tirawley was an important area of flax growth and spinning.⁹ John was as such a member of a comparatively well to do family; there is reference to them having both labourers and household servants.¹⁰ This abundance was to benefit John also in later years. On account of his trading business, Patrick MacHale travelled frequently and he made quite a few journeys to the Linen Hall in Castlebar, the Capitol City of Mayo, and also to Dublin. In this way he saw and learned much of the world outside of his own barony, and one important consequence of his travels was that he came in contact with the English language. He readily developed an interest in it, and, not least, an appreciation of the need for the Irish people to learn it. Irish (Gaelic) was still the language used by most of the Irish, but seeing as the language was banished from Parliament and local government, from the courts of law and the civil service and also from the upper levels of commercial life, bilingualism was becoming a necessity.¹¹

There were not many Irish speakers who, as yet, aspired to rise in the world of politics, but the importance of learning English was growing from the second half of the century, because of the expanding need of communication in connection with trade and business. Patrick MacHale was himself an example of this development. Because of their relative isolation, the people of Mayo were less than most other Irishmen aware of this growing need for learning English. Patrick can hence be seen as somewhat of a pioneer. To him learning English was important for the Irish in order to hold their own against the English, whom were felt to be a different race from their own.¹² Patrick thus represented a general view among Irishmen of both the English language and the Protestant English and

⁶ Jordan 1994: 13.

⁷ O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 8f.

⁸ Jordan 1994: 59.

⁹ Jordan 1994: 62.

¹⁰ O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 8f.

¹¹ Wall 1969: 82.

¹² O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 13f.

Anglo-Irish people; the English language was foreign, and it belonged to a foreign people. The tendency among especially Catholics towards alienating the English and Protestants as a race different from their own was not new.¹³ Be that as it may, by the end of the eighteenth century, the English language was firmly linked with economic prosperity, whereas vernacular Irish had come to be associated with the poor and illiterate.¹⁴ Wishing his children not to lag behind in this progress, Patrick thus decided to teach all his eight children, boys and girls, English from an early age. Even though Irish was his mother tongue, English was the first language in which John learned to read and write.

Primary education

John was sent to primary school in 1795. At the end of the eighteenth century, the majority of Catholic children did still not receive any form of formal education.¹⁵ County Mayo, being one of the poorer and more economically backward counties of Ireland, more than likely followed this pattern. The reasons for non-attendance at school varied, but most important were the factors of time, funds and the lack of a school in near surroundings. There were two main types of primary schools children could attend in eighteenth-century Ireland, and both were emphatically Protestant. The first type were the parliamentary schools, which were established by parliamentary law and endowed through government grants. The so-called Parish Schools, established under Henry VIII as early as in 1537, were a typical example. The initial focus of the parish schools was the propagation of the English language in Ireland.¹⁶ But from the 1690s, with the passage of penal laws on Catholics, the promotion of the Protestant religion had become the most important issue. Formally, the schools were open to both Protestants and Catholics, but instruction was in the Protestant religion only and all teaching was in English, with concentration on the elementary subjects of the ‘three Rs’ – reading, writing and arithmetic. Because of their close connection with official Anglo-Irish politics and religion, these schools were hardly integrated in Irish society. Unsurprisingly, under the circumstances, Catholic parents were sceptical and suspicious of such schools and very rarely sent their children to them.

The other main type of Protestant primary school was private. These schools were set up by private organisations and endowed through parliamentary grants and private

¹³ See Kee 1972: 18.

¹⁴ Wall 1969: 85.

¹⁵ See Bourke 1902: 110.

¹⁶ Dowling 1971: 41.

subscriptions. The most well known and widely spread of these private schools were the so-called Charter Schools. In 1733, ‘His Majesty’s Royal Charter for Erecting English Protestant Schools in the Kingdom of Ireland’ was issued, stating that:

(...) among the ways proper to be taken for converting and civilising of the said deluded Persons [popish Natives]...one of the most necessary, and without which, all others are likely to prove ineffectual, has always been thought to be the Erecting and Establishing of a sufficient Number of *English* Protestant Schools, wherein the children of the *Irish* Natives may be instructed in the *English* Tongue, and the Fundamental Principles of True Religion (...)¹⁷

It was more than apparent that the King and Parliament were in plain words encouraging missionary efforts, or what the Catholics would label proselytism, and the quote hence to a large degree represented the way the Catholics were viewed by Official Ireland. In the same year, the Incorporated Society in Dublin for promoting English Protestant Schools in Ireland established their charter schools on the basis of this Royal Charter. The charter schools thus had a mission of upholding and spreading the Protestant religion and the English language. These schools were initially also open to Protestants, but the schools were confined to Catholics by two resolutions of the 1770s.¹⁸ In addition to the typical elementary subjects, these schools also taught manual labour. Days were hard and long, with several hours of physical labour in addition to school. The charter schools were, partly because of this emphasis on physical labour, viewed with disfavour by contemporaries; the children attending these schools were believed to be miserable.¹⁹ The Incorporated Society also made a wide use of boarding schools, as they found it best to instruct the children in a controlled environment away from home. From its foundation, “the charter-school system was ultra-fanatic”,²⁰ and hence Catholics often avoided these schools as well.

The first official endeavours at creating a primary education system in Ireland took place long before similar attempts were made in England. Not until 1833 did the state grant aid to education in England.²¹ When the state intervenes in the education of children, it also intervenes more and more in everyday economic and social life. The most important explanation for why the government set up schools so early in Ireland, was the colonial mentality that prevailed. The main idea of the government was that “Ireland is too great to be unconnected with us, and too near us to be dependent on a foreign state, and too little to

¹⁷ ‘His Majesty’s Royal Charter for Erecting English Protestant Schools in the Kingdom of Ireland’, 1733. Quoted in Crowley 2000: 111. Italics in manuscript.

¹⁸ Akenson 1970: 33.

¹⁹ Dowling 1971: 53.

²⁰ Irish Liberal MP Thomas Wyse in a speech in the House of Commons on May 19, 1835. Quoted in Akenson 1970: 33.

²¹ Akenson 1970: 8.

be independent.”²² The school systems that were set up in the sixteenth century had a chiefly defensive character; they were intended to preserve the loyalty of the Anglo-Irish. Later on, when it was discovered that the Irish attempted to educate their own children, measures were taken, through the official school systems, to produce loyal subjects also of the Catholic Irish. Hence, education was an immensely important factor in English endeavours to produce loyal subjects in their colony. In like manner, education proved to the Irish to be a means of retaining their Irish and, not least, Catholic identity.

But the penal laws did not allow Catholics to teach legally. Through their penal legislation, the government thus gave the Irish Catholics two choices; they could either be educated as English Protestants or sink into ignorance and inferiority. Any action has a reaction, and Irish Catholics secretly established their own schools. Thus a third, and very important, type of school came into existence in early eighteenth-century Ireland: The Catholic hedge school. These schools – formally illegal – took their name from the fact that in their initial years instruction often took place in a ditch or a hedgerow, with one pupil looking out for suspicious people approaching. Any stranger could be an informer.²³ As the enforcement of the penal legislation was relaxed throughout the century, the hedge schools could find more permanent and comfortable sites, though they still remained illegal. Being illegal, these Catholic schools were allowed to receive neither parliamentary nor private endowments. The hedge schools were thus also known as ‘pay schools’, because the pupils were obliged to pay a fee to attend these schools. The sum was seldom large, but it was nevertheless enough that some children were not able to attend. These children were then either forced to stay home or sent to a Protestant school. The Catholic clergy in general encouraged the hedge schools and they often allowed their chapels to be used as schools.²⁴ This is highly understandable, for the legal schools available were undermining their authority and the authority of the religion they taught. Seeing as more than eighty per cent of the Irish population was Catholic, the hedge schools, although they lacked an organisation, must have given the people a sense of Irishness in the midst of all the English-type education. However, the hedge schools followed the expanding focus in other areas of Irish life on the importance of the English language. Most hedge

²² Letter by C. T. Grenville to the Duke of Rutland in 1784. Quoted in Akenson 1970: 19.

²³ Dowling 1971: 86.

²⁴ Dowling 1971: 98.

schoolmasters taught Irish, but as English became an increasingly important part of business, more and more of them also taught English.²⁵

By the time young John MacHale attended school, the long-standing Protestant Ascendancy had begun to lose some of its overwhelming position in Irish society, and Irish Catholics bit by bit regained civil rights. In 1782, a Relief Act restored to Catholics, under certain restrictions, the right to teach in primary schools. A Catholic schoolmaster would have to take the oath of allegiance to the Crown, and he was not allowed to teach Protestants.²⁶ At the same time, however, the Act forbade the endowing of Catholic educational foundations in Ireland.²⁷ Hedge schools thus remained pay schools. This was a setback in poor Ireland, even though the Catholics were familiar with such an arrangement. The Relief Act of 1782 also opened up for other types of Catholic schools. The Catholic Church quickly made use of this possibility and opened up so-called ‘day schools’. These schools were in fact free, as the clergy paid the fees for the children. Catholic teaching orders also set up schools. Two of the most important of these orders were the Presentation Sisters and the Christian Brothers. The hedge schools, having existed for decades and being by far the most numerous, continued to be the most widely attended schools in Ireland. In many instances they were from now on connected to the parish, and hence received a further degree of structure and clerical control.

John attended a hedge school in his near surroundings. The hedge schools also concentrated on the ‘three Rs’. Moreover, the literacy he and other Catholic children acquired in these fully Irish Catholic schools was English, and not Irish. The growing importance of English in Irish society was the most important reason for this. In addition, there was a lack of printed books in Irish. The Catholic Church did not promote Irish to a large degree, as the Catholic Church had never been a Church of vernacular language.²⁸ Furthermore, most Irish-speaking inhabitants were illiterate or too poor to be able to purchase books. The emphasis on the English language in many hedge schools gave rise to the so-called ‘score-stick’ or ‘tally’, a piece of wood that was hung around the neck of the child. Whenever John was overheard speaking Irish at home, his parents cut a notch on the tally, and when he came to school, the teacher would punish him accordingly.²⁹ Despite this hard-line emphasis on mastering the English language, the schoolmasters themselves

²⁵ Dowling 1971: 93.

²⁶ Dowling 1985: 24.

²⁷ Akenson 1970: 45.

²⁸ Crowley 2000: 84.

²⁹ Costello 1939: 13.

were not necessarily thoroughly trained in the English language. They often had no other education than hedge school themselves; the penal laws left no other possibilities for practising Catholics. The quality of their tutorial skills hence varied considerably, and stories were told both of those teachers who excelled and those who were soon themselves excelled by their own pupils.

From rebellion to union

John was born into turbulent times, both on the international and the local scene. In the 1790s the radicalisation of European politics set off by the French Revolution also came to Ireland. On October 18, 1791, the Society of United Irishmen was established in Belfast. This was a predominantly Protestant organisation. However, at the initial meeting the following resolutions were agreed to: A union of Irishmen of all religious persuasions was needed to counteract English influence in Ireland and secure a reform of Parliament.³⁰ According to the United Irishmen, English influence in Ireland was a cause of grievance. This was a view held by many Irish Protestants by the late eighteenth century. The so-called Protestant Ascendancy, with its general goodwill towards England, was growing economically self-reliant and thus politically self-aware. In the year 1782 the Irish Parliament, led by MP Henry Grattan, had issued a Declaration of Independence, aimed at making the Irish Parliament independent of English control.³¹ The United Irishmen agreed that the way to go about these changes was through parliamentary reform. In addition, though being mainly Protestant, the organisation held that the reforms would have to include Catholics, the majority of the population. The United Irishmen preached religious toleration and saw Ireland as a union of all religious creeds. The nationalism of the United Irishmen was as such exclusively political; they did not take interest in cultural aspects such as the Irish language and literature.

At the same time, the peasants were starting to take political action on their own. The Defenders was the name of a group of Catholic peasant rebels. They had a vague political agenda, which made them somewhat general and inclusive. At the same time their activities were still very much like those of the agrarian secret societies already so long a feature of Irish rural life. Such agrarian protest had existed since the early eighteenth

³⁰ Kee 1972: 52.

³¹ Since 1719, with the passing of the so-called Declaratory Act, the English Parliament had had a full right to legislate for Ireland. See Kee 1972: 29.

century.³² The penal legislation had forbidden Catholics to buy land at all or to take leases for longer than 31 years. By 1778 scarcely five per cent of Irish land was left in Catholic hands.³³ Catholics had been turned into a class of tenant farmers. The activities of the secret societies were most often of a very local nature; local landlords were often the source of grievance and hence the target of violent action. The term ‘secret societies’ referred to the violent nature of these groupings and also their practice of the members swearing an oath of allegiance to the organisation. In the 1760s, a secret society called the Whiteboys rebelled. They represented the first serious agrarian outbreaks since the beginning of the decade.³⁴ The focus was still primarily local, and at a Whiteboy execution in 1762, it was uttered that “in all these tumults it never entered into their thoughts to do anything against the King and government”.³⁵

The advance of United Irishmen and the Defenders in the 1790s was part of a European wave sparked off by the French Revolution of 1789. The ideas of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* spread through many parts of Europe, Ireland included. The relationship that had evolved between the two countries during the last century was also of importance; for Irish Catholics France had been an important haven since the passing of the penal legislation from 1695 onwards. It was a very essential place of study for Irish Catholic priests and also Catholic laity. The United Irishmen, by now radicalised and characterised as a secret society, worked actively to get military help from France for a rebellion for Irish independence, and in 1796, a first French military fleet appeared in Bantry Bay in County Cork. On the fleet was Theobald Wolfe Tone, one of the leaders of the United Irishmen. The invasion was a complete failure, for bad weather made a landing impossible. However, the British were surprised and worried by the mere attempt.

The British government was truly afraid of Irish independence and co-operation with France, the archenemy of England. In 1793, France declared war on England. This must surely have coloured the attitudes on both sides in the Irish situation. Part of England’s concern in Ireland was that the Catholics would prove to be disloyal to the British State. This had been the predominant reason for passing the penal laws, and the fear was intensified after 1793. However, the means taken to resolve the problem this time were different. The government decided to repeal some of the penal laws, in order to mollify the

³² There are references to agrarian crime in Mayo already in 1712. See Jordan 1994: 39f.

³³ Wall 1994: 220.

³⁴ Kerr 2000: 18.

³⁵ G. C. Lewis (1836): *On Local Disturbances in Ireland*. London. Quoted in Kee 1972: 26.

Catholics. The repeal of penal laws had started already in 1772³⁶, and the 1782 Relief Act granted Catholics the right to acquire land. Through the 1793 Relief Act most of the remaining disabilities were removed; among other things, Catholics were given the parliamentary franchise, allowing them to vote on the same conditions as Protestants. By these acts the British government hoped to gain the support of the Catholic people and, not least, the Catholic Church.

Judging from the developments in the Catholic Church, this seemed like a sound approach. Already in 1751, the Pope, Benedict XIV, condemned secret societies. The reasons given were that the secret societies were oath-bound; they were a threat both to state and church and they fostered religious indifference.³⁷ The Irish Catholic Church opposed the Whiteboy-outrage of the 1760s, probably very much because of this condemnation. In addition, the Church, also at this point in time, was afraid that the British State would see it as disloyal. Moreover, the Church opposed any rebellion against the structure of society.³⁸ The same focus could be seen in the strategies of the Irish Catholic Church as it entered the 1790s.

In 1793, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Troy, in a pastoral letter entitled 'Duties of Christian citizens' emphasised the respect Catholics should have to their sovereign and to the laws. Obedience to legitimate authority was a religious duty to him, and he believed the English King and the Irish Parliament to be legitimate. On the one hand, Troy represented, as the clergy of the 1760s did, a widespread sense of acceptance of the hierarchical order of society.³⁹ On the other hand, his warning to the Irish people was connected to a concern that revolt would lead to the Catholics losing their recently regained rights. However, in his pastoral letter, Troy also stressed the duties of the King and ministers to their subjects and to God.

When the United Irishmen and the Defenders joined together, the Irish Catholic Church condemned the Defenders as a secret society. In 1792, revolutionary France had separated State and Church, and the Catholic Church no longer approved of the developments in the country with which it had long had a close association. The Church also warned against the co-operation with France during the 1796 invasion of Bantry Bay.

³⁶This year a Bogland Act enabled Catholics to take bog reclamation leases of 61 years. See Moody and Martin 1994: 442.

³⁷ Kerr 2000: 18f.

³⁸ Kerr 2000: 18.

³⁹ Kerr 2000: 25.

Then, in 1798, the United Irishmen made their ultimate attempt at Irish independence from Britain. This time, the French forces were able to land, and the place of arrival was Killala Bay in County Mayo. Now the local environment of young John MacHale became the surroundings of national rebellion. Mayo had never been in the centre of political outrage; it had never been the site of organised agrarian protests of long duration.⁴⁰ As such, this situation was new for the inhabitants of the county. On August 22, 1798, French forces led by General Humbert landed.⁴¹ This expedition was one of three separate French expeditions to help the Irish rebels. The revolutionists headed for the house of the Protestant Bishop of Killala, and after a brief battle the French entered in his house. The next morning a green flag was hoisted, bearing the inscription *Erin go Bragh*, or ‘Ireland forever’.⁴²

Since the French forces chose Killala Bay as their landing point, John might personally have witnessed the soldiers coming ashore and marching to battle, and he could first-hand get the impressions of a rebellion. The French had been led by the United Irishmen in France to expect that “a numerous and well-disciplined army, headed by the gentry and chief-land-owners, would join them”.⁴³ This was a grave overstatement. The Irish proved to be a military disappointment. Where Humbert had expected to find a national revolutionary organisation, he had only found an ignorant, neglected peasantry.⁴⁴

Leaving a part of his army behind in Killala, General Humbert moved southwards. Within a week he had met and defeated a superior British force at Castlebar. Humbert immediately set up a provisional government, making a young Catholic gentleman named John Moore, President.⁴⁵ For one month in 1798, the area around Killala was under the nominal government of this ‘Irish Republic’. The fate of the revolution still depended on the rising of substantial bodies of Irish rebels and the arrival of reinforcements from France, and when neither of these things happened, it did not take long before Humbert’s troops were cornered. On September 8, at Ballinamuck, he surrendered.⁴⁶

The opinions on the rebellion and, not least, French participation in it, were divided among the adults in John’s surroundings. To the peasants of Mayo, the Irish rebellion was deeply connected to religion, even though this had never been an objective for the United

⁴⁰ Jordan 1994: 74.

⁴¹ Kee 1972: 134.

⁴² Kee 1972: 135.

⁴³ *Dublin Journal*, September 18, 1798. Cited in Kee 1972: 136.

⁴⁴ Kee 1972: 137.

⁴⁵ Kee 1972: 138.

⁴⁶ Kee 1972: 139f.

Irishmen. John could hear his father talk about the horror of the English. The Irish had for long felt, through first-hand experience, the persecution of Catholics by Protestant England. On the other hand, there were also people who were afraid to be subjected to the French, who had indeed turned anti-religious through their revolution. John's uncle, Rev. Richard MacKeal, is known to have been telling stories about the guillotine and the persecution of priests in revolutionary France.⁴⁷ These two versions held in Mayo at the time clearly illustrate the difference in view on the part of the Catholic peasants and the Catholic clergy. The Church in general opposed anything irreligious and non-Catholic, whereas the peasants concentrated on objectives of a more specifically local nature.

Even though the Catholic hierarchy denounced the rebellion, there were some priests who played an active role in it. When the rebellion was defeated, some seventy priests were accused of being involved, about fifteen of them living in the west of Ireland.⁴⁸ Rev. Conroy, the parish priest of Addergoole, who had ministered John's baptism, was hanged for high treason for allegedly having helped the French forces in Killala. Such an experience must have made quite an impression on a young boy.

The defeat of the United Irishmen led to the introduction of the Act of Union in 1801, which incorporated Ireland into Great Britain. The Irish Parliament was abolished, and Irish affairs were now solely legislated in Westminster. The Established Anglican Churches of the two countries were also united:

That it be the fifth Article of Union, that the Churches of England and Ireland, as now by law established, be united into one Protestant Episcopal Church, to be called, *The United Church of England and Ireland*; and that the doctrine, worship, discipline and government of the said United Church shall be, and shall remain in full force for ever, as the same are now by law established for the Church of England; and that the continuance and preservation of the said united Church, as the Established Church of England and Ireland, shall be deemed and taken to be an essential and fundamental part of the Union (...).⁴⁹

As a consequence of this article, Irish Catholics were now turned into a minority in Britain in stead of a majority in Ireland. The Protestant Church of Ireland had been the official State Church in Ireland since 1537, but its official union with the Church of England was nevertheless a watershed. This religious alliance had little direct importance to Catholic people, however, having for a century been penalised by the Protestant power elite. The Catholic Church did not lose any of its regained rights by the Act of Union. The most visible sign of change for the Catholic Church was in the boost of confidence appearing in the Protestant camp. This boost unfolded itself in different ways, and most important was

⁴⁷ Bourke 1902: 34.

⁴⁸ Kerr 2000: 23.

⁴⁹ 40 Geo III, c 67, *Statutes at Large*, XLII, Pt II. Quoted in O'Day and Stevenson 1992: 8.

the field of education. There was a clear acceleration in the establishing of Protestant education societies in the early nineteenth century. Already in 1792 the Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting the Practice of the Christian Religion was founded in order to encourage the development of schools in connection with the Established Church. After 1801, it received substantial grants from Parliament. From then on, other Protestant education societies came to the fore, and they too were welcomed with both governmental and private endowments. This accelerating devotion to teach the Irish people the Protestant way was strong during the first decades of the nineteenth century, and partly on account of this, the period has by contemporaries and scholars alike been named the Second Reformation.⁵⁰

Higher education

As these major shifts in the political and religious landscape in Ireland began, young John finished primary school. In the year 1804 he was sent to a secondary school in Castlebar. The secondary school system in Ireland consisted of fewer schools and pupils, and the system was subject to less direct governmental control, but its fundamental structure was to a large degree the same as the primary school system. There were two kinds of parliamentary secondary schools, namely the Diocesan Schools and the Royal Schools. The Diocesan Schools Act was passed by Elizabeth I's Parliament in 1570, whereas James I formed the royal schools in 1608, in connection with the Ulster Plantation.⁵¹ Similar to the parish schools of Henry VIII, these schools were endowed through government grants; they were Protestant, and they taught in English. Moreover, these schools also had the defensive design of preserving loyal subjects. Within the system of parliamentary education, there is reason to believe that some of the schools, especially within the diocesan school system, may have taught both elementary and secondary subjects, and hence were run as combination schools.⁵² There were also some private Protestant secondary schools, the most well known being those founded by the London merchant Erasmus Smith.

⁵⁰ See Bowen 1978: 89.

⁵¹ The Ulster Plantation was a large-scale immigration of Protestants, mostly Scottish Presbyterians, encouraged by the English Parliament in order to gain more power and a larger degree of peace in a largely Catholic and conflict-ridden area.

⁵² Akenson 1970: 27.

The Relief Act of 1782 gave no room for secondary Catholic education. There is little or no information about such schools during this period, but there is no reason to believe that they did not exist. Although fewer Catholics than Protestants aspired to rise on the social ladder, some of them, John MacHale included, nonetheless did. John was sent by his parents to study under Patrick Stanton. Stanton may in fact have been Protestant, for it is said about him that:

In that district, Stanton may fairly be reckoned amongst the last of those useful men who, before seminaries were permitted to be established by Catholics, did an immense deal of good amongst the people, and rendered enduring services to the Catholic cause in Ireland.⁵³

Under the guidance of Stanton, John mainly studied languages, most importantly English, Latin and Greek.⁵⁴ Secondary education was chiefly attended by young people who had plans for further studies. John stayed in Castlebar for three years. Stanton was deemed a fine teacher, and John was soon noticed for his excellent performance. Moreover, as a consequence of his good results, the Bishop of Killala, Dr. Bellew, had kept his eye on John and in 1807 he awarded the local star pupil a scholarship that enabled him to enter St. Patrick's College in Maynooth. Except for emigration, joining the priesthood was in truth the only way for young Irish Catholics to make real social advancement, and the clergy, though having been repressed, enjoyed considerable social status among the Catholic people. That John was given this chance, demonstrates first of all his vast scholarly competence, but also his sense of ambition and vocation.

Up until the 1790s the only college or university in Ireland was Trinity College in Dublin. Established in 1592 by an Act of Parliament, Trinity College was long open only to students professing the established religion of the Church of Ireland. From 1793 onwards Catholics could statutorily attend Trinity but had to swear oaths of allegiance and abjuration. This slight relaxation of an otherwise continued prohibition of any "popish university or college"⁵⁵ was further extended by the establishment of Catholic theological seminaries. Up until then, Catholics had to get their education abroad.

The religious persecution under the Tudors had led to the suppression of the monastic schools in Ireland. This was where the Catholic clergy chiefly received their education, and it therefore became necessary to seek education abroad. Irish colleges for the training of clergy were founded in Spain, Portugal, Belgium and France and in Rome.⁵⁶ The most important of these establishments was the Irish College in Paris. In a statement

⁵³ Quoted in Bourke 1902: 48f.

⁵⁴ Bourke 1902: 48.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Dowling 1971: 80.

presented to the British government by the Irish bishops in 1795, it appeared that out of a total of 478 Irish ecclesiastics studying on the continent, 348 were residents in France, and of these 180 studied at the Irish College in Paris.⁵⁷ In addition, numerous books on civility and morality had been translated from French to English and distributed throughout Ireland.⁵⁸ The French-Irish connection was strong and it was primarily based on religious ties.

When the Irish colleges on the continent were closed during the 1790s because of the French Revolution, the Irish bishops petitioned for the establishment of a Catholic ecclesiastical seminary in Ireland. Parliament agreed to this because such an action was in coherence with the policy of toleration that was by then implied by the several Relief Acts. In addition, and by no means less important, Parliament and the British government saw the establishment of an Irish seminary in Ireland as a way of avoiding revolutionary ideas spreading on the continent from diffusing into Ireland. The fear that the Irish would turn rebellious against England was most legitimate, as the events of 1798 would demonstrate. What was not accounted for, was that the rebels of 1798 would to a large extent be Protestants.

In 1795 the Royal College of St. Patrick was established in Maynooth, County Kildare. This college would become a powerful institution within the Irish Catholic society. It was a Catholic institution, run solely for Catholics. Still, the students had to swear an oath of allegiance to the Crown, and the college was funded through governmental endowments. John spent seven years studying at Maynooth. He acquired a wide knowledge of languages, for which he had laid a thorough foundation during his time under Patrick Stanton. The focus on languages was significant for his ability to study the sacred texts of his religion. In addition to Latin, Greek and English, he studied Hebrew, and also French, German and Italian. French he studied as part of his philosophy course. This was because many of the professors at Maynooth were French or had been educated in Irish colleges in France. When the revolutionists began chasing clergy out of France, many French priests came to Ireland. In addition to French influence on the staff, most of the books on philosophy and theology were French.⁵⁹ Because few English-speaking people were Catholic, it was not to be expected that very many books on Catholic theology, except those translated from French, existed in the English language. Most

⁵⁶ The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08158a.htm>.

⁵⁷ The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08158a.htm>.

⁵⁸ Inglis 1987: 135.

English theology books were on Protestant theology. Likewise, on account of restrictions, there were few or no books to be found in the Irish language. John studied German and Italian in order to read European literature; he also had the opportunity to improve his Italian in later years, on his numerous trips to Rome.

The education imparted at Maynooth had both enthusiastic supporters and ardent critics. On the one hand, priests trained at Maynooth were more immediately acquainted with the local conditions than were those who had been educated abroad. On the other hand, the hierarchy of the day, who chiefly had been educated on the continent, saw education at Maynooth as “(...) inferior as to learning and manner and professional utility, as well as to liberal sentiments and adaption to society”.⁶⁰ The clergy educated abroad was seen to be more sophisticated and in contact with the liberal and academic continent. One important charge against the Maynooth-trained priests was that they took the lead in popular agitation. In 1798 seventeen students reportedly were expelled from Maynooth for having taken part in the work of the United Irishmen.⁶¹ The Irish hierarchy, with Archbishop Troy of Dublin in the lead, was all through the 1790s very careful to declare itself in opposition to rebellious activities.

It was more than implied that the French professors at Maynooth were an important source of influence at the college. The French professors, of whom Professor De la Hogue was the most important to John, had studied and worked at the Sorbonne. At this university, the theological school of Gallicanism was an important influence. This Catholic direction appeared in the Church of France, or the Gallican Church, and much of the theology was summed up in the Declaration of the Clergy of France of 1682. Gallicanism reduced the temporal power of the Church and the Pope. Under the banner of Gallicanism, two distinct types existed: The episcopal kind and the parliamentary kind. The former lessened the doctrinal authority of the Pope in favour of that of the bishops, whereas the latter tended to enlarge the prerogatives of the State in proportion to the Church.⁶² The indication that Maynooth was Gallican was viewed with contempt by contemporary clergy. At the same time, the Irish Catholic hierarchy, one may argue, had displayed parliamentary Gallicanism in relation to the political agitation in the 1790s; the hierarchy showed an immense degree of loyalty to the State instead of fully stressing the rights of Catholics. It is

⁵⁹ Inglis 1987: 135.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Connolly 1982: 43.

⁶¹ <http://www.cablesurf.com/dungarvan/17983.html>.

⁶² The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06351a.htm>.

suggested that Maynooth was dominated by Gallicanism until 1850, when new times dawned upon the Irish Catholic Church, and the Church worked to expand its authority.⁶³

In addition to these differences in principle, it can be claimed that there was a difference between the young institution of Maynooth and the older institutions on the continent, in much the same way as the difference between young and old in other areas, the young being more energetic, less patient and tradition-bound and so on.

Critics also argued that studying at Maynooth was so much less expensive than at the continental colleges that it attracted students from lower, and hence inferior, social strata. This accusation cannot be said to convey much truth. First of all, the students had to be sent to a secondary school in order to prepare for college. These schools had to be paid for by the parents, since no endowments were allowed for Catholic secondary education. As was the case with John, some bright students received scholarships, but even though Parliament endowed the college, most students had to pay a fee also at Maynooth. The same arrangement had been usual in the continental colleges. Therefore, whereas it cannot be said that most students came from wealthy families, it can in fairness be said that the majority of Maynooth students must have been, in the context of their own community, somewhat well to do.⁶⁴

Although the college at Maynooth was a truly Irish institution, all instruction was carried out in the English language; Irish was completely ignored. Being a government-funded institution, it could perhaps hardly have done otherwise, but this was also a very strong indication of the college's and also the Irish Catholic Church's attitude towards the Irish and English languages.⁶⁵ Much of the explanation may lie in the Roman Catholic Church's emphasis on Latin and its disinterest in vernacular languages. The teaching, when not in Latin, hence was executed through the official language of Ireland, a language that was familiar to Catholics beyond the borders of both Ireland and Britain. This lack of interest in Irish was to have vast influence on the spread of the English language in Irish-speaking districts, and the Catholic Church in this way contributed to the decline of the Irish language in nineteenth-century Ireland.

In 1814, John ended his education at Maynooth, and on July 25 he was received into the priesthood at the hands of Archbishop Murray of Dublin. He was now no longer John of Mayo, but had become Father John MacHale, ordained priest of the Roman

⁶³ See Inglis 1987: 135 and chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁶⁴ Connolly 1982: 40.

⁶⁵ Crowley 2000: 84.

Catholic Church. On August 30 he was appointed lecturer of Dogmatic Theology at Maynooth, as the professor residing in that chair, Dr. De la Hogue, had turned ill. Thus at the age of merely 23, MacHale was not only a priest, but also a lecturer in the essential subject of Catholic dogma at the most important Catholic ecclesiastical college in Ireland. It was a remarkable achievement and must also have been a great honour for him. He served as lecturer for six years.

De la Hogue, who was still a member of the staff at Maynooth, was a member of the Theological Circle at the college, a group of professors who discussed various questions on theology. On his recommendation, MacHale was offered a place in the circle, even though he was not a professor.⁶⁶ This opportunity must have given the young lecturer valuable lessons in the art of rhetoric. At every meeting, different members of the group had the responsibility of reading up on the topic of the day and leading the discussion. In July 1820 the Board of Trustees unanimously elected MacHale to the position of Professor of Dogmatic Theology. He was to continue in this position for four more years, and he was now about to embark on his course toward the national political arena.

⁶⁶ O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 46f.

Chapter 3 – The struggle for Catholic rights, 1820-1834

In 1820 MacHale began his career as a participant on Ireland's political arena. The political agendas of the day were to a large extent associated with religion. During the next fourteen years, he would make known his fundamental principles and positions on many important issues in modern Ireland.

The advance of undenominational primary education

In July 1820, MacHale was appointed Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the college at Maynooth. This advancement within the Catholic Church combined with the stress in society on the perpetually important issue of primary education drove him on-to the public arena. Much had happened in education since the Act of Union, and the situation was now very different from what it had been at the time when MacHale was himself a pupil.

With the Act of Union sealed in 1801, the Church of Ireland, now part of a common British Anglican establishment, gained increasing support from a British Parliament. This support heavily materialised itself within the field of primary education. All the way from Henry VIII's parish schools in 1537 and up until the days of the Union, education had been important in the process of forming of the Irish people into loyal Protestant subjects. As has been presented in the previous chapter, the conditions of education in Ireland prior to the Union had been subject to chaos and coincidence rather than order and system. Many children did not attend school at all, and most of the Catholic children who did go to school, attended Catholic pay schools, the so-called hedge schools. In order to enrol more children into the primary education system and in order to work against these Catholic schools, the government commenced funding Protestant organisations that took it upon themselves to educate the poor of Ireland, so-called education societies, in an accelerating way.

Thus in addition to the school systems founded in the previous centuries, new organisations were now founded for the purpose of educating the Irish Catholic poor. Especially more evangelical groupings, often existing on the edge of the Establishment, proved active on this arena. Anglican evangelicals, who often joined with Protestant Nonconformist groups, placed much emphasis on the conversion experience and regular Bible reading. Seeing education as a means of teaching the Irish to read the Bible by

themselves, they more than other Anglicans embraced the cause of popular education. In 1806, evangelicals in Britain and Ireland co-operated to form the Hibernian Bible Society. The aim of this organisation was to distribute Bibles in both the English and the Irish languages and to encourage the use of the Bible in popular education.¹ Soon similar evangelical societies were establishing hundreds of schools across Ireland in order to provide a Bible-based popular education to the mainly Catholic poor.

The year 1812 in some ways saw the coming of new times within government-funded education. This year a Royal Commission of Education issued a report stating that changes had to be made within primary education. What seemed to worry the Commission was that the schools that the poor Irish attended were under no control or supervision. In spite of the ongoing and growing Protestant offensive, most Catholics still attended hedge schools. The schools were owned separately by the schoolmasters who taught in them and supported by the Catholic clergy, and fees were paid directly by the parents. The schoolmasters were considered to be incompetent and antagonistic to constituted authority.² The Commission concluded that Ireland needed a primary education system that did not discredit the belief of any religious group, that is, completely undenominational education. This conclusion came about as the Commission wanted to get rid of the hedge schools at the same time as they appreciated the difficulties in presenting a school system that both took away the Catholic essence and substituted it with a Protestant one. The conclusion shows that the Conservative government of the day was aware of the growing strength of the Catholic Church. Henceforth education was to be given without interference with religion. The government was not, however, interested in organising such a system, and instead decided to grant money to a private Protestant education society that would take it upon itself to do just that.

In 1811, such a society, the Society for the Education of the Poor of Ireland – better known as the Kildare Place Society – was founded in Dublin. This was an Establishment education society whose schools were rapidly met with acknowledgement from all parts of Irish society. Even Catholics turned to this society with a fairly open mind. The Catholic prelates of the day were the ideologically successors of the generation of Archbishop Troy. In addition to their liberal sentiment, the still rather economically distressed Catholic Church was fully aware that government aid would be needed to provide proper education

¹ Moore 1904: 15.

² Hickman 1995: 128.

to the growing Irish population.³ The most important reason for their good will towards this system was that the school system presented was truly undenominational. At the inaugural meeting of the Kildare Place Society it was resolved: “That for the accomplishment of the ‘great work’ of educating the Irish poor, schools should be divested of all sectarian distinctions in Christianity”.⁴ This implied for instance that the schools should employ teachers solely on the basis of their merits and not their creed. It also implied that the Bible should be read without any note or comment, as any comment would be an utterance of religious evaluation. This point would become a major controversy in the debate on education that MacHale was to take part in during the early 1820s. Introducing notefree reading of the Bible was clearly a decision reached by Protestants, because according to Protestantism, the Bible could and should be read by the individual. Within Catholicism, on the other hand, the Bible must be interpreted through the tradition of the Church. However disputable the issue was, and however imperfect the system was to Catholics, the Catholic hierarchy found this system of undenominationalism to be much better than any other system of Protestant education, especially the evangelical schools spreading throughout the country. Many Protestants also found the Kildare Place Society system to be less than satisfactory; they felt they had lost influence from the time of purely Protestant education. In the words of Henry Kingsmill Moore, a subsequent member of the society, “(...) no one maintained that such a system was ideal. The hope was that it might prove a practicable means of dealing with the prevailing differences”.⁵

The Kildare Place Society would engage itself in anything that related to the education of the poor, provided that the funds entrusted to their care were confined to schools conducted on their own system.⁶ Another reason for the broad appeal of the society, in addition to its undenominationalism, was that its work was thorough and dedicated. It started so-called model schools which should exhibit a model of the most approved methods of teaching, and which also served as training schools for teachers. It published schoolbooks, which were sold almost without any profit. It found that the capacity for reading acquired in school ought to develop into a taste for reading elsewhere, and to accomplish this, it also set up libraries at the schools.⁷ This expertise was a pleasant change from the rather random work of other schools.

³ Murphy 1971: 3.

⁴ Quoted in Akenson 1970: 86.

⁵ Moore 1904: 143.

⁶ Moore 1904: 41.

⁷ Moore 1904: 40.

The Kildare Place Society schools initially received solid support from Catholic camps. Daniel O’Connell, Irish Catholics’ leading political voice and the foremost icon of Irish Catholic unity, and also the Archbishop of Dublin, William Murray, joined the Board of Commissioners. With this, the undenominational system of the Kildare Place Society had been given official acceptance from the highest political and ecclesiastical authority in Catholic Ireland. But the harmony was not to last.

In 1820 there came to a breach between the Catholics and the Protestants within the Kildare Place Society. Rumours existed that the Society had started subsidising evangelical schools, and when the Congregation of Propaganda⁸ warned the Irish bishops about these schools in 1819, action was taken.⁹ At the annual meeting of the Kildare Place Society in February 1820, O’Connell left the Board of Commissioners. O’Connell’s motivation was twofold. He now felt equipped to protest on the notefree reading of the Bible in the Kildare schools. In addition, he found that with the influence of evangelicals, the practice of the Society was now inconsistent with its own principle of non-interference. If the Kildare schools were now turning evangelical, the teachers, being inclined to missionary efforts and hence conversion, would be liable to actually offer individual interpretations of the Bible. Hence, O’Connell was afraid of Protestant proselytism.¹⁰

The same year MacHale attacked the society in a series of public letters. As was common at the time, he wrote his earliest letters under a pseudonym: *Hierophilos*.¹¹ He started by explaining why he entered into this debate as late as he felt he did:

Although I have not been unobservant of their movements, I was hitherto silent; either because I saw the danger too distant to excite alarm, or from a consciousness of my own inability to arrest its progress.¹²

This ability of observance, combined with an apparent inability of action may be a sign of his loyalty to O’Connell and the prelates of the Catholic Church. Rank is very important in the Roman Catholic Church, as it is solidly built on the system of hierarchy. MacHale was at this time no authority within the Church, and it was probably not until he had been appointed professor that he felt fully equipped to enter into the public debate. This being said, he nonetheless found it very important to communicate that he was not only following up on the path laid by other Catholic leaders but that he had for long seen the

⁸ The Sacred Congregation of Propaganda is the department of the pontifical administration charged with the spread of Catholicism and with the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs in non-Catholic countries.

⁹ Murphy 1971: 4.

¹⁰ See Moore 1904: 84.

¹¹ Translates *Lover of the priesthood*.

¹² MacHale 1823: 53.

dangers of the Kildare Place Society and other educational societies or, as he called them in a collective phrase, the Bible Societies. He clearly wanted to free himself from general opinion and emerge as a confident, attentive individual.

Some of the earliest letters of Hierophilos were part of a controversy with an opponent calling himself, in MacHale's honour, *Bibliophilos*.¹³ MacHale identified Bibliophilos as "(...) one of the Evangelical Association", and the debate was on the Kildare Place Society, but the identity of his opponent was never confirmed.¹⁴ The mere fact that MacHale's letters were responded to must indicate that they provoked Protestants and also that they were found worthy of a reply. The letters to Bibliophilos were chiefly concerned with Bible-reading: "(...) what were the advantages that resulted from an indiscriminate perusal of the Scripture?"¹⁵ MacHale answered the question himself. He claimed that Luther at the beginning of the Reformation was seen as an oracle by his disciples, only to end up seeing rivalry amongst them:

I have too much respect for the sacred volume to make it the plaything of every school-boy; and too strong a conviction of man's weakness to allow him to wander through it without a guide.¹⁶

The individual reading of the Bible in combination with the weak nature of man was, in MacHale's view, the most important reason for rivalry and disruption within the Protestant ranks.

MacHale clearly represented the Catholic view on Bible-reading: People need a guide to be able to truly understand the meaning of the Bible. It is not possible to fathom its true meaning without conferring with the experience of past generations of church fathers. While he imparted this outlook, MacHale also realised the conflict between, on the one hand, encouraging the people to be educated and learn how to read and, on the other hand, disapproving of the instruction within an education system that was widely spreading in Ireland and hitherto had been approved of by the Catholic hierarchy. This problem could, however, be solved through the medium of denominational, Catholic education. This focus was put forward in a letter that he wrote to the Catholic clergy during the same year. The letter was intended to rouse the Irish clergy into taking the advance of the evangelical Bible Societies more seriously than they in fact were. Although one could see

¹³ Translates *Lover of the Bible*. It is self-evident, but still interesting and noteworthy to see how a Catholic and a Protestant chose to be known under two such names. The name Hierophilos represents the Catholic stress on hierarchy and tradition, whereas Bibliophilos represents the Protestant stress on the Bible.

¹⁴ MacHale 1823: 82ff. The letters of Bibliophilos were thought to have been written by the secretary of the Kildare Place Society, Mr. North, but MacHale disputed this reading.

¹⁵ MacHale 1823: 135.

¹⁶ MacHale 1823: 90.

the beginnings of reform in the Irish Church, it was still dominated by the spirit of Archbishop Troy. MacHale expressed grief that the clergy lacked unity in the defence of their religion, that the activity of some was undermined by the indolence of so many others.¹⁷ He partly pardoned the lack of united action as being caused by a want of papal engagement, but since the Congregation of Propaganda had presented an official warning of the education societies in 1819, there were in MacHale's view no longer any excuses for not acting. He found the main responsibility for a defence of the Catholic faith to lie with the clergy, and his main suggestion was that priests should teach the children themselves:

If but a small sum of money were put into the hands of each of the Catholic Bishops, schools could be established for educating the Catholic children; and a few tracts, containing a simple summary of religious and moral principle, might be circulated among them. This would be a method less expensive to the subscribers, less derogatory to the dignity of the sacred volume, than that which is now pursued, and still less prejudicial to the peasantry, as it would save them from the danger of extracting from its contents a dark and desperate fanaticism.¹⁸

His fear that "(...) under the mask of educating there lurks a design of proselytising the people (...)" was so profound that he did more about this than write public letters.¹⁹ The same year he invited the order of the Franciscan Brothers to set up schools in his native Killala because of his strong fear of Protestant proselytism.²⁰

In January 1821, after resigning from the Kildare Place Society, Daniel O'Connell founded the Irish National Education Society. In the schools of this organisation, children of different creeds should receive joint education in secular subjects, whereas he demanded full separation when it came to religious instruction. O'Connell had thus moved from supporting the undenominational education of Kildare Place Society to now support undenominational education only within secular subjects. MacHale was not partial to the principle of undenominational education in any form. In the preface to the 1847-edition of his published letters by Hierophilos, he expressed:

(...) the necessity of an education entirely free and Catholic for the Catholic people – Catholic in its conductors, in its books, in its living instructions, in short, in its influences on the senses and the hearts of the growing generation, with the like free privilege to all others of adopting their own favourite systems.²¹

The essence of religion flowed through not only religious instruction but through the entire spirit of education. Therefore, there could be no compromise when it came to education. The majority of the Catholic hierarchy was still to a large extent open for

¹⁷ MacHale 1823: 55.

¹⁸ MacHale 1823: 54f.

¹⁹ MacHale 1823: 57.

²⁰ Dowling 1971: 147.

²¹ Quoted in Bourke 1902: 64f.

undenominational education, and MacHale therefore fought a solitary battle.²² O’Connell’s new organisation aimed at becoming a genuine alternative to the evangelical education societies. But when its application to Parliament for a grant was met with refusal, the society soon collapsed.²³

Famine in the west

A part of the Protestant, evangelical view of the Irish Catholics was that they were ignorant and impoverished. It was believed that such shortcomings could be remedied with religion. This had been a strong incentive for the foundation of many of the education societies. In 1821, a partial crop failure hit the west of Ireland. Since the end of the eighteenth century, the population of Ireland had grown immensely. The agriculture did not develop in a pace that would enable it to cope with such a growth. The result was that farm holdings were subdivided into ever-diminishing plots, and the standard of living especially for the Catholic peasantry, who relied on the land for their income, dropped severely. When a bad harvest like the one of 1820 came along, famine-like conditions were never far away for many people. The event inspired MacHale to address the people of England in a series of public letters. He wanted to arrest the misconception that religion was the problem of Ireland:

The existence of much misery in Ireland has been universally acknowledged. The wretched condition of its population has almost passed into a phrase of compassion or reproach, and has exercised, of late, the speculations of benevolence. It was the interest of those who were aware of their genuine cause, to ascribe all the calamities of the people to religious ignorance. Religious blindness, it was said, was the prolific source of all their crimes; the complaint was re-echoed in the sister-country with sincere or affected commiseration; and so contagious was the sensibility, that a pathetic description of our spiritual woes was considered the surest indication of piety and eloquence.²⁴

The problems of Ireland were of a material nature, not a spiritual one, and hence required material changes: “When the fruit of labour is not equivalent to the demands on the produce of the soil, the people must necessarily be discontented.”²⁵ The population expansion, which had led to such competition for land, made rents increase. People were then left with even less of their produce, and survival became difficult for increasing numbers of people. This development was particularly visible in the west of Ireland, where farms were smaller and the soil was more barren than elsewhere. MacHale, having grown

²² Connolly 1985: 27.

²³ Murphy 1971: 4.

²⁴ MacHale 1823: 40.

²⁵ MacHale 1823: 23.

up in Mayo, was an untiring advocate for the material welfare of the Irish people. In addition to writing public letters on the issue, he collected large sums of money for the rescue of his people, much of which came from his own pocket.

The state of rural Ireland was deteriorating with increasing pace; since the end of the Napoleonic war in 1815, the commercial side of Irish agriculture was decreasing further in importance. Agrarian agitation again became a visible aspect of rural life in Ireland. The sectarian aspect of such agitation was increasing, and the Catholic Church was under pressure on account of this.²⁶ Such sectarianism could be fired against the Protestant State as well as the Protestant population of Ireland. MacHale was very aware of the problems that could arise if he did not present the matter in a very cautious and conciliatory tone. He was thus careful not to step on anyone's toes:

(...) in the present disturbances that distract some parts of Ireland, there is nothing of disloyalty to the Government; and (...) the influence of the Catholic religion, instead of fomenting the evil, has been uniformly exercised in mitigating its malignity, and arresting its diffusion.²⁷

The peasant agitators, MacHale held, were not disloyal; they were merely enraged at the conditions they lived under. And the Catholic Church, which was enemy number one of the Protestant evangelicals, did its best to counteract the activity of the agitators and the spreading of violence. The resistance to violence had long been a part of the official Catholic outlook. Even though MacHale in this quote explicitly uttered Irish loyalty to the government, he did not release the government from responsibility for the plight of Ireland. This, however, he did for the King:

Of all the varied ills which men endure,
How few that Kings can cause, or Kings can cure!²⁸

When addressing the English people, MacHale was very careful to declare his loyalty to their common monarch.

MacHale also openly flirted with his readers. It is quite obvious that MacHale wanted to gain the sympathy of the English people: "(...) the generous minds of the English people were filled with compassion for our lot."²⁹ Although the exercise of this compassion in many instances turned out to be through Bible societies, MacHale pointed at this benevolent origin. In addition he expressed a fascination of England being "(...) chequered by the agreeable variety of sects, which diversify with all the fantastic shades of

²⁶ An upsurge of millenarianism was visible in the 1820s, one of the main organisations being the Rockite movement of 1821-24. Millenarianism was the belief in an imminent fulfilment of the prophecy of Christ's Second Coming.

²⁷ MacHale 1823: 4.

²⁸ MacHale 1823: 27.

²⁹ MacHale 1823: 41.

colour the prospect of the sister country”.³⁰ Coming from a man who had uttered that one of the problems of Protestantism was the element of disruption, this declaration could have been nothing other than a demonstration of his attempt to gain the sympathy of his readers. This statement stands as a clear contrast to the view he professed in other forums and at other times. However, the strategy was probably very carefully considered, as most Englishmen in the outset were opposed to anyone Catholic or Irish.

Second Reformation

The Second Reformation of the Church of Ireland came to a climax in 1822. On October 24 of this year, the newly appointed Protestant Archbishop of Dublin, William Magee, charged that:

We, my Revd Brethren, are placed in a station, in which we are hemmed in by two opposite descriptions of professing Christians: the one, possessing a church, without what *we* can properly call a religion; and the other possessing a religion, without what *we* can properly call a church: the one so blindly enslaved to a supposed infallible Ecclesiastical authority, as not to seek in the Word of God a reason for the faith they profess; the other, so confident in the infallibility of their individual judgment as to the reasons of their faith, that they deem it their duty to resist all authority in matters of religion. We, my brethren, are to keep clear of both extremes; and holding the Scriptures as our great charter, whilst we maintain the liberty with which Christ has made us free, we are to submit ourselves to the authority to which he has made us subject.³¹

This charge’s importance lay in the fact that it was made by a prelate with great influence, both religiously and politically. He was no fanatical evangelical, but a rational, sober-minded High Church prelate.³² The most influential faction within the Church of Ireland was the High Church Party, a formal and unemotional variety of the religion. To this faction, the institutionalised Church was very essential. Another trait of importance was the emphasis on the union of Church and State and the character of the Church of Ireland as the one true Church within Ireland. The early decades of the nineteenth century have been termed ‘The Era of Graceful Reform’ within the Church of Ireland.³³ Reorganisation and a tightening of discipline took place during this time. The main reasons for this change were that episcopal appointments ceased being political and that evangelicalism gained a solid footing in Ireland.³⁴ Evangelicalism, the growth of which has already been presented, had existed in the Church of Ireland since the eighteenth century. It was part of a general

³⁰ MacHale 1823: 41.

³¹ William Magee (1822): *A Charge delivered at his primary visitation, 24 October 1822*, Dublin. Quoted in Bowen 1978: 89. Italics in manuscript.

³² Bowen 1978: 95.

³³ See Akenson 1970.

³⁴ Connolly 1985: 9f. Between 1801 and 1806, ten out of twelve episcopal appointments had been settlements of political engagements.

religious revival throughout Western Europe. Within the Church of Ireland evangelicalism took form in a Low Church Party. A combination of the two factions led to the rise of a more zealous generation of Protestant prelates.

Magee operated with three contrasting categories: Anglicans, Catholics and Nonconformists. Contrary to more evangelically minded priests, he did not approve of Protestant dissension. The response from those camps was not as explosive as the response he received from Catholic camps. The Catholic Archbishop Curtis of Armagh labelled the charge an:

Extraordinary document, no less unprovoked and unseasonable than unexpected, instead of recommending that amiable conciliation...so indispensable for uniting the hearts of Irishmen and promoting the welfare of the nation (...).³⁵

He and others saw Magee's charge as a destructive contribution in what they experienced to be a period of conciliation. MacHale participated in the criticism of Magee, and the debate between the two men would be a battle of the two religions. The dispute concerned fundamental issues about what a church was, and not least, about which was the true church in Ireland. Contrary to Magee, MacHale only operated with two categories, and he recommended that Magee would not disown the Nonconformists:

For if, my Lord, all who disbelieve the doctrines of the Establishment would wear the peculiar colors [sic], and range under the respective standards of their creeds, the strength and number of the host of the ungodly would smite you to the heart; and, like the ancient prophet, you would be left to weep over the apostacy [sic] of the people.³⁶

The already small group of people that Magee represented would diminish further on account of such charges as the one he had given. Such a reference to the small number of Anglicans in Ireland was an aspect in MacHale's argument that Catholicism was, indeed, the true church in Ireland.

Magee saw that the Church of Ireland was held back by Catholicism, a church with no religion. Built as it was solely on the Scriptures, the Established Church would, he held, overcome its present obstacle – the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, built on the tradition of man and corrupted by the “rubbish and superstition of ages”.³⁷

MacHale's defence was similar to what he had claimed in the debate with Bibliophilos:

We, too, appeal to the scripture as the great charter of our faith, but we appeal to it with reverence. We grasp no detached passages, which might appear more striking to our contracted view; but we reverence the whole as the dictates of divine inspiration; and lest we should err in adjusting the complex system of our duties by its standard, we listen with respectful docility to that guide, which

³⁵ Quoted in Bowen 1978: 90.

³⁶ MacHale 1822: 23.

³⁷ Quoted in Bowen 1978: 92.

after minutely surveying the whole, can best reconcile its apparent inconsistencies, and construct a balanced system of morality, by regulating the proper limits of our obligations, and assigning to the different virtues their respective proportions.³⁸

The Bible should not be read and interpreted individually; whereas man was weak, the ancient tradition of the Catholic Church was a confirmation of rectitude in interpretation.

In addition to denouncing the Catholic Church Magee, in his claim that the Church of Ireland was the true church in Ireland, also claimed to trace the continuity of his own church back to the Apostles. MacHale countered with the assertion that the Church of Ireland was a Parliament invention, which would exist only as long as its inventor exists or lets the church exist. The Catholic Church on the other hand was a divine institution: “It is derived to us from a higher source, and rests on more permanent authority”.³⁹ The Church of Ireland was a schismatic church, and could hence not claim authority of prescription. However, he could understand, he claimed, that the Established Church in England would claim continuity, for the Catholic Church was almost extinct there, but:

(...) that in a country whose very soil is interspersed with the traces of the ancient worship, and whose ancient hierarchy still exists in pure and apostolic splendor, the bishop of a new church should put forth such high pretensions to apostolicity, bespeaks a hardihood of mind in which humility had no share.⁴⁰

The Catholic Church was the one true church of Ireland, given by God and working for the great majority of the Irish population.

In the autumn of 1826 the objective of reformation led to a series of dramatic conversions to Protestantism in Cavan, County Cavan. On taking control of the Kingscourt estate, Lord Farnham, an emphatic member of the Hibernian Bible Society, sought to make it a model of Christian ‘moral management’, stressing moral supervision of his tenants and Bible-based education.⁴¹ It was usual that evangelical landowners served as patrons of local branches of the Bible Societies, providing funds and chairing meetings. The local linen industry was at the time in a state of virtual collapse, and many locals sought employment on his land. Within the first year, Lord Farnham was said to have been maintaining at his own expense seven schools with some 700 pupils.⁴² In September of that year, Farnham was reportedly approached by three Catholic teachers who claimed to have been converted by teaching Bible lessons to their pupils. They asked for Farnham’s support and protection. He agreed to it, and he let it be known that he would offer his protection to

³⁸ MacHale 1822: 40f.

³⁹ MacHale 1822: 31.

⁴⁰ MacHale 1822: 15.

⁴¹ Brown 2000: 199.

⁴² Brown 2000: 190.

other Catholics wishing to convert. A steady procession of Catholics made their way to Farnham's estate to be received into the Established Church; by early December 1826, over 250 people were reported to have conformed.⁴³ Farnham was a zealous evangelical; weekly bulletins were set up in Cavan on the number of converts. Tales were told of an enormous Protestant fund to buy up the religious belief of anyone willing to convert.⁴⁴

The reports from Cavan alarmed the Catholic Church, and in mid-December a deputation of five bishops travelled to Cavan to investigate the matters. MacHale was a member of this deputation, which was led by Archbishop Curtis of Armagh. A growing political self-awareness among the Catholics and the growing separation of the two religions made Farnham's aggression not only a question of religion, but also a question of culture and of power. After returning from Cavan, MacHale wrote Farnham two letters on his thoughts about what he had witnessed. The deputation claimed to have uncovered evidence of bribery and souperism⁴⁵, and in his letters MacHale primarily attacked Farnham's and other evangelicals' conversion methods. He suggested that "(...) Catholics, in name, without any religion in practice, were those who were chiefly sought by the Hibernian Society, for the purpose of undermining the Catholic Religion".⁴⁶ He illustrated his point by presenting the following statement by Captain Pringle, a member of the Hibernian Society, when interviewed by a Royal Commission of Education:

Commissioner: "Why do you prefer having Roman Catholic Teachers?"

Pringle: "Because they are a great deal more acceptable to the People and it takes away the handle of the Priests, when they say the Society is a proselytising society."

Commissioner: "Do you not wish then (the Roman Catholics you employ as Masters) to become Protestants?"

Pringle: "I do not wish them to become nominal Protestants."

Commissioner: "Do not you in some degree, in wishing to have Roman Catholics appointed Masters, contemplate the conversion of those persons through their connection with the society?"

Pringle: "Yes I do."

Commissioner: "Is not that in some measure an operating motive in your mind, in wishing to have persons who are Roman Catholics appointed in your Schools?"

Pringle: "It is."⁴⁷

Captain Pringle declared that the evangelical schools employed nominal Catholics who taught the Protestant religion. In MacHale's eyes, then, evangelical attempts at conversion were but foul play; people were being lured into converting. He also endeavoured to dismantle a common view of the converts being 'regular' Catholics, a view that would indeed harm the Catholic Church a great deal:

⁴³ Brown 2000: 199.

⁴⁴ Bowen 1978: 94.

⁴⁵ Souperism means offering people material privileges (originally soup) in exchange for converting.

⁴⁶ MacHale 1827: 11.

⁴⁷ Appendix to the report of Commission of Education. Quoted in MacHale 1827: 14.

Let names and places be specified, and it will be found that many of the new converts are old Protestants, and that the others are such as to make every decent Protestant blush for his new allies.⁴⁸

He simply defied the claims of massive conversions made by Farnham; many of the so-called converts had never been Catholics to begin with. Afraid as he obviously was of losing Catholics into the hands of Protestant proselytisers, MacHale in addition claimed that the persons his religion had lost to Farnham's cause were bad seeds, without which Catholicism would do better. He had an unfailing faith in his church and he demanded the same from other Catholics. His message was crystal clear. The evangelisation of the Established Church would continue for decades to come, but their work had lost most of its credit with the government, which had entirely turned in the direction of undenominational education.

The rise of a National Education System

In 1824, the Catholic bishops had put forward a petition in the House of Commons in which they asked the House "(...) to adopt such measures as might promote the education of Roman Catholic poor in Ireland in the most effectual manner".⁴⁹ Gone was the extensive support for the Kildare Place Society; the bishops complained that the money granted for education was of little or no use to the majority of the Irish because of the rule that made Bible-reading compulsory. The immediate result of this petition was the appointment of a Commission of Irish Education Inquiry, which was to inquire into and report upon the whole subject of the education of the poor in Ireland.⁵⁰ It was now twelve years since the work of the last Commission was completed, and whereas that Commission had encouraged the work of Kildare Place Society, the atmosphere in political circles had now changed substantially. The Commission criticised the Kildare Place Society in a twofold manner. It first of all disapproved of the basic principle of notefree Bible reading, giving the reason that it was in opposition to the discipline of the Catholic Church. The other part of the criticism was connected to proselytism. Whereas the Commission could not find any reason to believe that the Kildare Place Society intended to convert Catholics, it still found that the society granted funds to schools connected with educational societies that practised conversions. This practice was in clear opposition to the original principle of the Kildare Place Society, namely, to help schools conducted only according to its own system.

⁴⁸ MacHale 1827: 11.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Moore 1904: 94.

⁵⁰ Moore 1904: 94.

In January 1826, the Catholic bishops published a series of resolutions containing requirements regarding public education. Their tone was now markedly sharper. They demanded that all books for instruction should be approved by the Catholic bishop of the diocese where a school was situated, and they also demanded, contrary to Kildare Place Society principles, that no teacher should be appointed without reference to their religion.⁵¹ A clear development in the direction of a demand for Catholic education is here traceable. By now, the attitude of the majority of the Catholic bishops was drawing nearer the position that MacHale had taken already in 1820.

In March 1828, a Royal Committee was appointed to review the reports of previous Commissions of Education. In its final report, issued early in 1829, it endorsed the principle of unified secular education. This report had a marked effect upon parliamentary opinion, and during the same year, a final draft on a completely secular National Education System was issued.⁵² This scheme would be set into life in 1831.

Catholic Emancipation

Before the Act of Union was issued in 1801, Prime Minister William Pitt had promised his best efforts to carry a Catholic Emancipation Bill through Parliament. He was unable to win over the majority of the Houses, and the Catholic question was yet to be solved. Henry Grattan returned to the parliamentary arena in 1805, where his major aim was the achievement of Catholic Emancipation.⁵³ He put three Emancipation bills before the House of Commons, the last one in 1819. They were all defeated, but with an ever diminishing majority.⁵⁴ In 1823 Daniel O’Connell founded the Catholic Association, an organisation committed to the cause of Emancipation. The Catholic Association continued a tradition of political organisations being forums for the middle and upper classes. In 1824, this changed. This year O’Connell turned his Association into a mass movement. He worked actively to rouse and unify the Catholic people, and to be able to do that he entered into a partnership with the Catholic clergy. This was an ingenious strategy, since the clergy was well distributed all over Ireland and they were authorities to the Catholic people. The Catholic Church, having seen a period of institutionalisation and tightening of discipline

⁵¹ Moore 1904: 110.

⁵² Moore 1904: 158.

⁵³ Grattan had been one of the forces behind the 1792 Declaration of Independence issued by the Irish Parliament. See p. 16 of this thesis.

⁵⁴ Cronin 2001: 123.

similar to that of the Church of Ireland, provided a better organisation than it had been able to do for a long time. Such an improvement in force combined with a more politically aware type of priest made the clergy an ample partner for O'Connell. One additionally important strategy that O'Connell put to use was the issuing of the so-called 'Catholic rent', an inexpensive subscription rent which Catholics of all stations could afford. Since the Catholics were so numerous, this provided the organisation with large funds. It also had an immense psychological effect on the people: They were now part of a visible community and fought a common battle.

MacHale took a prominent part in the fight for Emancipation. In 1824, a set of letters to the British Foreign Secretary, George Canning, was published in book form.⁵⁵ In these letters he, as Hierophilos, discussed Emancipation. The Tory Canning had himself pleaded the cause of Catholic Emancipation in England. According to MacHale, the original reason for issuing the penal laws was the fear of competition to the throne by a Catholic. This reason was no longer valid in the 1820s. Why, then, although some of the laws had been mitigated, did penal laws continue to exist? The most prevalent justification given was that the Catholic Irish were ignorant, indolent and criminal. If this were the case, MacHale asked himself, why was it so? The decay of Ireland, in the degree that it did exist, was in his view completely due to the penal legislation:

Although in the conduct of the Irish people there is much to be compassionate; it will not be denied that there is also something to be condemned (...) We acknowledge the existence of evils which spring from the system by which we are governed; and are anxious for their removal.⁵⁶

Access to knowledge had for decades been closed for Catholics; the wealth of Britain had not been spread to Ireland, and investments in industry had never been made.⁵⁷ The only solution, then, to the decay of Ireland was the diffusion of equal laws to all. One additional reason, according to MacHale, for the issue of penal laws had been the fear and disrespect of the Catholic religion. But he believed Catholics to be no less supportive of the King than Protestants; this was a point MacHale stressed thoroughly, in this book and at other occasions.

In spite of the penal enactment, MacHale also held that the Catholics were not as ignorant and indolent as claimed, and he gave the Catholic clergy much of the honour for that. In addition, he maintained that crime had lately been growing enormously in England despite the majority of its population being Protestant. Contrary to what was generally

⁵⁵ MacHale 1824.

⁵⁶ MacHale 1824: 5.

conveyed, religion, also Catholicism, if given confidence, as a general rule gave governments the steadiest security; the Catholic Church was not a revolutionary institution, but supported established authorities.

According to MacHale, Catholics had too strong a connection to their religion and their Church to turn into subjects of the Church of Ireland. Therefore, Emancipation was unavoidable if the government wanted justice and a content and well functioning Ireland. In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, MacHale also remarked on the exposure abroad. The penal laws forced upon Catholics made Britain seem unjust; thus, all the good that Britain would do abroad would not be a display of her humanity but of her ambitions. Lastly, MacHale proposed that since the laws already had been mitigated several times, there was no reason not to fulfil the work.

Emancipation was to MacHale not a definite end in itself, but an important first step for social rest and a positive development for Ireland and hence for the Union as a whole. What MacHale was looking for was:

(...) men Irish in affection, no matter whence their origin. Men who seek to promote the happiness of the country in the only way which is now possible – by identifying her laws, institutions, interests with those of England, and forming of both islands one solid empire.⁵⁸

A Parliament that focused on working for Ireland's best was the solution to problems and discontent in Ireland. At the time he still believed that this could be done within the Union.

In 1826, two years after his letters to Canning were published, MacHale was interviewed by a Royal Commission of Inquiry at Maynooth. In this interview he gladly confirmed his opinions on the penal legislation:

I look upon those penal laws as malignant which proscribe the Catholics, and require of Protestants, as a condition to obtain office, to declare before God, that the religion of Catholics is damnable and idolatrous.⁵⁹

As he wrote at a later occasion, “(...) [my] motto is never to put to paper a single line which (...) [I] should wish to erase”.⁶⁰ This not only showed that he was true to his prior attacks on the British State, but also that he was mindful as to what he wrote. This year the fight for Emancipation achieved a breakthrough. At the general election of that year, O’Connell and the New Catholic Association managed to convince many Catholic electors to vote for candidates who favoured Emancipation.⁶¹ Most Catholic electors were tenant

⁵⁷ There were cases of industrial investments in Ulster, but these proved to be an advantage almost exclusively for the Protestant population there.

⁵⁸ MacHale 1824: 96f.

⁵⁹ Maynooth Commission, November 3, 1826. Quoted in Bourke 1902: 85.

⁶⁰ MacHale 1893: 245.

⁶¹ The Association had adopted the “New” in its name in 1825.

farmers, and the tradition had been that they voted in the way that their landlords told them to. Since the enfranchisement of the forty-shilling freehold in the 1790s, landlords had started granting leases in order to qualify their tenants for the vote, and because the voting was public, most tenants voted according to their landlords' wishes. Candidates who favoured emancipation had thus never been given much support by Catholics at elections. At the election of 1826, the Catholic Association had decided to compensate electors who were victimised by their landlords on account of their voting. In this election, supporters of Emancipation were returned from the four counties of Waterford, Westmeath, Louth and Monaghan.⁶² It was an unprecedented victory for the Catholic Association, and it would not be the last.

The 1826 election in many ways set the standard for Catholic behaviour in elections. In the Clare election of 1828, the victory would be complete. The Catholic Association in this election attempted to find a pro-Emancipation Protestant to stand as its candidate against the Tory candidate Mr. Vesey Fitzgerald. Finding this impossible, O'Connell offered to run. Being Catholic, he could not sit in Parliament, but he was not forbidden to go forward as a candidate. O'Connell won the election by a landslide: 2,057 votes to 982.⁶³ After this exhibition of strength, the government, fearing civil unrest in Ireland, no longer dared to take any other course, and on April 13, 1829, the Catholic Emancipation Bill became law.

Church of Ireland or Irish Church?

In his letters to Canning in 1824, MacHale also discussed the Church of Ireland. In the same tone as he displayed in his dispute with Archbishop Magee, he questioned the fundament of the Church of Ireland. First of all, he asked himself whether the Established Church was a religious or a political system. He landed on the same conclusion as he had done with Magee, namely that it was a political system. It originated from the British legislature and could likewise be dissolved by legislature. No religion of mere State creation could lend to that State by which it was created any other authority than that which it had received from the same State.

By now, MacHale was able to campaign for this and other issues with increased authority. In 1824, a great change came in MacHale's personal life: He resigned his

⁶² Whyte 1994: 252.

⁶³ Whyte 1994: 254.

position as professor at Maynooth College. At the end of this year, the health of Bishop Waldron of Killala began to fail, and MacHale was elected coadjutor Bishop of his beloved native Killala and Bishop of the see of Maronia.⁶⁴ On January 31, 1825, the Congregation of Propaganda officially elected MacHale as Bishop, and on June 5 he received Episcopal consecration at Maynooth.

In 1828, for three years now a bishop, MacHale turned to a discussion on theology. This year he published a book called ‘The Evidences and Doctrines of the Catholic Church’. According to his own account, the object and scope of the book was to:

(...) deduce the evidences of the Catholic Church from the primitive source of revelation, and illustrate the speculative truth of its doctrine, as well as their practical influence on the happiness of society.⁶⁵

Being a former professor of dogmatic theology, MacHale took it upon himself to write one of very few books at the time that discussed Catholic doctrine in the English language. The book to a large extent expressed MacHale’s theoretical position on the connection between religion and society.

In the book he discussed the relationship between the Catholic Church and the temporal State and also the Church’s role in politics. First and foremost, he resolved that Church and State are independent institutions. This was a stark contrast to for instance the view of the Anglican Archbishop Magee. On the one hand, argued MacHale, the Church, and thus the Pope, has both spiritual and temporal authority. On the other hand, the State holds temporal authority but cannot hold spiritual authority, as it is not the source of spiritual authority. Spiritual authority derives from a divine source that no man-made institution can alter, whereas temporal authority derives from human institutions and is hence subjected to them. A consequence of this analysis is that the Pope does not have the right to interfere in temporal issues in independent states. By saying this, MacHale presented himself as a truly moderate Catholic. Even though spiritual power is above temporal power, MacHale continued, the Church must still be faithful to temporal authorities; civil obedience is a duty to all members of society. There were definite traces of the Gallicanism of the Church of the 1790s in these assessments. But while the Church must be obedient to the State, its members also have the right and, indeed, the duty to exercise their civil privileges as members of society. In stressing this, MacHale justified his own conduct as a political priest. Catholicism, he wrote, supports both political

⁶⁴ His childhood home Tubbernavine was located in the Episcopal see of Killala and Maronia was a see in Greece. Coadjutor bishops, having no real diocese of their own, were often appointed to sees from Asia Minor of early Christian days.

freedom and established authority. He supported any established authority that worked for the good of the people, but also declared that the monarchy was, in his view, the best system of power. He also expressed himself in opposition to any form of revolution, as he believed that the ends did not justify the means. During the years he had several times shown himself as a strong supporter of constitutional means. At a later occasion, he also uttered, in a similar way, his view of the State:

For me, I prefer the old theology of Thomas Aquinas. *A tyrannical government is unjust, being ordained, not for the common good, but for the private good of the ruler; therefore the disturbance of this rule is not sedition, unless when the overthrow of tyranny is so inordinately pursued, that the multitude suffers more from the disturbance than from the existence of the government.*⁶⁶

Revolution was such an inordinately disturbance. MacHale was not, as he also had said to Canning, opposed to temporal authorities, but he was opposed to those temporal authorities that were not working for the common good of the people. One could now start to detect a growing antagonism towards the British government in MacHale's writing.

In the extension of the discussion on Church and State, MacHale again took up the position of the Church of Ireland as the State Church in Ireland and part of the established authority in the country. In 1833 he wrote a letter to the Whig Prime Minister, Earl Grey, advocating the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. His earlier statements on this issue had been more vague. But more than a change in direction, one could now see in MacHale an intensification of his views. On the subjugation of the Church, he said:

(...) there is no individual distinguished for a reach of thought or integrity of purpose in the country, who, according to his temperament, does not indulge in feelings of ridicule or indignation against the mockery of supporting an establishment in defiance of every reason for which an establishment should be upheld. If his Majesty's bishops confine their pretensions to the lordly titles which it is surely in the power of his Majesty to confer, we should as cheerfully recognise them as any portion of the secular aristocracy of the realm. Had they ministered any religious comfort or instruction to the poor flock (...), there might be some colour of right for their rapacity. But to stand up in a country, and to possess all the pride and pomp and property of a peerage, without those hereditary obligations which are some pledge of its popularity; and again to arrogate the respect and veneration of pastors from a people who look upon them as laymen, and for whose property they make no return except in unbounded contumely towards their persons, and the most unsparing calumnies on their creed, is an anomaly in legislation to which no country on earth can furnish a parallel.⁶⁷

The continued advancement of a Protestant State Church in Ireland was a display of disrespect to the majority of the Irish population and to the church of that majority. Previously he had advocated the unsuitability of the position in Ireland of the Established Church; he now argued for its total removal. While it may seem as a breach in conduct and opinion, it can rather be interpreted as a natural continuation of his preceding work. His

⁶⁵ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 123.

⁶⁶ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 209. Italics in manuscript.

⁶⁷ MacHale 1893: 454f.

position was growing stronger within Ireland and the Irish Catholic Church and he now dared to speak more forcefully.

In a letter to the Protestant Bishop of Exeter later in 1833, MacHale answered to a charge that he had “(...) assailed the Protestant establishment, and predicted its downfall [sic]”.⁶⁸ The straightforward and outspoken position he had now taken made him state:

Far then, from shrinking from any avowal of hostility to a system fraught with such injustice, I must frankly own that the establishment has been, and shall continue to be, the object of every legal and constitutional opposition in my power.⁶⁹

But even though his opposition was strong, MacHale still underlined his belief in legal and constitutional means.

Land and establishment

One important part of the Irish people’s hostility to the Church of Ireland was that they had to pay tithes to the church. In a country where the vast majority of the people worked hard for survival, the payment of tithes to an alien church was a major source of animosity. Opposition to tithes had been a permanent feature of agrarian disorder since the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ From 1735 to 1825, pastureland was absolved from the tithe, and that was a regulation which had produced further anger within especially the Catholic communities, for it meant that the burden of tithes fell more heavily on the cultivators of small tillage plots, who were mostly Catholics. In 1823, a new Act was passed in order to improve the system, and in 1824 the privilege of pastureland was abolished. But the general objections to tithes remained unchanged.

In his 1824 letter to Canning, MacHale connected the issue of tithes to the rights of the Church of Ireland in a Catholic country. In England, he maintained, the Established Church had both a natural and a constitutional right to require tithes, for its priests were the real as well as the constitutional ministers of religious instruction. In Ireland on the other hand, they only had a constitutional right; the religious instruction was still imparted by the Catholic clergy. The right to tithes was founded on the duty of religious instruction, and since this duty had not been transferred to the Established Church, neither should the tithes. Because of its insistence on collecting tithes in Ireland, the Established Church kept Ireland and England divided. MacHale’s solution to the problem at this point, before he later

⁶⁸ MacHale 1834: 5.

⁶⁹ MacHale 1834: 5.

⁷⁰ Ó Tuathaigh 1972: 173.

demanded a full disestablishment of the Church, was that the ministers of the Church of Ireland, being state officials, should receive their salary from the Exchequer. In this letter, MacHale did not argue for the transfer of the right to claim tithes to the Catholic Church.

In the 1830s, tithe agitation again came in the forefront of Irish peasant agitation. This year an anti-tithe campaign began in Leinster, and it soon became more widespread and intense than previous such campaigns had been. The ever-growing population, leading to rising rents and an increased level of poverty, combined with the victory of the campaign for Catholic political rights, made the people focus on the tithe-issue with increasing hostility. By 1833, the campaign had led to more than half the tithe arrears of the previous two years being still outstanding.⁷¹ After initial hostility to the campaign, the government found that it could not defeat the resistance, and it initiated new measures.

The tithe issue was obviously a part of a larger theme of land-issues. Life was vulnerable and a bad harvest could have brutal consequences. And in 1831, famine yet again came to Mayo. As in 1820, the harvest of 1830 was a partial failure in Mayo, and come spring 1831, the people were starving. In this situation, MacHale, experiencing the toll of the famine firsthand and feeling responsibility for his parishioners, wrote Prime Minister Grey:

Some ascribe all the evil to the Government; others to the people. Like other complicated effects, it might be shared, though not in equal proportions, by both. When I reflect on the effects of good government on far less generous natures, I must confess that many of the people's vices are traceable to the influence of bad laws.⁷²

His tone had changed immensely from the letters he wrote to the people of England at the time of the 1821-famine. The difference is most likely based mainly on the fact that his audience was now very different and that he had grown in his role during those ten years. These letters were more consistent with other letters of MacHale than were the letters of 1821. When addressing Grey, MacHale made it clear that he was not expecting miracles. But he did expect the government, Ireland's government, to make an effort: "Give me the will, the sincere and efficient will, on the part of the Government, to improve Ireland, and we ask no more".⁷³ In these letters he repeated the tone of his letters to Foreign Secretary Canning; he mainly blamed the problems of Ireland on bad laws. Another similarity between these letters was his sober view of the situation. Neither in this case nor in others did he expect instant positive developments. Earl Grey never replied to MacHale's

⁷¹ Ó Tuathaigh 1972: 177.

⁷² Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 154.

⁷³ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 154.

addresses, so MacHale went to London to have an interview with the Prime Minister. But all his efforts were in vain.

A radical bishop?

With his high public profile and his never-ending criticism of the political and religious establishment, was John MacHale a radical bishop? Ever since the seminary at Maynooth was established in 1795, it had been criticised for breeding radical priests. In 1827, MacHale wrote a public letter in the defence of Maynooth and the priests educated there. Oft-heard criticism referred to the discipline and doctrine of the college. First of all, the discipline at the college was found to be too strict. If the discipline were less rigid, said the criticism, the priests would be more tolerant. MacHale replied that the only thing more flexible discipline would lead to was a priesthood tolerant of “every error in belief”.⁷⁴

Regarding the doctrine of the college, MacHale took up the rumours in Catholic circles that Maynooth was a college teaching according to Gallican principles. Gallicanism was not a new phenomenon in the Irish Church. As was displayed during the 1790s, the hierarchy itself promoted a sense of parliamentary Gallicanism, in its utter respect for temporal authorities. The sense of compromise that had prevailed within the Church since those days was another case in point. The Maynooth-priests, on the other hand, were charged with promoting episcopal Gallicanism. Episcopal Gallicanism was the advancing of the bishops’ authority in favour of that of the Pope, and it was not a popular position in the Roman Catholic Church. Trying his best to pacify these rumours, MacHale proclaimed that “the College of Maynooth, content with following the straight line of defined doctrine, adopted neither the Cisalpine nor the Transalpine opinions”.⁷⁵ In his ‘Evidences and Doctrines’ MacHale had advocated that:

(...) to enlarge the collective rights of the episcopal body to a superiority over their head [the Pope] is a proposition no less fraught with schismatical consequences than it is repugnant to the language of our Redeemer, and to the usages of the first and purest ages of the Church⁷⁶

He supported the supremacy of the Pope over the bishops. But at the same time, he weakened the temporal power of the Pope:

⁷⁴ MacHale 1893: 241.

⁷⁵ MacHale 1893: 247. The term *Transalpine* refers to the term *Ultramontanism*. Ultramontanism is a direction within the Roman Catholic Church that finds that the Pope should decide in all matters, spiritual and temporal. The term *Cisalpine* is a designation of the directions, among others Gallicanism, that denied this view.

⁷⁶ MacHale 1852: 290.

But is it meant to exalt the pope's authority beyond the reach of any control; and, by consequence, to subject again to his arbitrary will the destiny of empires and the majesty of kings? No, the phantom of the pope's temporal dominion has passed away with the opinions from which it rose; nor is there the least danger of its revival.⁷⁷

So, if the Pope had no supremacy in temporal issues and the priests and bishops had, as he had stated in 'Evidences and Doctrines', a right to exercise their civil rights and duties as citizens of the temporal state, then the bishops had the same strength of authority in temporal matters as did the Pope. MacHale was, however, aware of the danger of being stigmatised, and thus proclaimed that Maynooth followed the "straight line of defined doctrine".

In 1831, MacHale wrote yet another public letter to answer critics of Maynooth. Now he had to answer to assertions that the Maynooth-priests were selected from the humbler classes of the people. This was an allegation that had existed since the 1790s. MacHale in his reply put focus on the fact that it was recognised in Ireland that there were vast differences between rich and poor. The Catholic clergy was, he agreed, in the latter group, together with most Catholics. In this way, he managed to gain focus on the fact that Catholics were much worse off than Protestants. But the large sums the Maynooth-priests had to spend on their education were, he found, proof "(...) that they belong to the more decent class of farmers".⁷⁸ On their alleged ignorance, he said:

In the College of Maynooth the students are disciplined into their extensive knowledge by a long and laborious process of study. (...) Not so in the Protestant church.⁷⁹

His defence hence became a counter-attack on Protestant ecclesiastical education. Another point of criticism he ruled out was that Maynooth-priests were thought to be hostile to the institutions of the Union. There existed some fear that the clergy of an increasingly strong Catholic Church was hostile to the state institutions. MacHale claimed full loyalty to the Houses of Parliament and the monarchy, as he had done so many times before:

(...) the Catholic clergy took a prominent share in the formation of the Catholic Association, and in the collection of the Catholic rent, which were the two great instruments by which our freedom was achieved. They enrolled themselves among those who combated for a participation in the constitution, and cheered the exertions of Mr. O'Connell on behalf of his oppressed countrymen. Though the bigots of the empire were defeated by Emancipation, still it was a measure which, while it enlarged the sphere of civil and religious liberty, gave fresh accession of strength to the government.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ MacHale 1852: 291f.

⁷⁸ MacHale 1893: 304.

⁷⁹ MacHale 1893: 306.

⁸⁰ MacHale 1893: 309.

The Catholic clergy, including the Maynooth-clergy, was not hostile to the institutions of the Union. On the contrary, it worked solely through these institutions and, in that way, honoured them with respect.

A plea for repeal of the Union

In 1833 MacHale wrote Prime Minister Earl Grey a letter in which he advocated the repeal of the legislative Union. This was a unique plea at the time. In 1803, Ireland had witnessed another rebellion aimed at ending the legislative relationship with Britain. Led by Robert Emmet, a small group of people with United Irishmen-sympathies rose in Dublin. This rising was rash, badly planned and a complete failure. Since those days, the fundament of the Union between Ireland and Britain was not debated. So, when MacHale offered his opinion in 1833, this represented a new trend. Catholic political efforts had mostly been spent on gaining Catholics political and economic rights within the Union. This set aside, MacHale's statement did present continuity in his own position. At previous occasions he had criticised the work of the government, but still respectfully uttered his total loyalty to the same government. His position was now more marked:

In the best regulated and most prosperous states of antiquity their laws were few and simple, because they were the production of men who knew the wants of the people, and were anxious to relieve them. Members of parliament chosen in England and Scotland, who form the overwhelming majority of the British senate, have not sufficient knowledge of the wants of the Irish people, nor anxiety to relieve them. The first proposition will scarcely be combated; and, as to the second, as the English members are the representatives of a nation which considers mastership as a right, it cannot be disparaging to their moral feelings to assert, that they shall always deem it a duty, that the laws which affect England and Ireland should be marked with the same relative discrimination.⁸¹

There were no signs of disrespect in this declaration; MacHale was just growing tired of waiting for a change in the system that had not and, apparently, would never take place. MacHale had always promoted a belief in constitutional authorities, but he demanded that these authorities work for the best interests of Ireland. Finding that this had not happened, he now ceased believing that a non-Irish state would ever promote Irish interests as much as Ireland needed and deserved. A belief in repeal of the Union was starting to be visible among Catholic politicians of the day, but an open pronouncement of this aim was still years ahead.

⁸¹ MacHale 1893: 485f.

Debated and elevated

In August 1831, MacHale went, for the first time in his life, to Rome. Here he was to have an interview with Pope Gregory XVI. Gregory had been elected Pope on February 2 the same year.⁸² During the spring and summer of 1830, the revolution of France had spread to the Italian states. The new government in Bologna issued a declaration stating that since Christ had declared that his kingdom was not of this world, the Pope could not justify its temporal power.⁸³ After turning to Austria for help, the Papal States quelled the rebellion. Having already in his time seen two Popes driven from their State by revolutionaries, Gregory was a conservative Pope.

Gregory XVI would prove to have an important role to play in the election of a new Archbishop of Tuam. When Archbishop Kelly of Tuam died in 1834, MacHale was presented as one of three candidates for the position. When the British government learned that MacHale was one of the three candidates, it was rapid in its condemnation of him. To the government, MacHale was a firebrand and a demagogue, arousing the Irish people to rebellion. He did not, the government claimed, behave or write in the proper manner for a religious man, and if he was appointed to the see of Tuam, the government feared there would not be peace in Ireland.⁸⁴ After years of being confronted with MacHale's strong opinions on most matters regarding the conditions of the Irish Catholics and their relationship to Protestant Britain, the government was clearly afraid of what he might do if he were given an even more influential office. Why was MacHale so dangerous to the British State? To them, he represented a strong, self-aware Catholic Church, which demanded an end to British, Protestant power in Ireland. He was a threat to the entire existence of British authority in Ireland. MacHale was outspoken and appeared to them to be more nationalist than the other Catholic bishops.

The government's opinions and accusations were duly presented to the Pope. In order to judge for himself, Pope Gregory had MacHale's writings translated into Italian. Upon reading them, he pronounced them fully orthodox and worthy of a Catholic bishop. The conservative Gregory was not alarmed by the opinions of the Bishop of Maronia. Therefore he appointed MacHale to the see of St. Jarlath as the Archbishop and metropolitan of Tuam.

⁸² Chadwick 1998: 3.

⁸³ Chadwick 1998: 5.

⁸⁴ Bourke 1902: 96.

Chapter 4 – Politics and dissension, 1834-1850

With the elevation to archbishop, MacHale became one of the four most influential prelates in the Irish Catholic Church. His was the westernmost of the four archbishoprics in Ireland. MacHale governed the diocese of Tuam, geographically the largest diocese in the country¹; at the same time he presided over the bishops of all the dioceses of the province of Tuam. In his new role, he continued his fight for the Irish people. At his installation, he stated that:

To the rich and the poor, to the high and the humble, I am a debtor. It shall be my study, by impressing on all classes their reciprocal obligations, to bring about the peace and concord which can never exist but by adjusting to their proper places the varied interests of society (...).²

The statement clearly shows that the shift in assignment did not in any way alter his focus.

Before MacHale became archbishop, in January 1834, two resolutions were agreed to by a united Irish Catholic prelacy. The first resolution said that chapels should not be used for any purposes except those devoted to charity and religion, the other that the clergy should not interfere with the civil rights of their flocks. They should not make any reference from their altars to political subjects, but confine themselves to the discharge of the duties of their office. They were also recommended not to connect themselves with political clubs.³ What would now emerge was a prelacy that focused on religious duties and to a larger extent discarded politics. MacHale signed the resolutions. One could marvel at such a finding, for MacHale had proved himself to be indeed a political bishop. There were, moreover, no signs that he would reduce his national-political zeal.

Tithes

Catholic agitation against paying tithes to a Protestant clergy was further intensified in 1834. At the end of that year, there was a change of ministry at Westminster, and the Conservative Robert Peel became Prime Minister. After having no progress with his correspondence on Irish matters with the Liberal Prime Minister Earl Grey, MacHale decided to write Peel. He told Peel that having to “(...) pay tribute to the teachers of an

¹ The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15079d.htm>.

² Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 271.

³ Burke 1882: 277. See also Hoppen, K.T. (1984): *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland 1832-1885*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

adverse creed” was “contrary to right reason and justice”.⁴ He further informed Peel that he had leased a small farm “just enough to qualify me for the exercise of the franchise, and I am resolved never to pay tithes to the parsons, a tribe who have scourged the people with a whip of scorpions”.⁵

Meanwhile, Daniel O’Connell had also taken his place at the front of the tithe-war. MacHale wrote him on several occasions on the matter in 1837. They strongly differed in opinion as to the measures taken by the government. The Peel ministry had since, in 1835, been replaced by another Whig ministry under Lord Melbourne. In one letter to O’Connell, written May 26, 1837, MacHale stressed the significance of the tithe issue to the Catholic people:

On no other measure are the hearts of the people so much fixed as on their release from contributing to the support of an Establishment that is ever opposed to their best interests. The Tithe Bill they look upon as the test of the JUSTICE [sic] which has been so long promised, but of which the performance, - they complain, - had been so long delayed.⁶

The parliamentary bill MacHale was referring to was the Tithes Act that would be passed on August 15, 1838. This Act converted the tithes into a rent charge, thereby transferring the burden onto the shoulders of the landlords and removing or, rather, concealing some of the focus on religion.⁷ The Act was passed with the support of O’Connell. MacHale, however, connected the tithes closely to general Catholic Emancipation. For him, the removal of tithes to the Church of Ireland should have been a part of the 1829 Emancipation Act. He was truly disappointed by the Act, and he further maintained:

Coming in daily contact with the clergy, and having a good deal of intercourse with the people themselves, I can state that I never knew a measure to which they are more opposed. Their aversion to the Bill is such, as that I am convinced no influence that the bishop or clergy could exercise would persuade them of its advantages.⁸

A system that was to such an extent despised by the Catholic people should not be condoned as O’Connell had done. MacHale criticised him firmly for having supported the Bill. He wrote O’Connell on September 26, 1838:

It is my conviction that the unreserved confidence which has been hitherto placed in the Ministry has had a baneful influence on the interests of Ireland; and that if they were taught to feel the measures of general good, and not of individual benefits, would be the test of the public confidence, something would have been done for the country.⁹

⁴ Quoted in Burke 1882: 264.

⁵ Quoted in Burke 1882: 264.

⁶ Quoted in O’Reilly 1890, vol. I: 485.

⁷ Hoppen 1989: 24.

⁸ Quoted in O’Reilly 1890, vol. I: 489.

⁹ Quoted in Costello 1939: 46.

Three years earlier, in 1835, O’Connell fully demonstrated that he was a pragmatic politician. This year he and his followers pledged their full support of the Whigs. In return, the Whigs among other things committed themselves to providing a tithe settlement.¹⁰ MacHale strongly disapproved of the path chosen by O’Connell. On the one hand, he thought O’Connell placed “unreserved confidence” in the Whigs. On the other hand, he attacked the liberalism of the Whigs; he believed that the good of the people must come before the good of the individual. The 1830s were the peak of *laissez-faire* politics, which aimed at general deregulation of the State. With a liberal government for nine out of those ten years, Ireland followed a general European trend. This trend was demonstrated in the United Kingdom by a period of reforms. For instance, the 1832 Reform Act had increased the franchise by about fifty per cent. The 1838 Tithes Act had been part of this wind of reform. With their differing views on political co-operation, MacHale and O’Connell explicitly disagreed as to what was the best means for their common goal, namely a better life for the Irish people.

Poor Law

The same year as the Tithes Act was passed, Parliament also extended the English poor law system to Ireland by the 1838 Poor Law Act. Ireland had never had a poor law; poor relief prior to 1838 had mostly consisted of organised public works and assisted emigration.¹¹ Because of this omission, the English Poor Law was the only reference model at the time of construction. Prior to 1834, poor relief in England had consisted mainly of outdoor relief, but with the passing of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, the outdoor relief system was replaced by a centralised system based on the workhouse. The system of the workhouse was unpopular from the beginning, as it was based on the so-called ‘less eligible’ principle; it was constructed so as to be less comfortable than life outside the institution.¹² This among other things included the separation of families.

In 1833 a Royal Commission was appointed in Ireland to investigate and make recommendations on the conditions of the Irish poor. The report of this Commission rejected both the workhouse system and outdoor relief.¹³ It was generally thought in Ireland that the English system was wrong for Irish conditions, since it was a system of

¹⁰ Ó Tuathaigh 1972: 181. This was the so-called Lichfield House compact.

¹¹ Daly 1986: 43.

¹² Ó Tuathaigh 1972: 111.

¹³ Ó Tuathaigh 1972: 111.

poor relief related to industrialisation, short-term unemployment and difficulties related to the process of rural-to-urban migration.¹⁴ By sharp contrast, the Irish situation was predominantly agricultural and rural. The 1833 Commission hence recommended several alternative measures, but Lord Melbourne's Whig government of 1838 was determined – the English workhouse system of 1834 should be transferred to Ireland. British opinion was in general in favour of this measure. The Irish landlords were divided on the issue; on the one hand they would have to meet the costs, but on the other hand all the suggested schemes seemed to them equally expensive. O'Connell had been opposed to the proposition of the law, but in the end, presumably because of his co-operation with the Whigs, he changed sides and supported it.

Passage of the Poor Law generated a debate that MacHale could not leave untouched. At his investiture as Archbishop of Tuam, he had proclaimed that “the poor have always been and shall ever be the special objects of my care”.¹⁵ So it was natural that he let his voice be heard on the new Poor Law. In addition he had gained much experience in poor relief through the 1821- and 1831-famines in Mayo. His chief criticism was twofold: He was opposed to what he found to be bad management of the new poor relief, and he was strongly opposed to the practice of the workhouses. In 1838, he branded the workhouses as:

Those prison-houses of the poor...subjected to a discipline that is to separate the husband from the wife, where the ties of nature and affection are to be rent asunder, and where the consolations of religion itself must depend on the caprices of anti-Catholic Commissioners.¹⁶

His three main fields of criticism of the workhouses were that in practice they were comparable to prisons, that families were separated and that the chaplains of the workhouses most often were not Catholic. This latter point, of obvious importance to a Catholic prelate, was a response to a proposal that the workhouse chaplains should be appointed by members of the Board of Governors.¹⁷

In a letter to the recently re-inaugurated Prime Minister Robert Peel on June 24, 1842, MacHale in a very little diplomatic manner accused the poor law system of being badly managed:

If we can rely on the published accounts of the disbursements, it seems that some £60,000 or £70,000 have been already expended on those functionaries [Poor Law Commissioners], and that

¹⁴ Cronin 2001: 130.

¹⁵ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 271.

¹⁶ Quoted in Burke 1882: 47.

¹⁷ Burke 1882: 47.

other subordinate officers are entitled to pay, whilst *in many instances not one particle of charitable relief has reached the poor of the most distressed localities*.¹⁸

Having now seen the Poor Law in action for about four years, MacHale was in effect charging the Poor Law Commissioners with being immoral: They received their funds without doing their jobs.

A different aspect in MacHale's criticism of the management of the poor law system was the trend of centralisation. On February 12, 1838 he wrote Home Secretary John Russell:

Centralization is now the great secret of policy (...) hence, instead of placing funds in the hands of responsible bodies, who in their respective districts would administer relief at little expense, you must have central boards in London and in Dublin, of which the principal object, or at least the effect, shall be to swell the crowd of suitors who are continually beseiging [sic] the porches of the Court in their importunate scramble for its patronage.¹⁹

Here we can see an argument that MacHale also had used resolutely in his fight for Catholic education in the 1820s: Decentralise resources, and any system will be improved. If the money is given to people who know local practices and who know and are trusted by the people, a system will work and it will be less expensive than any alternative. MacHale denounced the poor law system and the entire machinery of poor relief in Ireland, and in just a few years his work for the poor and his denunciation of the lack of governmental commitment would reach new heights.

The fight on the National Education System

While social issues were rising to a new level of importance in Irish society, the issue of education was still the topic that generated the most heat within the Catholic Church. From the late 1830s the primary education question rose once again to the level of importance it had had in the 1820s. The National Education System had received much criticism since its establishment in 1831, mainly regarding the place of religious education within the system. The curriculum in the schools run by the new system was secular, but provision was made for separate religious instruction at specific times.²⁰ Initially both Anglicans and Presbyterians strongly opposed it, both groups wanting to cling to their independence. They also felt animosity because the new system disregarded Bible reading. The majority of this opposition, however, decreased rather rapidly, and the Protestant Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately, who had succeeded Magee in this office in 1831, became one of

¹⁸ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 598f. Italics in manuscript.

¹⁹ Quoted in Burke 1882: 280f.

the true patrons of the new education system. Not all hostility ceased, however, and in 1838 the Church Education Society was founded, a society established on the principle that all pupils must read the Bible.²¹

The initial reaction of the Catholic Church to the system was one of quiet approval. Within the Church one could find both those who favoured the system and those who opposed it, and those in favour of the system were in majority, led by such significant figures as the three archbishops of Dublin, Cashel and Armagh. After experiencing the work of Protestant education societies for decades, they were optimistic about a new education scheme that did not aim to destroy Catholicism. They were open to such a – in their eyes – valid compromise. The Archbishop of Dublin, William Murray, even joined the Board of Commissioners, as he had done in the Kildare Place Society.

Nevertheless, the minority that opposed the new scheme was forcefully led by the fourth archbishop, John MacHale of Tuam. The internal dissension among the prelates of the Catholic Church, and especially between archbishops MacHale and Murray, turned out to be the most prominent element in the Irish debate on National Education. The problems started at the annual meeting of the Irish bishops in February 1838, when the Bishop of Ardagh, William Higgins, announced his opposition to the National Education System. Although the majority of the bishops present disagreed with him, Archbishop MacHale took up his lead.

As he had demonstrated frequently in the last decade or so, one of MacHale's guiding principles was "educate that you may be free"²², free as Catholics and free as Irishmen. In education he demanded to have God first and last, so he was in principle opposed to any undenominational education. He believed the National Education System to be both anti-Catholic and anti-national. The reason he had given for assailing the system when he did was an intensified fear of proselytism. In 1837 the government had set up two committees of inquiry, whose investigations led to a change of rule allowing religious instruction at an intermediate hour, in contrast to on separate days.²³ MacHale reacted strongly to this, and soon after the annual meeting in February he wrote an open letter to Home Secretary Russell, denouncing the system.

²⁰ Murphy 1971: 6.

²¹ Murphy 1971: 10.

²² Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 634.

²³ Murphy 1971: 10.

In a letter to Paul Cullen, the Rector of the Irish College in Rome and as such an important representative of Ireland in Rome, MacHale explained his opinions on the National Education System:

The government is labouring to effect by fraud and wiles what past ones could not achieve by force and to supercede [sic] the authority of the local pastors and to place the entire education of the people in bodies over which they may exercise absolute control.²⁴

MacHale had no belief what so ever in the government's good intentions. As earlier, he was afraid that the Church would lose influence over teachers and the books these teachers taught by. This position stood in stark contrast to Archbishop Murray and the majority of the bishops. In a letter to Cullen in April of that year, Murray underlined the dissension, as he remarked on MacHale that:

Dr. MacHale, you will have perceived, is making a violent outcry, in opposition to the sentiments of the great majority of his Episcopal Brethren against our National System of Education.²⁵

Murray approved of the system because he wanted to raise the poor "out of their degrading inferiority".²⁶ He had no expectation of obtaining public aid for a separate Catholic system. This, however, MacHale did, and in the same letter Murray said of MacHale:

As for his pretended hope of procuring a separate grant for the education of the Catholic poor, it is so utterly visionary that no rational person could entertain it for a moment.²⁷

This quote to a large extent describes the difference of character between the two archbishops. A rational and pragmatic Murray was frustrated by the visionary and uncompromising MacHale.

The two factions disagreed on the books used for instruction and also on the influence of Catholic patrons within the system. The minority faction of MacHale insisted that Catholics were not duly represented either on the Board of Commissioners or within each school. Murray's faction disagreed to this. It was quite singular that members of the same denomination argued about whether or not they were sufficiently influential in a inter-denominational institution. In addition, MacHale's unchanging fear of proselytism made him focus much on the literature provided in the schools. As Murray uttered in another letter to Cullen:

But what is most surprising is that he bases his principle argument on an evident *misstatement* [sic]; namely that the Bible is under this system made a school book.²⁸

²⁴ Quoted in Larkin 1970: 124.

²⁵ Quoted in Larkin 1970: 124.

²⁶ Quoted in Larkin 1970: 128.

²⁷ Quoted in Larkin 1970: 124.

²⁸ Quoted in Larkin 1970: 124.

There was no inter-denominational religious education, but extracts from the Scriptures and also other book of a religious character were used for moral instruction. For instance a book entitled ‘Lessons on the Truth of Christianity’, written by the Protestant Archbishop of Dublin and member of the Board Richard Whately, was used in the schools. Cullen in reply to Murray requested copies of such schoolbooks and Scripture extracts for the inspection of the Congregation of Propaganda. In June 1839 Propaganda condemned the material they had been given. Instead of complying, Murray appealed the issue to the Pope.

Rome was, however, most interested in the Irish Church solving the problem of dissension among themselves. In the autumn of 1839, Cullen had written both MacHale and Murray, trying to make them realise this. But the answer he received from both camps was one of no compromise; the conflict was by now too strong. On February 12, 1840 was the next annual meeting of the prelates.²⁹ At this meeting it was decided to appoint a committee of three prelates favourable to the system and three prelates opposed to it. This committee, of which MacHale and Archbishop William Crolly of Armagh were members, constructed a proposition containing six articles, intended as a compromise between the two groups. The proposition was submitted to the Lord Lieutenant, who flatly refused it. After the meeting, both Murray and MacHale wrote Cullen with their account of what had happened. According to MacHale, Rome should now, after this refusal, warn all the prelates against the National Education System and instead recommend them to petition to the government for separate grants for Catholic education.³⁰ Murray’s account of the meeting was quite different; according to him the group opposed to the National System “gave up the claim for a separate grant for the education of Catholics as unattainable”.³¹ The distance between the two sides was still vast, but as shown above, they had at least now tried to unite in their petition to the Lord Lieutenant. In a letter to Rome Murray explained his intention with the petition:

If, then, we agreed with the Archbishop of Tuam, in asking the Lord-lieutenant to increase the number of commissioners, we did so, not because we had any fear of the National system as dangerous to the Catholic faith or sound morality, but, as we have already said, for the love of peace and concord.³²

Murray had rejected to make a compromise with MacHale before the meeting; now he uttered an aim of creating a settlement with MacHale. Murray was twenty-odd years older than MacHale and had grown up during penal times. He had also been educated in pre-

²⁹ Burke 1882: 299.

³⁰ Larkin 1970: 137.

³¹ Quoted in Larkin 1970: 138.

³² Quoted in O’Reilly 1890, vol. I: 429f.

Revolutionary Spain. These were factors that formed him into a man compliant to temporal authorities. MacHale, on the other hand, was still no man of compromise. When the petition to the Lord Lieutenant was declined, he promptly banned the national schools in his archdiocese. He invited various Orders to settle in his province and establish schools for his Catholic parishioners. Thus the controversy had serious consequences in Tuam. However, since the three other archbishops favoured the system, its effect in the rest of Ireland was on a much smaller scale.

In January 1841 the Congregation of Propaganda issued a circular stating:

Resolved that no judgment should be definitely pronounced in this matter and that this kind of education should be left to the prudent discretion and religious conscience of each individual bishop, whereas its success must depend on the vigilant care of the pastors, on the various precautions to be adopted and on the future experience which time will supply.³³

This non-committal solution taken by Rome quelled the issue for a time, but it was not the end of disagreement on the issue of primary education.

The Irish language – a national heritage?

The National Education System undeniably reduced illiteracy in Ireland. At the same time it generally disregarded indigenous Irish culture and in many ways helped destroy the Irish language as a vernacular. The system was British; instruction was in the English language only, and no Irish history or literature was taught. Ireland was, according to the books, not a country but merely a geographical expression.³⁴ The Catholic Church and hedge schoolmasters were not true to the Irish language in tutorial settings either. MacHale had himself been taught English from a very early age, and the Catholic seminar at Maynooth held classes in English only. Still, the National Education System, since it was more institutionalised and had better funding than other primary education systems, vastly increased English literacy and had much responsibility for the decline of the Irish language. It made thousands of Irish people monolingually English, at least when it came to writing.

Especially two modes of interest in the Irish language as a part of Irish society and national heritage were prevalent in the first part of the nineteenth century. One of these was within Protestant education societies. In 1817, the evangelical J. S. Taylor had presented

³³ Quoted in Larkin 1970: 141.

³⁴ Ó Tuathaigh 1972: 106.

‘Reasons for Giving Moral Instruction of the Native Irish through the Medium of their Vernacular Language’:

I repeat it, the most effectual means to introduce to the Irish peasant a salutary influence, which must correct an injurious and hereditary teaching, is to make the language of truth address him – in what, *in his own tongue*.³⁵

This was a fairly common mentality among such education societies; the Hibernian Bible Society was one of the organisations that also worked through the Irish language. The other mode of interest in the Irish language was connected to a growing sense of Irish antiquarianism. Organisations like the Gaelic Society, founded in 1808, put patriotic attention to Irish literature, history and language:

The friends of literature, and of Ireland, are invited to join an institution, whose purpose is to preserve and cultivate a Language the most ancient, copious and elegant of Europe; by far the best preserved from the changes and corruptions incident to other languages (...)³⁶

Although their aim was mostly literary, the Gaelic Society represented a part of Irish cultural nationalism. To cultural nationalists, the Irish language was very important. Several such organisations appeared in the early decades of the nineteenth century, but their influence was rather limited at this time.

Cultural nationalism existed abreast with the political nationalism of the day. However, there was a split between the two and they seldom united in any person or group. Political nationalism was by far the most prevalent form of nationalism in nineteenth century Ireland, as it had been in the eighteenth. The United Irishmen had not had Irish language or culture in a wider form as part of their agenda. Likewise, Henry Grattan never promoted Irish; rather, he had in 1812 said to a Board of Education that:

(...) I think the diversity of language, and not the diversity of religion, constitutes a diversity of people. I should be very sorry that the Irish language should be forgotten; but glad that the English language should be generally understood (...).³⁷

Also, Daniel O’Connell did not advocate the use of the Irish language. He had a strictly utilitarian view of the matter:

A diversity of tongues is no benefit; it was first imposed on mankind as a curse, at the building of Babel. It would be of vast advantage to mankind if all the inhabitants spoke the same language. Therefore, although the Irish language is connected with many recollections that twine around the hearts of Irishmen, yet the superior utility of the English tongue, as the medium of modern communication, is so great, that I can witness without a sigh the gradual disuse of the Irish.³⁸

³⁵ Taylor, J. S. (1817): *Reasons for Giving Moral Instruction of the Native Irish through the Medium of their Vernacular Language*. Quoted in Crowley 2000: 147. Italics in manuscript.

³⁶ O’Flanagan, Theophilus (1808): *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Dublin*. Quoted in Crowley 2000: 137.

³⁷ Rt. Hon. Henry Grattan, to the Secretary of the Board of Education, 1812. Quoted in Crowley 2000: 141.

³⁸ Quoted in Crowley 2000: 153.

For him the Irish language was not an important part of being Irish, and it would not become an important part in his political nationalism.

In the 1840s, a group of people producing the nationalist newspaper *The Nation* put the Irish language on their agenda: “A people without a language of its own is only half a nation”.³⁹ The Irish culture was a very important element in their nationalist views, and this group of people would rise to become of greater importance than any previous cultural nationalists had been.

The Catholic Church displayed very little interest in the Irish language. Maynooth College was an English-only institution and it produced English-speaking priests. Only individual clerics made an effort for Irish. John MacHale was perhaps the most important of these. He had always put emphasis on speaking to his parishioners in their own language. The west of Ireland was the most dominant Irish-speaking area in the country. It had a high percentage of Catholic inhabitants, and that must have inspired MacHale in his work. In 1841 he translated Thomas Moore’s songs ‘Irish Melodies’ from English to Irish. Moore, who was later given the honorary title of Ireland’s National Poet, between 1807 and 1834 wrote ten volumes of poems set to music. Much of the music was based on older Irish airs. Moore himself spent most of his life in England and was not known, at least in his early years, as an Irish nationalist.⁴⁰ When MacHale translated a number of his poems, this work was enhanced, both in making them more accessible to the Irish people and also in the promotion of Irish as a national language. In December of 1841, MacHale received a letter of gratitude from Moore:

That these songs of mine should be translated into what I might call their native language is in itself a great gratification and triumph to me; but that such a tribute should come from the pen of your Grace, considerably adds to the pride and pleasure I feel in it.⁴¹

MacHale’s interest in the Irish language and activity in increasing the amount and availability of material in the Irish language did not stop with his translation of Moore’s Melodies. He was very anxious that the Catholic children learn the Catechism of their religion in their mother tongue. This zeal can in some ways be seen as a part of MacHale’s effort for decentralisation. He did not appreciate that more and more aspects of Irish life were imported from England.

MacHale was not opposed to the use of English in Ireland as such. But to him, Irish was the language of the Irish people’s religion, whereas English was the language of their

³⁹ Davis, Thomas (1843): ‘Our National Language’, in *The Nation*. Quoted in Crowley 2000: 161.

⁴⁰ The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10553b.htm>.

⁴¹ Quoted in Burke 1882: 320f.

business. Therefore, also in 1841, he worked on translating the Pentateuch of Moses into Irish and he had submitted for approbation in Rome a Diocesan catechism in Irish. In addition he worked on translating Homer's 'Iliad'.⁴² The Iliad was regarded then, as it is today, as one of the true masterpieces of literature, produced in what was seen as the cradle of Western civilisation. It was thus a very important book for MacHale to translate into his mother tongue. The translation was published in 1844, and in the preface MacHale stated that:

Even in its present condition, the Irish language is one of the most effective instruments of oratorical persuasion, by which the feelings of a religious and sensitive people could be roused to any pitch. Were there no other monument to attest the early and superior civilisation of our nation, it is indelibly impressed on its truly philosophical language. For if, as is universally confessed, language be one of the most unequivocal standards by which you can ascertain the degree of refinement reached by any people, the sententious and expressive aphorisms that give such a complexion to ours, prove that those, to whom it is familiar even only as a spoken dialect, must necessarily be a highly intellectual people.⁴³

In this way MacHale worked to improve the self-respect and integrity of the Irish people. However, the general disregard for the Irish language and the effect of the National Education System led to a further decline in the use of the Irish language, and it was not until the 1880s that the work to revive the Irish language would fully bloom.

The Repeal Association

Whereas Catholic Emancipation was made possible through partial acceptance in Parliament at the outset, the cause of Repeal of the Union would prove to be much more difficult to procure. In April 1834, O'Connell raised the question in the House of Commons, where the motion was defeated by 523 votes to 38.⁴⁴ During the debate in the House O'Connell argued that: "Repeal cannot endanger the connection – continuing the Union may (...)"⁴⁵ He believed that Ireland had too little influence in the British Parliament. On the other side the chief spokesman for those opposed to Repeal, the Secretary for War and the Colonies, Mr. Spring Rice, did not see this problem. He argued that: "Who governs Ireland? Who legislates for Ireland? Why the Parliament of the United Kingdom, not the Parliament of England (...)"⁴⁶

From 1835, with the alliance between the O'Connellites and the Whigs having been settled, O'Connell continued his work, although in a more subtle manner. In 1838 he

⁴² O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 596.

⁴³ MacHale, John (1844): *An tIliad*. Quoted in Crowley 2000: 165.

⁴⁴ Ó Tuathaigh 1972: 170. Kee operates with the numbers 529 votes to 38; see Kee 1972: 190.

⁴⁵ Hansard, H. C. Debates, 3rd series, vol. 22, col. 1156. Quoted in Kee 1972: 188.

founded the Precursor Society, and at this stage his motto was “a real Union or no Union”.⁴⁷ O’Connell’s intention was that this society would be a forerunner to a Repeal Association if its demands were not met by Parliament. O’Connell wanted reforms constituting of an increased Irish electorate and also increased Irish parliamentary representation.

MacHale was very negative to O’Connell’s new organisation. MacHale had advanced the demand for Repeal of the legislative Union openly since 1833, when he had written Earl Grey on the matter. He had been one of the first to publicly offer his opinion on the matter of Repeal, and his opinion had been clear:

Members of parliament chosen in England and Scotland, who form the overwhelming majority of the British senate, have not sufficient knowledge of the wants of the Irish people, nor anxiety to relieve them.⁴⁸

But he refused to attach himself to the new organisation in 1838. He would not compromise the important issue of Repeal, and he did not share O’Connell’s faith in the Whigs. In MacHale’s opinion, the Irish Members of Parliament should not join with any of the other political parties or factions; if only the Irish representatives formed a united front, the government would have to yield to their demands. On October 15, 1838 he told O’Connell that: “I fear the Whigs calculate on a full amnesty for their bad acts because the people hate the Tories. They are expecting too much”.⁴⁹

In the spring of 1840 the Chief Secretary Lord Stanley introduced the Municipal Reform Act, which would raise the valuation for the franchise still higher. That, combined with the decreasing support for the Whigs in Britain convinced O’Connell that there was nothing to be hoped for from a British Parliament. He now founded the Repeal Association, an organisation working primarily for the Repeal of the legislative Union. In the general election of 1841, the Whig administration of Lord Melbourne was also severely defeated by the Tories, led by Robert Peel. From now on, O’Connell had the possibility to fight for Repeal without looking to the Whigs for acceptance. From this year on, he made the Repeal Association a mass movement in the spirit of the Catholic Association of the 1820s. He for instance introduced a ‘Repeal rent’ for economic and psychological gains.

The new Repeal Association stated its goal as being a native Irish Parliament under the Crown. It stressed the loyalty to the monarchy and it also stressed its opposition to

⁴⁶ Hansard, H. C. Debates, 3rd series, vol. 22, col. 1178. Quoted in Kee 1972: 188.

⁴⁷ Kee 1972: 192.

⁴⁸ MacHale 1893: 485.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Costello 1939: 48.

violent means; the cause of Repeal should be fought on a constitutional level.⁵⁰ These principles were not new to O’Connell but it proved important now to vocalise them in Parliament. During the initial phase of the association in the spring of 1840, O’Connell consulted MacHale on his thoughts on the Association, and now MacHale was much more positive:

O’Connell shall be welcomed in Tuam and throughout Connaught, simply because he shall bind himself henceforward to an INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY POLICY.⁵¹

But in connection with the founding of the Repeal Association, O’Connell wrote to MacHale, claiming that:

Whenever I have formed the intention of making a *great* popular movement, or a movement which I hope to be *great*, I have, in latter times, taken the liberty of announcing my intention to your Grace, in the strong wish to obtain the aid of your giant mind and national influence. In this I have not been very successful. I got from you much excellent and very wise advice; but active co-operation you thought it fit not to give me.⁵²

O’Connell’s impression was that MacHale was passive, that he did not participate in active politics and active nationalism. MacHale was a very active man, but had, it is true, put most of his ardour into letters and sermons. He had been more ‘active’ in his fight for Catholic education, during which he had banned schools from his diocese. This kind of activity was evidently an important indication of zeal to O’Connell. MacHale had not participated actively during the elections prior to the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829. This is presumably because he then was but a bishop and had limited influence on voters outside his own bishopric. At the Mayo election of December 1840, however, MacHale had become archbishop and would prove himself to be, even in O’Connell’s definition of the word, an active politician.

As had also proved itself to be a difficulty in the Emancipation campaign, it was a challenge getting people to vote according to their own conscience. This was a smaller problem in the 1840s than it had been, but it still existed. The small degree of influence held by Irish voters had also led to problems with the voters being inclined not to take their responsibility serious. MacHale had on several occasions spoken on the matter of elections. In his first pastoral letter to the clergy of Tuam, issued on May 6, 1835, he observed:

During elections the minds of many of the faithful are so often loosened from the ordinary restraints of duty, that it is unfortunately looked upon as a time when bribery, perjury, drunkenness, and every species of corruption, are permitted to supplant the ordinary virtues of the people (...)

⁵⁰ Kee 1972: 192.

⁵¹ Quoted in O’Reilly 1890, vol. I: 499. Capital letters in manuscript.

⁵² Quoted in Bourke 1902: 140f. Italics in manuscript.

As for bribery, (...) your denunciations of so enormous a sin must be cogent in proportion to its atrocity. The freehold is not a property to be set up for sale. It is held in trust for the benefit of such a vile bargain to inflict injury upon the community.⁵³

This letter was written only one year after all the bishops agreed in a resolution that priests should not involve in politics. Five years after this pastoral letter, MacHale would act on his own advice to participate in elections, even though his actions now exceeded mere moral guidance of electors. In October 1840 a vacancy occurred in the Mayo constituency. December 16 was the date set for the election.⁵⁴ MacHale himself nominated Mark Blake, a Catholic pledged to Repeal. Blake was returned to Parliament unopposed, but shortly thereafter, in the spring of 1841, a general election was called. Again MacHale was active in the nomination. Mayo sent two representatives to Westminster. MacHale repeated his nomination of Mark Blake and he also nominated another Repealer named Dillon Browne. Once again his nominees were returned unopposed. MacHale also managed to assist in returning two more Repealers in County Galway, another county under his jurisdiction.⁵⁵

MacHale's open political activity could be seen as a violation of the 1834-resolution of the bishops, which had stated that clergy should confine themselves to the discharge of the duties of their office. But MacHale saw such activity as precisely a duty of his office. As he had stated in his 1828-book 'Evidences and Doctrines of the Catholic Church', clergy had the right and also the duty to exercise their civil privileges. Therefore MacHale participated in the election with a good conscience.

All in all the general election of 1841 did not go well for the Repealers, and their group in Parliament was now greatly reduced. The fall of the Whigs in 1841 had led O'Connell to agitate even more determined for a Repeal of the Union. Peel opposed the Repealers by declaring that Repealers holding office would be deprived of their place.⁵⁶ Even though O'Connell's organisation had now become a true mass movement, supported by the Catholic clergy and people of all stations and creeds in Ireland, although predominantly by poor Catholics, things went rather slowly. In autumn 1842, this changed. This year had seen widespread distress, and the lack of governmental commitment might explain why more people supported Repeal of the Union. Moreover, this autumn O'Connell was joined by the people around the newspaper *The Nation*. This group was led by the Protestant Thomas Davis. Davis's vision of an Irish nation was quite similar to that of the United Irishmen:

⁵³ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 306.

⁵⁴ Burke 1882: 314.

⁵⁵ Burke 1882: 318.

(...) a Nationality which will not only raise our people from their poverty, by securing to them the blessings of a DOMESTIC LEGISLATURE, but inflame and purify them with a lofty and heroic love of country – a Nationality of the spirit as well as the letter...which may embrace Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter – Milesian and Cromwellian – the Irishman of a hundred generations and the stranger who is within our gates (...)⁵⁷

As we have seen, Davis and his colleagues in addition put emphasis on the cultural aspect of Irish nationality.

O'Connell pronounced 1843 as the 'Repeal year'. This year he started arranging so-called monster meetings, political gatherings that assembled tens of thousands of people. The same strategy had been used with great success during the fight for Catholic Emancipation. The government now felt threatened by the movement. A gathering of so many people could easily lead to rebellion, and even though O'Connell preached non-violence, the government had no assurance that things would go quietly ahead. When O'Connell in October 1843 called a monster meeting in Clontarf, County Dublin, the government banned the meeting. Afraid that it would turn into bloodshed, O'Connell called the meeting off. In May the following year O'Connell and some of his main supporters were arrested and charged with conspiracy. However, in September his sentence was aborted.

When O'Connell returned to active politics in September 1844, voices of strong opposition within the Association could be heard. O'Connell now had opened the organisation to Federalists, however without changing his aim of Repeal. The group around *The Nation*, although initially not disagreeing to this, eventually protested against any compromising of the aim of Repeal of Union. As a result, the Association divided into two factions, the Old Irelanders of O'Connell and the Young Irelanders.⁵⁸ The Young Irelanders were also not pleased with what proved to be O'Connell's continued co-operation with the Whigs, and when the Whigs returned to office in 1846 after five years in opposition, O'Connell determined to force the Young Irelanders to submit or withdraw from the Association. In a debate in July of 1846, O'Connell demanded an absolute declaration that no political objective justified the use of violence. The Young Irelanders had since the early days changed their view of constitutional measures and were now not willing to accept such a limitation. Hence they withdrew from the Association.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 521.

⁵⁷ Duffy, Charles Gavan (1890): *Thomas Davis: A Memoir*. London. Quoted in Kee 1972: 196. Capital letters in manuscript.

⁵⁸ Kee 1972: 214.

⁵⁹ Kee 1972: 254.

MacHale did not utter his opinion on the development of the Repeal Association and the division into Old and Young Irishmen. However, he strongly opposed the use of violence; ever since he wrote 'Evidences and Doctrines' in 1828, he had advocated his belief that violence was unnecessary and that the end did not justify the means. This principle he stood by without yielding. However, neither was he pleased with O'Connell's continued association with the Whigs. Regardless of that, the fight for Repeal and the fight between the Young and Old Irishmen were not over.

Charitable Bequests Act

Before the Young Irishmen left the Repeal Association, the Charitable Bequests Act was introduced. On August 9, 1844, Prime Minister Peel introduced the bill as part of his program of reforms by which he hoped to separate moderate Catholics from the demand for Repeal of the Union. The act sought to facilitate legacies for Catholic religious and charitable purposes. The principle of the Act was to place donations and bequests into the hands of a specially created Board of Commissioners. Whereas previous such Boards had been overwhelmingly Protestant, the new Board would have a markedly higher percentage of Catholic members. All commissioners were to be appointed by the Government.⁶⁰

Three Catholic bishops, led by Archbishop Murray, accepted places on the Board. For this they came under fierce attack from MacHale. He objected to the continued prohibition of legacies to religious orders even after the Catholic Emancipation Act, to the invalidation of bequests made less than three months before death and, not least, to what he claimed was interference in church discipline.⁶¹ O'Connell joined MacHale in his denunciation of the Act. He saw the Act as a way of plundering religious orders, and he believed no charity was safe from this threat.⁶²

At a meeting of the prelates in November, the matter was deliberated, but no decision was reached. Admitting that the Act left much to be desired, Murray believed it was the best that could have been hoped for in that time in age, and that, with a little goodwill, it would work all right.⁶³ The meeting passed the following resolution:

⁶⁰ O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 552. According to O'Reilly, five out of twelve commissioners on the new Board should be Catholic.

⁶¹ The Oxford Companion of Irish History: <http://www.celticcrossroads.com/celt1800.htm>

⁶² Costello 1939: 59.

⁶³ Costello 1939: 60.

That, as the prelates have taken different views of the new Charitable Bequests Act, it is the opinion of this meeting that every prelate be left at perfect liberty to act according to the dictates of his own conscience respecting that measure.⁶⁴

MacHale was far from satisfied with this resolution, and he appealed to Cardinal Fransoni, Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda, on November 25:

If your Eminence only writes a timely letter to the bishops of Ireland, or to the four archbishops, bidding them not to accept any place whatever without the consent of their brother-prelates and that of the Apostolic See, then religion will be in safety here, concord will be maintained, and the authority of the Holy See preserved inviolate.⁶⁵

MacHale's appeal to Rome was a failure; instead of supporting him, Cardinal Fransoni warned MacHale of the evils of dissension among the clergy.⁶⁶ Despite this disheartening reaction from Rome and the clear division among his own colleagues, MacHale continued his attack on the Act. On January 24, 1845 he wrote Peel that: "It is a step to the complete subjection of the Catholic Church to the State, which no doubt is your aim, that you have introduced that fatal measure of the Bequests Bill".⁶⁷ MacHale did not see this Act as a measure of reform of a harsh system; as always he showed no sign of compromise, and fought ceaselessly for a complete end to governmental power over Catholic Bequests, even if it meant yet again opposing his own brother-prelates.

Queen's Colleges

Dissension would prevail, not only within the Catholic Church, but also within large sections of the Catholic community. In May 1845, the Queen's Colleges Act was introduced. It proposed the establishment of three provincial non-sectarian colleges at Belfast, Cork and Galway. Up until now there had only been one university in Ireland, Trinity College in Dublin.⁶⁸ Since 1794 Catholics had been allowed to proceed to degrees in Trinity, even though they were still excluded from scholarships.⁶⁹ After this no further moves were made on the matter of higher education for decades. After Catholic Emancipation had been obtained in 1829, the obvious injustice that existed in higher education became more apparent. In the 1830s there were some attempts of remedy, but none of the suggestions were applied. Then, on May 9, 1845, Prime Minister Peel introduced the Queen's Colleges Bill. The new colleges were to be non-residential, open to

⁶⁴ Quoted in D'Alton 1928: 21.

⁶⁵ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 556.

⁶⁶ Costello 1939: 60.

⁶⁷ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 562.

⁶⁸ A lay college was opened at Maynooth in 1800, but it was no success and ceased to function in 1817.

⁶⁹ McGrath 1971: 85.

those of any or no religion, were to have no religious teaching and no religious tests for professors.⁷⁰ The appointment of professors and officials was to rest with the Crown. In other words, the Queen's Colleges were planned on the same principles of undenominationalism as the National Education System.

The Bill created fierce reactions within the Catholic community, and also created a division within the Repeal Association. The problems that had been building up between the Young and Old Irelanders came to the fore with this Act and made the division in 1846 foreseen. At a meeting of the Association on May 12, O'Connell attacked the governmental proposal and denounced the 'godless colleges'. He demanded Catholic colleges in Cork and Galway and a Presbyterian college in Belfast. The Young Irelanders, on the other hand, welcomed the Bill. To them, the united education of students of different beliefs would promote national unity.⁷¹ The Bill also created dissension within the Catholic hierarchy. The bishops met on May 21 to discuss the Bill. A minority led by Archbishops Murray and Crolly were inclined to accept the colleges with reservations, whereas the majority, led by Archbishop MacHale, denounced the Bill and favoured a demand for purely Catholic colleges. Two resolutions were agreed to at the meeting. The first resolution was proposed by Archbishop Slattery of Cashel and seconded by MacHale. It stated that the bishops should not give their approval of the system. This resolution was actually adopted unanimously. A second resolution was proposed by Crolly and seconded by Murray. This resolution was also adopted by the meeting; it provided that a "respectful memorial, suggesting and soliciting amendments to the bill" be drawn up and presented to the Lord Lieutenant.⁷² This memorial suggested radical changes: A fair proportion of the professors and officials should be Catholic; all office-bearers should be appointed by a board of trustees which should include the Catholic bishop of the diocese in which the college concerned was situated; dual professorships, Catholic and Protestant, should be provided for several of the subjects.⁷³ The memorial was disregarded by the government, and the Bill received the royal assent on July 31, 1845.

From now on the division within the Catholic Church became more evident. At a public meeting on August 14, Archbishop Crolly professed himself satisfied with the system, whereas on September 20, a statement appeared in the newspapers, signed by eighteen of the twenty-six bishops, in which the colleges were declared to be "dangerous to

⁷⁰ D'Alton 1928: 23.

⁷¹ McGrath 1971: 87.

⁷² Quoted in Costello 1939: 83.

the faith and morals".⁷⁴ Now both sides agreed that the matter should be referred to Rome. Not until October 9, 1847 did the Congregation of Propaganda send its first rescript. In it the colleges were denounced. Propaganda now suggested that the Irish bishops should set up a Catholic university. In 1848 minor educational concessions were offered by the government, a step that was counteracted by MacHale. He went to Rome and urged the policy of no compromise. Also the British government and Archbishops Murray's minority faction in the Irish Church had delegates in Rome.⁷⁵

On October 11 that year Propaganda yet again pronounced its denunciation of the colleges. All these efforts had no effect, for in October 1849, the government opened the Queen's Colleges. Catholics were grossly underrepresented on the staff of the colleges, but since the papal rescripts had not prohibited the entrance of Catholics in the colleges, some Catholics did enrol. Upon seeing this, some bishops thought it would be advisable for the clergy to accept teaching appointments at the colleges. But in a third rescript, issued on April 18, 1850, Propaganda prohibited this and urged the bishops to discourage their subjects from enrolling as students.⁷⁶

The Great Famine

The debate on the Queen's Colleges must be seen as but a minor detail in the circumstances that Ireland experienced by the autumn of 1845. This year Ireland was struck by widespread famine. Famine was in itself nothing new in the country; several famines of varying intensity had struck Ireland during the previous decades. The famines that had struck Mayo hard in 1821 and 1831 were but two examples of this tendency. The reasons for this increase in agricultural depression were to a large degree inter-connected. There had been an immense growth in population which, combined with an economic decline since 1815, had led to a rise in subdivision into ever-smaller agricultural plots and an increased reliance on the potato as a staple crop in an increasing subsistence agriculture. One could feed many individuals on a small plot of potatoes. But this growing dependence on a single crop left the Irish peasants more vulnerable to changing weather conditions. The Devon Commission, a commission set up by the government in 1843 to investigate into the state of Ireland, argued in 1844, before there were any signs of famine, that as long

⁷³ McGrath 1971: 88.

⁷⁴ Quoted in McGrath 1971: 88.

⁷⁵ O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 122.

⁷⁶ McGrath 1971: 90.

as small plots remained in existence, the future of Irish agriculture and especially the peasant class were bleak.⁷⁷ Hence there was nothing new about famine conditions in Ireland. What was different this time, was the enormous impact it would prove to have.

In September 1845, blight damaged many potato fields in Ireland. The fungus had also struck in England and in countries on the continent. The impact was however much more serious in Ireland, where a large percentage of the population depended so heavily on the potato for their own survival. In confronting the crisis, the British government, led by Robert Peel, discovered that the Irish Poor Law was designed to meet long-term needs and not the acute demands caused by a major famine. Thus the famine relief apparatus for a long time ignored the Poor Law.⁷⁸ The grain harvest in England was this year partially damaged. In an attempt to relieve the situation in both England and Ireland, Peel abolished the Corn Law, a law created in order to restrict the free importation of grain into the United Kingdom. In addition he secretly imported American maize to Ireland to be sold at a low price. His decision to repeal the Corn Law brought Peel down by his own Conservative Party. The party disagreed with his apparent drift in the direction of liberal free trade politics. In 1846, the liberal John Russell took over his office. Russell followed the well-known *laissez-faire* politics, and therefore did very little in order to help the Irish; from now on the Irish had to work their way out of their despair. Therefore much of the initial relief was based on the erection of public works schemes.

This change in sentiment in Westminster angered John MacHale severely. The harvest of 1846 was indeed struck even harder by blight than the one of 1845. In a letter to Russell on August 21, 1846, MacHale wrote:

Allow me respectfully to impress on your Lordship, that hunger and starvation are already at the doors of hundreds of thousands...The British Empire boasts, and boasts with justice, of its measureless resources. Now is an opportunity of exhibiting as well the extent of its humanity as of its resources.⁷⁹

MacHale's engagement in the famine was not unique for a priest. But he lived in an area where this and also former famines had struck very hard and harder than in most other parts of the country. There were generally more people living on smaller plots in Connacht than in other parts of Ireland. The people of County Mayo already lived on the verge of starvation, and the increasing population living on pressured land and a fragile potato crop

⁷⁷ Cronin 2001: 137.

⁷⁸ Daly 1986: 92.

⁷⁹ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 618.

had resulted in a gradual rise in the number of deaths recorded in Mayo even before the Famine.⁸⁰

The history of famines and the generally fragile life led in County Mayo made MacHale very conscious of his parishioners' material needs. It also had given him abundant experience in the field, and in October he presented Russell with some means necessary for helping the Irish in their hour of need:

The question is not now about the preference to be given...to the most remunerative labour. The pressing, the imperative question, is about saving lives of famishing thousands. Better that they should be making holes and filling them again than that they should die, and in their death scatter pestilence among those who may have no pity for their misfortune. Food is the first requisite, and then employment, productive, remunerative employment, if you can, but, at any rate, employment to save the lives of the people.⁸¹

But Russell's administration continued its passive policy. In December MacHale wrote yet another letter. Now he charged the government with being hypocritical; it benefited from Irish produce, making Ireland part of the common British economy, but was not interested in the welfare of its Irish population:

Whilst we supplied you with our abundant produce, we were as dear and cherished a portion of the empire as Yorkshire, or any other shire in England. Nothing could exceed the indissoluble closeness, nay, the affection of the Union.

But when adversity comes upon us in consequence of this legislative identity, when famine walks, a destroying angel, through the land, (...) then we are told: "You have no claim on us; sink or swim; look to yourselves and rely on your own resources".⁸²

Sadly, Russell did still not listen.

The main burden of famine relief still rested with the system of public works. However, the work done at these sites were, first of all, too heavy for many people, already emaciated. In addition, the work sites were often far away from where people lived and they had to spend much time and much needed energy getting there and back each day.⁸³ Not until 1847 did the government start acting. This was the worst year of the famine. People were dying in ever-increasing number. From now on the strategy of public works were abandoned in preference of soup kitchens, a measure the liberals by principle were adverse to. Outdoor relief was formally prohibited by the 1838 Poor Law.⁸⁴ Some private organisations had already started soup kitchens, with good results. The Society of Friends was one of these good benefactors. By now, Russell had by far given up on the Irish, and more and more of the famine relief was being transferred to the Irish poor law system, a reflection of the government's belief that Irish poverty should be the responsibility of Irish

⁸⁰ Jordan 1994: 105.

⁸¹ Quoted in Costello 1939: 80.

⁸² Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 621.

⁸³ Daly 1986: 79.

property.⁸⁵ Henceforth the provisions of the 1838 Poor Law were executed to the letter. This meant that the strongly opposed workhouses were put to use. The severity of the famine led to the workhouses being overfilled, and the conditions worsened rapidly. Seeing people dying and securing no positive answers to his appeals from the government, MacHale started charity work on a large scale. He appealed to the people of England, America, Australia and Europe.⁸⁶ Thousands of pounds were distributed through his hands to his clergy in order to be given to the starving people.

In 1849, seeing no end to what seemed to be an everlasting famine, MacHale resolved to address an open letter to the Queen. This year the Queen had decided to visit Ireland. At her visit, Archbishop Murray proposed that the Catholic prelates present her with a letter of homage. He found MacHale's plan of an address on the famine to be uncalled for. MacHale's response, written on July 24, 1849, was firm:

As pastors of the people, we have serious duties to discharge toward the throne and toward our flocks; and, whilst we convey to her Majesty the assurance of our hearty allegiance, we must not, in duty to her and her subjects, neglect to inform her of the mischievous policy of her Ministers, which has so cruelly sacrificed the lives of so many of her loving people (...)⁸⁷

MacHale had never preached anything but unyielding devotion and loyalty to the Queen. But he had a stronger sense of loyalty to his people, and he did not find the current circumstances appropriate for humble restraint.

The Famine changed the future prospects of Ireland. By the end of the Famine, in 1850, approximately one million people had died from starvation and diseases, and another million had emigrated. Most of the people who had died or emigrated belonged to the class of poor Catholic tenant farmers. The 1850s paradoxically introduced good times for farmers; there was abundance of land and thus prospects of a more secure living. The Catholic Church also experienced better times, as the ratio between priests and parishioners now was more balanced. However, one of the most important effects of the famine was the place it would take in the minds of Irish nationalists. There was now to be a reawakening of Irish nationalist sentiment. The famine would be promoted as proof that the British presence in Ireland was evil and destructive.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Daly 1986: 88.

⁸⁵ Daly 1986: 95.

⁸⁶ Bourke 1902: 146f.

⁸⁷ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 189.

⁸⁸ Cronin 2001: 147.

The dawning of new times

The first stirrings of nationalism appeared already during the famine years. The year 1848 witnessed a whole series of rebellions across many European states. The Young Irelanders, who had broken with the Repeal Association, decided that the time was right to strike for national freedom. But the Famine had produced a population that was deeply apathetic to political activity, and their support was hence meagre. Many Catholic priests did on the other hand support the rebels. The general opinion was that it was, as a Limerick priest declared, “far better to die as men died in Berlin, Vienna and Paris than that another million should die the death of Skibbereen”.⁸⁹ The vast majority of the prelates did however disown physical force. MacHale had distanced himself from revolutionaries by stating that “with the advocates of physical force and sanguinary revolution we disown all sympathy”.⁹⁰ Likewise, Archbishop Murray insisted that priests should distance themselves from the use of violence. The support of the priests sharply decreased by the summer of 1848. The June rebellion in Paris was more extreme and bloody than the previous uprisings had been, and now the Irish priests began to pull out. It was said that the shooting of Archbishop Affre of Paris on June 25 marked a turning point.⁹¹ The Young Irelanders’ revolts during the summer of 1848 proved to be a complete failure, comparable to Emmet’s rising in 1803, and the rebels put much of the blame on the Catholic Church. With the death of Daniel O’Connell the previous year, it would now be long before Irish nationalists again found a strong leader.

The Catholic Church also entered a period of transition. In Rome, Gregory XVI had in 1846 been succeeded by a supposedly liberal-minded Pope, Pius IX. The revolutions of 1848 had, however, turned Pius into a reactionary and conservative Pope who would lead his Church for decades with a strong hold. Likewise, the Irish Church was given a new strong archbishop with similar determination for the unity and growth of his Church. In 1849, Archbishop Crolly of Armagh died and he was succeeded by Paul Cullen of the Irish College in Rome. MacHale supported this election; he found Cullen to be “(...) a man not only admirably qualified, but who would be most acceptable to the entire body of bishops and the Irish clergy”.⁹² Cullen brought with him a whole new vision for the Irish Catholic Church.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Kerr 2000: 27. “The death of Skibbereen” refers to death by starvation. Skibbereen in County Cork was one of the places hardest struck by the Famine.

⁹⁰ *The Tablet*, August 8, 1846. Quoted in Kerr 2000: 27.

⁹¹ Kerr 2000: 32.

⁹² Quoted in D’Alton 1928: 41.

Chapter 5 – Land and nation, 1850-1881

With the appointment of Dr. Paul Cullen as Archbishop of Armagh, the traditional *primus inter pares* in the hierarchy of the Irish Roman Catholic Church, MacHale looked to the future with confidence. He had long been impressed by Cullen's capabilities. Two decades earlier, MacHale had supported Cullen's appointment as Rector of the Irish College in Rome. MacHale believed himself to be generally more in agreement with younger Cullen than with Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Murray, who was now drawing to the end of his career.

1850 was the start of new times in the Roman Catholic Church. The age of revolution seemed now to have passed, and a sense of religious revival was again felt.¹ This revival also brought Ultramontanism to the fore in the Church; with the revival of the Church came also a revival of the papacy and papal authority. The emphasis on central, Roman authority thus increased. Cullen, a firm Ultramontanist after his years in Rome, brought this sense of revival to Ireland, and in the decades that followed, he would work to reform the Irish Church and consolidate a devotional revolution among Irish Catholics. The Famine had been a traumatic experience and led people to look to religion for comfort and answers. The Irish Church was now economically and organisationally better equipped to deal with this.² Equally important was Cullen's further work to reform the Church organisation. This work was to be done from the top down, starting with the prelates.³

Cullen, having been made apostolic delegate, took up his position in Ireland with two primary projects specially commissioned by Pope Pius IX, with whom he was on close terms.⁴ The first was the creation of a Catholic university in Ireland; the second was the holding of a national synod, the first in modern times, to concert the initial measures for the university's foundation.⁵ The importance of such a national synod was great. It was a distinct indication of the papacy's wish for consolidation in the Church and an end to internal divisions. At the meeting Cullen emphasised these intentions by announcing his strong wish that the synod produce general unanimity amongst the prelates. He had undoubtedly followed the dissension that had increased within the Irish Church during the

¹ Chadwick 1998: 109.

² Larkin 1984: 72.

³ Larkin 1984: 73.

⁴ An apostolic delegate is a representative usually sent to countries which have no regular diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

1840s from his place in Rome. The desire for unity at the synod was expressed in a letter to MacHale on May 5, 1850, soon after Cullen's arrival in Ireland:

God grant that we may succeed in establishing union in our body. If we were united we could obtain everything from the government; but so long as we are divided we can effect no good.⁶

A Catholic University

The idea of a strictly Catholic university had been pushed forward by the establishment of the undenominational Queen's Colleges in 1849, and now, both in Rome and in Ireland, the idea seemed ready to be turned into reality. The prelates at the national synod, held in Thurles in County Tipperary in August 1850, stated in a public address that they had:

(...) determined to make every effort in our power to establish a sound and comprehensive system of University Education, that will combine all that is practically useful in the present system with all that is pure and edifying in religious doctrine.⁷

The synod appointed a Catholic University Committee. This Committee, consisting of among others the four archbishops, duly submitted an address on September 9, 1850, presenting the reasons for the establishment of a purely Catholic university:

Such an education must of course be Catholic: the horrors of the revolutions in France and in Europe bear witness to the evil which result when religion is separated from public education.

There are particularly weighty reasons for providing a Catholic education for the youth of Ireland. It will strengthen them in their many contacts with persons of strong anti-Catholic opinions. It will provide an antidote against the poison nowadays diffused through evil literature. It will impart a higher tone to the Catholic body, diffusing Catholic notions through society, creating a greater interest in the welfare of the Catholic religion, encouraging a taste for Catholic art and literature and diffusing the living principle of faith through the whole Catholic body.⁸

This address adopted MacHale's long-standing arguments that education and religion should not be separated and that Catholics needed an education infused with a Catholic essence. In 1851, Cullen got in touch with the Englishman John Henry Newman concerning the founding of such a university. Newman was a very controversial character in England at the time. From 1833 he had led the so-called Oxford Movement, which sought to lead the Anglican Church of England in the direction of what they saw as its Catholic inheritance: The movement believed that there was an unbroken connection between the original Church and the Church of England.⁹ In 1845, Newman converted to Catholicism, an act that vexed many of his countrymen.

⁵ O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 487.

⁶ Cullen in MacSuibhne 1962, vol. II: 49f.

⁷ The Synodical Address of the Fathers of the National Council of Thurles, 1850. In Moran 1882, vol. I: 34.

⁸ Address of University Committee, September 9, 1850. In MacSuibhne 1962, vol. II: 59.

⁹ The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11370a.htm>

In 1852, Dr. Murray died and was replaced by Cullen as Archbishop of Dublin. Murray had not been a wholehearted supporter of the idea of a Catholic university, and when Cullen took over his office, things started to move faster. In addition two briefs were issued from Rome that year, presenting apostolic authority for the setting up of the university.¹⁰ On November 3, 1854, the Catholic University was formally opened with Newman as rector.

What appeared at first to be agreement between Cullen and MacHale on the university question soon became open disagreement. They differed primarily on two aspects. First, they disagreed on what and for whom the university ought to be. Whereas Cullen wished the university to be open to all English-speaking Catholics, MacHale wanted a purely national institution.¹¹ Once again he displayed his national agenda; he wanted the Catholic University to be an institution of not only Catholic but Irish education. This national agenda was one important reason for MacHale being opposed to the appointment of the English Newman. Such a contrast in outlook demonstrated a fundamental difference between Drs. Cullen and MacHale, a difference that would prove visible also in subsequent matters: Cullen was international or universal in his perspective, whereas MacHale put the needs of Ireland and the Irish first. Even in purely religious matters, MacHale waved the Irish flag. This difference between the two prelates would also be part of their many conflicts in the future.

The second aspect of disagreement between Cullen and MacHale involved the administration of the university. Cullen agreed with Newman that whereas the bishops should appoint the rector and vice-rector of the university, the rector should appoint the other officers, although subject to the approval of the archbishops. MacHale strongly disagreed and pressed for the exclusive right of the bishops to make all legislation and all appointments.¹² In the winter of 1854, MacHale broke with the university. That year the Congregation of Propaganda had issued a decree which transferred the highest authority in matters of the university from the whole episcopal body to only the four archbishops, a tie-breaking vote being given to Cullen.¹³ MacHale was a firm believer in episcopal power and he believed that the bishops ought to have a decisive voice, as they were the highest authorities in the Irish Church. He was strongly opposed to the tendency of centralisation

¹⁰ McGrath 1971: 92.

¹¹ Costello 1939: 92.

¹² McGrath 1971: 93f.

¹³ McGrath 1971: 95.

that he was witnessing in the business of the University and hence also the business of the Church.

After this break, MacHale's interest in the Catholic University faded away. What once had seemed the only appropriate response of Catholics to the establishment of the Queen's Colleges had turned into yet another divisive issue for the Irish Church. In November 1859, after a bishops' meeting on the university question, Cullen wrote the new Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Barnabò, about MacHale's opposition:

Finally he will very likely again oppose the collection [of funds] by his very silence and I am sure it will not be held in his diocese just as it was not held after the last bishops' meeting that was prescribed in a similar manner; but at least one can hope that he will not be able to publish anything and that he will not reveal his own disagreements with the bishops.¹⁴

Dissension on the university question was strong, and opinions were stubborn. But, luckily for the Church, there were other events that pulled in the opposite direction.

The Catholic Defence Association

In the autumn of 1850, the English-Irish priest Nicholas Wiseman was appointed the first Archbishop of Westminster and simultaneously elevated to cardinal. There had been no Catholic hierarchy in England since the Reformation and the Holy See now found the time to be ripe for the restoration of the English hierarchy. Among other things, England had experienced a mass of immigration of mostly Catholics from Ireland after the Famine, and the English Catholic Church no longer wanted to have to refer everything to Rome, which until then had been the procedure.¹⁵ Since the English Catholic Church had had no hierarchy, it was under the immediate jurisdiction of the Holy See, and was governed by a delegate, a vicar Apostolic.¹⁶

Rome, in the midst of revival attitudes, did not discuss the matter with the British government, for it found that that the decision was purely for the Church, and a Protestant government had no say in the matter.¹⁷ The British Parliament did not agree. When it reopened in February 1851, the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill was introduced. It was designed to prohibit Catholic bishops in Great Britain from using the titles of their sees and to confiscate all property left to them under those titles. Needless to say, the bill created a storm of protest from Catholics throughout the United Kingdom. The same month as the

¹⁴ Cullen in MacSuibhne 1962, vol. II: 303.

¹⁵ Chadwick 1998: 114.

¹⁶ The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15401b.htm>

¹⁷ Chadwick 1998: 114.

Bill was introduced, MacHale furiously asked Prime Minister Russell: “Why propose penal laws on the untenable ground that the Sovereign is insulted or her rights invaded?”¹⁸ From now on, MacHale was careful to use his full ecclesiastical title on any occasion. The resentment and concern that the Bill aroused among Catholics resulted in a closer fusion between Irish and English Catholics. It was generally felt that it was needed to prevent further similar legislation from being passed, and on August 23, 1851, the Catholic Defence Association of Great Britain and Ireland was established, with Archbishop Cullen in the chair.

The Catholic Defence Association was yet another establishment that Cullen hoped would unite the Catholic Church and its people. In a letter to MacHale on February 13, 1851, he had given a more general outlook: “Perhaps our enemies may compel us to be united”.¹⁹ The chief purpose of the Association was to remedy Catholic grievances by parliamentary action. Both Cullen and MacHale were positive to the measures taken. Cullen, however, considered it essential to stress that he was not chairing a political organisation:

In thus coming forward to-day, I do not consider that I am intruding into the domain of politics, or travelling beyond the sphere of ecclesiastical duty. The present does not appear to be in any way a political movement. It is, rather, a great manifestation of Catholic feeling in favour of the liberty of our holy Church, a manifestation that has the strongest claim to be guided by the voice and sanctified by the prayers and blessings of the priests of the Most High.²⁰

Cullen was not interested in participating actively on the political arena. MacHale, on the other hand, was far beyond such an opinion. He hoped that this association would lead to the creation of an independent Irish parliamentary party that would work for Irish and Catholic rights.²¹ This concern for politics and deliberate political agitation stood in sharp contrast to Cullen’s more careful approach and apparent dislike to be connected with politics. Cullen supported the cause of the Association wholeheartedly, but he opposed priests working actively on a political platform. In this way, even though the Catholic Defence Association did unite Catholics, this disagreement of principle was to become yet another issue that would separate Cullen and MacHale. In a letter from Frederick Lucas²² in 1855, MacHale was told of the views of Cardinal Barnabò:

¹⁸ Quoted in O’Reilly 1890, vol. II: 254.

¹⁹ Cullen in MacSuibhne 1962, vol. II: 65.

²⁰ Quoted in O’Reilly 1890, vol. II: 266.

²¹ O’Reilly 1890, vol. II: 265.

²² Frederick Lucas was an English Protestant turned Catholic. In 1849 he moved with his Catholic newspaper *The Tablet* from London to Dublin, and henceforth he took a keen interest in Irish politics. He became a good friend of MacHale’s and was also strongly criticised by Cullen on his strong link of Catholicism and politics.

It [The Cardinal's letter] entered at large upon the interference of priests in politics. It urged, very much as Dr. Cullen had done in our interview, - that the proper way for the priests to acquire and to maintain influence among their flocks was by the performance of their ecclesiastical duties, and - if I remember right - it also urged that they should abstain, as much as possible from direct and active intervention.²³

Cullen, then, also had strong support from Rome. But this did not dampen MacHale's political zeal. He thought in a political, national manner, and, as he had uttered on numerous occasions, he found it better to fight one's political battles as an independent body, under one's own control, than to be dependent on other political parties. This had been the main reason for many of his differences with Daniel O'Connell in the 1830s and 1840s.

The Irish Tenant League

The Famine to a large degree put an end to the great popular agitation for repeal of the Union with Great Britain.²⁴ One effect of the Famine was that mobilisation of the masses was no longer possible. In addition there was a widespread lack of interest in the question of repeal. Even though the Famine had convinced people of the lack of sympathy for Ireland within the British Parliament and the liberal government, the catastrophe had nevertheless produced strong arguments against repeal. At one level it crushed the confidence in the viability of a self-governing Ireland, and at another level, constitutional questions had become almost irrelevant to the basic things in life, like general economic survival.²⁵ In 1849, this loss of enthusiasm had also left its mark on the usually so resolute Archbishop MacHale. After returning from Rome that year, he stated that:

As the Repeal of the Union may not be deemed sufficiently near or practicable, let the tenants of Ireland have the legal pledges of a tenure and a compensation for their outlay (...).²⁶

Having witnessed the calamities of the Famine and seeing that the climate was shifting, he realised that the ultimate goal was out of reach, and he was willing to settle for gaining allowances in the land question.

In the autumn of 1849, Charles Gavan Duffy, one of the former leaders of the Young Irelanders, made a fresh start with agitation for self-government. However, he soon discovered that the times were wrong for promoting the nationalist question. Instead he embraced a newly prospering agitation with more limited aims: The Tenant Right

²³ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 393.

²⁴ Comerford 1998: 12.

²⁵ Comerford 1998: 21.

²⁶ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 170.

campaign.²⁷ The Famine had uncovered an enormous potential for conflicts of interest between different classes. Several tenant right movements all over Ireland agitated with the purpose of overpowering landlords. The relationship between tenants and landlords had become very strained during the Famine, because the landlords in many instances were blamed for the poor lot of the tenants; an increase of evictions came about as growing numbers of tenants were unable to pay their rent. In addition, following the many bankruptcies that appeared during the late 1840s, Parliament had passed two Encumbered Estates Acts, in 1848 and 1849. The idea behind these acts was that bankrupt landlords would have their land bought by non-Irish gentleman farmers. These imported farmers, with their high levels of skill and experience, would encourage a system of tenantry in the improvement of their land. The scheme failed, for the farmers who came to Ireland more often than not were mere speculators.²⁸ In August 1850 the various tenants' movements united to form the Irish Tenant League. The aims of the League became known as the 'three Fs' – fair rent, fixity of tenure and freedom of sale.

Gavan Duffy was negative to the focus the Catholic Defence Association put on religion within Irish society. The Tenant League was an inter-denominational organisation that worked for the benefit of all Irish tenants, Catholic or non-Catholic. But the Catholic Church hierarchy still supported the Tenant League. At the national synod at Thurles, the prelates announced that:

We behold our Poor not only crushed and overwhelmed by the awful visitations of heaven, but frequently the victims of the most ruthless oppression that ever disgraced the annals of humanity. Though they have been made to the image of the living God, and are purchased by the blood of Calvary – though the special favourites and representatives of Jesus Christ, we see them treated with a cruelty which would cause the heart to ache if inflicted on the beasts of the field, and for which it would be difficult to find a parallel save in the atrocities of savage life.²⁹

The poor of Ireland in the early 1850s were those who worked on the land without owning it. The synod in 1850 had nevertheless been clear in its denunciation of violent agitation on a tenant right platform:

The moment they [the poor] become their own avengers, enter into secret and illegal combinations, condemned so severely by the Church, and have recourse to deeds of blood and violence, they lose all resemblance to that Divine model who, in suffering left them an example that they should tread in his footsteps, as well as all right to that future joy in which none can participate save those who have shared in His afflictions here below.³⁰

²⁷ Comerford 1998: 21f.

²⁸ Cronin 2001: 148f.

²⁹ The Synodical Address of the Fathers of the National Council of Thurles, 1850. In Moran 1882, vol. I: 44.

³⁰ The Synodical Address of the Fathers of the National Council of Thurles, 1850. In Moran 1882, vol. I: 45f.

The Church was explicitly repeating its denunciation of incidents like the rebellion of 1848, and this was probably an important reason for its wholehearted approval of the Tenant League.

Independent Parliamentary Representation

Events on parliamentary level improved the conditions for both the Catholic Defence Association and the Tenant League. First of all, the Representation of the People (Ireland) Act became law on August 14, 1850. The basic voting qualification would now be the tenure of property valued at £12 or more. No legal estate in the holding was any longer required. The result was that thousands of tenant farmers now could vote.³¹ The Ecclesiastical Titles Act of 1851 had led to several of the Catholic Irish MPs opposing the government. They resolved to make it difficult for the ministers in the House of Commons until the act was repealed. This group of MPs were called the 'Irish Brigade', or by some the 'Pope's Brass Band'. They partook in the creation of the Catholic Defence Association. Soon the Association co-operated with the Tenant League, despite the reservations of Gavan Duffy.³²

In 1851, one of the leading characters among the 'Irish Brigade', George Henry Moore, gathered around him what would become the first independent Irish Party in the British Parliament. Moore was a Mayo landlord who had worked hard for his own and other tenants during the Famine, and was elected MP for County Mayo in 1847.³³ The object of this new party was twofold: The improvement of the conditions of Irish tenant farmers, and the advancement of national interests in the House of Commons. Co-operation with the Catholic Defence Association also meant that a main goal was the assertion of Catholic rights.³⁴ The first significant test of the potential of such an organisation would come with the general election of 1852.

MacHale realised the importance of the upcoming election, and he worked strenuously in the months preceding it. The nomination of representatives for Mayo took place at Castlebar on July 22.³⁵ MacHale believed it to be his duty to be present at the nomination and encourage the electors to vote according to their conscience:

³¹ Comerford 1998: 23.

³² Comerford 1995: 24.

³³ Jordan 1994: 172.

³⁴ Comerford 1998: 26.

³⁵ O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 327.

I am speaking in presence of men well versed in jurisprudence. I say nothing privately to my people which I do not proclaim from the pulpit and the housetop. I therefore say now that it is a violation of constitutional right, as well as of Christian morality, to compel one's tenant to vote against his conscience: It is illegal, unconstitutional, immoral to do violence to any man's conscience or free will in the exercise of a right over which God alone has control.

All this I have said, because I deemed it my duty to establish thus publicly your perfect right to vote freely, and your duty to exercise that right both freely and conscientiously.³⁶

We can here sense the same conviction that MacHale displayed during the Mayo election of 1840. He believed that people should be free and willing to vote according to nothing other than their own conviction of what was in their best interest. He also saw himself and other members of the clergy to be the safekeepers of this right. It was, as he had held during the 1840 election, not a question of mere politics, but, rather, a question of morals. On the election day in Galway on July 26, 1852, MacHale was present to do the same job as he had done in Mayo. Archbishop Cullen still looked with contempt on clerical participation in political affairs, and he uttered in a pamphlet that:

It is hostility to religion to assume its defence against those who, by the Grace of God and the favour of the Holy See, have been constituted its legitimate ministers, administrators, and guardians.³⁷

According to him, the Church should tend to ecclesiastical matters only, whereas the constitutionally elected politicians, of which Rome approved, should tend to the political matters of the day. Unlike MacHale, Cullen saw these two aspects of life as separate. A part of Cullen's opposition to clerical participation in politics was grounded on his experiences in Italy before he came to Ireland. During the 1848 rebellion, he had seen the Pope driven from Rome by revolutionaries. He had also personally helped the College of Propaganda avoid confiscation by the revolutionaries.³⁸ These events probably provided Cullen with a feeling of antipathy towards popular movements and their leaders, and he believed that the Church should not take part in such revolutionary movements.

The 1852 election was a success for the Irish Party. Some forty out of the 105 Irish representatives to be sent to Westminster were now pledged to the causes of tenant right and nation.³⁹ The new composition of Parliament gave the Irish Party considerable possibilities of influencing the course of politics; the Tories were in power, but it was a minority administration.⁴⁰ If the Irish Party members stood united, they could make the balance incline in favour of either Whigs or Tories. On September 8, 1852, all the newly elected Irish Party members were summoned to a conference in Dublin. Here a resolution

³⁶ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 329.

³⁷ Quoted in Costello 1939: 118.

³⁸ The Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04564a.htm>

³⁹ O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 303, Moody 1994: 277.

⁴⁰ Comerford 1998: 26.

proposed by Mr. William Keogh, elected MP for Athlone and one of the original members of the 'Irish Brigade', was adopted:

Resolved: - That in the opinion of this conference it is essential to the proper management of this cause, that the MPs who have been returned on Tenant Right principles, should hold themselves perfectly independent of, and in opposition to, all governments which do not make it a part of their policy, and a cabinet question, to give to the tenantry of Ireland a measure embodying the principles of Mr. Sharman Crawford's Bill.⁴¹

Yet despite being the author of this devoted declaration, Keogh would just months later inflict a deadly blow on the political hope that was the Irish Party. In December the Tory government was voted down, and a new Liberal (Whig) administration, led by Lord Aberdeen, took its place. When Parliament resumed early in 1853, Keogh and also another MP and former part of the 'Irish Brigade', John Sadleir, were offered the offices of Solicitor-General for Ireland and Junior Lord of the Treasury, respectively, under the new administration. And they accepted. The defection by Keogh and Sadleir inflicted a setback on the fledgling party that would prove difficult to recover from. It undermined the people's confidence in parliamentary action. In the years to come, Irish national and political action would lean more and more towards revolutionary methods.

The apostasy of Keogh and Sadleir produced severe difficulties also within the Irish Catholic Church. MacHale was very rapid in denouncing the two men. He found that those who had broken their pledges were no longer worthy of support. On January 15, 1853, he wrote George Henry Moore:

If the proposed pledge be considered hard or inconvenient, then the honest course would have been respectfully to decline. (...) It is much better not to vow, than after the vow not to perform the thing promised.⁴²

Being a man of no compromise, MacHale could not see Keogh and Sadleir's case; he could not see how anyone could yield from their principles. MacHale's problem was that not everyone within the hierarchy saw the situation as he did. Cullen, who had just now become Archbishop of Dublin, was silent on the matter. In addition, the action of Keogh and Sadleir was condoned by many clerics.⁴³ Thus, an open conflict now waged between those who condemned the acts and those who, tacitly or otherwise, condoned them. Because of this affair and also the growing disagreement over the Catholic University, Archbishops Cullen and MacHale entered into open, mutual opposition.

⁴¹ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 302. William Sharman Crawford was one of the co-founders of the Tenant League.

⁴² Quoted in Bourke 1902: 167f.

⁴³ Bourke 1902: 166.

The tenant right movement and the Irish party had largely collapsed after 1852. The strongly reduced group of independent oppositionists, led by George Henry Moore and resolutely supported by MacHale, was not able to arouse much interest at the 1854 election, and priestly action was also very low.⁴⁴ In 1855 Gavan Duffy resigned his seat in Parliament and moved to Australia because of low morale and no prospect of success.⁴⁵ In the general election in April 1857, however, both Moore and MacHale worked hard in order to keep the Irish Party on its feet and to keep constitutionalism at the centre stage in Irish political activism. This time their focus was not only on the nomination of tenant rights representatives but also on preventing the nomination of pledge-breakers. Moore and Colonel Ousely Higgins were the current MPs for Mayo, and their nominations were repeated. Higgins was a follower of the pledge-breaker John Sadleir, and hence MacHale opposed his re-election. Following MacHale's lead, the clergy in Mayo resolved to support Moore and the Conservative Colonel Palmer, and when the votes were counted, the two had won.⁴⁶ But Higgins filed a petition in the House of Commons alleging excessive clerical influence in the election.⁴⁷ The case was tried by a House of Commons Committee on July 4, 1857.

MacHale was summoned to the examination, where he explained his views on the election and on his own role in it. The most important question posed was why MacHale was politically active in the election at all. MacHale commenced his explanation by stating that everything he had done was done out of a sense of duty; he did not gain personally on elections, materially or otherwise. He continued by explaining that it was important for both himself and the clergy in general to make sure that a person elected had two basic qualities, namely, the ability of doing service to one's country and the faithfulness to one's own resolutions.⁴⁸ In the examination, then, answering to an explicit question, MacHale stressed the importance of supporting one's country, and not one's religion, an uncommon stance for a priest and probably an unpopular stance with Dr. Cullen. The latter quality suggested by MacHale referred explicitly to the pledge-breaking the Irish had witnessed in 1853. The commission then asked MacHale whether he found that he, as a cleric, had a right to be so active in politics. He answered:

St. Paul was an Apostle, yet that did not prevent him exercising his rights as a Roman citizen: and there is no law in the Church or State that deprives me of any right as a citizen which I hold, and

⁴⁴ Bourke 1902: 181.

⁴⁵ Comerford 1998: 30.

⁴⁶ Jordan 1994: 176f.

⁴⁷ Jordan 1994: 177.

⁴⁸ Bourke 1902: 176.

having a vote from exercising the right of voting. I shall propose candidates or not, exercise the right of voting or not as I shall seem fit in the circumstances.⁴⁹

MacHale, then, fervently believed that political activity was not only the clergy's civil right, it was also their civil duty, because, as he had claimed several times in the past:

(...) I look on it as a question of morality and not mere politics. I believe that the selecting of worthy persons to fill important offices is a moral question, involving serious responsibilities with regard to the public weal. And there are no persons who have more important duties to perform than members of parliament – legislators.⁵⁰

The role of the clergy in the setting of an election was justified by their being persons of very high morals, and would hence be the best advisors for any voter. In an election, MacHale opined, the constituents should follow their own free will and conscience. In the election of 1840, he had worked determined to make the electorate vote according to their own will and not according to the will of their landlord. The core of MacHale's logic was that people should vote as their own conscience told them to. If they were in doubt as to what to vote, they could ask a priest's advice. If this advice were followed, the vote would still be free.⁵¹

In 1854, the Congregation of Propaganda in Rome had issued rules regarding the conduct of priests in political affairs. The rules stated that there should be no political work or statements within the church buildings. However, the priests must be allowed to speak about bribe-taking, about avoiding perjury and to deal with issues concerning the rights of the Church and duties of charity and care of the poor.⁵² Further, priests should avoid dissension and quarrels amongst themselves in public assemblies. This was a contribution in the debate on the ongoing dissension within the Irish Church. Propaganda's statement to a large degree supported MacHale's actions during the 1857 election:

While enacting these rules, we think we are only doing what is required by the good of religion and the liberty of the Church, by demanding that, whenever there is question of electing poor-law guardians or members of Parliament, from whose way of acting the faith and safety of our Catholic poor or the rights and liberties of the Church would have to suffer, priests should be solicitous to have these offices conferred on men of integrity and favorable to the Catholic religion.⁵³

This statement supported MacHale's conduct during the election and fully backed his view on the place and role of the Church in politics. The only difference between Propaganda's rules and MacHale's view was MacHale's conviction that priests should work for the best of their country, and not for their religion. Frederick Lucas's letter from 1855, however, presented the views of Cardinal Barnabò, who had urged the clergy not to take active part

⁴⁹ Quoted in Bourke 1902: 176.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Bourke 1902: 173.

⁵¹ Bourke 1902: 178f.

⁵² O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 479.

in politics. This was in accordance with Cullen's views, and thus, Cullen had a very influential ally in Rome.

National Education and the Irish language

The 1857 election did not prove to be another success for Moore and MacHale. The belief in constitutional methods had been given a serious blow by the defections and ensuing disputes, and it now seemed unlikely that the Irish Party should resume its old position. Increasingly, it seems that MacHale withdrew from the political arena for a time.

In 1854 and 1858 he chaired provincial synods in Tuam, and two important issues that were dealt with at both these synods were primary education and the Irish language. In 1853, Cullen had condemned the Protestant Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Whately's book 'Lessons on the Truth of Christianity', and in response the government agreed to exclude the book from the National Schools.⁵⁴ Whately, having been one of the champions of the National Education System, then retired from the Board. Also in 1853, MacHale had written Pope Pius IX on his view of education:

But there is no such lack of schools in my diocese as these persons persist in affirming. I confess that I have not as many National Schools as are to be found in other dioceses. The reason for this is, that from the beginning I judged the principle of mixed education on which these schools are founded to be one replete with danger, and I, therefore, did not encourage the establishment of such schools. Yet, although I make it a point to recommend in an especial manner to opening of purely Catholic schools, I do not indiscriminately forbid the introduction of others. I merely admonish my priests to watch carefully over them, so that the conditions enjoined by the Apostolic See be complied with, and the dangers inherent in them carefully guarded against.

The National Schools have, it is true, certain desirable advantages. But these are only granted on such hard conditions, that our priests complain that they cannot put up these schools without violating the conditions imposed by the Holy See in order to make them safe for catholic children.⁵⁵

This belief was one MacHale had entertained ever since the National Education System had been established in 1831. Although he now maintained that he did not forbid schools that were not Catholic, he had, however, forbidden National Schools in Tuam in 1840. This dissonance can imply either that MacHale had lifted the ban on National Schools and now governed in a more open manner, or that he wanted the Pope to believe that he did. The provincial synod's addresses, both in 1854 and in 1858, were in agreement with this letter of MacHale's. At the 1858 meeting, the synod announced:

Wishing to arouse more and more the diligence of our priests, we admonish them to bestow their most zealous efforts in increasing the number of purely Catholic schools, which shall have nothing whatever to do with any system of National Education.⁵⁶

⁵³ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 479f.

⁵⁴ Murphy 1971: 29f.

⁵⁵ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 451.

This de facto condemnation of the National Schools in an entire archdiocesan province meant that the question would have to be discussed in the hierarchy. In February 1859 the Congregation of Propaganda recommended that the Irish bishops should meet to discuss educational matters.⁵⁷ At this meeting, which was held in August, the bishops agreed that they should ask the government for a separate system but that they should not issue a condemnation of the National System for the time being, as it would not be possible to maintain Catholic schools without the subsidies that they were given through the National Board.⁵⁸ The bishops issued a memorial, written by MacHale to be given to the Lord Lieutenant, and a pastoral was issued to the Irish people. At this meeting there was no sign of the disagreement between Cullen and MacHale, but in November that year, the dissension yet again presented itself. The government had by then responded to the memorial. The response confirmed the government's belief in undenominational education but it also said that the government would make concessions in order to relieve some of the causes of complaints among the bishops of any religion. Cullen prepared an answer, which all the bishops except MacHale signed. This was just after MacHale had retreated from the Catholic University, and also MacHale and George Henry Moore had recently made their last attempt at an Irish Party in Parliament. In MacHale's view, independent opposition in Parliament was the only way to get concessions.⁵⁹ Hence, MacHale was in a general dispute with Cullen, and he still resolutely stressed the importance of parliamentary action in all matters.

In the extension of the discussion on education, the provincial synods of Tuam also took up the issue of the Irish language. MacHale had long been one of the few champions of the fight for the slowly vanishing Irish language. The Irish language had been seen as an important part of Irish national sentiment and nationalism by the Young Irelanders in the 1840s, but was not regarded as important in most other camps. In addition to MacHale's personal interest, his archdiocese was also one of the parts of Ireland where most Irish-speaking people lived; use of English was growing rapidly, among other things because of the National Schools, but it was still primarily an urban phenomenon. These two reasons made the 1858 synod appeal the following:

It was to us a subject of deep anxiety to see that the study of our national idiom was either altogether banished from parish schools, or only treated superficially and for a very brief space. It would be no

⁵⁶ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 473.

⁵⁷ Murphy 1971: 31.

⁵⁸ Murphy 1971: 33.

⁵⁹ Murphy 1971: 34.

slight reproach to our age, if we forgot altogether the tongue in which our holy apostles and their successors evangelized our forefathers, and which was the vehicle by which the words of faith came down to us untainted and unimpaired.⁶⁰

This address must to a large extent have been influenced by MacHale. The Catholic Church in general still did not pay much attention to the needs of the Irish vernacular. At the same time the address displayed a belief in the Irish language being the language of the Irish Catholic religion. This was an opinion that MacHale had long held. In 1861, he published an Irish translation of the Bible, and in the preface he wrote:

The want of a complete version of the Canonical Scriptures, in our own native language, has long been felt and deplored in Ireland. Though this want is to be obviously ascribed to the religious persecutions to which so many of our privations can be traced, it must be confessed, that it could ere now have been supplied by vigorous exertions.⁶¹

In this preface, MacHale uttered his dissatisfaction that the task of translating the Bible to Irish not being carried out earlier. Translating the Bible into vernacular, however, was not a typically Catholic activity. This was yet another example of MacHale's relatively unorthodox view of duty; he was an Irish national Catholic. This indication of lack of Irish written material underlines both the importance of MacHale's work, but also the unique approach taken by MacHale on the issue.

The National Association

After the substantial set-back for the independent Irish Party in the 1850s, independent parliamentary opposition still prevailed, although in a smaller degree. In 1864, John Blake Dillon, a friend of Charles Gavan Duffy's and former member of the Young Ireland movement, attempted to start a new constitutional movement in 1864. The National Association was founded, having as its objectives:

1st. To secure by law to occupiers of land in Ireland compensation for all valuable improvements effected to them. 2nd. The disendowment of the Irish Protestant Church, and the application of its revenues to purposes of national utility, saving all vested rights. 3rd. Freedom and equality of education for the several denominations and classes in Ireland.⁶²

The Association gained much appeal in the Catholic Church, and Archbishop Leahy of Cashel and also Cullen participated in the organisation. Dillon also approached MacHale, asking for his co-operation in the new association. But MacHale rejected his appeal, and on December 6, 1864, he replied to Dillon's request: "Though there is no question regarding the importance of the objects, it is not so with the agency proposed to carry them into

⁶⁰ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. I: 475.

⁶¹ MacHale 1861: v.

⁶² *Freeman's Journal*, December 30, 1864. Quoted in Norman 1965: 150.

serious and practical effect”.⁶³ MacHale mainly rebuffed the Association because of its co-operation with the pledge-breakers of the early 1850s: “I cannot enter into alliance with any who manifest no regret for the violation of former solemn engagements”.⁶⁴ In addition the National Association had realised the need for co-operation with Irish and British Liberals, and MacHale and also his former associate, George Henry Moore, were very disappointed with the organisation not demanding the same independent opposition as they had promoted in the Independent Irish Party.

Archbishop Cullen had joined the Association, though with some quandary; he still did not like encouraging a political campaign. But he had found in the National Association an organisation that advocate the same issues as he and the Catholic hierarchy in general did. The disendowment of the Church of Ireland and the fight for denominational education were the two issues closest to his heart and the main reason for his involvement. The National Association promoted independent parliamentary action as long as there was any hope for gaining many MPs, but when the election of 1865 proved to be a failure they started to co-operate with the sitting Liberals. Cullen agreed to the Association not adopting an inflexible position to such co-operation. He believed that the Association should also support men who would refuse to expel a government from power if it had the intention of presenting concessions to Ireland.⁶⁵ In December 1864 the Pope had issued ‘The Syllabus of Errors’, declaring Liberalism to be one of them. Why would Cullen still support the National Association after that? He probably found co-operation with the British Liberals to be better than indifference; one of Cullen’s justifications for joining the Association, as he stated in a letter to Barnabò in January 1865, was that it was a necessary alternative to the growing violent agitation seen in the country at the time.⁶⁶

The lack of a national agenda was another item that MacHale disapproved of in the National Association. Responding to yet another request for participation, he stated in a letter written on January 13, 1865:

It is unnecessary to enumerate the obvious causes of the deep distrust in the recent movement. They are found in the studied forbearances from any reference to the treachery already practised on the Irish people. One of the deepest, however, is the restriction of our country’s misery to subordinate grievances, without daring even to allude to the prolific parent of wrong [the Union] from which all the rest derive their noxious vitality.⁶⁷

⁶³ Quoted in O’Reilly 1890, vol. II: 536.

⁶⁴ Quoted in O’Reilly 1890, vol. II: 536.

⁶⁵ Norman 1965: 165.

⁶⁶ Comerford 1998: 108.

⁶⁷ Quoted in O’Reilly 1890, vol. II: 541.

But the National Association lost much of its momentum after the election of 1865, and in 1866 Dillon died, which was a major blow to the organisation.⁶⁸ However, it continued to exist until 1873, but before then, other and more revolutionary forces had presented themselves.

Fenian times

In 1858, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, or the Fenian movement, was founded, one branch in Ireland and one in America. It was founded by a group of men who had been connected with the Young Ireland uprising in 1848, and it followed the Young Ireland doctrine as to what constituted Irish nationality; to them the Irish nation consisted of Irishmen of all creeds, classes and ethnicities. The Fenians only had one single aim, and that was independence from Britain; everything else, even the land question, was a distraction. The Fenians believed that Britain would never grant Ireland independence except if met with physical force, and so they prepared an armed uprising. The organisation was arranged as a secret society, with a secret oath where the members swore “allegiance to the Irish Republic now virtually established”.⁶⁹

The Irish Catholic Church rapidly condemned the Fenian organisation. The Catholic Church had always taken a strict line with secret societies; in 1826 Pope Leo XII issued an Encyclical forbidding secret societies, and since then several Papal censures had been issued.⁷⁰ Archbishop Cullen was very rapid with denouncing the Fenians, and he commanded his fellow-prelates and priests to follow in his lead. Archbishop MacHale, however, again proved to be a problem for Cullen. MacHale had also often stated his opposition to violence and revolution, but at the same time he was glad that the issue of national independence was yet again a voiced objective in Ireland.

In 1861, MacHale was part of an event that infuriated Cullen. In November that year Terence Bellew McManus, one of the rebels of the Young Ireland rising in 1848, died in America. As a national gesture, the Fenians in America decided to send his remains back to Ireland for a funeral there.⁷¹ Cullen strongly opposed the idea, and he did not allow McManus’s body to rest in Dublin Cathedral, nor did he allow his priests to officiate at the funeral. Father Patrick Lavelle, parish priest of Ballyovey Parish in Tuam, ignored

⁶⁸ Norman 1965: 182.

⁶⁹ Propaganda: *Scrittura* 35, Leahy to Barnabó, August 10, 1865. Quoted in Norman 1965: 87.

⁷⁰ Norman 1965: 92.

⁷¹ Kee 1972: 313.

Cullen's warnings and decided to preach the funeral oration. MacHale, being Lavelle's superior, had not forbidden Lavelle to do the oration, and he loyally supported Lavelle against loud cries of denunciation. According to Cullen, MacHale ruined the united Catholic condemnation of the Fenians by this action.⁷² This was not the only incident that infuriated Cullen. In 1864 MacHale had had several dealings with the American Fenians; early in February he had sent autographed portraits of himself to be sold at a Chicago Fenian Fair, and later the same month he had received a contribution from the American Fenians to be given to charities in his diocese.⁷³ The American Fenian organisation was not a secret society but an open, legal association. Nevertheless, after hearing about these incidents, Cullen suggested penalties for MacHale: "If the Fenians carry out their project of invading Ireland, Dr. MacHale will get into trouble for his communications with them".⁷⁴ The Congregation of Propaganda admonished the Irish Church to call a meeting of the prelates to settle the issue, but this meeting, held in Dublin in October, solved nothing. It, however, confirmed the condemnation by most of the prelates.

In February and March 1867 the Fenians rebelled. In a Pastoral letter written on March 1, 1867, MacHale acknowledged the ongoing development, and he observed that:

It is enough for us seriously to reflect that at this moment there is a crisis in the condition of our country, which is deserving of the most serious considerations of all concerned, rulers, legislators, pastors, and people. On the one side are they who are charged with guiding and giving counsels; on the other, those whose duty it is to receive and follow this prudent counsel of their legitimate superiors and guides. That wisdom and justice may sway the resolves of the one, that humanity and justice may be extended to the requirements of the other, and finally, that peace and justice may become the common portion of all, should be our common prayer.⁷⁵

This statement was very careful; he did not pass any judgement in any direction. Cullen, who had been elevated to Cardinal the previous year, was much blunter in a pastoral letter to his archdiocese in October the same year: "During the past years I have often warned you against the evils which result from secret societies, and exhorted you to shun all communication with them".⁷⁶ The Fenian uprisings were futile. When the leaders were imprisoned, MacHale did not denounce them by public letter despite his known rejection of political violence. Not until 1870 did a papal condemnation of Fenianism appear, and then the initiative came not from the Church but from the British government.⁷⁷ But in

⁷² Norman 1965: 101.

⁷³ Norman 1965: 101.

⁷⁴ Norman 1965: 101.

⁷⁵ MacHale 1867: 11.

⁷⁶ Letter to the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of Dublin, Transmitting the Resolutions adopted by the Irish Episcopate. In Moran 1882, vol. III: 78.

⁷⁷ Norman 1965: 129.

1870 Fenianism was already losing its power and was slowly disappearing from the surface of Irish nationalism.

At the national synod held at Maynooth in 1875, the first one since the synod at Thurles in 1850, the hierarchy took up the question of revolution and secret societies. The Maynooth synod discussed many of the same issues as had been discussed at Thurles, and the meeting demonstratively stated:

Avoid all secret societies, all illegal combinations, so severely condemned by the Church. Such associations (...) have never yet formed a true champion of justice or of liberty. Their efforts have ever been cursed with sterility. The sole result secret organisations have anywhere achieved had been the uprooting of the Faith, the degradation of the national spirit (...)⁷⁸

This was an opinion the Church had insisted on during all the great rebellions in the last century. Since the 1850s, the synod claimed, the Church had been charged with being too focused on civil allegiance: “One distinguishing characteristic of the policy that at present assails the Church is, that it deals its most deadly blows in the name of civilization, and in defence of its authority”.⁷⁹ The denunciation of Fenian operations made nationalists lean against such charges, and it was probably a feeling entertained by MacHale during the 1860s. The synod agreed that the Church had ceased practising political opposition and now practised more civil loyalty to the established authorities, and the explanation given was:

It is because the Revolution itself has changed its position with regard to the seat of power. It has gradually gained possession of the authority against which it formerly conspired, and its irreligious principles have come to shape, more or less distinctly, the legislation of modern Governments. But in the hour of triumph, it has felt that it must silence the Church or be resigned to see its present advantages swept from it, one by one, before the vigour of the renewed faith of Christian nations.⁸⁰

The Church was becoming more politically co-operative and saw itself now as more constructive. The core of the Church’s opposition to the Fenians and other revolutionary secret societies was not, however, solely the revolutionary elements but also the irreligious elements.

Church reforms

The British government had asked the Pope to condemn Fenianism. Still, the Liberal Prime Minister since 1868, William Gladstone, accepted that Irish violence and Fenian violence

⁷⁸ Pastoral Address of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, Assembled in National Synod at Maynooth, to their Flocks. In Moran 1882, vol. III: 675.

⁷⁹ Pastoral Address of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, Assembled in National Synod at Maynooth, to their Flocks. In Moran 1882, vol. III: 669.

⁸⁰ Pastoral Address of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, Assembled in National Synod at Maynooth, to their Flocks. In Moran 1882, vol. III: 670.

were a product of Irish grievances.⁸¹ Gladstone represented a change on the British political scene which would prove to have enormous consequences for the Church and for Ireland as a whole. Much on account of the Fenian rising the year before, Gladstone in 1868 initiated a programme of ‘justice for Ireland’. He initiated reforms in the three areas of church, land and education, the three issues that had been important to the National Association, which still lingered in existence. In 1869, Gladstone issued the Irish Church Act, which disestablished and disendowed the Anglican Church of Ireland. He had called for disestablishment of the Church of Ireland already before he became Prime Minister in December 1868. Henceforth, all religious denominations were equal to the law. By passing this law, the British Parliament finally officially admitted and recognised that the majority of the Irish were of a different creed than the State religion. The growing importance and power of the Catholic Church organisation during the century seemed to culminate with this acknowledgement. There was also an economic side to the issue. With the passing of the Church Act, large areas of land that had belonged to the Church of Ireland were now to be redistributed. This did not have an immediate effect on the Church, but the principle of it was important: The church of a small minority should not be funded from the state when the church of the majority was not.

By now, the Catholic Church was a major contributor of opinions on Irish politics and society in general. The power of the central Roman Church was also growing. On December 8, 1869, the first Vatican Council commenced in Rome. The most important issue discussed there was the infallibility of the Pope. There was a general accept in the Roman Catholic Church that the Church was infallible, but there was much disagreement on whether the Pope was infallible only when supported by the Church or also by his own office.⁸² According to long-standing Gallican attitudes, the Church could not err only when the General Council made the decision. But Gallicanism was powerless within the Roman Church by the 1870s; Pius IX’s stress on Ultramontanism – the utter allegiance to the Pope and his decisions – had long since triumphed in the Roman Church. But the opposition to the definition of papal infallibility still was unexpectedly high. The Irish Church, among others, was divided on this issue; the Ultramontane Cullen was in favour of papal infallibility, whereas the “Gallican” Archbishop MacHale, who had always stressed the rights and powers of the bishops as well as nationalism and general decentralisation, was

⁸¹ Cronin 2001: 153.

⁸² Chadwick 1998: 185.

opposed to it.⁸³ However, the dogma was approved by the Council on July 18, 1870, and it defined that the Pope's authority over the Church was derived from Christ and not from the Church.⁸⁴ The definition was in itself a sign of the Catholic Revival that had taken place in the Roman Church since the 1850s. Also in Ireland it would prove to have far-reaching consequences.

Home Rule

The Irish Catholic Church was very pleased with Gladstone's Church reform and was initially not interested in joining a new national organisation that was emerging at the same time. In September 1870 the Home Government Association was founded. It was led by Isaac Butt, a Protestant barrister who saw a need to focus Irish attention on national issues. He was himself chairman of the Irish Tenant League⁸⁵, which had been founded the preceding year, and he also was President of the Amnesty Association, an organisation initiated to secure the release of Fenian prisoners.⁸⁶ However, Butt believed that all the different groups should be joined in a common national association. Whereas the Fenians had fought for complete independence, the aim of this new movement was not as intemperate: "And when I say national independence I don't mean separation, I mean a self-government which gives us the entire right to manage our own affairs".⁸⁷ Butt's political thesis was simple: Since the Act of Union, the British Parliament had proved itself unable to rule and administer Ireland without negative consequences. Therefore Ireland needed a Parliament in which Irish matters could be given the particular treatment that the country required. In 1873 members of the Association met in Dublin to form the Home Rule League, and the focus of this new league was the stressing of Irish Home Rule at Westminster. However, this was still no tight organisation. Butt only proposed that Home Rule MPs should be pledged to vote for an annual Home Rule motion in Parliament. Otherwise they could vote as they pleased.⁸⁸ The general election of 1874 was the first possibility to survey the strength of the League. This election was the first to be fought under the conditions laid by the 1872 Ballot Acts, which introduced secret voting.

⁸³ O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 546.

⁸⁴ Chadwick 1998: 214.

⁸⁵ Not to be confused with Gavan Duffy's Irish Tenant league of the 1850s.

⁸⁶ O'Day 1998: 25.

⁸⁷ *The Nation*, November 20, 1869. Quoted in O'Day 1998: 28.

⁸⁸ Kee 1972: 360.

MacHale had for decades been engaged in the right of people to vote freely; during his 1857 examination, he referred to a proposal he had presented in 1847:

That a certain barrier be drawn round the hustings, than that all the landlords and the bailiffs, and police, and priests and bishops, if you will, should all retire and name the candidates, and let the voters come up and vote for whom they pleased (...).⁸⁹

Butt's men won more than half of all the Irish seats in Parliament at the 1874 election, and the MPs renamed themselves the Irish Party. Much on account of the Church Act of 1869 and a general feeling that the present government was working in their favour, the Catholic hierarchy in general did not support the Home Rule League in its start. Cardinal Cullen proclaimed in 1871 that:

I have determined to having to do with the Home Rule movement for the present. The principle leaders in the management here are professors of Trinity College who have never heretofore manifested any good feeling towards the people of Ireland, and Orangemen who are still worse. The object appears to be put out the present ministry and get Disraeli into power. (...) The great mass of the people in Ireland was always ready to join any movement which is presented to them as something patriotic, but I think that the Home Rule movement is still looked on with suspicion by them on account of its leaders.⁹⁰

Cullen disliked the Home Rulers to a large degree because they were not Catholic and because he believed that they wanted the return of a Conservative government. The Home Rulers, on the other hand, could not function effectively without the support of the Catholic Church. The Catholic revival that had taken place since the 1850s and which culminated at the Vactican Council of 1870, had much strengthened the position of the Church in the country. The Catholic Church was a great source of power to any organisation, because it was a powerful institution within Catholic Ireland.

In spite of Cullen's objection to the Home Rulers, an opinion that doubtless generated many similar opinions among other prelates, MacHale was a vigorous supporter of Butt and the Home Rule League. In 1875, he presided at the Connaught Provincial Home Rule Meeting. Speaking at this meeting, he referred to Butt with great respect: "Mr. Butt is a man of high integrity. He speaks what he thinks, and he always thinks right".⁹¹ MacHale believed Butt was the man that could take up the legacy of O'Connell; he was a new national leader. The Home Rule League did not pledge its MPs to its cause. That had always been a fundamental point for MacHale, and within the Home Rule League, he continued his ever vigilant stress on, precisely, the importance that "we have not only

⁸⁹ Quoted in Bourke 1902: 177f.

⁹⁰ Cullen to Manning, October 13, 1871. Quoted in Norman 1965: 417f.

⁹¹ MacHale 1875: 3.

talented men advocating our cause, but [that] we have what is far more valuable, faithful men".⁹² This remark was a clear hint at the Sadleir-Keogh affair of the 1850s.

Parliamentary efforts on higher education

But despite MacHale's zealous efforts for Home Rule, the Catholic hierarchy was still more interested in a second strand of Gladstone's reform measures, namely education. In 1871 the bishops issued a pastoral letter in which they repeated the claim of Catholics to have a Catholic university. The Catholic University that had been established in 1854 was not living up to its expectations, and much of the reason for this was the lack of a parliamentary charter that would provide it with higher public recognition and thus more money.⁹³ In the letter the bishops pointed out that the essential condition of religious equality within higher education could also be secured by the government founding of a Catholic college within the existing University of Dublin. In 1873 Gladstone introduced a measure, the establishment of subordinate colleges, among others the Catholic University, under the University of Dublin. The measure met with general opposition, also from the Catholic bishops. They opposed it because the measure granted no endowments to any Catholic institution and the University would be secular in character.⁹⁴ Gladstone's bill was defeated.

At the national synod of Maynooth in 1875, education was one of the most important issues raised. In a Pastoral address by the prelates, issued on September 20, 1875, the prelates said that:

The control of the State over the education of the country has been enlarged in a degree perilous to liberty, while the circle within which the rights of parents or of conscience should have sway has been proportionately narrowed.⁹⁵

The Church had not thus far been very successful in its endeavours to gain formal control over Catholic education. Both on primary and higher levels the government still insisted on undenominationalism. In 1877, Home Rule League leader Isaac Butt also proposed a bill on higher education. His proposition was the inclusion of the Catholic University with

⁹² MacHale 1875: 4.

⁹³ McGrath 1971: 100.

⁹⁴ McGrath 1971: 104.

⁹⁵ Pastoral Address of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, Assembled in National Synod at Maynooth, to their Flocks. In Moran 1882, vol. III: 663.

Trinity College within the University of Dublin. This bill was also rejected in Parliament.⁹⁶ The university question was thus bound to continue.

Land and nation

There were also developments in other areas of Irish politics. After the election of 1874, Butt advocated Home Rule at Westminster, but his claims were not taken seriously. Soon factions within the League began to question his methods. Joe Biggar, a Fenian member of the League, introduced the policy of obstruction, that is, interfering the business in the House of Commons so as to make it impossible to get any parliamentary work done.⁹⁷ In this way, it was thought, the House would be forced to take up Irish matters. Butt strongly disliked this method, but his position in the movement was decreasing. Biggar found an ally in Charles Stewart Parnell, who had joined the Irish Party in 1875. Parnell countered Butt's criticism by claiming that:

England respects nothing but power, and it is certain that the Irish party, comprising, as it does, so many men of talent and ability, might have the power, which attention to business, method and energy always give, if it would only exhibit these qualities.⁹⁸

Parnell wanted the Irish Party MPs not only to represent the cause of Home Rule, but to express this cause as well. A struggle for leadership began, and by the middle of 1877, Parnell took over the command.

With the leadership of Parnell, the Home Rule League was about to be radicalised. Parnell gained more vocal support from the Fenians, who had from the beginning partly supported the League. However, he chose not to make a formal alliance with them, as he found their emphasis on revolution would hinder his work. Parnell was, despite his quarrels with Butt, a firm believer in parliamentarism.

Parnell also made another connection. When he took over command of the Home Rule League, it started to put more distinct focus on land issues. In 1870, as part of his reforms, Gladstone had passed a Land Act. It had proved to be a disappointment, but was nevertheless a signal that the Liberal government was aware of the issue. The Home Rule League had always consisted of tenant right members, and in 1873 Butt had uttered that the foremost aim of the League should be "to secure Ulster Tenant Right and generally to

⁹⁶ McGrath 1971: 107.

⁹⁷ Biggar was known for reading long extracts from previous Acts of Parliament to delay the passage of new bills. Kee tells of one episode when Biggar spoke for four hours against a new bill, reading extracts from newspapers and government papers until he finally sat down because he was 'unwilling to detain the House any longer'. See Kee 1972: 362f.

amend the Land Act".⁹⁹ But with Parnell, the land issue would take centre stage. In 1877, Michael Davitt, one of the Fenian rebels of 1867, was released from prison. Davitt had grown critical of Fenian methods and dogmatism. In addition, he had developed an ardour for social justice.¹⁰⁰ In 1878 he formulated a new policy for a national movement. The essence of this new movement was an alliance of revolutionary and constitutional nationalists on the two issues of Home Rule and land.¹⁰¹ In 1879 he founded the Irish National Land League, an organisation that would provide land agitation with a nationwide organisation. The Land League's main enemies were the landlords. The landlords symbolised not only agrarian difficulties, but also the presence of Britain in Ireland; thus there was made a link between land and Home Rule.¹⁰² Parnell agreed to become president of this new organisation.

The land issue had grown immensely in importance during the 1870s. An agricultural depression plagued most of the 1870s, and many tenants fell into arrears. This situation was gravely worsened in 1877 and 1878, when the potato crop failed again.¹⁰³ As a result, the number of evictions from the land exploded once more. Now the situation for tenant farmers was increasingly looking like the situation of the Famine years. As in 1850, the result of these conditions was that riots started on the countryside, riots that were then brought together in Davitt's Land League. On June 5, 1879, MacHale wrote an open letter to the *Freeman's Journal*, in which he stated:

Of the sympathy of the Catholic clergy for the rack-rented tenants of Ireland, and of their willingness to co-operate earnestly in redressing these grievances, abundant evidence exists in historic Mayo as elsewhere. But night patrolling acts and words of menace, with arms in hand, the profanation of what is most sacred in religion – all the result of lawless and occult association – eminently merit the solemn condemnation of the ministers of religion, as directly tending to impiety and disorder in Church and in Society.¹⁰⁴

Partly because of the League's participation in violent action, and partly because Davitt had organised a Land League meeting in Westport in County Mayo without consulting him, MacHale issued this letter condemning the said meeting and, implicitly, Davitt and his League.

⁹⁸ O'Day 1998: 47.

⁹⁹ O'Day 1998: 37.

¹⁰⁰ Moody 1994: 284.

¹⁰¹ Moody 1994: 285.

¹⁰² Moody 1994: 289.

¹⁰³ Cronin 2001: 158.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in D'Alton 1928: 97f.

However, his dislike for Davitt did not change the fact that MacHale had faith in Parnell and his Home Rule movement. However, MacHale was concerned by the deviation of focus. In a letter written on January 4, 1879, he stated:

Let the existence of Home-Rule be vigorously insisted upon. Let unity of action among the members, as far as possible, be insured by summoning them in due time for seasonable deliberation in London, whenever great measures for the benefit of Ireland or our British dominions are about being introduced into Parliament, as well as during the progress of such measures through both Houses.¹⁰⁵

In this letter, written by the now 87 year old prelate, MacHale stressed the importance of the national cause and also the importance of unity and independence. But even though MacHale still was politically active, he was by now feeling the strain of his office.

The end of an era

The era of Home Rule had not truly started yet, and neither the question of education or land had been solved, but the place of John MacHale in these events was irrevocably drawing to the end. He was growing old and tired, and in 1875, the year of the Maynooth national synod and also MacHale's 85th year, MacHale applied for a coadjutor bishop. Two applications were met by refusal, on the grounds that MacHale was in good health. In August 1876, he wrote Cullen on the matter:

I am preparing to proceed to Rome humbly to petition His Holiness to grant me as coadjutor Dr. Thomas Mac Hale, who obtained a high place among those in favour the clergy gave, on the 17th, their respective suffrages. The only one who had a considerable number of votes was the Bishop of Galway, whom for well known reasons I never can consent to accept as my coadjutor.¹⁰⁶

The Bishop of Galway, Dr. McEvelly, had never seen eye to eye with MacHale on most matters. They had usually found themselves on the opposite sides in political and religious quarrels, and MacHale found McEvelly to be "openly and notoriously hostile to me".¹⁰⁷ MacHale would rather, put in his own words, "simply resign my charge" than to have a coadjutor which he did not find acceptable.¹⁰⁸ An important part of Cardinal Cullen's organisational revival of the Irish Church had been the replacement of oppositional bishops with Cullen's own nominees. In this way, he produced a loyal and united prelacy. MacHale had been the strongest and the most influential of such oppositional bishops in Cullen's time, and the Cardinal's refusal to stop the appointment of McEvelly was a last sign of the mutual antagonism that had existed between the two prelates for decades. The fear of

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 667.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 603.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 626.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 615.

McEvilly being appointed as his coadjutor made MacHale send a plaintive address to Rome:

As a rule, observed by the Sovereign Pontiff, no coadjutor, whether bishop or priests, is appointed to an aged or infirm prelate without his good will and consent. The reason for this is obvious. The Church is particularly desirous that peace and charity should reign among all its members. Now, such a blessing can scarcely be hoped for when an assistant-bishop is appointed in opposition to the wishes of the prelate to be assisted.¹⁰⁹

Despite this plea, MacHale was informed in August 1879 that, indeed, McEvilly had been chosen to be coadjutor to the Archbishop. MacHale was told to invite McEvilly to Tuam within one month; he never sent such an invitation. But his opposition was to no avail; McEvilly had been appointed coadjutor; Rome had spoken. It was a hard set-back at the end of MacHale's long career.

In 1878, before McEvilly had officially been appointed coadjutor to MacHale, Cullen died and a long and powerful prelacy was thus at its end. The same year, his long-time friend Pius IX went to his grave. It was the end of an era both in Ireland and in Rome. Three years later, on November 7, 1881, it was the turn of Archbishop John MacHale of Tuam to draw his last breath. He had attained the methuselan age of ninety years and had experienced and helped to shape nearly an entire century of Irish history. He had seen the Union with Britain coming to life and had seen and participated in numerous battles for emancipation from the British Protestant grip. As a tribute to this life of service, MP T. Sullivan had composed the following tribute to an old, Irish air, on St. Patrick's Day, 1876:

In our green isle of old renown,
From many a by-gone age,
Full pure and clear the fame comes down
Of soldier, saint, and sage;
But high amidst those glories bright
That shine on Innisfail,
'Tis ours to write in lines of light,
The name of John Mac Hale.

A pastor fond and true he is,
Beloved by rich and poor,
A patriot spirit bold and free
To do or to endure;
No traitor's wile, no force or guile,
With them can e'er prevail
Whose watch and ward, whose guide and guard,
Is noble John Mac Hale.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in O'Reilly 1890, vol. II: 607.

Ah, men will come and pass away
Like rain-drops in the sea,
And thrones will crumble to decay,
And kings forgotten be;
But through all time, in every clime,
The children of the Gael
Will guard the fame and praise the name
Of glorious John Mac Hale.

Long may he live to bless our land,
And glad our hearts as now,
The crosier in his manly hand,
The mitre on his brow;
And when God's love calls him above,
For us will still avail.
The gracious cares, the potent pray'rs,
Of sainted John Mac Hale.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Bourke 1902: 189f.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The Irish Constitution of 1937 distinctly points to the intimate relationship between the new Irish Nation State and the Catholic Church. It was the culmination of a development that had taken place over the previous century. By the 1930s, Catholicism was the central characteristic of Irish nationalism.¹ Irish Catholic prelates now wholeheartedly embraced the idea of the Irish nation, and they had found their legitimate place and role within it. They were unequivocal participants in the issues of the nation state and open supporters of its existence. Likewise, the authorities of the New Ireland saw the Catholic Church and clerics as a natural, necessary part of the nation state.

Already in the 1880s, one could see emphatic signs of this development. In 1885, shortly after his inauguration, Archbishop William Walsh of Dublin stated to the Mayor and a crowd of citizens in Dun Laoghaire:

With me it is no new theory of to-day or yesterday, but a settled and deeply-rooted conviction, that for a remedy of the many grievances for the removal of which the people of this island so long laboured with but partial success, there is but one effectual remedy – the restoration to Ireland of that right of which we were deprived now nigh a century ago by means as shameful as any that the records of national infamy can disclose. (...)

With you, then, I rejoice that the flag which fell from the dying hands of O’Connell has once more been boldly uplifted, and I pray that it may never again be furled until the right of Ireland is recognised to have her own laws made here upon Irish soil, and by the legally and constitutionally chosen representatives of the Irish people. (...)

I have thought it right, my Lord Mayor, thus freely to avail myself of the opportunity which your address afforded me of expressing plainly and without reserve my personal opinion on this question of vital importance, as I regard it, for the future welfare of my country.²

The fact that William Walsh was the Archbishop of Dublin makes this statement particularly important. As pointed out in the introduction, the Archbishop of Dublin as a general rule represented the official opinions and attitudes of the Irish Catholic Church. Walsh’s wholehearted embrace of the national cause is hence a sign that points clearly towards 1937 and article 44 of the Constitution.³

But Walsh’s position did not come out of the blue. As I have shown in the preceding chapters, the decades-long activities of the Archbishop of Tuam laid a groundwork for Walsh and successors. John MacHale’s efforts for the development of the

¹ Keogh 1988: 105.

² Walsh 1886: 19.

³ “The State recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of its citizens.” Quoted in O’Day and Stevenson 1992: 196.

Irish nation state were a vital contribution to the building of the Church-nation alliance in modern Ireland. As a high-profile Catholic prelate who emphasised the importance of the institutions of Nation and State as well as that of the Church, he helped create the intimate relationship between Church and nation. MacHale was the first truly nationalist archbishop.

But he long fought his battles alone. The mainstream position of the Catholic Church during his lifetime was not one of nationalist politics. In Ireland the majority position of the Church can roughly be divided into two periods, represented mainly by Archbishops Murray and Cullen, respectively. In the period of Murray, the Church showed a strong sense of loyalty to the British State and its established authority; the bulk of prelates, excepting MacHale, considered that the Church had no place on the political arena or should at least not make any special political demands. In Cullen's time, this non-political orientation was intensified; the Church's main spokesman did not wish to participate significantly in politics. Cullen's line of politicals was primarily pragmatic; for instance he supported the Home Rulers in exchange for their support in the most important political issues for the Church. Whereas Murray represented a strong sense of respect for the State, Cullen represented a growing focus on the Church in its own right.

Cullen primarily pursued concessions on education. To him, the fight for denominational education was primarily religious. To MacHale, the same fight was national. In 1908, with the passing of the Irish Universities Act, the long-fought battle of higher education seemed to have come to an end.⁴ Now the Catholic Church was in many ways pleased with the university system in the country. But the Church continued to support the nationalists, which is an indication that times were changing, in the direction previously chosen by MacHale. For MacHale, in opposition to the mainstream courses of his time, was a prevalent nationalist, putting the issues of the nation almost equal to those of the Church.

It must again be emphasised that it was, obviously, not only MacHale who created this connection between Church and nation; Cullen, for example, was an especially important contributor to the institutionalisation of the Church, which was in many ways decisive for such an alliance to have an effect. But MacHale was definitely the most important cleric for the development of the wholehearted nationalist prelacy.

⁴ The new law determined that there should be two new universities, one in Dublin, one in Belfast. The university in Dublin would have three constituent colleges, one in Cork and one in Galway, taking the place of the former Queen's Colleges, and a new college in Dublin.

How did MacHale see his own role in Irish society? As a nationalist Catholic prelate he represented, indeed, a paradox in the general outlook of the Roman Catholic Church. The mere fact that he fought for nationalism was unusual within a Church that was truly international. MacHale connected religion and politics naturally together. He believed the Church and the State to be separate and independent institutions, and that the Church was superior because of its divine origin. But because the priests were members of society, they had both rights and duties as citizens of the state. Their role in politics was more of a moral character than anything else, for, in MacHale's opinion, priests had high morals per definition. MacHale believed that the priests of individual states had a natural and legitimate place within state politics. But because of the mutual independence of the two institutions, the Pope had no temporal rights in independent states. In a period of increasing papal power which culminated in the definition of papal infallibility at the Vatican Council in 1870, this was not a popular position with the Catholic Church. But MacHale was a fervent believer in decentralisation.

This was yet another paradox. The Catholic Church in the same period worked vigorously to promote centralisation in its own organisation. But the Roman Catholic Church was not as centralised as one might believe. If it were, MacHale would have been silenced by the central authorities of the Church. The bishops had, or maybe rather took, much freedom in questions of a non-doctrinaire nature. Therefore, there was room for both Murray, Cullen and MacHale within the Irish Church. Most likely, MacHale would probably never have been offered the position of Archbishop of Dublin, as such a position called for a prelate of a more Roman outlook. The importance put on the position of Archbishop of Dublin was evident when Cullen, Rome's special delegate, was offered the office after only two years in his office as Archbishop of Armagh. On the other hand, MacHale would probably not have been interested in such a position.

MacHale favoured decentralisation also outside the Church. Obviously, his nationalist beliefs were influenced by this mentality. But he also displayed his favour of decentralisation on other areas. In all political matters, resources and responsibility should be decentralised so that the best possible care could be provided by people who knew and cared for the local circumstances. This was the case with education as well as poor relief. His focus on the Irish language can be seen as a part of this want for local influence. The English language represented a centralisation of language that he found to be wrong. This view gained supporters in the early twentieth century and MacHale's position was subsequently incorporated into the 1937 Constitution, although the force of the Irish

language by then was of a more symbolic character. Irish was made the first official language of the new state, whereas English was made a second, subordinate official language.

MacHale's focus on the Irish language was obviously also an expression of his emphasis on cultural nationalism in addition to his stress on political nationalisation. This focus was also paradoxical, as the Roman Catholic Church was renowned for its traditional disregard for, especially, vernacular languages. It was also quite unusual among other Irish nationalists at the time, as most of them concentrated on political issues. The cultural aspect, with its focus on the "genuine" Irish, did not enter mainstream nationalism until the 1880s and 1890s – after MacHale's death.⁵

MacHale also demanded independence in politics. He did not think that priests should co-operate with the existing political parties. This was a view he held on Irish politics in general. One should fight one's battles independently of other factions, which as a general rule had different objectives. He was not opposed to co-operation but strongly disapproved of wheeling and dealing. Therefore he fiercely opposed nationalist-political co-operation across the Irish borders. The Irish had to fight their own battles; this he had learned through his numerous conflicts with the British government. Only the people who lived under the disputed conditions in question were able and willing to apply the remedies necessary to eliminate grievances. This was an important lesson for MacHale, for he had always been loyal to the institutions of the British state, even though the government time and again proved to neglect Irish conditions.

And loyalty was a notion MacHale regarded very highly. He was indeed loyal to the British State in spite of his opposition to the British government. He made use of the institutions of the state to oppose the doings of the British government, and in this way he displayed respect for the system. MacHale was equally loyal to the British monarchy. He believed the monarchy to be the true and, in fact, the only connection between Ireland and Great Britain. He also believed the monarchy to be the best form of temporal authority. The nationalists of the early twentieth century abandoned this idea for the benefit of a republic. By then, Irish nationalism had proceeded beyond Home Rule and towards full independence. In these circumstances a republic was the most reasonable alternative, as the monarch of Ireland for the last three hundred odd years had been the monarch of England. Seeing as MacHale was favourable to the monarchy he would perhaps not have approved

⁵ The primary organisation for this cultural nationalism was the Gaelic League, founded by Douglas Hyde in 1893.

of this choice. On the other hand, it was what seemed to be a necessity for the acquiring of an Irish nation, and that would most likely also have been his primary focus.

This kind of loyalty was to him equally important in any representative, religious or political. It was only through loyalty to the principles of the group that political independent opposition would be effective. Loyalty to one's own resolutions was equally an important quality in any public representative. MacHale manifested this mentality by his own strong hold of principle. He had no respect for people who did not adhere to their own principles. This reasoning had led to his occasional retreat from political organisations and his regular quarrels with members of the Irish hierarchy. This was part of his frequent strong dissension, both in politics and in religious matters.

In these various ways, Archbishop John MacHale brought Irish nationalism into the centre of clerical activity. His never-ending national zeal and his strong integrity became a model for important later prelates such as Archbishop William Walsh of Dublin. Thus the antagonist had become the protagonist.⁶

⁶ For a narrative and analysis in Norwegian of post-MacHale developments in the Church-nation alliance, see Flo 1997.

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