CHAPTER 4

Forged in the Fire of Persecution: Edmund Rice (1762–1844) and the Counter-Reformationary Character of the Irish Christian Brothers

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From the dawn of Catholic Emancipation to the eve of the Great Famine, the life of Edmund Ignatius Rice (1762–1844) spanned a critical age in the emergence of Catholic Irish consciousness.[1] In the history of schooling, it was a particularly significant period in which Catholic education emerged from the constraints of the Penal Laws and embraced the confident attributes associated with the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and subsequent reformers. Transported to Ireland, however, such uncompromising reforms assumed a political and sectarian character as an explicitly Catholic pedagogy emerged in the context of a nationalist advance and the bitter controversies of the 'Bible Wars' which established the tenor of the age.

I

Eighteenth century Ireland was a curious combination of a colony and an *ancien régime* type society. Its colonial standing derived from the fact that, while it had an ancient parliament and constitutional status as a separate

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kingdom, the Dublin parliament was subordinate to Westminster. It was also an example of an *ancien régime* type society, but one in which religion rather than noble birth was the critical determinant of status. Within this context, the monopoly of power and privilege was enjoyed by a minority Anglican (Church of Ireland) community, while dissenters (8%), and the Roman Catholic majority of the population (80%) endured the consequences of punitive legislation, enacted piecemeal in the centuries since the Reformation. Edmund Burke (1729–1797) famously condemned the penal regime as a 'machine of wise and elaborate contrivance well-fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people'.[2] Nineteenth century nationalist historians focussed on the religious elements of the laws, but the more recent historiography has emphasised the importance of the legislation in the defence of the Protestant state. Within this reading, they were rooted not in a desire to eliminate the Catholic religion, but rather in an attempt to destroy 'popery', the political and military threat of the majority. For this reason the inheritance of land, the political system and the legal profession were closed to Catholics, while, in the light of their prominence in the rebellion of 1641, the regular clergy, bishops and those exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction were banished from the kingdom.[3]

Within this context, the control of education was of vital importance. Indeed, amongst Henry VIII's earliest reforming legislation was an act of the Irish Parliament (1537) which planned a network of parochial schools intended to teach 'Christ's religion,…English Order, habit and language'.[4] This significant initiative, marked not just the first intervention of the state in the realm of Irish education but also the king's determination to advance royal supremacy in Church and State through the medium of instruction. In 1570, in the reign of Elizabeth, too, further legislation sought to establish state-funded diocesan grammar schools, conducted by 'Englishmen, or of the English birth of this realm', while a number of Royal Schools were erected across the northern counties in the context of the Ulster Plantation (1608–1630). In reality, however, as with the Reformation enterprise itself, these schools were under-resourced and achieved little success beyond the Anglophone Protestant community.

In part, too, the educational designs of the Reformation were undermined by the survival of a parallel network of illegal Catholic schools, which demonstrated, in Colm Lennon's expression, the 'polarized nature of politico-religious identity' in Ireland.[5] These schools were critical to the survival of a native Gaelic culture, characterised by legislators as 'savage and

wild', but also of the cosmopolitan urban schools, Anglo-Norman (Old English) foundations whose connection with the university of Oxford was transferred to Europe following the establishment of a network of Irish continental colleges in the reign of Philip II of Spain.[6] These institutions were vital to the transmission of the Catholic Reformation to Ireland. And while legislation frustrated the implementation of Tridentine reforms, the Counter-Reformationary zeal of their graduates infused Irish Catholicism with a militant spirit for which the state church was no match. On this account, the historian Aidan Clarke has observed, it was 'not so much that the Protestant Reformation failed in Ireland but that the Counter-Reformation succeeded'.[7]

II

Both communities in Ireland were acutely aware of the power of education in shaping the polity, but the tumult of the seventeenth century made this of paramount importance to the state. In the aftermath of the bloody rebellion of 1641–1649, Oliver Cromwell determined to escalate the process of Anglicization and outlined a radical plan for Irish education that envisaged the removal of poor children from their parents and placing them as 'bound Apprentices to religious and honest people in England or Ireland'. This initiative, in 1657, came too late in the Protector's life to be put into effect, but the subsequent rebellion (1690–1691) prompted the introduction of a swathe of penal legislation, which included measures designed to secure Protestant control over education by curbing the subversive influence of Catholic schoolmasters. As early as 1695, it was enacted that 'no person of the popish religion may publicly teach school or instruct youth', but politically the most important provision was an act to restrain foreign education, which aimed to stem the flow of Catholic students to the continental colleges.

There is good evidence to suggest that this legislation was enforced, at least in the first half of the eighteenth century. Writing in the 1930s, P.J. Dowling compared eighteenth century education to a kind of guerrilla war where the teacher, like the priest was frequently on the run. It was perhaps easier for schoolmasters to avoid prosecution than priests, but there are numerous instances of masters being punished. Corcoran in his study of the penal era lists 19 indictments against popish schoolmasters brought before the grand jury in the county of Limerick alone between 1711 and 1722, a decade that witnessed a significant rise in the

Jacobite threat to the kingdom.[8] The effect of this and similar legislation was to drive Catholic schooling underground, producing in the process the celebrated 'hedge schools'. Much has been written about these schools, which have become the subject of great lore. Many accounts are excessively laudatory, containing stylized depictions of masters imparting 'the best Latin poets…and the orations of Cicero'. Others dismiss them as places of squalor where the children read from notorious chapbooks and objectionable texts such as *Freney the Robber* and *Irish Rogues and Rapparees*, which hawkers pedalled through the country.[9] In reality the truth lies somewhere in between and a recent commentator has described them as 'private schools established on teacher initiative and existing as long as they proved financially profitable'.[10]

In reality, therefore, the educational restrictions, like other provisions of the penal laws, were relaxed outside of times of international crisis and political threat. Catholic teachers were operating outside the law, but after 1730 they were largely left undisturbed. In fact, in 1731, a House of Lords committee reported the existence of some 550 popish schools across Ireland. This report is particularly informative, not simply for the statistics it provides, but for the insight it affords into the mentality of the period. Some areas were better served for schools than others. There were no Catholic schools in the Plantation diocese of Derry, and while an occasional 'straggling schoolmaster' came to the mountainous parishes, such was the Protestant vigilance that *'upon being threatened* [with a Warrant], *as they constantly are*…they generally think proper to withdraw'.[11] In the western diocese of Tuam, however, there was a well-developed Catholic educational infrastructure:

> In the town of Galway there are ten Nunnerys (which the Papists commonly call boarding schools)…I have an account of 32 schools taught by papists: divers of them teach Latin and Philosophy and some of them Divinity in order to qualify young men for their Priesthood. Many Papists keep tutors in their house, who privately teach not only the youth of the family, but others of the neighbourhood who report to them: there being scarce a papist who will send their children to a Protestant School, even to learn his Grammar or so much as to read.[12]

The prevalence of such illegal schooling demonstrated the failure of state education policy and prompted the establishment of a network of 'Charter Schools' in 1733 on the initiative of the primate, Englishman

Hugh Boulter. Financed by a combination of individual benefactors and a royal bounty of £1000 per year, the schools extended the scope of government education measures. They had an explicitly evangelical character and aimed to instruct 'the children of the popish and other poor natives… in the English tongue and in the principles of true religion and loyalty'.[13] This represented an intensification of the original Tudor legislation and it enshrined, too, controversial elements of Oliver Cromwell's 1657 plan, including the practice of 'transplantation', which made it difficult for parents to reclaim their children.[14]

Charter Schools were hated by the Catholic community and one later commentator described them as an attempt to carry the nation by a *'coup de main'*.[15] Ironically, the panic they created spurred the clergy to systematise their schooling, lest children were enticed to such state funded proselytising schools. Moreover, reports to Propaganda Fide from *zelanti* in Ireland about the non-residence of Catholic bishops and the dangers the Charter Schools posed to the faith of the nation prompted a wave of Tridentine renewal, including a prioritisation of education. As a consequence, an effective parish school system was in place over much of the country by the second half of the century.[16] In many cases chapels served as school houses, and this strengthened the renewed parish structures. A priority was given to education in Episcopal visitations and reports from the 1750s illustrate the importance of schoolmasters as catechists in parish communities. By the turn of the century, there were over 7000 hedge schools accommodating as many as 400,000 pupils. The essential point, in this instance, is that these were pay schools that excluded those who could not afford the master's fee. In these circumstances, Catholic priests established confraternities, especially the Confraternity of the Christian Doctrine—the equivalent of the Sunday School movement—as an auxiliary to the work of the schools. Moreover, in the wealthier regions of the southeast, the century's end brought the foundation of a number of free Catholic Schools established by the mercantile philanthropists.

This Tridentine Surge was intensified in the Age of Revolutions (1775–1815), as a consequence of both political circumstances and the evangelical zeal of a new generation of Catholic prelates, typified by John Thomas Troy (1739–1823), the Dominican archbishop of Dublin. In the context of the American Revolutionary War, the British government sponsored a series of relief acts, beginning in 1778, which lifted some of the penal laws restricting the practice of religion and the delivery of Catholic education. This offered unprecedented opportunities, and the subsequent

Catholic revival is reflected in the wave of chapel building that characterised the age. The period also witnessed a flowering of religious life and, in the context of education, the foundation of the Presentation Sisters by Nano Nagle (1775) and the Irish Christian Brothers by Edmund Rice (1802) were to transform the landscape, especially in urban areas where their large free schools were particularly effective in applying the pedagogy of the European Counter-Reformation in an Irish context.[17] These indigenous orders, especially the Christian Brothers, established the archetype for a system of Catholic Nationalist education that became dominant in the century following the Great Famine. At the outset, however, their priority was not, as the traditional historiography suggests, the provision of schooling where none existed. Rather it was to offer an explicitly Catholic education as an alternative to the education provided by free schools, which they accused of prosletyism.

III

Nano Nagle's choice of vocation reflected the anxiety of the Catholic elites at the alienation of the poor from the institutional church. Moreover, her Episcopal biographer's description of 'the bleak ignorance' that confronted her at every turn echoed the contemporary preoccupation with the need for the moral reformation of the lower orders.[18] Such sentiments intensified in the course of the French Revolution, which illustrated both the alarming susceptibility of Irish Catholics to the 'French Disease', as conservatives described radical politics, and the tenuous nature of the Church's call on the loyalty of the people, who had ignored the threat of excommunication and embraced the rebel cause in the summer of 1798. From a Protestant perspective, too, the 1798 Rebellion demonstrated the volatility of the island and highlighted the necessity of extending popular elementary education, not merely as a safeguard against future political calamity but also as an engine of social and economic reform in a period where a burgeoning population threatened a Malthusian correction. In this sense, both creeds were enthusiasts of a modernizing agenda that emphasized the bourgeois values of the age: literacy (in English), industry and sobriety.

Edmund Rice (1762–1844) embraced the modernizing ideal and the 'Protestant ethic', but he sought to achieve a distinctly 'Catholic Reformation' through the provision of 'useful education' that would benefit not only the poor but also the Church and State.[19] In Rice's expres-

sion, his Brothers laboured 'to train up…children in early habits of solid virtue, and to instil in their young minds principles of integrity, veracity and social order'.[20] Rice, of course, was not an educationalist, but a successful merchant. His own education was limited, but the routine in his schools reflected a careful borrowing from the innovation of contemporary reformers, including those of Edgeworth, Lancaster and Bell.[21] Fortunately, too, between 1806 and 1812, a Royal Commission, styled the 'Board of Education', produced 14 reports and recommendations on Irish schooling.[22] Rice reflected on their conclusions, and on the merits of the schools conducted by the Kildare Place Society and the subsequent National Board, to produce a system visitors to Mount Sion believed contained all that was 'most practical and useful in recent improvements'.[23] He also drew from memories of his own schooling at the 'Academy' in Callan, County Kilkenny, but he radically improved the traditional methods of the 'hedge schools' to satisfy the demands of the large numbers his urban schools attracted.[24] The influence of the Presentation Sisters was central to his project, too, not simply because of his observations of their 'little schools' in Cork and Waterford, but because the Sisters, like his own Brothers, were religious, vowed to the education of the poor.

The Presentation Rule, which Rice's Brothers adopted in 1802, reflected the influence of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651–1719) who had systematised the pedagogy of the Catholic Reformation that subsequent founders applied across Europe. In the large urban schools of France, his Brothers prepared the children to be good Christians and subjects in an increasingly industrialised society. As Sarah Curtis has observed:

> The structure of their school lives, even more than the content of their lessons, emphasised the kind of method and order that employers and notables hoped would result in a well disciplined society and polity.…To them, social order and religious order were fundamentally connected.[25]

The Catholic elites of nineteenth century Ireland were no different in their expectations, and it was the Christian Brothers' ability to satisfy these aspirations that won them enthusiastic approval.

The Irish Brothers applied the essence of De La Salle's teaching manual, *The Conduct of Christian Schools*, but they diverged radically in their use of the 'mutual' or monitorial system that had been developed by Lancaster and Bell. Critics argued that children could learn little from a 'monitor', but they were taught discipline and the system was inexpensive.[26] This

was an important consideration for philanthropists and the providers of large-scale education; Bishop Moylan's Charitable Committee in Cork, for example, was particularly attracted by what its minutes refer to as 'Mr Lancaster's cheap mode of instruction'.[27] The Presentation Sisters used it in their schools, but the French Brothers considered this English novelty a Protestant anathema, which would undermine the critical influence of the master in the traditional 'simultaneous' system.[28] Rice's clever mixing of the two methods of teaching, however, resulted in a hybrid system that contemporaries described as an improvement on Lancaster's methods.[29]

In time, these innovations were institutionalised in the Brothers' *Manual of School Government*.[30] Published in 1845, it was both a compendium of best practice and a distillation of the lessons learned since the Order's foundation.[31] It outlined in the 'minutest detail' the essentials Brothers required in order to 'discharge systematically and efficiently the important duty of instruction'.[32] Such compendia were vital to the maintenance of an efficient system that prized 'perfect uniformity' above 'capricious novelty'.[33] Standardisation, moreover, facilitated the frequent transfer of brothers from one school to another and enabled the congregation's schools to function as a unit. Significantly, too, uniformity reduced competition and conflict amongst Brothers and it made it easier for the weaker teachers, with little formal training, to function within a highly regulated system.[34] The *Manual*, in turn, provided the inspiration for the teaching guides of the Sisters of Charity and other orders, while in England, the first Inspector of Catholic Schools reported that the Brothers' system was the model for most of the 105 schools he inspected in 1849.[35]

IV

Every minute of the school day, from nine to three o'clock, was prearranged and energies were directed towards the 'salvation of…children' and their formation as 'good practical Catholics'.[36] A striking clock was consciously placed in each class as a vital preparation for the time-discipline of the industrial age.[37] There was no opportunity for idleness and the constant activity of the children was regulated with military precision, assisted by the efficient use of a wooden clicker, or 'signal', which contributed to the robotic obedience of the exercise.[38] Teachers 'spoke little and in a whispering or low tone', while the 'signal' facilitated the maintenance of silence and order, which was considered the hallmark of effective teaching.[39] The boys were taught in variations of the 'two room system', depending on the size of the school. In the lower room they

learned 'spelling, reading and writing on slates', while the upper room was reserved for the more advanced scholars.[40] Normally, there was more than one Brother in each room, and the spatial arrangements of the classrooms were carefully prescribed to accommodate large numbers and to maximise his moral influence. From a raised platform, the Brother exercised a Foucauldian surveillance that characterised early-modern schooling and prepared children for the discipline of employment.[41] Moreover, within this choreographed context, the Brother himself became 'a silent by-stander and inspector', and the obedience of the children was not to him personally but to the rules, thus the children were provided with a transferable respect for authority that they carried through life.[42]

In a radical departure from traditional practice, Edmund Rice hoped to educate through a 'spirit of love rather than fear'.[43] This was an ambitious aspiration in an age where Irish schools was frequently harsh and brutal, as recorded in the *First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry* (1825), which describes instances of savage brutality, including the use of horse whips by masters.[44] By contrast, the Brothers aspired to remove 'as much as possible, everything like corporal punishment' from their schools, and relied instead on intuitive and emotional means of securing order that had been pioneered by contemporary reformers.[45] Rice banned the use of 'whipping' and allowed only for 'slight punishments' for 'very serious faults'.[46] Successive visitors and Government reports noted that the Brothers seldom resorted to physical punishment but relied instead on a system of rewards, premiums, 'humiliations' and other chastisements.[47] However, corporal punishment was never entirely banished from the schools. In his memoir, for instance, Edward O'Flynn, who had been a student in Cork's 'North Mon' in the late 1840s, recalled Br John Wiseman, a former civil engineer and author of several of the Brothers' celebrated textbooks, punishing a liar by chasing 'the victim round the school, caning him at the same time'.[48] Moreover, successive revisions of the Brothers' Rule and teaching manuals brought a dilution of Rice's original prohibition, which suggests both a philosophical shift and perhaps an increase in the incidence of corporal punishment within the schools.

V

This regimented system nurtured the dispositions employers expected in their workers. 'Good habits' had been a constant theme of educational discourse of the eighteenth century, but in the reforming agenda, the contemporary 'ideology of the schools' religious training assumed para-

mount importance. The Brothers sought to shape the behavioural traits of students, but especially to develop character, to infuse internalised moral regulation and self-discipline.[49] The English tourists, Mr and Mrs Hall on their visit to Waterford's Mount Sion in 1840, noted that the masters' greatest concern was the 'training of the affections the manners and the habits' of the boys.[50] Indeed, the *Manual* asserted that this formation 'may prove of much greater advantage to them than their literary or scientific attainments', but that without it boys would remain 'unfit for the commonest duties of society'.[51]

The Brothers' formation extended to the physical appearance of the boys and each day began with a cleanliness inspection. This preparation for employment included training in diction, posture and deportment. Above all, the system sought to engender self-control—the quality most admired by the middle classes—in children who might otherwise have been running wild through the streets. In the Brothers' schools children were socialised to behave with 'modesty and decorum... Rude and disorderly conduct' was forbidden and teachers were to correct the boys' 'awkward and clownish habits'. They were taught to 'sit, stand, move, and address a person with the modesty, gracefulness, and propriety', which polite society expected.[52]

The school curriculum reflected a similar modernizing tendency in its orientation towards the demands of an increasingly commercialised society that required a literate workforce. Exaggerated claims have been made for the scope of the education offered by the first Brothers, as instanced by Normoyle's assertion that 'Edmund Rice gave a graded teaching from the lowest primary level to a complete secondary education'.[53] At one level this is correct, but it requires qualification. The vast majority of students remained only a short time at Rice's schools, and even then, attendance was frustrated by the cycles of the agricultural year and the counter attractions of the city.[54] The 1837 returns for Hanover Street School in Dublin, for instance, cite the enrolment as 550, yet 'counting those who are obliged to be frequently absent', the average daily attendance at the school was 480.[55]

There were bitter critics like James Bicheno who claimed that the chief instruction given by the Brothers was 'bad writing, bad reading and tolerable arithmetic' (1830).[56] Yet in his evidence before a Select Committee of the House of Lords (1837), Rev. George Dwyer, rector of Ardrahan, hailed the schools in Mill Street, Dublin, and Cork as the 'most perfect

schools' he had ever been in. There he witnessed 'the most extraordinary progress…made by children', but he was especially struck by the Brothers' flexible delivery of what might be now be called child-centred curriculum.[57] The Rector's evidence was corroborated by Edward O'Flynn, a student at the North Monastery in the late 1840s, who recalled an equally pragmatic approach:

> the master would always find out what a new boy's parents would want him to be, so as to get a suitable education, so as not to be wasting time on things he could do without, for it was uncertain when they would be taken away to business.[58]

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Hall, who toured Ireland in 1840, noted that the Brothers offered boys 'an education suited exactly to their condition in life'.[59] Such practicality was entirely consistent with the Brothers' original aim, which was, in Br Austin Grace's expression, the provision of 'a suitable education, to qualify [boys] for business and the various departments of commercial life'.[60] Practicality was the hallmark of the system. Indeed Rice's retention of a tailor at Mount Sion reflects a desire to not just to clothe the poor, but to dress them for their employment by the shopkeepers, merchants and tradesmen of the city.[61] An additional feature of their schools was the maintenance of a lending library of improving books, which the boys were encouraged to read to their parents at night. By 1822, for instance, the lending library at Hanover Street contained over 1000 books, including practical manuals, such as Michael Donovan's *Domestic Economy* (1830), which contained chapters on brewing and distilling—vital occupations in Dublin's inner-city.[62] This was the vocational preparation required by the children of the poor; basic numeracy, literacy in English and the necessary social skills to function in an increasingly bourgeois society.

Methodism has been described as 'the midwife of social and political progress', on account of the self-discipline, order and organisational skills it brought to the working classes in England and Wales.[63] Similarly in Ireland, the Brothers instilled in their pupils the virtues of discipline, hard-work and sobriety. These values were at the core of their programme and were celebrated by contemporary commentators. Richard Ryland, in spite of his hostility to the 'unhappy' Catholic ethos of the schools, expressed satisfaction for the work of the Christian Brothers.

> They have already impressed upon the lower classes a character which hitherto was unknown to them: and in the number of intelligent and respectable tradesmen, clerks and servants which they have sent forth, bear the most unquestionable testimony to the public services of Edmund Rice.[64]

However, Ryland's identification of the 'unhappy' ethos touched on the heart of Rice's ambition, which was not the provision of education where none existed, but rather the establishment of an explicitly Catholic education. Indeed, in many cases, Rice opened schools with the specific intention of replacing existing schools that, if not overtly proselytising, were neutral on the business of salvation. In the view of one contemporary, Rice's mission was not simply the material improvement of his scholars but rather his desire to see them 'godly'.[65] Such sentiments were clearly articulated in his correspondence, while the Rule and teaching *Manual* were unambiguous in their definition of the Brothers' purpose.[66] Essentially, the system was an attempt to adapt European Catholic pedagogy to the particular needs of the Irish Church. And just as the secular instruction in the Brothers' schools sought to foster internalised self-discipline, so too, the catechesis was directed towards the formation of religious dispositions and a commitment to the Catholic way of life.

To this end, each school day began with an elaborate morning offering and, in keeping with the tradition of the continental orders, the entire day was punctuated with the recitation of the Hail Mary on the strike of every hour, A half hour was set aside each day for a formal catechesis, which Rice believed was 'the most salutary part of the system'.[67] Yet while this lesson was isolated for formal instruction, the entire day was run through with a Catholic ethos. Indeed, Rice's concern for the whole man gave the system its 'mixed character', where religion and the secular subjects were integrated, and taught side-by-side, in contrast to the 'separate' instruction of the technically non-denominational national schools. It was this fundamental difference, in fact, which set the Brothers on a collision course with the national schools and led Rice to withdraw his schools after a short flirtation with the system.

It was not enough to teach the children Christian Doctrine; the Brothers sought to inspire devotion to the church. This was no mean task because, contrary to the popular notion that Catholicism embraced the Irish of all classes, the poor were often alienated from the institutional Church. If, as Magray argues, 'Catholicism had to be taught aggressively to the majority of the population', the Brother's system was designed to meet that challenge.[68]

The Presentation Rule laid down that the Brothers should accustom the children to 'think and speak reverently of God and holy things'; they were not to be over-curious in their questioning, but rather to 'captivate their understanding in obedience to faith'.[69] The schools sought to foster an internalised obedience to the Church. Children learned 'to honour and respect their parents and superiors', but emphasis on the special reverence due to priests brought criticism that the system cultivated 'ready instruments for the priests' domination'.[70] They were also taught to examine their conscience in preparation for Confession, and Rice's system provided for the regular reception of the sacraments.[71] The *Manual*, for instance, contained a pro forma school register that included columns in which the boys' monthly Confession and Communion were to be recorded.[72] As the century progressed, preparation for First Communion and Confirmation assumed increasing importance, and often the sacraments marked the end of primary school and the beginning of pupils' working lives.[73] Yet, while religion appears to dominate the day, the focus was less intense than in many Protestant Bible schools where frequently the only reading allowed was from the Bible.[74] Neither did the Brothers' regime include the de La Salle and Presentation Sisters' practice of daily Mass for the children.

Inevitably, given these emphases, Edmund Rice's system was not without its critics. Few challenged his pedagogical method, but most rounded on the religious ethos of the schools and the perpetuation of 'popish superstition'. The traveller, Henry Inglis' observations were typical of many:

> The most important institution I visited [in Waterford] was a Catholic school at which upwards of 700 children were instructed…although I am far from questioning the motives of the founder Mr Rice or the young men who thus made a sacrifice of themselves, yet I cannot regard favourably an institution under such tuition. I know too much of Catholicism in other countries to doubt that intellectual training will be made very secondary to theological instruction…I would rather not see a system of education extensively pursued in which the inculcation of popish tenets forms so chief a part'.[75]

Writing in 1825, one observer condemned the Brothers' schools as 'the most intolerant and mischievous which any individual or society has attempted to mask under the disguise of Christian instruction'.[76] Bicheno, too, held up the Brothers' schools to demonstrate 'how little likelihood there was of Protestants and Catholics joining cordially in the cause of education'.[77]

VI

It is ironic that the Christian Brothers brought the pedagogy of the Counter Reformation to Ireland in the context of what has been called the 'Second Reformation' there.[78] The religious revival that characterised the early years of the nineteenth century was not confined to the Catholic Church, nor was it simply an Irish phenomenon. This was part of a wider renewal that had swept Great Britain and Ireland, dramatically transforming the religious landscape in the process. In Britain one consequence of the revival was a renewed interest in missionary activity and the Catholics of Ireland were as attractive a target for evangelisation as the 'heathens' of Africa or India.[79] With this task in mind a plethora of missionary societies were formed in Ireland, the more important of which included the Hibernian Bible Society (1806), the Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their own Language (Irish Society) (1818) and the Scripture Readers' Society (1822).

The Methodists were among the first to enter the great crusade. John Wesley made his first of 21 visits to Ireland in 1747. By 1809, there were 12 Methodist missionaries working in 6 areas, while ten years later 21 missionaries worked in 14 stations dotted around the country. Like many of the other missionaries, Methodists believed their task in Ireland was not simply one of conversion. This was an opportunity to civilise Ireland, to bring the gospel to the deluded Irish peasantry and in so doing, the problems of the island could be solved. More than this, the Methodists looked upon Ireland as the centre of a worldwide conflict between heretical Catholicism and biblical Protestantism.[80] In this environment, religious rivalry and conflict increasingly became the norm as resurgent Catholicism clashed headlong with evangelical Protestantism and, more often than not, that antagonism was centred on the education question. Since their first arrival, the provision of schools had formed a vital part of the evangelical crusade. The Bible societies established schools in which free education was offered to all those who were prepared to accept religious instruction. With financial assistance from the Treasury, these bodies set up free schools in places that had previously lacked educational facilities and often they attracted pupils away from nearby pay schools. The Societies were most active in poorer areas, urban centres such as the teeming Liberties of Dublin, or counties such as Cavan or Mayo, where the Catholic revival was less advanced.[81] This trend was particularly evident in Co. Clare where the London Hibernian Society had over 80 schools with 1000 Catholic children on their rolls.[82]

The Catholic bishops enlisted the support of the Brothers in these 'Bible Wars'. There were structural issues, however, which limited the flexibility of their response. From the outset, they had been a diocesan congregation. Each community of the Institute, though united by a common founder and vision, was an independent foundation subject only to the bishop of the diocese. In time the weakness of this system became apparent, since the evangelicals were particularly active outside the areas of the Brothers' traditional influence. In the crisis, the Archbishop of Dublin proposed an amalgamation of the various communities and urged Rice to seek papal approval for a new Rule and constitutions that would enable the transfer of men from diocese to diocese. An application followed and, in 1820, Pope Pius established the Brothers as a Pontifical Congregation under the authority of a Superior General.

This reform increased the flexibility of the Brothers in their opposition to militant Protestantism. They proved particularly effective in the cities where their innovative system was applied with satisfactory results. In terms of enrolment, these big schools, run by the Brothers, were equivalent to 10 or 12 smaller schools. In Archbishop Murray's Dublin parish there were no fewer than 36 Protestant free schools attended by upwards of 1000 Catholic children. To counteract these, Rice opened a school in Jervis Street in 1828.[83] A similar role, of course, was performed by the teaching sisters in their inner-city schools, and there is evidence of practical collaboration between the male and female religious orders. By the 1820s the Brothers had 'perfected' their system of education, but in Dublin the Sisters of Charity faced a daunting task at their new school in Gardiner Street, where the 'children were first subdued before they were taught'.[84] Towards that end, Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the Irish Sisters of Charity, sought assistance from Br Bernard Duggan, principal of the Jervis Street school. The convent annals record his efforts and present a vivid account of the Brother's frantic activity in the classroom, which was a far cry from the impressions formed from a reading of the Christian Brothers' *Manual* (1845) he had written, with its emphasis upon the robotic silence of the master. The convent annalist remarked how Duggan, a small and frail brother, 'had to whistle and shout to secure' silence in the classroom, but that he soon took charge'.[85]

During the Great Famine (1845–1850), decades later, the 'Biblical' threat was keenly felt. In that context, the Brothers were particularly active in the urban ghettos which became the refuge of the hungry poor, and there they opposed what became known as 'souperism', or the phenomenon

of Catholics abandoning their faith in return for the 'soup' offered by certain Protestant charities.[86] Indeed, the Brothers' decision to establish a foundation at Francis Street, Dublin (1846), was a direct response to the intrigues of 'perverters' who 'with meal and money bags…tempt[ed] the poor to forfeit their glorious birthright in Heaven'.[87] Similar motives brought the Christian Brothers to Dingle (1848), where, according to Father Philip Dowley CM, the 'demon of heresy' had induced 'hundreds of the ignorant poor' to sell their souls 'to the devil by outwardly renouncing the faith of their Fathers'.[88] In Kerry, the Brothers worked not just in the school, but they also accompanied the Vincentian 'missioners' to the remote parts of the county, translating, catechizing and seeking out apostates.[89]

VII

The Christian Brothers were characterised by one Protestant critic as a 'fraternity…as exclusive and mischievous as it is well possible to conceive'.[90] This assessment was not without foundation, and amongst certain Catholic commentators, too, there was a sense that the Brothers were at the extreme of opinion. The experience of the 'Bible Wars' had placed them in a Counter Reformationary role, but it might be argued that this was not merely accidental, but in their essence. Certainly, Edmund Rice took his inspiration from the saints of the Catholic Reformation. He was particularly influenced by his patron Ignatius of Loyola, and in practical ways his fledgling congregation mediated the Counter-Reformationary pedagogy of De La Salle and his contemporaries to Ireland. In many regards, the Brothers were in advance of Catholic Ireland in this regard. Certainly, the confidence of the Christian Brothers was at odds of the mildness of Archbishop Murray and the liberal bishops of the early nineteenth century. So it was, for instance, that the Brother's ideological rejection of the mixed-approach National Schools brought stern criticism and rejection from Episcopal quarters, effectively halting the expansion of the congregation. Neither were the bishops enamoured by the papal status extended to the congregation by Pope Pius VII, and issues of authority would impede their relationships with the episcopate.

The consecration of Paul Cullen as Archbishop of Armagh in 1850, however, brought a radical change in the character of the Irish Church, creating an environment more receptive to the Brothers' zeal.[91] From his first tentative steps at Mount Sion, Edmund Rice had promoted the peda-

gogy of the European Counter Reformation as a radical voice within the Irish church. However, in the context of the 'Devotional Revolution', and the subsequent Catholic Ascendancy that endured for a century and more, the uncompromising confidence of the Brothers set the standard for Catholic Education that nurtured and was synonymous with the Catholic-Nationalist character of the age.[92]

Notes

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18. Bishop Coppinger of Cloyne, cited in T.J. Walsh, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters* (Dublin, 1959), 42.
19. Edmund Rice to the Holy See, n.d. [Autumn 1819], APF, SORCG, Vol. 926, F., 146–48.
20. Edmund Rice, North Richmond Street Appeal, n.d. [1829?], APF, S.C., Irlanda, 1828–34, vol. 25, f., 748.
21. Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849) author of *Practical Education* (1796). Joseph Lancaster (1778–1838) and Andrew Bell (1753–1832) founders of the Monitorial System of instruction.
22. H. Hislop, 'The 1806–12 Board of Education and non-denominational education in Ireland', *Oideas, Journal of the Department of Education*, vol. 40 (Spring 1993), 48–61.
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