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Trapped Between Two Worlds:

Edward Nangle, Achill Island, and Sectarian Competition in Ireland,

1800-1862

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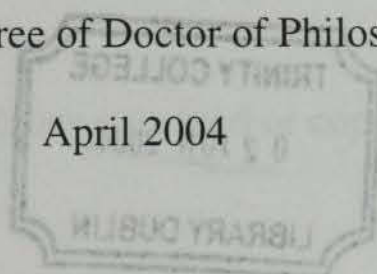
Edward Nangle, Achill Island, and Sectarian Competition in Ireland, 1800-1862

Thomas J Kelley, M.Phil.

Submitted to the Department of Modern History, Trinity College, Dublin,

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2004



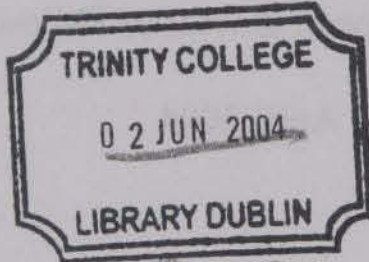
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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AMH</i>	<i>Achill Missionary Herald and Western Witness</i>
D.D.A.	Dublin Diocesan Archive
<i>DEP</i>	<i>Dublin Evening Post</i>
B.L.	British Library
I.C.R.	Irish College, Rome
MFCI	Microfilm Church of Ireland
MUN	Muniments of Trinity College
N.A.I.	National Archives Ireland
N.L.I.	National Library Ireland
PP	Parliamentary Papers
SOC	State of the Country Papers
T.C.D.	Trinity College Dublin

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Summary

This dissertation centers on Edward Nangle, a Church of Ireland clergyman, who established a protestant missionary settlement on Achill Island, Co. Mayo, in 1834. My purpose in writing it has been threefold: (1) to examine the intellectual and social underpinnings of the evangelical movement among Ireland's protestant community during the first half of the nineteenth-century, particularly among that section whose denominational allegiance was to the established Church of Ireland; (2) to better understand the relationships between Protestants and Catholics in Connacht during a time when religious identities in Ireland became more sharply defined; and (3) to investigate how the sectarian competition on Achill Island during the middle years of the nineteenth-century shaped the religious identities of those associated with the Protestant missionary settlement, both directly and indirectly, and how the conflicts and confrontations between Nangle and the Roman Catholic priests on the island affected the lives of the impoverished islanders.

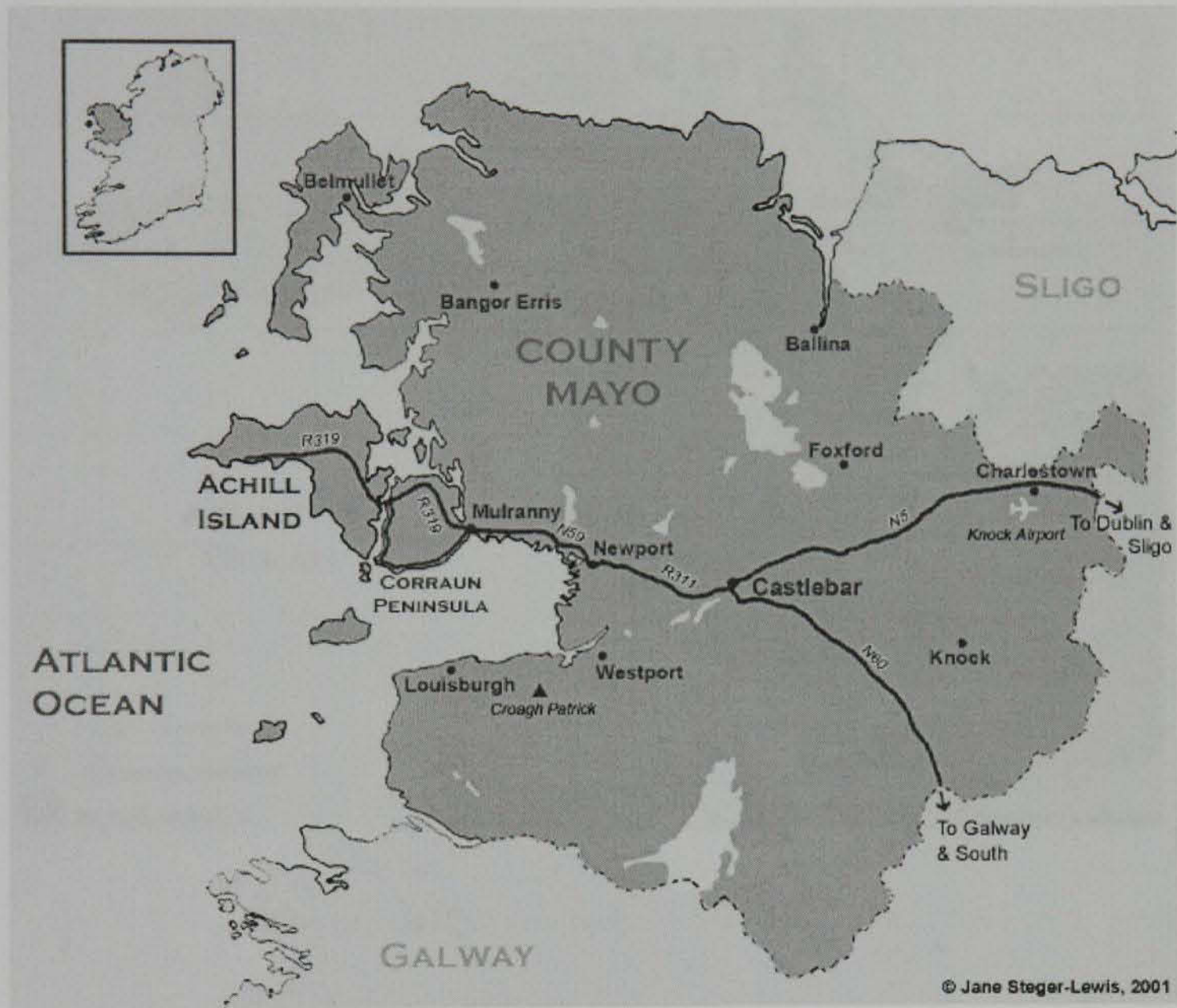
Since it is virtually impossible in Ireland, like in most other places, to completely separate culture from religion, this study also explores the differences between the respective cultural spheres of Protestantism and Catholicism in early nineteenth-century rural Ireland. Although educated at one of Britain's finest universities, Trinity College, Dublin, where undergraduates undertook a regimented course crammed with the rational empiricism of Locke's *Essay on human understanding* and the High Church theology of "Leland and Porteus", Nangle nonetheless felt that he was living in the "last times", and looked to the pages of the Bible, rather

than the undergraduate course, to unlock the questions of secular history. The first chapter examines the intellectual origins of Nangle's evangelicalism during the early years of the nineteenth-century, with particular attention paid to the undergraduate and divinity courses in operation at Trinity College.

In order to try to understand the Protestant mind of men like Edward Nangle, the mindset of Irish Catholics is considered. The second chapter examines the relationships between Protestants and Catholics in rural parts of Ireland, particularly in Connacht, where sectarian tension and millennial expectations rose to the surface as the economy slowed during the 1820s. During this time, Nangle, as a newly appointed Irish Church curate, experienced the increasing cynicism between Protestants and Catholics which set the stage for his missionary work on Achill during the 1830s. The third and fourth chapters present an in-depth investigation of the Achill Mission from 1834-1854. The fifth chapter looks at the congregational identities of the Protestant community as seen through their hymnody.

The conflicts and confrontations generated from the sectarian clash between the missionary settlement and the Catholic Church changed the religious and cultural landscape of west Mayo for generations. Furthermore, Nangle looked to the "signs of the times" for clues of Christ's return to secular history. The final chapter, therefore, puts a millenarian cap on the dissertation, as it concludes with another dive into Nangle's evangelical mind.

Map of County Mayo



The Historiography of the Second Reformation in Ireland

What is meant by Protestant evangelicalism? Over the years, many scholars have tried to answer this question when investigating the religious history of the United States, Great Britain and Ireland during the nineteenth century.¹ Unfortunately, there is no simple answer, for the word 'evangelical has a complex history'.² Even the seemingly best qualified have been left scratching their heads, as Lord Shaftesbury, one of the leading evangelical lights in Britain during the nineteenth century, did at the twilight of his life: 'I know what constituted an Evangelical in former times,' he wrote, 'I have no clear notion what constitutes one now'.³ Through the years evangelicalism has influenced many groups and institutions, and like a 'wine that has been poured into many bottles', it has found a home among several Christian denominations.⁴ While evangelicalism might be a difficult term to define, some of evangelicalism's basic characteristics need clarification before its influence on Irish life, especially on Achill Island, Co. Mayo, can be measured.

Some contemporary historians, like Joseph Liechty, have spent much time and energy trying to define what evangelicalism means within an Irish

¹ See for example: David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989); Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession: radical evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815-35*; John Wolfe, *The Protestant crusade in Britain* (Oxford, 1991); Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-1870* (Dublin, 1978); David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society, 1740-1890* (London and New York, 1992); Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism: British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago and London, 1970); Ian Bradley, *The call to seriousness: The evangelical impact on the Victorians* (London, 1976).

² John Wolffe, 'Introduction' in John Wolffe (ed.), *Evangelical faith and public zeal: evangelicals and society in Britain 1780-1980* (London, 1995), p. 4.

³ E. Hodder, *The life and work of the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, K.G.* (London, 1888), p. 738.

⁴ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain*, p. 1.

context. Liechty has argued that evangelicalism began in England as a church reform movement in the mid eighteenth century in direct opposition to Deism, the extreme tendency in eighteenth-century religious thought that posited an impersonal and distant God who played no part in the maintenance of His creation.⁵ This explanation is helpful, but the root of evangelicalism can be taken even further back to Pietism, the early eighteenth-century German movement that sought to transform the world based on man's faith.⁶ While Deism and evangelicalism were both religious and intellectual by-products of the Enlightenment, the former naturally emphasized the immanence of God in the world. A key British evangelical pioneer, like John Wesley, who formed a 'Holy Club' at Oxford in 1729, had noticed a spiritual lethargy within the established church and attempted to inject new zeal into the existing Protestant denominations by creating within them more active, energetic, and passionate Christians whose spiritual life would be measured by a conversion experience, which in turn would lay the foundation for a new personal relationship with God. Therefore, the most noticeable feature of eighteenth-century evangelicalism was its emphasis on the individual. Through a conversion experience God would once again matter in the every day lives of His people. Both supporters and opponents of these reformers called this 'vital' or 'evangelical' religion and by the nineteenth century, it had eclipsed Deism as the major strand within British Protestantism, influencing politics and culture as well as religious practice at large.

⁵ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism, Trinity College Dublin, and the mission of the Church of Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century" (Ph.D. Thesis, Maynooth 1987), p. 3.

⁶ W.R. Ward, 'Power and Piety: The Origins of Religious Revival in the Early Eighteenth Century', in *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library*, 63, 1980-81, p. 235.

The conversion experience strengthened another trait common to eighteenth-century evangelicalism: an ecclesiology that emphasized the invisible and universal church; this in turn created an indifference to denominational church structures, bringing like-minded evangelicals from different backgrounds closer together in spiritual cooperation. The classic example of this development, especially in Ireland, was Methodism. Methodism began in the mid-eighteenth-century as an informal collection of Anglicans committed to living a holy life, and quickly expanded to become a denomination-within-a denomination, attracting members from a variety of churches, with a great number coming from dissenting places of worship. From the beginning its leader, John Wesley, considered Ireland as a major part of his spiritual empire. Between his first visit to Dublin in 1747, when he took over the Old Baptist Hall in Swift's Alley, until his death in 1791, Wesley made a remarkable twenty-one visits to Ireland. Wesley's disdain for denominational allegiance was well known and he encouraged the Methodist emphasis on intense spiritual experience rather than participation in a particular church structure.⁷ His ambition was to reawaken a complacent Protestant church establishment, but he also actively sought the allegiance of the Irish Catholic population, a cause that was later taken up by evangelicals from the Church of Ireland in the early nineteenth century. Ten years after John Wesley's death, the Irish Methodist Conference instructed its missionaries 'to do their utmost from this time to form societies among the awakened Roman Catholics, or to bring as many of them as possible into our

⁷ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 55.

present societies'.⁸ Wesley's emphasis on spiritual experience rather than denominational affiliation helped him to gather together the loose ends of Irish Protestantism which, according to David Hempton, mainly consisted of artisans in newly industrialised areas, soldiers garrisoned in towns, and the occasional estranged aristocrat.⁹ Wesley's openness and charisma rubbed off on others, men like Albert Blest, a nonconformist evangelical from Co. Sligo, who believed that he worked for the universal kingdom of heaven and with this in mind, 'stretched forth the right hand of Christian fellowship to any individual in whom he recognised the Saviour's image, irrespective of religious denomination'.¹⁰ Although evangelicals often operated within rigidly defined church structures, they tended nevertheless to work closely with one another, at least initially, ignoring denominational lines of demarcation in order to promote the greater goal of winning those outside of the fold into their society.

Another defining characteristic of the evangelicals has always been intense anti-Catholicism. In many countries evangelicalism was profoundly anti-Catholic, but nowhere did this have a more lasting effect than in Ireland. David Hempton, in his study of British evangelicalism, reminds us that, 'until 1830 one is hard pressed to find evidence to indicate that they [English evangelicals] were to the forefront of 'no popery''.¹¹ In fact most evangelical MPs from England voted for Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Yet, the

⁸ As cited in June R. Binns, "A history of Methodism in Ireland from Wesley's death in 1791, to the reunion of Primitives and Wesleyans in 1878" (Q.U.B., M.A. Thesis 1960), p. 59.

⁹ David Hempton, 'Methodism in Irish Society, 1770-1830,' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 36 (1986), pp. 117-142.

¹⁰ Naiben C. Motherwell, *A memoir of the late Albert Blest, for many years agent and secretary for Ireland of the London Hibernian Society* (Dublin, 1843), p. 28.

¹¹ David Hempton, 'Evangelicalism and eschatology', in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xxxi, no. 2 (April 1980), p. 184.

preponderance of evangelicals in Ireland feared and vigorously opposed the passing of Catholic emancipation. This suggests that their opposition was perhaps not a function of their evangelicalism, but of the wider Irish context.¹² It also suggests the importance that Ireland may have had for the development of British evangelicalism; Hempton suggests that its anti-Catholic dimension came directly from Catholic opposition to the Methodists in Ireland.¹³

While the rationalism of the Enlightenment did indeed soften some of the bitter memories from the Reformation period, the most fervent evangelicals found it impossible to offer a positive evaluation of Catholicism as a religious system, especially after the rebellion of 1798 made Irish Protestants even more suspicious of their Catholic neighbours. Therefore, by the 1820s, when relations between evangelical Protestants and the Catholic Church in Ireland became especially tense, the only channel of communication between the two groups was through sectarian controversy. Alan Acheson, who has studied the role of the evangelicals in the Church of Ireland, presents a fair, yet rather over-coloured evaluation of evangelical attitudes towards Catholicism in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Thus he has argued that a hostile confrontation between Protestants and Catholics was inevitable:

They must maintain their 'protest' against the doctrines of the Roman Church, for these were held to be, as much by Evangelicals as by Reformers, the negation of Scriptural truth. Indeed, the post-Tridentine Roman Church was considered more systematically anti-evangelical than that from which the Reformers had 'come out'. The only 'dialogue', then, that the Evangelicals could hold with the Roman Church, was that of controversy: the only attitude, that of repudiation of her erroneous doctrine.¹⁴

¹² Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 86.

¹³ David Hempton, 'The Methodist crusade in Ireland,' in *Irish Historical Studies*, 22 no. 85 (Mar. 1980), pp. 33-48.

¹⁴ Alan Acheson, "The evangelicals in the Church of Ireland, 1754-1859" (Ph.D. Thesis, Q.U.B. 1967), p. 234-235.

These key features of Irish evangelicalism – an ecclesiology that emphasized interdenominational cooperation among Protestants and a growing anti-Catholicism – helped to set evangelical Christians apart from other religious groups of the time. From the conversion experience, evangelicals derived another key attribute, a missionary orientation that encouraged strong attention to religious duty and a penchant for building charitable institutions. From 1787 Irish evangelicals were involved in the creation of many missionary and educational societies. While they served many different purposes, the majority of these Irish charitable societies were to educate the Irish poor, familiarise them with the Bible, and help in converting them to Protestantism.¹⁵ Older eighteenth-century concepts of philanthropy differed greatly from those of the evangelicals in the early nineteenth century; the former was not possessed of any visionary or apocalyptic urge to construct a New Jerusalem or to build the world in God's image, but these were the hallmarks of the evangelical approach after 1801.¹⁶ This is not to suggest that eighteenth-century men like Jonathan Swift, dean of St. Patrick's, or Bartholomew Mosse, who founded the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin, were devoid of Christian charity – quite the opposite. As Irene Whelan has pointed out, the eighteenth-century notion of Christian philanthropy is important in shaping the way evangelicalism took root in the Church of Ireland, for it 'engrafted itself onto a tradition of philanthropy already in existence'.¹⁷ Yet, there was a secular dimension to their approach, entirely absent from the programmes of later evangelicals.

¹⁵ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicals", p. 8.

¹⁶ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion and the polarization of Protestant-Catholic relations in Ireland, 1780-1830" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Madison-Wisconsin 1994), p. 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

The great growth of philanthropic societies in Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century is testimony to the growth and influence of evangelicalism. As a corollary to their conversion experience, passionate evangelicals in Ireland sought to improve both the material and spiritual condition of Irish society. While evangelical men and women did not of course run all of the new asylums and welfare institutions, many of the new initiatives carried the trademarks of evangelicalism. The Bethesda Chapel, located in central Dublin and founded in 1786 by William Smyth, protégé of Lady Huntingdon and a nephew of the former archbishop of Dublin, operated an orphan school, an asylum for girls, and living space for reforming prostitutes attached to it.¹⁸ By the 1820s, there seemed to be a charitable society linked to every likely and unlikely cause. Another group, the Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor (a.k.a. The Kildare Place Society), was founded in 1811 by a number of Dublin citizens drawn from various religious denominations (including Roman Catholics) in the hope of conferring lasting benefit upon their country by offering high-quality education to the poor.¹⁹ However by the middle 1820s, influential Catholics had withdrawn their support, charging the Kildare Place Society with proselytising. The controversy surrounding these societies generated many of the social tensions of the era. And from 1822, when the archbishop of Dublin, William Magee, delivered a pastoral address that gave offence to both Catholics and Presbyterians alike, polemical tracts and public disputations

¹⁸ Aaron Crossley Hobart Seymour, *The life and times of Selina, countess of Huntingdon* (2 vols, London, 1839-1840), ii, p. 202.

¹⁹ Helen R. Clayton, "Societies formed to educate the poor in Ireland in the late and early nineteenth centuries" (M.Litt thesis, T.C.D. 1980), p. 149.

became an ever present feature of public life.²⁰ Yet much of the rhetorical groundwork had been set long before, not least by the many evangelical educational and charitable institutions established in Dublin.

While British and American historians have long explored the evangelical tradition in their respective countries, Irish evangelicalism has been a neglected topic.²¹ During the nineteenth century, evangelicals in Ireland were at least as significant a cultural and religious force as they were in England, Scotland, Wales, and the United States, yet only a handful of serious studies dealing with Irish evangelicalism and its cultural manifestations have appeared over the last forty years. Many modern historians have concentrated on studies of British and American evangelicalism, thereby bringing the field into a sophisticated state of historiographical development, but their work cannot be directly or automatically applied to evangelicalism in Ireland.²² For example, in a study of American evangelicalism, William McLoughlin has described a process of Calvinist/Arminian doctrinal synthesis, weighted toward the Arminian end of the spectrum, as a trait of evangelicalism in the United States in the first third of the nineteenth century.²³ Such a synthesis was entirely absent from Ireland at this time; indeed choosing between a Calvinistic and an Arminian

²⁰ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 8.

²¹ Some fine work on British and American evangelicalism are the following: Ian Bradley, *The call to seriousness* (London, 1976); Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition, 1760-1810* (New Jersey, 1975); William McLoughlin, (ed.), *The American evangelicals* (New York, 1968); Klaas Runia, 'Evangelicals and the doctrine of the church in European church history', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, viii, no.1 (April 1984), pp. 40-57; G.V. Bennet and J.D. Walsh (eds.), *Essays in modern English church history* (London, 1966); Max Warren, *What is an Evangelical?* (London, 1944).

²² Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 9.

²³ William McLoughlin (ed.), 'The American Evangelicals', p. 26.

perspective was a fundamental part of becoming an evangelical in Ireland.²⁴

In Ireland men were one or the other.

In recent years, however, attention has increasingly begun to be paid to the ways evangelicals helped to shape Irish society. These studies have added significantly to our understanding of the world of Irish evangelicalism and the reasons for its success, yet more work still needs to be done. In 1949 Thomas O'Neill, one of the first modern historians to tackle the contentious topic of Irish evangelicalism, wrote an essay investigating "souperism", or the charge that Protestant evangelical ministers offered poor Catholics food and clothing in exchange for their spiritual allegiance. The essay, 'Sidelights on Souperism', appeared in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* and presents a well-structured narrative based on reliable primary material. Yet O'Neill viewed the missionary work done by the evangelicals among Irish Catholics, especially during the years of the Great Famine, as a 'concerted effort to entice Catholics to do violence to their consciences'.²⁵ Using military imagery to depict the work done by the evangelicals during the Famine, O'Neil described it as 'an organised evangelical attack on Ireland'.²⁶ While the imagery is fair enough, it was O'Neill's, not the evangelicals'; they saw themselves as fighting *for* Ireland, not *against* it, with the enemy being the Catholic Church and her priests. Given the underdeveloped state of Irish evangelical historiography in 1949, O'Neill's essay is indeed a significant contribution, yet his confessional bias is too evident. For instance, O'Neill dismissed Protestant charges of proselytising among recent converts, supposedly carried

²⁴ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 40.

²⁵ Thomas O'Neill, 'Sidelights on souperism', in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* lxxi (1949), p. 55.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

out by agents of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, as simply 'without foundation'.²⁷ His evidence for this rejection is a reference from the *Fourth annual report of Saint Vincent de Paul*, which Dr Liechty rightly claims, 'should probably not be allowed to stand alone in refutation of charges against the Society'.²⁸

While the historiography of Irish evangelicalism is important for this thesis, so too is the scholarship that has been carried out on the "Second Reformation" in Ireland. In 1966, Brian MacNamee published an essay called 'The Second Reformation in Ireland', which described the main events and personalities of the evangelical campaign in Ireland from roughly 1820 until 1860, a period when fervent Protestants actively sought the mass conversion of Irish Catholics.²⁹ MacNamee's approach was more open-minded than O'Neill's, but his scope was too broad and his dependence on secondary material renders his argument unconvincing. Yet his even-handed treatment of all parties involved set a precedent for future work in Irish evangelicalism.

By the time MacNamee wrote, several graduate students had taken up the investigation of Irish evangelicalism. Alan Acheson submitted a doctoral thesis in Queen's University Belfast in 1967, "The evangelicals in the Church of Ireland, 1784-1859"; it added an important contribution. While Liechty has complained that Acheson wrote from a narrow, uncritical evangelical perspective, he praised the breadth and scope of this work.³⁰ Acheson's thesis contains much of value and scholars have continued to cite his work, especially passages that questioned traditional assessments of British

²⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁸ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 12.

²⁹ Brian MacNamee, 'The Second Reformation in Ireland', in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, xxxiii (Jan. 1966), p. 48-49.

³⁰ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 13.

evangelicalism. Acheson may have presented an idealised portrait of the evangelicals within the Church of Ireland, but his well-researched account revealed numerous nuggets of primary evidence.

Most of the new work before 1970 was conducted by graduate students, but by far the most influential exploration into the relations between Catholics and Protestants in nineteenth century Ireland was that carried out by the Canadian historian, the late Desmond Bowen, who had spent the early part of his career investigating nineteenth-century English church history. Three of his books, *Souperism: myth or reality?* (1970); *The Protestant crusade in Ireland* (1978); and *Protestantism and the shaping of Irish history* (1995), have had a great impact on modern understandings of the social and religious history of nineteenth-century Ireland.

By taking a detailed look at the conditions in the western dioceses of Tuam, Killala and Achonry during the Famine era, in *Souperism: myth or reality?* Desmond Bowen demonstrated how difficult it was to prove – or disprove – charges of souperism.³¹ He discovered that the concerted efforts of Catholic priests and Protestant parsons during the Famine era have been obscured by the souperism myth, which kept religious intolerance alive and prevented modern historians from studying emotional issues in Irish history objectively. Bowen, nevertheless, revealed how much of the story of souperism was based upon myth and how much upon reality. He argued that the failure of the ‘Second Reformation’ in Ireland, particularly in the Famine-stricken west, helped to bring about the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869. It was truly a pioneering study, its findings opening up new

³¹ Desmond Bowen, *Souperism, myth or reality?* (Cork, 1970), p. 20.

possibilities in Irish evangelical historiography. Yet its methodology can be criticised, for it generalizes from the particular situation in the west of Ireland to the general problem of Roman Catholic and Protestant relations throughout the middle years of the nineteenth century.³² Bowen was aware of this, for he recognised that many regions in Ireland did not exhibit the same degree of sectarian venom as did Mayo, Sligo, and Galway. Furthermore, despite Bowen's obvious narrative gift and vast biographical knowledge, he placed too much emphasis on a supposedly golden era of interdenominational peace before 1820, assuming that the real conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland only began with Archbishop William Magee's infamous primary pastoral address in 1822. This tended to take the 'Second Reformation' movement out of context, ignoring the reality of religious tensions in Irish society long before 1820. That said, Bowen's great merit was to produce the first in-depth historical account of the Protestant missions in Dingle, Co. Kerry and on Achill Island, Co. Mayo. His assessment of these Protestant colonies, which has been favourably received by later historians, was as follows:

The real importance of the colonies was ideological. What upset the majority of the Protestant population about the zealots of Dingle and Achill was that they succeeded in forcing Catholics to take the idea of a Second Reformation seriously. They represented a new militancy on the part of the missionary wing of Protestantism – and this attack seemed to be directed not only at the religious supremacy of the Catholic Church in Ireland, but at the whole social basis of Irish rural culture...They wished to change the whole basis of Irish rural society: their movement represented cultural as well as religious imperialism.³³

Bowen pointed out that only a vocal minority within the established church advocated the extreme evangelical ethos supporting these missions; the majority preferred peace and quiet with their Catholic neighbours. This was

³² Ibid., p. 19.

³³ Desmond Bowen, *Souperism: myth or reality?*, p. 104.

an important insight, for it forced later scholars to focus on the many trends and personalities within Irish Protestantism.

Bowen's research on the Dingle and Achill missions was pioneering, but it was too brief to be definitive. And while *Souperism: myth or reality?* did help to debunk the souperism myth, it characterized the 'Second Reformation' as a novelty rather than an exacerbation of sectarian discord already prevalent in Irish society. While *Souperism: myth or reality?* dealt with the tensions between Irish Catholics and Protestants over a specific period of time and in particular geographic area, Bowen's next endeavour, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-1870* was more ambitious and dealt mainly with the Protestant side, trying to understand the mindset and the ideology behind the missionary stage of the 'Second Reformation'. Most historians praised Bowen for tackling a neglected topic, yet *The Protestant crusade* had its detractors. Some of this criticism is deserved, but most of it comes from the fact that Bowen took a pioneering role in an understudied aspect of Irish history.

Bowen started from the premise that in Ireland during the nineteenth century there existed two imagined 'nations', Protestants and Catholics.³⁴ If left to their own devices, Bowen perhaps naively argued, they might have developed a peaceful, pluralistic society.³⁵ But along came the evangelicals who led the 'Second Reformation' and opened up the potential divisions. The evangelicals did indeed have a lasting effect on Irish society – even after the nineteenth century – but such a monocausal explanation for the tense relationship between Protestants and Catholics overlooks the plethora of

³⁴ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 100.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

political and economic factors at work and overstates religious factors. Ignoring the development of evangelicalism in the eighteenth century, Bowen still characterized nineteenth-century Protestant missionary efforts and the tensions they created as essentially new phenomena. Others, especially Oliver MacDonagh, K. Theodore Hoppen, and Donald Akenson, were critical of this line of argument in Bowen.³⁶

In fairness, any groundbreaking historical work is easy target for criticism. While Bowen's treatment of Catholicism is perhaps coloured by his own Anglican upbringing, Akenson's claim that Bowen's problems in assessing the role of the Protestant evangelicals arose from the lack of 'a cold and sceptical eye' goes too far. Bowen's Anglicanism probably did more to illuminate than to obscure.³⁷ His deep knowledge of key personalities in Irish Protestantism allowed him to present sympathetic portrayals of men like Alexander Dallas, the rector of Wonston who founded the Irish Church Missions in 1845, and even of Edward Nangle, the founder of the Achill Mission in 1834 – men who had been treated much more harshly by Bowen's predecessors. Yet even Patrick Corish, who in a brief entry for *Irish historiography, 1970-1979*, suggested that Bowen had not 'risen above writing in the Anglican tradition', and asserted that Bowen's personal biases seem to have overtaken his fairness.³⁸ This remains an open question, but the genuine breadth and scope of *The Protestant crusade in Ireland* overcomes any possible shortcoming.

³⁶ Donald Akenson, review of *Protestant crusade* in *American Historical Review*, lxxxiv (Feb. 1979); K. Theodore Hoppen, review of *Protestant crusade* in *English Historical Review*, xciv (July 1979), pp. 656-7; Oliver MacDonagh, review of *Protestant crusade* in *Times Literary Supplement* (4 Aug. 1978), p. 885.

³⁷ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 24.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

In the years since Bowen's publications, innovative work on Irish evangelicalism in general and on the 'Second Reformation' in particular has appeared. Joseph Liechty's doctoral study, 'Irish evangelicalism, Trinity College, Dublin, and the mission of the Church of Ireland at the end of the eighteenth-century' (1987), is a major addition; he argued that Irish evangelicalism originally derived from English experience and initiatives, first from the Methodists and later from other English sources.³⁹ In choosing to focus on the late eighteenth century, he complemented previous work on Irish evangelicalism and attempted to place it in the context of the ongoing development of the Church of Ireland's mission, specifically as that mission was formed and mediated by Trinity College, Dublin, a place that became the intellectual hub and defender of the Protestant establishment in Ireland. According to Liechty, many of those who went on to play leading roles in the 'Second Reformation' were the direct products of an identifiable Trinity network composed of ordained fellows, ex-fellows, students and graduates.⁴⁰ Bowen and others before him had mainly examined Protestant and Catholic relations in Ireland during the nineteenth century, but Liechty chose to concentrate on evangelical developments before the bitter years of the 'Second Reformation'. The main reason why so many evangelicals came out of Trinity in the late eighteenth century, he concluded, was due to the influence of its fellows, who inculcated students with a strong sense of the Church of Ireland's mission to the Irish people.

Overall, Liechty's argument is convincing. His general description of Trinity's intellectual characters and its ethos in the 1790s is particularly

³⁹ Ibid., p. 23

⁴⁰ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 149

insightful. Yet, in his search for credible evidence to explain the large numbers of evangelicals educated at Trinity, he failed to consult at least one obvious source: the undergraduate syllabus. While personal contacts and religious experiences in the Irish capital did indeed make an impression upon Trinity men, the books studied may perhaps have made the most immediate impact. All undergraduates, regardless of residence, had to pass a quarterly exam before rising with their class, a common denominator that Liechty overlooked. In this work I will extend Liechty's work on Trinity evangelicalism with an examination of the undergraduate course used when Edward Nangle, the main subject of the thesis, attended Trinity (1819 until 1823).

Liechty's work sparked wider interest in Irish evangelicalism. Irene Whelan's M.A. thesis, 'New lights and old enemies: the 'Second Reformation' and the Catholics of Ireland, 1800-1835', supplements *The Protestant crusade*. Unlike Bowen, who saw evangelicalism as a foreign ideology, Whelan highlighted its Irish roots and demonstrated that the period 1800 to 1822 was 'itself tumultuous and building toward the greater tumult to come'.⁴¹ Her doctoral thesis, 'Evangelical religion and the polarisation of Protestant-Catholic relations in Ireland, 1780-1840' (1994), refined her earlier work and when published will replace Bowen as the seminal study of Irish evangelicalism before 1845. In writing about the role of the religious revival in Irish life during the final decades of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth, Whelan examined the root of evangelicalism within the Church of Ireland and how this affected the relationship between

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 30.

Protestants and Catholics during a period in which existing political establishments throughout Europe tried to adjust to the rise of democracy and the demand for representative government.⁴² She placed Irish evangelicalism within a broader European context and sought out analogous trends and personalities within Irish Protestantism and Catholicism, notably in the period from 1800-1830. While Whelan was concerned with the position of Ireland within the wider British colonial world, she paid particular attention to the concrete expression of evangelical zealotry: the missionary colonies established at Dingle and Achill. However, her coverage of these neither modified nor added to Bowen's prior analysis. Furthermore, in her final judgement of the Protestant missionary colonies one feels a sense of personal distaste. She referred to Protestant relief efforts during the Famine era as attempts to 'take advantage of economic vulnerability', a charge she did nothing to establish convincingly.⁴³

Whelan's two published essays extend the material in her doctorate. 'Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission, 1824-1852', was included in a collection of essays on the history of Co. Mayo and published in 1987, her purpose being to examine the origins and the development of the Mission colony – a project that she claims was the high water-mark of Protestant evangelicalism in Ireland in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ One purpose of my is to build on Whelan's article, which until recently was the only serious study dealing exclusively with Nangle and the Achill Mission; in it, she spoke of Nangle as a 'fanatic', even though she relied on a biography of Nangle written

⁴² Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 634.

⁴⁴ Irene Whelan, 'Edward Nangle and the Achill mission. 1824-1852' in Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (eds.), *'A various county' essays in Mayo history 1500-1900* (Westport, 1987), p. 113.

by a supporter, his contemporary Henry Seddall's. This biography is full of feigned spiritual melodrama and is in fact an easy target for criticism, especially from a late twentieth-century vantage point. However, Whelan did provide an intelligent discussion of the Mission's impact on the development of the island and compared the Achill project to similar enterprises in England and the United States where, she argued, evangelicalism became attached to ideas of 'progress' and 'modernisation'. The rationale behind evangelical 'progress' in England and the United States was linked to industrialisation whereas in Ireland, especially in the rural, Irish-speaking west, it was associated with the improved management of an agricultural estate along commercial lines.⁴⁵ Whelan's research highlighted an evangelical project that was perhaps uniquely Irish.

Whelan's other published essay, 'The stigma of souperism' (included with a collection on the Great Famine, and published in 1995) dealt more with Protestant relief efforts during the Famine than with Nangle or the Achill Mission.⁴⁶ Like Bowen, Whelan acknowledged the important relief work carried out by Protestants in the West, especially during the Famine; yet she was highly critical of some of their motives, although she found it difficult to sustain the allegations of souperism.

The scholarship carried out on Irish Protestant evangelicalism over the last fifty years has therefore laid substantial groundwork for further investigation. Two recent studies in particular have benefited from the literature reviewed above. In 2000 Stewart J. Brown published an essay on the

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

⁴⁶ Irene Whelan, 'The stigma of souperism', in Cathal Poiteir (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine* (Cork, 1995), pp. 135-154.

“Second Reformation” movement in the Church of Ireland.⁴⁷ He added an Irish dimension to the intriguing work of Jonathan Clarke, Linda Colley and others that has drawn attention to the centrality of Protestantism in shaping a collective British identity during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴⁸ From this premise, Brown argues that the Second Reformation, which reached heated levels in Ireland after 1822, was used to consolidate the political union of 1801. Another scholar, Timothy C.F. Stunt, has highlighted the international connections between Irish and continental evangelicalism in his book, *From awakening to secession: Radical evangelicalism in Switzerland and Britain, 1815-1835* (2000). Stunt provided new evidence that draws Ireland within the European network of evangelicals (especially after 1830, when Lady Theodosia Powerscourt welcomed prominent evangelicals to her beautiful Co. Wicklow home to discuss the intersections between secular history and biblical prophecy). Stunt recognised the interaction of evangelical Protestants across Europe, noting their similarities ‘and the process by which the shared objective began to disintegrate’ over time.⁴⁹

Despite all of this scholarship, many issues relating to Protestant evangelicalism in Ireland remain to be addressed. Regional studies that would test in a specific region the conclusions drawn from studies on the national level are long overdue. Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, as a result of postgraduate work at NUI Maynooth, has offered one such a local study in her pamphlet, *Dugort, Achill Island, 1831-1861* (2001), which provides us with an overview of society and economy in part of Achill during the years of the missionary

⁴⁷ Stewart J. Brown, ‘The new reformation movement in the Church of Ireland, 1801-1829’ in Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller (eds.), *Piety and power 1760-1960: essays in honour of Emmet Larkin* (Notre Dame, 2000).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁹ Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession*, p. 23.

settlement.⁵⁰ Ní Ghiobúin's research is the most specific study of the operations of the Achill Mission to date, and is very important. Yet it is concerned mainly with what happened on Achill, and neglects its important intellectual and theological underpinnings, and thus the driving force behind the project.

My dissertation, which looks principally at a specific geographic region – Achill Island, Co. Mayo – and a specific evangelical personality – Edward Nangle – offers such a study in as comprehensive a manner as possible. My purpose here has been threefold: (1) to examine the intellectual and social underpinnings of the evangelical movement among Ireland's Protestant community during the nineteenth century, particularly among that section whose denominational allegiance was to the established Church of Ireland; (2) to throw more light on the relationship between Protestants and Catholics in Connacht during a time when religious identities in Ireland became more sharply defined; and (3) to investigate how the sectarian competition on Achill Island during the middle years of the nineteenth century shaped the religious identities of those associated with the missionary settlement, both directly and indirectly, and how the conflicts and confrontations between Edward Nangle and the Roman Catholic priests on the island influenced the lives of the impoverished lay community.

Since this study is concerned with the thought and actions of Edward Nangle, a representative of the militant evangelical party within the Church of Ireland, I have chosen as my starting point the year 1800, when the Act of Union, which created the political entity called the United Kingdom of Great

⁵⁰ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort, Achill Island, 1831-1861: the rise and fall of a missionary community* (Dublin, 2001).

Britain and Ireland, gave a much needed psychological boost of confidence to the sprouting evangelical party that looked for daylight within the Church of Ireland. The ecclesiastical union of the Church of Ireland and the Church of England allowed members of the Irish Church to identify more closely and interact more fully with their English, Scottish, and Welsh brethren, thereby drawing them further into the religious revival underway across the Irish Sea. In honouring Bowen's request to understand the mind of the Irish Protestant, the first chapter examines the intellectual origins of Nangle's evangelicalism in the early years of the nineteenth century, with particular attention paid to the undergraduate and divinity courses in operation at Trinity College. Dublin's cultural and spiritual spheres were in a singular state of religious excitement in the years 1800-1820, as academics and religious zealots came together to praise the divine creator in seemingly diverse places like Trinity and the Bethesda Chapel, located just north of the River Liffey in central Dublin.

This was paralleled by a resurgent Roman Catholicism, the secular leaders of which latched onto the spirit of reform, in some cases for political purposes. However, the Catholic poor continued to live lives dependent on a strong agricultural economy, and when the bottom fell out of that economy in the years after Waterloo there was heightened insecurity and times of collective fear. The second chapter examines the economic and social structures of Mayo in the early nineteenth century, with particular attention paid to the relationships between Protestants and Catholics. During this time Nangle, a newly appointed Church of Ireland curate, was exposed to the

increasing tensions between Protestants and Catholics, which influenced his decision to engage in missionary work on Achill during the 1830s.

The first two chapters explore in broad terms the attitudes of Protestants and Catholics in Ireland during the first quarter of the nineteenth century; the following two tell the story of what happened when the religious controversies that beset the country were implanted on Achill Island. Before 1831 the island was little known to outsiders, apart from intrepid map makers and adventurous sportsmen; however, soon after Nangle's arrival, news of the gains made in reclaiming wastelands from the swamp and souls from the Roman Catholic Church reached across the United Kingdom. The conflicts and confrontations between the missionary settlement and the Catholic Church changed the religious and cultural landscape of west Mayo for generations. The reaction of the Roman Catholic Church to the Achill Mission is examined specifically in Chapter five; and Chapter six investigates Nangle's writings and thinking regarding the second coming of Christ.

My hope is that this study should avoid being condescending towards the protagonists, however misguided or misdirected it may seem to us they were. Nangle poured a lifetime's passion and energy into his Achill project. The fact the Achill Mission endured not only the vituperations of parish priests for as long as it did, but that it did so in such an unforgiving climate is testimony to his dedication. Achill's landscape matched well the mind of its missionary-in-chief who, when leaving the island for the last time, melodramatically raised his head, saying 'Achill may well be called the Happy

Valley...in spite of all our trials, I know of no place like it'.⁵¹

Biography: Edward Nangle, Trinity College, Dublin, and the Revival of Irish Primary Education, 1834-1852.

...in spite of all our trials, I know of no place like it'.⁵¹ The Rev. Edward Nangle, a Protestant minister in Dublin (1834-1852), is one of the many nineteenth-century men and women who have the distinction of being unknown in Irish evangelical circles before 1834, when he first set foot upon Achill Island, Co. Mayo, but in the middle years of the nineteenth century this highly intelligent and successful layman was increasingly associated with an ultra-Protestant and aggressively expansionist movement to convert the Catholic population in Ireland to the established church. The conventional wisdom would have him as a 'convert' - while others, perhaps more sympathetic to his mission, included Nangle among the many ranks of evangelical Protestants. While on the one hand, it is true that the Protestant missionary movement that he helped to establish in the context of the Revival of 1834 regarded the region as religiously barren, creating the basis of sectarian politics.

In order to understand Nangle, he must be set in the context of early nineteenth-century Ireland, when the evangelical movement gradually overtook the Irish highlands, a process of the nineteenth century. The Revival of 1834 regarded the region as religiously barren, creating the basis of sectarian politics.

⁵¹ Irene Whelan, 'Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission, 1834-1852', p. 134.

Chapter One

Beginnings: Edward Nangle, Trinity College, Dublin, and the Rumbblings of Irish Evangelicalism, 1800-1825.

‘Doubtless at times headstrong in forming his opinions, stubborn in holding them and harsh in giving them expression...’¹ this posthumous description of the Rev. Edward Nangle, ascribed to William Conyngham Plunket, Protestant archbishop of Dublin (1884-1897), represents well the view of many nineteenth-century men and women who knew the controversial figure. Nangle was unknown in Irish evangelical circles before 1831, when he first set foot upon Achill Island, Co. Mayo, but in the middle years of the nineteenth century this highly intelligent and resourceful clergyman was inextricably associated with an ultra-Protestantism that aggressively attempted to convert the Catholic population in Ireland to the established church. His confrontational reputation caused some to label him a ‘fanatic’, while others, perhaps more sympathetic to his mission, included Nangle among the many heroes to evangelical Protestantism. Whatever the case, all agree that the Protestant missionary settlement that he helped to establish in the fastness of Connacht in 1834 engulfed the region in religious conflict, creasing the lines of sectarian passion.

In order to understand Nangle, he must be set in the context of early nineteenth-century Ireland, when the evangelical movement gradually overtook the broad high-church attitudes of the eighteenth century. The legislative union which came into being on 1 January 1801, helped in two ways to promote the evangelical awakening within the Church of Ireland.

¹ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle: The apostle of Achill; a memoir and a history*, (London and Dublin, 1884), p. xv.

First, the fourth article of the Act of Union provided 'that Four Lords Spiritual of Ireland by rotation of Sessions...shall be the number to sit and vote on the part of Ireland in the House of Lords of the Parliament of the United Kingdom'.² Before, when all Church of Ireland bishops sat in the Irish House of Lords, the hierarchy had been too politically minded to care much about spiritual matters. Now, because only four Irish bishops sat in the united House of Lords in a given session, they could pay more attention to ecclesiastical affairs and the other spiritual peers could spend more regular time in their dioceses. Secondly, since the government owed considerable favours to the Irish families who had voted for the union, one type of political patronage used was nomination to the episcopal bench. This resulted in the bishops receiving into their ranks 'an infusion of new members', becoming, 'more Irish at the episcopal level'. Consequently, this provided the Protestant establishment with an unprecedented influx of native prelates more sensitive to the views of the Church of Ireland clergy than their mostly English predecessors.³ Although many within this group were in no sense evangelicals – it was not until 1842 that an avowed evangelical was raised to the Irish bench – they all exhibited a new attention to duty that encouraged a stronger commitment to the spiritual needs of their parishioners and paved the way for a somewhat different breed of Irish clergymen.⁴

After the post-union celebrations, the Church of Ireland hierarchy faced the daunting task of getting its administrative affairs back in order. This

² 39 & 40 Geo. III, c. 67 [G.B.] (2 July 1800); 40 Geo. III, c. 38 [Ire.] (1 Aug. 1800).

³ Donald H. Akenson, *The church of Ireland: ecclesiastical reform and revolution, 1800-1885*, (New Haven and London, 1971), p. 73; Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession: radical evangelicalism in Switzerland and Britain 1815-35* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 151.

⁴ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-1870* (Dublin, 1978), p. 76.

was not easy; in 1807, a Royal Commission revealed a scandalous state of affairs within the Church of Ireland: parish clergy often officiated at dilapidated churches; absenteeism and pluralism were widespread; and Protestants living in remote parts of the country often had no place to attend worship.⁵ Consequently, entire Protestant families had gone over to the Catholic Church in the previous generation, leaving behind an institution that had neglected them for many years.⁶ To counter these desertions and to reclaim its dignity and respect, Westminster used its new authority over the Church of Ireland to initiate a reform programme, which was intended to strengthen the parish system and to eradicate the most serious abuses. To attract clergymen back to their parishes, the Board of First Fruits was empowered to provide generous interest-free loans, earmarked for church building and glebe construction.⁷ Furthermore, in 1808 and later in 1824, parliament passed acts imposing new sanctions against clerical non-residence, which gave reform minded prelates, like Lord John Beresford (who became the Church of Ireland primate in 1822) considerably more leverage in correcting absenteeism.⁸ In 1806 only 39.1 per cent of the Church of Ireland clergy in Tuam diocese resided in their parishes, whereas by 1819 this had increased to 63.3 per cent and by 1832 to 74.6 percent, which roughly corresponded with the national average.⁹ Evidently, parliament's two-pronged strategy of empowering the Irish bishops and making more funds available to improve church lands was a success, for clerical discipline had noticeably

⁵ Donald H. Akenson, *The church of Ireland*, p. 111.

⁶ Stewart Brown, 'The new reformation movement in the Church of Ireland, 1801-1829' in Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller (eds.), *Piety and power in Ireland 1760-1960: essays in honour of Emmet Larkin* (Notre Dame, 2000), p. 186.

⁷ Donald H. Akenson, *The church of Ireland*, p. 117.

⁸ 48 George III, c. 66 [Ire.] (18 June 1808); 5 George IV, c. 91 [Ire.] (1825).

⁹ Donald H. Akenson, *The church of Ireland*, pp. 128-129.

improved. However, these improvements in discipline can also be attributed to another influence at work since the final decade of the eighteenth century – the evangelical movement, which encouraged a new brand of religious commitment and devotion among clergy and laity alike.¹⁰

The centre of Irish evangelicalism at this time was Dublin, second-city of the Empire. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the city was more like a beacon of cultural splendour and social innovation than breeding ground for evangelical doctrine.¹¹ Its gracious Georgian squares and spacious open thoroughfares symbolised the impact of the enlightenment on the city. Trinity College, which in the late eighteenth century had begun to take on its modern appearance, seemed reduced to a mere adjunct of the city's thriving cultural life. A visitor to the college would have been at pains to distinguish between the chapel, where religious services took place, and the examination theatre, where students sat exams.¹² However, the political intrigues of the Act of Union somewhat dulled Dublin's cultural status, as most of the political and cultural elite left for Westminster seeking patronage and influence. Those intellectuals remaining in Dublin, who were mainly centered on Trinity College, subsequently began to consider embracing a new civilising mission centered on religion.¹³

From the late eighteenth century the evangelical movement in the Church of Ireland had been intimately linked with Trinity College. Throughout the 1790s the calls for ecclesiastical reform within the established

¹⁰ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 45.

¹¹ Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession*, p. 149.

¹² *Ibid.*, Timothy C.F. Stunt, 'Evangelical cross-currents in the Church of Ireland, 1820-1833' in W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds), *The churches, Ireland and the Irish* (London, 1989), p. 215.

¹³ Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession*, p. 150.

church had been voiced the loudest from behind the walls of Trinity, whose fellows, most in clerical orders and imbued with the new spirit of evangelicalism, latched onto the reform ethos of the period.¹⁴ Many of them were to play a significant part in the Irish evangelical movement during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Joseph Liechty has concluded that at the turn of the nineteenth century Trinity did a great deal to promote the Protestant establishment in both church and state.¹⁵ Although fellows held a wide range of political and religious views, after 1801 almost all believed that the Church of Ireland still had before it an unfinished mission to make Ireland a Protestant nation.¹⁶ For example, the *Christian Examiner*, an evangelical journal edited by Joseph Henderson Singer, a junior fellow of Trinity, and Caesar Otway, a graduate from the college, contained an article defending Trinity's role as a Protestant seminary. The article attempted to rebuke critics who dubbed the college a 'silent sister' of Oxford and Cambridge for its supposed deficiencies of literary and scientific achievement. 'Trinity College was founded', the author wrote, 'for the education of the people, and peculiarly of the *Protestant clergy* of the established church...if the clergy sent forth by the College, be completely furnished with the important requisites of their profession, then the object of the establishment is obtained.'¹⁷ Many of the fellows, who acted as tutors to undergraduates, saw it their primary duty to imbue students, especially those bound for holy orders, with this sense of

¹⁴ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion and the polarisation of Protestant-Catholic relations in Ireland, 1780-1840" (Ph.D. thesis. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994), p. 151.

¹⁵ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism, Trinity College, Dublin, and the mission of the Church of Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century" (Ph.D. thesis. N.U.I. (Maynooth), 1987), p. 470

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Christian Examiner*, iii, no. 28 (Dec 1826), quoted in Richard Hastings Graves, 'Memoir', in Richard Graves (ed), *The whole works of Richard Graves, D.D.* (4 vols, Dublin 1840), i, pp. lii-liii.

Protestant mission.¹⁸ This strongly suggests that the junior fellows, who acted as tutors to future generations of clergymen, gave shape and direction to Irish evangelicalism shortly before and after 1800.

In his work on Irish evangelicalism, Liechty admitted that he could not establish a direct connection between Trinity College and the evangelical wing of the established church. Other historians have also noticed this link, yet the source of this link remains elusive. Writing before Liechty, both Bowen and Acheson (who claimed that Trinity was ‘the chief sphere of influence’) acknowledged the close association between Irish evangelicalism and Trinity, but in each case admitted that conclusive evidence was lacking. In putting the case more sharply, Whelan argued that a network of Trinity-educated clergymen carried the evangelical movement throughout the country after 1790.¹⁹ Despite the evidence – the unfinished mission of the Church of Ireland, the clerical and missionary nature of Trinity, and a strong link between Trinity and evangelical clergymen – Liechty remained dissatisfied and continued to look for more direct evidence linking Trinity with the proliferation of evangelical activity in Ireland after 1800.²⁰ Although sceptical, he concluded that the dominant intellectual and ideological force behind Trinity was ‘a vibrant, rarely violated consensus in support of the Protestant establishment in church and state.’²¹ According to Liechty, central to this consensus was the belief that Ireland needed to be transformed into a Protestant nation.²² This unchallenged consensus, Liechty suggested, gave

¹⁸ Joseph Liechty, “Irish evangelicalism”, p. 165.

¹⁹ Irene Whelan, ‘New lights and old enemies: the ‘Second reformation’ and the Catholics of Ireland, 1800-1835’ (MA thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison 1983), p. 21.

²⁰ Joseph Liechty, “Irish evangelicalism”, p. 134.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

²² *Ibid.*

birth to nineteenth-century Irish evangelicalism. While Liechty argued that an atmosphere of defensive intransigence, generated by the political crisis of the late eighteenth century, paved the way for the ascendancy of serious religion among the Trinity-based ideologues, he also considered the possibility that the link between Trinity and evangelicalism was only circumstantial, not causal. Yet Liechty refused to ignore the likely influence of Trinity fellows upon their students, who left home at the average age of sixteen to spend four or more formative years in the college. In the absence of hard evidence linking Trinity and evangelicalism, Liechty sought a broad and indirect answer, one that set the emergence of Irish evangelicalism in the 'context of the mission of the Church of Ireland as mediated by TCD.'²³ Ultimately Liechty decided that the junior fellows at Trinity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were probably the greatest influence on the growth of evangelicalism in Ireland.

Junior fellows instructed, examined, and undertook the general supervision of the undergraduates. They acted as moral guardians and provided the teaching that guided students through their college courses. Although Trinity could boast of many highly acclaimed scholars from the eighteenth century, most notably George Berkeley, a fellow from 1707 until 1724, the early years of the nineteenth were characterised by intellectual stagnation.²⁴ The copious amounts of mental energy expended on teaching and examining the undergraduates perhaps offers an explanation to this period of cerebral inactivity:

²³ Ibid., p. 135.

²⁴ R.A. McDowell and D.A. Webb, *Trinity College, 1592-1952, an academic history* (Cambridge and London, 1982), p. 103.

Under the system pursued in Trinity College, its Fellows can scarcely be expected to devote themselves to any work of research or even of compilation; constantly employed in the duties of tuition, which harass the mind more than the most abstract studies, they can have but little inclination, at the close of the day, to commence a new career of labour.²⁵

Another reason for this perceived academic sluggishness could be the emergence of an evangelical party within the college in the years just before and after the Union. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, some fellows of the college became involved with the plethora of religious and educational societies which proliferated in the Irish capital at this time, thereby distracting them from their academic pursuits.

Liechty focused mainly on evangelical developments within Trinity College during the 1790s, a time when the Irish evangelical party was small, but the connection between the college and evangelicalism became more pronounced after 1800.²⁶ Between 1810 and 1833, two fellows of Trinity College, James O'Brien (1792-1874) and Joseph Henderson Singer (1786-1866), established a considerable following in College, imbuing undergraduates and ordinands with the merits of 'vital religion'.²⁷

James O'Brien was born at New Ross, Co. Wexford in 1792. He descended from a Catholic branch of the family; however, his father had converted to the established church and sent his son to be tutored by Dr Edward Carr, a former Trinity student and well-known evangelical. James had a brilliant career at Trinity College, becoming a scholar in 1813, a fellow in 1820, and a Doctor of Divinity in 1830. From 1833, he held the second chair in theology as an assistant to Archbishop King's lecturer in divinity.²⁸ Later,

²⁵ T.R. Robinson, *A system of mechanics*, (Dublin, 1820), pp. vi-vii.

²⁶ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 124.

²⁷ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 67; Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession*, p. 158.

²⁸ *Dublin University Calendar* (Dublin, 1833), p. xiii.

in 1836, he married Ellen Pennefather – second daughter of Edward Pennefather, brother-in-law of John Nelson Darby, and later appointed by Robert Peel as Chief Justice of Queen’s Bench and Privy Councilor in 1841. In the prime of his career, therefore, James O’Brien had considerable influence in Irish religious and legal circles. He became dean of Cork in 1841 and a year later, reached the apogee of his ecclesiastical career, being appointed bishop of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin.

O’Brien was known to greet students at his door with an euphoric, ‘well, sir!’ before starting his tutorial lectures.²⁹ While undergraduates remembered his eccentricities and learned erudition, his sermons made the longer lasting impression on those outside of the college. In 1832, he delivered a spate of sermons on the doctrine of justification by faith alone in the College Chapel. These sermons, which closely flirted with Calvinism, were published subsequently as *Ten sermons upon the nature and effect of faith*, being dedicated to the students of Trinity.³⁰ This work, considered by some Irish Protestants to be the most influential Trinity publication since the seventeenth century, became the theological basis of the divinity school after 1833.³¹ His preaching style and message won him fame outside of Trinity, with many readers in the United States, England and Ireland admiring his work. Later, as bishop of Ossory, a diocese that had witnessed much evangelical activity during the early nineteenth century, O’Brien was severely criticised by his peers on the bench for causing unnecessary sectarian friction in the countryside. Although he gained much respect and ecclesiastical

²⁹ R.B. McDowell and D.A. Webb, *Trinity College*, p. 104.

³⁰ James O’Brien, *Ten sermons upon the nature and effects of faith* (London 1833).

³¹ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 77.

prestige later in his career, his main concern as a TCD fellow in the 1820s was the examination and instruction of undergraduates.

Another Trinity academic who assumed a leading role in shaping the Irish evangelical party was Joseph Henderson Singer, perhaps 'the most influential leader of the Evangelical party in the Church'.³² Singer was born at Annadale, Co. Dublin in October 1786, the son of James Singer, deputy commissary-general in Ireland. He lengthy career at Trinity was impressive: fellow in 1810; a Doctor of Divinity in 1825; Donnellan lecturer in Divinity from 1835 until 1837; professor of Modern History in 1840; and Regius professor of Divinity in 1850. Later, he became the bishop of Meath in 1852. As a young fellow, Singer was the tutor of James O'Brien, and when Edward Nangle arrived at Trinity in 1819, he too became his tutor (this was Nangle's choice).³³ Apparently Singer was popular among incoming undergraduates: 'With his general character and good address, a cheerful courtesy, a classic taste, variety of information, combined with excellent conversational talent, and an extensive acquaintance in the country, it was scarcely possible that Mr. Singer should not have been a most popular tutor'.³⁴ Richard S. Brooke, one of his students in the 1820s, recalled his teaching as being both erudite and urbane, describing Singer as a 'man of universal and accurate information, possessing very polished manners and a kind and winning address'.³⁵ His informal lectures on theology, which inspired many Church of Ireland evangelicals in their disputes with their Catholic counterparts, later became part of the divinity school curriculum. Furthermore, Singer, by keeping his

³² James Godkin, *Ireland and her churches* (London, 1867), p. 249.

³³ Senior Lecturer's Books (T.C.D. MSS MUN/V/11/2).

³⁴ *Dublin University Magazine*, no. ccli (Nov. 1853), vol. xlii., p. 563.

³⁵ R.S. Brookes, *Recollections of the Church of Ireland* (2 vols, London, 1877-78) i,

rooms open to undergraduates for theological discussions, influenced many young men whom later would become ministers and defend the Church of Ireland. He especially encouraged controversy with the Catholic Church, claiming that it threatened the security of the established church: 'The age in which we live in', Singer charged in 1824, 'is peculiarly to us a controversial age – that the authority of our church, the foundation of our faith, and the principles of our practice, have been, and are, hourly assailed'.³⁶

While Singer perhaps had the greatest theological influence at Trinity, his impact extended beyond the walls of the college. Singer and O'Brien were both closely connected with the Bethesda Chapel, a 'proprietary chapel' or free church, whose ministers, especially Benjamin W. Mathias, another Trinity graduate, guided the Bethesda from the fringe to the centre of Protestant religious life in Dublin during the 1820s.³⁷ Students from Trinity College, lawyers, doctors, gentry and nobility, as well as many of the humbler classes all flocked to the Bethesda to hear Mathias preach during the first two decades of the 1800s.³⁸ With Mathias's help, Singer's evangelical views found concrete expression in 1828 with the founding of the Established Church Home Mission, whose members, including Robert Daly and Dr Hamilton Vershoyle, vowed to bring the Protestant religious revival to the doorstep of Roman Catholics.³⁹ A year later, Singer gladly accepted the invitation to become the vice-president of the Hibernian Church Missionary Society (1814), giving this organisation, based on its London counterpart, a

³⁶ Joseph Henderson Singer, *A sermon preached in the cathedral of Christ's Church at the ordination held by his grace the Lord Archbishop of Dublin on the 19th day of December, 1824* (Dublin, 1825), p. 15.

³⁷ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical Protestantism", p. 166.

³⁸ W.D. Killen, *The ecclesiastical history of Ireland from the earliest period to the present times* (3 vols, London, 1875), ii, p. 382.

³⁹ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 67.

'missionary character'.⁴⁰ On the literary front, Singer and another Trinity graduate, Caesar Otway, became in 1825 co-editors of *The Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine*, where like-minded evangelicals could read of the advances made by the Home Mission and other missionary societies.

Singer's indirect influence on young Trinity undergraduates must have been considerable. When Singer entered Trinity in 1802, the evangelical movement in Ireland was struggling in its infancy. However, as Singer established himself as a young academic at Trinity, the fluid nature of the evangelical movement, of which he had become an integral part, had begun to solidify. Singer is sometimes viewed as 'the Gamaliel at whose feet generations of evangelical Trinity students sat'; however placing such importance on one individual is perhaps oversimplified.⁴¹ Whatever the case, his influence outside and within the college ran deep, as his personal endeavours supplanted the prevailing High Church ethos with a vigorous Protestant evangelicalism. Furthermore, Singer's obsession with millenarianism, which had become popular in Trinity (especially after the rebellion in 1798) as well as his unqualified hatred of Roman Catholicism, outlasted his reputation as an academic and set the fire of missionary evangelicalism within the hearts of what became an army of Church of Ireland zealots.⁴² Around 1800, only a handful of Church of Ireland clergymen described themselves as evangelical, the majority preferring the sobriquet of High Churchman; however, 'a remarkable period was about this time opening

⁴⁰ *Church Missionary Society Register* (1829), p. 246.

⁴¹ Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 67.

⁴² Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 68. J.H. Singer regularly attended the Powerscourt meetings that met from 1830 until 1841 to discuss Biblical prophecy.

on Ireland, and especially on the Church of Ireland', changing the way the established church in Ireland saw itself, while also changing its attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church.⁴³

As the Church of Ireland, led by some prominent Trinity academics, became increasingly evangelical during the first decade of the nineteenth century, Edward Nangle, it seems, quietly enjoyed his childhood. He was born at Kildalkey, near Athboy, Co. Meath in 1799, a year before the Act of Union.⁴⁴ The Nangle name went back for generations and its family could claim to be one of the oldest Hiberno-Norman families in Ireland.⁴⁵ An ancestor, Gilbert de Angulo, had come over to Ireland with Strongbow in 1169 and for his services was given land near Navan, establishing a military heritage that remained with the family.⁴⁶ Edward's father, Walter Nangle (1747-1843), had served in the 16th infantry regiment of the army, retiring with the rank of captain. There is no evidence that the Nangles were an overly religious family; they had only become Protestant in the late eighteenth century, when Walter took a Protestant woman, Catherine Sall, daughter of George Sall of Dublin, as his second wife. Edward was a product his father's second marriage and consequently was reared in the Protestant faith by his mother, who died in 1808 when he was just nine years old.

Regrettably, material concerning Edward Nangle's early days is scarce. In 1812, Edward's father sent him to the Royal School in Co. Cavan, where he

⁴³ Donald H. Akenson, *The Church of Ireland*, p. 132; S.J. Connolly, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-30' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union, I, 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989), p. 75; *Dublin University Magazine*, no. ccli (Nov. 1853), vol. xlii., p. 562.

⁴⁴ Irene Whelan, 'Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission, 1824-1852', in Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (eds.), *Mayo, 'a various country' essays in Mayo history 1500-1900*, (Westport, 1987), p. 118.

⁴⁵ R.S. Brookes, *Recollections of the Church of Ireland*, i, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Burke's Irish Family Records*, (London, 1976), p. 872.

was taught by the headmaster, the Rev. John Moore. The Royal School enjoyed a considerable reputation as a preparatory school for the university and Edward's classmates included John Pennefather, later lord chief baron of Ireland and Robert Daly, later bishop of Cashel. A recollection taken from his schooldays, made by John Moore, recalled that the young Nangle 'was a boy that was always beloved by his companions, and even in his earliest days exhibited a good deal of that artistic taste which was afterwards so fully developed.'⁴⁷ Nangle's biographer, Henry Seddall, offers another insight into his character by remembering him as a precocious yet jovial schoolboy:

The worst that might be said of him is that like most boys and young men he was giddy and thoughtless. His energetic spirit put him at the head of many a boy frolic, but there is no evidence to show that he ever gave himself up to any practice of a vicious character. His predilection for manly sports, rarely to be found in base and wanton natures, would seem to warrant these conclusions.⁴⁸

While information regarding Nangle's early life might be limited, considerably more is known about his young adulthood. In 1819, he left the comfortable environs of Kildalkey and the Royal School, venturing to Dublin to commence studies at Trinity College, where for the first time he encountered the evangelical ethos that had been gaining momentum within the Church of Ireland. While his biographer mentions that his friends and family had steered him towards a career in medicine, Nangle left for Trinity with an open mind, preparing himself for the intellectual demands of the college's undergraduate course, which provided young men with a solid ground work in logic, classics, mathematics, natural philosophy, and ethics.⁴⁹

Trinity was an urban university, and this alone would have been a change from Nangle's rural upbringing, although he had probably spent time

⁴⁷ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 25.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁴⁹ McDowell and Webb, *Trinity College*, p. 69.

at the Dublin home of his grandparents. From its foundation in 1592, Trinity had been Protestant, or more specifically, Anglican, in its religious affiliation; male in its composition; and politically conservative. Yet, at Trinity, unlike Oxford or Cambridge, where an acceptance of the Thirty-nine articles was required, Roman Catholics and nonconformists could attend after 1793.⁵⁰ The typical Trinity undergraduate was slightly younger than his counterpart at either Oxford or Cambridge and upon entering the college, students chose a tutor from the ranks of the junior fellows, who guided them through the undergraduate course.⁵¹ As mentioned earlier, Nangle chose Joseph Henderson Singer as his tutor.

The undergraduate course lasted for four years. For academic purposes, students were divided into four annual classes of Junior and Senior Freshman and Junior and Senior Sophisters. Similarly, the academic year was divided into three quarterly terms: Hilary, Trinity, and Michaelmas. In addition to their class grouping, undergraduates were also graded socially into noblemen, fellow-commoners, pensioners, and sizars. A peer, peer's son, or baronet could matriculate as *nobilis ipse*, *filius nobilis* or *eques*, which on payment of four times the pensioner's fee, permitted him to take his degree in two years instead of four.⁵² Like the noblemen, the rank of fellow-commoner was open to anybody who cared to pay for it, the only real advantage being able to take his degree six months earlier than the pensioners.⁵³ The sizars were students of lesser financial means, who were awarded a sizarship at entrance on the results of a special examination. Originally, sizars had been seen as inferior to

⁵⁰ Entrance Records (TCD MUN/V/23/4).

⁵¹ John William Stubbs, *The history of the University of Dublin from its foundation to the end of the eighteenth century* (Dublin and London, 1889), p. 252.

⁵² *Dublin University Calendar 1833* (Dublin, 1833), p. 65.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

other students, but this prejudice had gone by the early years of the nineteenth century, perhaps a function of the larger middle class population in the college.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, most undergraduates, including Edward Nangle, enrolled as pensioners, registered their religion as Protestant, paid the annual fee of fifteen pounds, described their fathers as 'gentlemen', and commenced after four years.⁵⁵

In 1800, 75 per cent of the undergraduates had come from outside Dublin – 25 per cent from Munster; 30 per cent from Ulster and Connacht; and 20 per cent from Leinster outside of Dublin City.⁵⁶ Because of this, only a small number of students actually lived in College or even in the city, perhaps finding accommodation difficult to find. However, Trinity was unique among universities in the United Kingdom in that the statutes permitted a student to qualify for a degree simply by passing periodical examinations, without requiring attendance at lectures or even residence in the city.⁵⁷ Non-residents received instruction from private tutors and subsequently travelled to Dublin four times a year, remaining there for the duration of the quarterly exams. Since these 'back-stairs men', as they were commonly called, received a degree and little else, many, like Samuel Butler, the bishop of Lichfield, frowned upon the quality of Trinity graduates, refusing candidates for ordination 'who have never resided at College, and thus have no regular academic education, but have merely gone up for a few days to sit and pass a general examination'.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ McDowell and Webb, *Trinity College*, p. 114.

⁵⁵ Matriculation Book (TCD MUN/V/11/2).

⁵⁶ McDowell and Webb, *Trinity College*, p. 113.

⁵⁷ *Dublin University Calendar* 1833, p. 64.

⁵⁸ Samuel Butler, *Life and letters of Dr Samuel Butler* (2 vols, London, 1896), ii, p.

Since Nangle attended six catechetical lectures during Hilary Term in 1819, it appears that he lived in Dublin during his Junior Freshman year.⁵⁹ These lectures were given to the college freshmen, and dealt with Biblical exegesis as well as Archbishop Thomas Secker's *Lectures on the church catechism*, which covered material on the 'privileges of Baptism, grounds and rule of faith, and the forgiveness of sins'.⁶⁰ Senior Freshmen could not rise with his year and become Junior Sophisters without attending four terms of these lectures, or, if non-resident, without passing a supplement to the quarterly exam. Although Nangle attended these lectures during his first year, suggesting that he lived in Dublin at this time, he subsequently sat the supplemental exam during his Senior Freshman year, suggesting his non-residence in Dublin thereafter.⁶¹ Therefore, any influence that Trinity, Singer, or any other evangelical had upon Nangle is extremely difficult to substantiate. While Nangle might not have been physically present in Dublin after his Senior Freshman year, he was still required to study the material on the undergraduate course. Perhaps the contents of the undergraduate course may shed some light on Nangle's acceptance of Protestant evangelicalism, assuming he arrived at Trinity without any sense of religious controversy.⁶²

Since there is no surviving record of the undergraduate course in operation while Nangle attended Trinity, we cannot be certain which subjects he studied. However, we do know the course for the years 1793 and 1833, for they have been recorded – the former in the statutes of the college and the

⁵⁹ TCD MSS MUN/V/83.

⁶⁰ Beilby Porteus and George Stinton (eds.), *Lectures on the church catechism of the Church of England with a discourse on confirmation by Thomas Secker* (2 vols, London, 1771), i, p. 1.

⁶¹ Catechetical Lecture Attendance (TCD MUN/V/83).

⁶² Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 17.

other in the first printed college calendar of 1833.⁶³ Another description of the undergraduate course, given in the *Discipline of Dublin University* (1823), though only a practical and unofficial guide, may be trusted to give a fair representation of the college's operations during Nangle's stay. However, the similarities of the undergraduate course in 1793 and 1833 strongly suggest that the version Nangle undertook in 1819 could not have been drastically different from either.

Logic dominated the undergraduate course. For four years, Nangle studied the *Artis logicae compendium* by Dr Richard Murray, a former provost, who had compiled a concise logic reader to replace the outdated texts by Smiglecius, a Polish Jesuit, whose *Logica* had appeared in 1618, and the *Institutiones logicae* (1626) of Burgersdicius, a professor at Leyden. Like most undergraduates, Nangle ploughed through Murray, a dense and complicated text, oftentimes unsure of its purpose. Yet John Walker, an eccentric and evangelical fellow of the college, tried his best to reassure exasperated undergraduates:

And I can confidently assure you that, as far as you may ever have occasion to exercise your reasoning powers upon any subject, a real acquaintance with the art of Logic will abundantly compensate the labour of acquiring it. Nor have I ever met a person unacquainted with it, who could state and maintain his arguments with facility, clearness and precision...I have commonly seen a man, of the acutest mind, puzzled by the argument of his antagonist; sensible, perhaps, that it was inconclusive, but wholly unable to expose the fallacy which rendered it so: while a Logician, of perhaps inferior talents, would be able at once to discern and mark it.⁶⁴

Nangle, therefore, acquired a very useful skill expertly used later in his life: the ability to competently construct and defend an argument.

⁶³ See the undergraduate course for 1793 in appendix A.

⁶⁴ John Walker, *A familiar commentary on the compendium of logic used by undergraduates in the University of Dublin* (Dublin, 1814), p. 4.

In contrast to the Aristotelianism of Murray, Nangle read John Locke's *Essay on human understanding* during his Freshmen years. Although the academic conservatism of Trinity remained intact in keeping texts like Murray on the undergraduate course, it could not ignore the powerful spirit of an age that regarded Locke as one of its prophets.⁶⁵ While Locke first appeared at Trinity late in the eighteenth century, his addition to the undergraduate course was a progressive innovation, for even at Oxford he was read with 'caution and reserve'.⁶⁶ While the *Essay* remained extant until 1833, the *Treatise on government* disappeared after 1800, possibly a result of the College reaction to the contagion of radical ideas in the 1790s. Immediately after Emmet's ill-fated revolt in 1803, Richard Graves, who later became Regius Professor of Divinity in 1814, warned students of the evils of French inspired revolution in a chapel message:

This is our island, remote and secluded as it appears in the map of Europe, and it is harried into the vortex of foreign war [with Napoleon], and convulsed by internal discord and sedition. This same ambitious and destructive power, which has overwhelmed so great a part of the civilized and with the horrors of servitude and misery, threatens to overwhelm us also with similar ruin. The same principles of disunion and anarchy which have facilitated its progress in other countries, prevail also here, and menace us with similar effects.⁶⁷

Consequently, Nangle only studied the *Essay*, which celebrates the intellectual reasoning that 'sets man above the rest of the sensible Beings'.⁶⁸ Despite his admirers at Trinity, Locke had his detractors who considered the *Essay* too tedious for undergraduates: 'the prolix and uninteresting disquisitions with which it now abounds, tend to fatigue and misemploy diligence, and to give

⁶⁵ McDowell and Webb, *Trinity College*, p. 70.

⁶⁶ C.E. Mallet, *A history of the University of Oxford*, (3 vols, London, 1824-27), iii, p. 128.

⁶⁷ Richard Graves, *The whole works of Richard Graves, D.D., now collected with a memoir of his life* (3 volumes, London, 1840), iii, 591-592.

⁶⁸ John Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding* (2 vols, London, 1753), i, p. 1.

students a distaste for Science, and a false notion of its utility.’⁶⁹ Liberal-minded fellows wanted to see less time spent on Murray and Locke in order to make room for Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* and the study of chemistry. Evidently, such pleas were ignored.

Besides Murray and Locke, undergraduates pored over classical writers such as Homer, Demosthenes, Lucian, Euripides, Sophocles, and Longinus – all part of the course since 1793. In addition to Greek literature, Nangle read Virgil, Horace, Terence, Livy, Cicero, and Tacitus. Furthermore, the undergraduate course introduced him to contemporary scientific methods. Gone were the remnants of the eighteenth-century course that included Varenus’s *Universal geography* (1664); in was the astronomy of John Brinkley (1813), John Stack’s *Optics* (1811), and Thomas Elrington’s impressive volume of Euclid (1819), which supplanted Aristotle with Lockean empiricism: ‘For this purpose the syllogistic mode of argument, in which the direct proofs had usually been drawn up, has been abandoned, and the arrangement approved by Locke adopted in its stead’.⁷⁰ Nangle studied these science texts, all written by Trinity Fellows, during his Sophister years. Overall, the science taught at Trinity upheld ‘mathematical precision in demonstration, an appreciation of the ordered harmony of the Universe, rational empiricism as a habit of thought, liberal oligarchy as the basis of government, the avoidance alike of deism, enthusiasm and superstition’.⁷¹ Such a description would hardly seem to encourage the pursuit of evangelical ideals.

⁶⁹ Robert Burrowes, *Observations on the course of science taught at present in Trinity College, Dublin, with some improvements suggested therein* (Dublin, 1792), p. 25.

⁷⁰ Thomas Elrington, *The first six books of Euclid, with notes* (Dublin, 1819), p. iii.

⁷¹ McDowell and Webb, *Trinity College*, p. 72.

For ethics, Nangle read the rather dated *Principles of natural law* (1747) by Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui, a professor at Geneva, and Joseph Butler's antiquated *Analogy of religion, natural and revealed* (1736). Both of these works had been included on the 1793 course and reveal that the college, while innovative in some areas, was slow to update its ethics texts. While Burlamaqui dealt with understanding the natural world through pure human reason, Butler argued for the necessity of revealed religion in coming to terms with existence, declaring that 'without an intelligent Author and Governor of Nature, no account at all can be given, how this universe, or the part of it particularly in which we are concerned, came to be'.⁷² Although these works discussed the interaction between God and the natural world, they did not directly tackle theological issues, yet Burlamaqui and Butler increased Nangle's awareness of the deists and the obligation of the educated to eradicate apocryphal teachings from the world.

By 1793, the only book on the undergraduate course that directly dealt with Protestant theology was John Conybeare's *Defence of revealed religion*, published in 1732, a rebuke of the deist Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as old as the creation* (1739). 'The light of common reason is abundantly sufficient without Revealed religion,' wrote Tindal in 1739, 'revelation can teach us nothing which every Man's reason might not as perfectly teach him.'⁷³ The *Discipline of Dublin University*, published in 1823, stated that undergraduates read a combined volume of John Leland's *The advantage and necessity of the Christian religion* and Belby Porteus's *Evidences for the Truth and divine*

⁷² Joseph Butler, *The analogy of religion, natural and revealed, to the constitution and course of nature* (London, 1736), p. 134.

⁷³ John Conybeare, *Defence of reveal'd religion against the exceptions of a late writer, in his book, intituled, Christianity as old as the creation* (Dublin 1732), p. 6.

origin of the Christian religion, during the Senior Sophister year.⁷⁴ Thus it appears that Conybeare's popularity had been waning as the college entered the nineteenth century, making way for the modish 'Leland and Porteus', which closely resembled Conybeare and defended the High Church ethos from the twin attacks of Catholicism and atheism. Going on the evidence of the *Discipline*, Nangle most likely studied 'Leland and Porteus' during the last term of his Senior Sophister year, thereby putting a theological cap upon the rational empiricism he has been exposed to during the previous three years at Trinity.

As an undergraduate, Nangle was an average student. His biographer substantiates this in saying, 'at college, he appears to have acquitted himself creditably, without, however, gaining, perhaps without aspiring to, any of the highest honors attainable by a clever and diligent student.'⁷⁵ His examination performance corroborates this observation, for throughout his undergraduate career at Trinity, Nangle never received a mark above *valde bene* nor one below *mediocriter*.⁷⁶ Nor was he 'cautioned', nor placed into a premium or Gold Medal examination division.

Although the material covered in the undergraduate course was rather dry and tedious, at least by modern comparison, its strength lay in its diversity. John Walker aroused enthusiasm for the undergraduate course saying, 'Here, converse with the sages and the wits of antiquity – living in their works.

⁷⁴ A.B. Late Student, *Discipline of Dublin University: being a concise account of all the duties of students in Trinity College, from entrance to the time of being candidates for the degree of A.M.* (Dublin, 1823), p. 9. John Leland was a Dublin nonconformist minister and Belby Porteus (years).

⁷⁵ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 28.

⁷⁶ TCD MSS MUN/V/27/6; Examinations were awarded the following marks, ranging from highest to lowest : *optime, valde bene, bene, satis bene, mediocriter, vix mediocriter, male, pessime*. A mark below *mediocriter* was recorded with a 'Caution' next to the name of the concerned student in the exam register. A student who received two 'Caution' marks risked repeating his exams or being demoted to a lower class.

These men wrote, as the painter drew, – *in oeternitatem*. And their works will remain the models of composition, the standard of literary taste; unless an iron-age of unlettered barbarianism should return.’⁷⁷ Besides acquiring a broad knowledge of mathematics, physics, classics and ethics, a Trinity undergraduate gained mental training and discipline. Yet the contents of the undergraduate course can hardly explain how men like Nangle became fierce evangelicals later in life. ‘Leland and Porteus’, the only required text that expressly dealt with theology, was an apology for High Churchism rather than an endorsement of evangelical values. Since the undergraduate course taught at Trinity does not account for the rise of evangelicalism in Ireland, it does demonstrate that graduates of the college were well-trained in the rhetorical arts, a skill used adeptly by evangelicals in their polemical writing and public debates. However, many would complete the undergraduate course without exposure to evangelical opinion. One must look beyond the undergraduate course to find a satisfactory answer.

After Nangle passed the undergraduate course, he was denominated a Candidate Bachelor. He remained a Candidate Bachelor until he formally received his BA at the college’s public commencements in 1823. At this point, after receiving the BA, he had two basic choices: he could pursue a professional career elsewhere, or he could continue his studies for a higher degree. Nangle, with hopes of entering the Church of Ireland ministry, chose the latter and decided to take the one-year divinity course designed for candidates seeking holy orders. A brief examination of this year in Nangle’s life may shed more light on his later acceptance of Protestant evangelicalism.

⁷⁷ John Walker, *Familiar commentary on the compendium of Logic*, p. 181.

Richard Graves, Regius Professor of Divinity, told Trinity students that as men preparing for ministry, their primary sacred duties were, 'to expose the misrepresentations of infidelity, to distinguish carefully, and lead others to distinguish, between the original truths of revelation, and the corruptions engrafted upon it by human folly and human fraud; to warn men against confounding the abuses of Christianity with Christianity itself, and mistaking the errors and crimes of its professors, for the natural effects of the institution'.⁷⁸ Candidates for holy orders were required to attend four terms of the lectures given by the assistants to Archbishop King's Lecturer in Divinity. With these lectures, which supplemented well *Bishop Burnet's exposition of the thirty-nine articles*, the class book adopted, Nangle received instruction in Greek, Hebrew, and Oration. Another theology text that was required reading for a divinity student was Thomas Newton's *Dissertations on the prophecies* (1777).⁷⁹ Newton, an Anglican bishop, composed this massive work as an apologetic handbook delineating the prophecies of Old and New Testament Scripture. Newton described Roman Catholicism as 'the great corruption of Christianity' and waited for the time when the truth of the Gospels would overcome the forces of the Pope.⁸⁰ Graves also recommended Henry Kett's *History, the interpreter of prophecy* (1799), which predicted the downfall of Roman Catholicism and held that the conduct of modern infidels was the working out of predictions and apostolic warnings given in the New Testament. Such texts could possibly have nudged Nangle towards a more pro-evangelical outlook.

⁷⁸ Richard Graves, *Works*, iii, p. 549

⁷⁹ Richard Graves, 'The first praelection, delivered as professor of divinity', in *Works*, iii, p. 23.

⁸⁰ Thomas Newton, *Dissertations on the prophecies which have been remarkably fulfilled, and at this time are fulfilling in the world* (London, 1838), p. 604.

While the brand of religious instruction at Trinity became more influenced by evangelicalism, especially within the divinity school, standards for the numerous divinity candidates were being tightened as well. In April 1790 the board of Trinity College received a resolution from at least eleven Church of Ireland bishops, saying that they would refuse to ordain a Trinity graduate who failed to produce a 'Testimonium...certifying that he has attended at least one complete course of each of such Lectures in Divinity as from his standing might have attended.'⁸¹ Subsequently, the bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Cashel wrote to the board with an outline of the material that Cashel ordination candidates would be expected to have mastered.⁸² Going one step further, John Jebb, the widely respected bishop of Limerick, proposed that the Irish bishops should immediately formalise the ordination process; in the meantime, Jebb would only ordain those who could convincingly demonstrated their knowledge of established church formularies:

In the meanwhile, and for the information of those who may present themselves as candidates for holy orders within this diocese, I think it right to give this public notice, that I will make very special inquiry into their knowledge both historical and critical, of the offices, the rites, and ceremonies of our Church; and into their capacity for reading those offices, and administering those rites and ceremonies, as they ought to be read and administered. And, whatever may be their qualifications...shall never be ordained by me.⁸³

Because of these protests, a certificate – the divinity testimonium – was inserted into the BA degree after a student had attended divinity lectures at Trinity for a year. Since the minimum age before a candidate could receive holy orders was twenty-three, the divinity lectures allowed Nangle to fill the time between graduation from the undergraduate course and ordination with

⁸¹ Register of the TCD Board, 9 April 1790 (T.C.D. MUNV 5/5).

⁸² Ibid., 24 May 1790.

⁸³ John Jebb, *A charge delivered to the clergy of the diocese of Limerick, at the primary visitation in the cathedral church of Saint Mary, on Thursday, the 19th of June, 1823* (Dublin, 1823), p. 26.

theological study and preparation. In proving his worth as a candidate for ordination, Nangle not only attended one year of divinity lectures, he also earned a Downe's divinity premium.

Trinity introduced Downe's divinity premiums to promote liturgical reading and to improve extemporaneous preaching, with an understanding that judgments would be based on form as well as content.⁸⁴ Each year, the Regius Professor in Divinity proposed 'a subject either moral or controversial' for 'such students as have attended at the least four terms in Divinity and Oratory with remarkable diligence'.⁸⁵ These celebrated premiums, named after Dr Dive Downes, a former fellow and ecclesiastic from the seventeenth century, carried a monetary award for the best written composition; best extempore discourse; and the best reading of the liturgy. In other words, the premium for the best-written composition on a 'moral or controversial subject' was £20; £10 for the next best and smaller amounts for inferior compositions as they 'shall appear to merit'.⁸⁶ The College Board awarded Edward Nangle a Downes divinity premium of £5 for a written composition in 1823, thereby suggesting that although he was an average undergraduate, he was a better divinity student and caught the attention of both his peers and Trinity academics sitting on the Board.⁸⁷ His biographer also noted the award, 'a second prize for a composition', which perhaps inspired Nangle to continue his career in the Church of Ireland.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 170.

⁸⁵ *Dublin University Calendar* 1833, p. 87.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Minutes of the Board (T.C.D. MUNV/5b/1, folio 346); *Dublin University Calendar* 1835 (Dublin, 1835), p. 35.

⁸⁸ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 26.

However, attending divinity lectures and receiving a Downes divinity premium did not guarantee Nangle a place in the Church. Competition for places in the Irish ministry was heated. Testimony available from the last decade of the eighteenth century suggests that roughly 78 students received the BA annually, and of this number, approximately 52 sought a career in the Church of Ireland.⁸⁹ By 1800, the total number of established church appointments did not exceed 1,200; and within this figure, no more than 40 became available each year. An anonymous writer lobbed a complaint at the reality of preferment in the Church of Ireland, siding with the seemingly frustrated graduates from Trinity College:

Many and great are the discouragements which offer themselves to the students who are intended for the learned professions, particularly those designed for the Church...If, on their coming out into the world, the doors of the professions which they wished to enter are shut against them, the education they have received will tend to make them miserable.⁹⁰

Furthermore, while it was common for an English or Scottish man to get church preferment in Ireland, it was virtually impossible for an Irishman to get any such opportunity in England.⁹¹ The limited number of positions that became available each year, therefore, were perhaps offered to the best and brightest from Trinity. Yet, after completing the divinity course with a Dr Downes premium in hand, Nangle may well have looked an impressive and capable candidate.

By 1824, Nangle had completed the regimented undergraduate and divinity courses, which armed him with a strong sense of rational empiricism, tempered with a developing evangelical ethos. Although perhaps catching

⁸⁹ *Thoughts on the present state of the college of Dublin; address to the gentlemen of the university* (Cork, 1792), p. 22.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁹¹ *Thoughts on the present state, Op. cit.*, p. 31; D.H. Akenson, *The church of Ireland*, p. 15.

some of the northerly breeze that carried 'vital religion' from Mathias's pulpit at the Bethesda Chapel to the College rooms of O'Brien and Singer, Nangle's evangelical sail was only half full before 1825. The most evangelicals like Singer could do before 1829, when Catholic Emancipation welded together the divers strands of Irish Protestantism, was to inculcate in students what Bowen refers to as 'High Church Evangelicalism', a designation that best describes Nangle's own conviction at this time.⁹² However, his real life experiences as a curate forced Nangle to abandon the ideology associated with the 'era of graceful reform', and to join 'the Protestant crusade in Ireland'.

Although evidence from a variety of sources indicates that the ascendancy of evangelical influence in the Church of Ireland was apparent in the years 1812-1816, it was not until 1822 that an archbishop officially sanctioned the 'Second Reformation' in Ireland.⁹³ On 24 October 1822 – when Edward Nangle was in his junior sophister year at Trinity College – William Magee, the newly appointed archbishop of Dublin, delivered his primary charge to the diocesan clergy assembled at St. Patrick's Cathedral. For many, his words inaugurated the beginning of open spiritual warfare between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. 'Political considerations', he began, 'unfortunately, make it the interest of many, whose condition, is influential, to court the favour of those who are hostile to the Established Church'.⁹⁴ Instead of seeking reconciliation with those worshipping outside of the established church, Magee chose to insult both the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterians with these now infamous lines:

⁹² Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 68.

⁹³ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 319.

⁹⁴ William Magee, *A charge delivered at his primary visitation, in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, on Thursday, the 27th of October, 1822* (Dublin, 1822), p. 2.

We, my Reverend brethren, are placed in a station, in which we are hemmed in by two opposite directions 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 speak in the Word of God a reason for the faith they possess; the other, so confident in the infallibility of their individual judgment as to the reasons of their duty to resist all authority in matters of religion.⁹⁵

Presbyterians had long been accustomed to such harangues from established church bishops, but to Roman Catholic leaders, who had advocated cooperation with their Protestant brethren, Magee's words read like a declaration of unprovoked religious war.⁹⁶ A year before, when King George IV had visited Ireland, sectarian animosities had been restrained. Now, after Magee's unexpected pre-emptive strike, they appeared unbridled.

Magee, who had successively been dean of Cork, bishop of Raphoe, and finally archbishop of Dublin, came from a district of Co. Fermanagh where there had long existed religious tensions. Before his Episcopal career, Magee had enjoyed an outstanding scholarly reputation as a fellow of Trinity College, where he taught from 1788 to 1812. During the 1790s he served as junior dean, demonstrating his affinity with orderliness and discipline, characteristics that carried over to his ecclesiastical career.⁹⁷ Magee was not generally 'evangelical' in the purely religious sense of the term, and indeed he had earlier deprecated those who advocated biblical as opposed to ecclesiastical authority in spiritual matters.⁹⁸ Although conservative by nature, Magee earned a reputation as a liberal in politics through his outspoken support for his lifelong friend, William Conygham Plunkett, who, despite

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 21.

⁹⁶ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 89

⁹⁷ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 254.

⁹⁸ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 385.

being Protestant, had strongly supported Catholic Emancipation during the 1820s.

Some years later, in 1825, Magee, before a parliamentary committee investigating the state of Ireland, asserted that there was nothing extraordinary in his charge of 1822, certainly nothing that he had not said many times before.⁹⁹ However, as archbishop of the country's most important diocese, he not only invited open conflict with the Catholic bishops but placed himself and his church in the forefront of the crude anti-Catholic crusade of the 'Second Reformation', which had recently been gaining momentum.¹⁰⁰ The organ of liberal Protestant opinion, the *Dublin Evening Post*, remarked, 'Had this charge, expressed as it was, in no very courteous or measured language, come from an individual less elevated in character and station than Archbishop Magee, it would have passed without any comment from us'.¹⁰¹ In his address, Magee could have taken the conciliatory tone of Richard Laurence, the Church of Ireland bishop of Cashel, who earlier in 1822 had spoken to his diocesan clergymen with 'no petulance of temper'.¹⁰² Yet, Magee chose to insult, perhaps unnecessarily, the faith held by the majority of people in his archdiocese.

As the *Dublin Evening Post* boldly predicted, neither the Presbyterians nor the Catholics took Magee's insults lightly. The liberal Unitarians among the Presbyterians made the strongest defence of their beliefs on rationalistic grounds, while a rising star in the Catholic episcopate, the youthful James

⁹⁹ *State of Ireland: Reports and Minutes of Evidence from the Select Committee Inquiring into Circumstances which had led to Disturbances in that Part of the United Kingdom 1825*, p. 3, H.C. 1825 (129) viii, 799.

¹⁰⁰ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 381.

¹⁰¹ *Dublin Evening Post* 29 Oct. 1822.

¹⁰² *Dublin Evening Post* 31 Oct. 12 Nov., 1822.

Doyle, bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, replied on behalf of the Catholics. Doyle's response to Magee's charge appeared two weeks later in the pages of the *Dublin Evening Post* – an unprecedented step for a Catholic bishop – and consequently infused a sense of confidence into the Catholic body as a whole.¹⁰³ Magee had left himself open to attack by arguing in his primary charge that the established church was the only body possessing a legitimate claim to apostolic succession. In an impressive display of legal, historical, and theological erudition, Doyle chipped away at Magee's argument, declaring that the property of the Church of Ireland was held not by divine sanction, but 'only by virtue of the civil law, and that law is penal – highly penal'.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Doyle ably grasped and highlighted the contradictions between the privileges enjoyed by the established church in Ireland and the moral framework of the legal system as endowed by the constitution. This was especially evident as Doyle attacked the system of tithes, long a bitter grievance of the hard-pressed peasantry.¹⁰⁵

Other high-ranking Catholics broke their silence and joined Doyle in defending their church and its followers from attack. In particular, Patrick Curtis, the Catholic primate of Ireland, and the youthful John MacHale, then a professor at Maynooth, eagerly entered the fray. MacHale had previously rallied the Catholic clergy to their standards in the famous *Hierophilus Letters*, written from 1820-1823. The primary purpose of the *Letters* was to expose the proselytising nature of evangelical societies involved in education and bible distribution. In particular, MacHale venomously attacked the Kildare

¹⁰³ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 387.

¹⁰⁴ W.J. Fitzpatrick, *The life, times, and correspondence of the Right Rev Dr Doyle, bishop of Kildare and Leighlin* (2 vols. Dublin, 1861), i. 203.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Place Society, an organisation that had previously been free from charges of proselytism; yet by 1819, a number of things, including the rise of evangelical opinion on its board of directors, forced Catholics to question the society's objectives.¹⁰⁶ Since the government gave an annual grant to the Kildare Place Society, Catholic leaders such as MacHale feared that the scope of their activities would greatly increase. While agitation between Catholics and Protestants had been increasing during the second decade of the nineteenth century, Magee's charge obviously exacerbated such tensions.

Subsequently, after 1822, local and national newspapers became a forum for polemical disputes between lesser-known apologists. While the controversy between the bishops was in full swing, sectarian hostilities at the popular level became even more open and aggressive. A severed calf's head, a symbol of gross insult and ridicule, was left by vandals upon the altar of a Catholic church in Ardee, Co. Louth which was, according to an incensed Patrick Curtis, the first act of war against his Church. Curtis quickly cast the blame on Magee, whose silence on the matter infuriated the Catholic primate: 'He must, therefore, have calmly foreseen, intended, and despised the evils his unprovoked aggression would naturally occasion'.¹⁰⁷ Almost overnight, Irish Catholics closed ranks with their leaders, threatening Protestants who endorsed Magee's message with verbal harangues – even physical harm. Consequently, fearing for his life, after 1824 Magee never left his residence unarmed.¹⁰⁸ Eventually, the effects of Magee's visitation address were seen throughout Ireland, as controversialists on both sides of the divide held public

¹⁰⁶ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 332.

¹⁰⁷ *Dublin Evening Post*, 16 Nov. 1822.

¹⁰⁸ William Magee to John Jebb, 29 May 1824 (T.C.D., Jebb Papers, MS 6396-7/196).

debates and composed polemical tracts defending their brand of Christianity. While the epicentre of the 'Second Reformation' was undoubtedly Dublin, rural areas began to show increased signs of sectarian tension during the 1820s. Outside Dublin, the difference between Protestants and Catholics was becoming more profound – a difference, according to a 'Dr. Brimstone', an avid reader of the *Dublin Evening Post*, meaning 'the difference between heaven and hell'.¹⁰⁹

Why did Archbishop Magee choose this particular time to give official sanction to the 'Second Reformation'? Irene Whelan had sought an answer in the nature of the campaign for Catholic rights, which increasingly emphasised the legal and constitutional. She saw Magee's charge in October 1822 as an attempt to regain the high moral ground for the Church of Ireland and its followers from the legal and constitutional reformers on the one hand but equally from the criticism and challenge of the evangelical movement on the other.¹¹⁰ In assuming the mantle of the reformation movement, Whelan claims that Magee was not so much ignoring the needs of the evangelicals within the established church as 'jumping on board and taking over the reins in the name of the Church of Ireland'.¹¹¹ While credible, this analysis perhaps gives too much power and influence to the evangelical movement in Ireland at the time. The reforming ethos within the Church of Ireland was at least partly responsible. Led by Archbishop Beresford, the first quarter of the nineteenth century was notable for a marked tightening in clerical discipline within the established church. Magee's own career, beginning with his days at Trinity,

¹⁰⁹ *Dublin Evening Post* 31 Jan. 1822.

¹¹⁰ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 382.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

was also characterised by a strict attention to organisation and discipline.¹¹² While the political climate of the time undoubtedly contributed to Magee's aggressive and provocative tone, as the archbishop of Dublin, he also felt compelled to remind his assembled clergy of their ministerial duties – one of which was to bring the Word of God to the Irish people. In his primary charge, he also castigated the clergy's lack of religious zeal: 'at no time, it is to be feared, has an indifference to religion been more prevalent.'¹¹³ Believing that religious indifference was a weakness within the established church, Magee attempted to light a spiritual fire under the assembled clergymen.¹¹⁴ While trying to get his own house in order, he stirred up a sectarian hornet's nest throughout the country. It was within this environment that Nangle came of age.

Thomas Lewis O'Beirne, the bishop of Meath, ordained Nangle deacon in 1824. Subsequently, Nangle returned to his hometown to receive his first clerical nomination as curate of Athboy. When he returned to Athboy, the priests denounced him by name from the pulpit and the local inhabitants shouted at him in the streets, labeling him a 'mischievous heretic and a gloomy fanatic'.¹¹⁵ However, he did not remain in Athboy long, for his superiors transferred him to a temporary appointment in Monkstown, a Dublin suburb. Later, in 1824, he was transferred to Arva, a parish in the Kilmore diocese, which formed a subdivision of the larger and more attractive parish of Killashandra. His time spent in Arva is crucial to understanding his later

¹¹² Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", p. 254.

¹¹³ William Magee, *A charge*, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Desmond Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 76.

¹¹⁵ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 32.

career, for the sectarian tensions in the area, which now hit close to home, forced Nangle to doubt the Roman Catholic church.

On 31 October 1823, Major Finch, the Military Secretary at the Royal Hospital in Dublin, forwarded a letter to the Dublin Castle offices of Henry Goulburn, the Irish chief secretary. The letter told of the repeated rioting that had afflicted the town of Killashandra, Co. Cavan. Gideon Ouseley, a Protestant itinerant missionary, had been preaching throughout the area and arrived in Killashandra at about four o'clock in the afternoon on 3 October to address the people attending the market. The Methodist General Irish Mission had previously employed Ouseley as a circuit-riding Irish preacher in 1797, and during the years following the 1798 rebellion, he had amassed a considerable following among the Irish poor. His 'comical leer', acquired after a fowling piece had exploded into the right side of his face when a young man, and his sincere message endeared him to his listeners, with many turning out just to have a look at the unusual looking man. Curious physical features and an approachable demeanor were not the only attributes that attracted his many admirers, for Ouseley preached in Irish, convinced that God's message was best conveyed in the native tongue. While crowds of country people showed their appreciation, calling him *Sioda na bhFear* – the silk of men – the priests did not share this admiration and frequently interfered with his preaching. On one bizarre occasion, a priest stood near Ouseley while he spoke and beat on a kettle to drown his voice.¹¹⁶ His preaching at

¹¹⁶ Thomas McCullagh, *Gideon Ouseley the wonderful Irish evangelist* (London, 1906), p. 119. The story of the priest and the kettle occurred in Binghamstown, Erris and has been used by his biographers to make the most of a moral victory. The reference is Bowen's, from *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland*, p. 37, which he found in William Arthur, *Life of Gideon Ouseley* (London and Toronto, 1876), p. 205.

Killashandra on 31 October 1823 unsurprisingly ignited a brawl.¹¹⁷ Usually Ouseley was able to use his charm and savvy to calm the rioters' passions, but this time the military was called in to quell the disturbance and it took them two hours to restore order.

About a month later, rioting returned to Killashandra and a number of people were injured or were 'very badly treated'.¹¹⁸ Military officials, trying to contain these disturbances, feared that they would spill over into bordering districts. These concerns became reality when rioting broke out just south of Killashandra, in Arva, Co. Cavan on 25 March 1824 when 'a great number of people collected and beat any Protestant that could be met with in the Fair.'¹¹⁹ Now Protestants were being targeted, irrespective of their social standing, and based on these reports they must have walked the streets with trepidation by December. During the 1820s, Arva 'was not an agreeable place to live in', as unrest and skirmishes between Protestants and Catholics continued to make life almost unbearable for those professing the established religion.¹²⁰

Sectarianism, therefore, had been rampant in Cavan prior to Nangle's arrival. During the middle 1820s, the county was a major arena of the Association for Promoting the Second Reformation, Lord Farnham's evangelical organisation that used all of its resources to attempt the conversion of Irish Catholics to Protestantism in the 'Kingscourt District', an area which

¹¹⁷ Ensign Edgelow to Major Finch, 30 Oct. 1823 (N.A.I., SOC, 1823 2520/12, enclosed).

¹¹⁸ Ensign Edgelow to Major Finch 28 Nov. 1823 (N.A.I., SOC, 1823 2520/13, enclosed).

¹¹⁹ Brigadier Major J. Sample to William Gregory, 27 Mar. 1824 (N.A.I., SOC, 1824 2622/9).

¹²⁰ Richard S. Brooke, *Recollections of the Church of Ireland*, ii, pp. 37-38.

consisted of parts of the counties of Cavan, Louth, Meath, Monaghan.¹²¹ In 1823, John Maxwell, the fifth Lord Farnham, inherited an extensive estate in the Kingscourt District. His father had been a firm supporter of ultra-Protestantism and when Lord Farnham married Lucy Annesley of the Gosford family, long-time stalwarts of the evangelical cause in Armagh, he became further entangled in the work of the 'Second Reformation'. The push to convert the Catholic tenants of the 'Kingscourt District' formally began in 1822, when the Rev Robert Winning, a minister connected with the Farnham household, invited the Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their own Language to provide teachers for Lord Farnham's Protestant schools.¹²² The Irish Society, founded in 1818 by Henry Joseph Monck Mason, a gold-medal winner from Trinity College, recruited, trained and supported Irish speakers to travel door-to-door, reading the Scriptures to Irish-speaking communities.¹²³ By 1825, the Irish Society maintained roughly 140 separate stations in Connacht and Munster.¹²⁴ The Irish Society, promptly responding to Winning's request, opened 83 schools on Lord Farnham's estate between 1822 and 1825, enrolling 3,090 scholars, including 2,110 adults. Although the reason for the increase in enrolment is difficult to explain, and we should be wary of evangelical propaganda, it does suggest a profound desire for primary education in Ireland at the time. By 1825, Lord Farnham reported that hundreds of Catholics living on his lands

¹²¹ Baptist Wriothlesley Noel, *Notes of a short tour through the midland counties of Ireland in the summer of 1836, with observations of the condition of the peasantry* (London, 1837), p. 103.

¹²² Henry Joseph Monck Mason, *History of the origin and progress of the Irish Society established for promoting the education of the native Irish, through the Medium of Their Own Language* (Dublin, 1846), p. 25.

¹²³ Padraig de Bruin, 'The Irish society's Bible teachers, 1818-27' in *Eigse* 19/2 (1983), p. 282.

¹²⁴ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 287.

had converted to Protestantism. Consequently, by the time Nangle arrived in Arva, Cavan had already become a centre for an aggressive and well-publicised proselytising mission.

To facilitate the management of his lands, Lord Farnham divided the Kingscourt Estate into five districts, each overseen by his agents, in order to advance 'the moral and religious character and improvement of the tenantry'.¹²⁵ Kingscourt's prominence as a centre for the 'Second Reformation' was further raised with the creation of a new administrative position: the moral agent. The office of moral agent, in contrast with the regular agent who oversaw the granting of leases and the collection of rent, was a completely novel development in British estate management, although evangelical communities in North America had been employing these types of agents for years.¹²⁶ Essentially, Farnham supplied tenants with churches, schools, and libraries; in return, the tenant was expected to pay rent in a punctual manner and to act in a courteous way to his neighbours and to Farnham's agents. The tenants came into frequent contact with the moral agent, whose duties consisted 'in visiting the schools throughout the estate; inquiring into the religious and moral condition of the peasants; and endeavouring in every practicable way, to promote their welfare.'¹²⁷

Lord Farnham's moral agent was William Krause, a native of the West Indies, who had seen active service in the Napoleonic wars. Krause,

¹²⁵ Lord Farnham, *A statement of the management of the Farnham Estates* (Dublin, 1830).

¹²⁶ For a detailed account of such an evangelical community operating during the early nineteenth century, see Paul E. Johnson, *A shopkeeper's millennium: society and revivals in Rochester, New York 1815-1837* (New York, 1985). Although a survey of a developing American city is not fully related to Ireland at this time, they have many similarities.

¹²⁷ C.S. Stanford, *Memoir of the late W.H. Krause, A.M., with selections from his correspondence* (Dublin, 1854), p. 37.

distinguished by 'a holy sobriety, a quiet cheerfulness, and an evenness of temperament', first came to Ireland in 1821 to attend the marriage of Joseph Dyas, a military friend, whose sister encouraged Krause to read the Bible and to apply it to his everyday life.¹²⁸ While recovering from a near-fatal illness during the summer of 1822, he underwent a conversion experience, after which 'his heart turned from sin to the world to the Lord.'¹²⁹ Since he now wished to enter into Holy Orders, he enrolled at Trinity College, Dublin in 1826, and later that year, accepted Farnham's invitation to become his moral agent, thereby embarking on a lengthy career as a controversialist, which ended by becoming an incumbent of the Bethesda Chapel in Dublin from 1840 until 1852.

Krause was ultimately responsible for bringing Nangle into the evangelical fold.¹³⁰ Since Arva was in close proximity to the Farnham estate, Nangle had appreciable interaction with Krause, whose Arminian views challenged Nangle's understanding of eternal salvation. Arminianism, which softened the doctrine of election by insisting that Jesus died to provide everyone with a chance for salvation, had been espoused by the Wesleys, bringing the displeasure of established church authorities. Nonetheless, Krause proudly attributed his evangelical zeal to the Methodists, whose doctrines inspired his work.¹³¹ Although Nangle never fully accepted Krause's Arminian outlook, he was greatly impressed with the moral agent's robust preaching style and religious fervour, which included reading and singing hymns, like the following:

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹³⁰ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 36.

¹³¹ C.S. Stanford, *Memoir of the late W.H. Krause*, p. 220.

Thou art gone to the grave! – but we will not deplore thee,
Whose God was thy ransom, thy Guardian, and Guide;
He gave thee, He took thee, and he will restore thee,
And death has no sting, for the Saviour has died.¹³²

By interacting with Krause, Nangle became aware of the Irish Society's work in Ireland as well as the designs of influential evangelicals – clerical and lay – who were resolute on transforming Ireland into a Protestant nation. Moreover, he also witnessed the benefits of good estate management, which looked after both the temporal and spiritual needs of the tenants.

While the proselytising activity at Kingscourt heightened the tensions between Catholics in and around Arva, another potential problem, the friction between the Methodists and the established church, threatened to divide the Protestant community in the county.¹³³ Earlier, Co. Cavan had become a stronghold for the primitive or church Methodists, an offshoot of the larger Methodist fold. Methodist ministers, who had not taken Anglican orders, had attracted the ire of established church authorities by administering the sacraments to Church of Ireland communicants. Relations deteriorated further when both the established and Presbyterian churches in Ireland refused the sacraments to those who frequented Methodist meetinghouses. Attempts to resolve this religious squabble led Methodists to split into two factions: the primitive or church Methodists, which seceded from the established church, offering full ecclesiastical rites to its people; and the Methodists, which became a religious society remaining within the Church of Ireland.¹³⁴ The primitive or church Methodists were an outspoken group, and to assert their

¹³² Ibid., p. 127.

¹³³ David Hempton, 'Evangelicalism in English and Irish Society, 1780-1840' in Mark A. Knoll, David W. Bebbington and George A. Rawlyk (eds.), *Evangelicalism: comparative studies of popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and beyond, 1700-1990* (Oxford, 1994), p. 168.

¹³⁴ David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster society 1740-1890* (London and New York, 1992), p. 77.

legitimacy, they resisted the proselytising advances of the Church of Ireland on Lord Farnham's lands. Subsequently, they never fully welcomed Nangle or other evangelical curates to their community, making their work among the people difficult.¹³⁵

Despite these tensions within the Protestant community around Arva, where Nangle had lived and worked, his main enemy was the Roman Catholic Church. He believed that the poverty and ignorance of the Catholics within his parish resulted from the control of the priests who, according to Krause, 'use the most unchristian and barbarous means to maintain their dominion over the people's minds.'¹³⁶ One incident in particular, which took place while Nangle was in Arva, solidified his antipathy towards the Roman Catholic priesthood. A parish priest told a local epileptic man that his condition would be cured if he wore a scapular, recited a few Latin prayers, and never set foot in a Protestant church for the rest of his life. Desperate for relief, the ailing man complied with the priest's recommendations, but to no avail, as the uncontrollable tremors persisted. Hearing that the man still suffered from epilepsy, Nangle became filled with righteous indignation, for the priest's deceitful trickery had been exposed to the public. Soon afterwards, Nangle 'began to be fully alive to the errors and superstitions of the Romish system', and he determined that, with God's help, he 'would henceforward use all his energies to counteract the influence of that system.'¹³⁷

¹³⁵ C.H. Crookshank, *Days of revival: being the history of methodism in Ireland* (4 vols, Clonmell, 1994), iv, p. 54.

¹³⁶ C.S. Stanford, *Memoir of the late W.H. Krause*, p. 168.

¹³⁷ C.H. Crookshank, *Days of revival*, p. 38.

Nangle's conversion experience, like that of most 'educated, sober and respectable' Anglican evangelicals in the nineteenth century, was gradual.¹³⁸ While the most dramatic evangelical conversion stories were of wildly dissolute sinners who settled down to live sober and godly lives, a much more common type was that of a reasonably moral person, perhaps even someone ordained, who came to see that everything in the world came from God.¹³⁹ Evangelicals who had once experienced such awareness looked back on their previous religious lives, which might have seemed impeccable to others, as no better in the eyes of God than the wickedness of the most debauched. While in Arva, Nangle underwent a type of Pauline conversion, a 'road to Damascus' experience, in which he became immediately aware of God's immanence in the world. He had been visiting a friend, discussing a Biblical justification for evangelicalism as read in Isaiah 53.1 ('Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities'). When returning home on horseback, the presence of God overcame him. In relating this incident to his biographer, Nangle remarked, 'I travelled along the road, calling upon the beasts and the birds, the trees and the fields, the mountains and the plains, to join in celebrating Jehovah's praise.'¹⁴⁰ Although Nangle did not seriously contemplate a career as a Church of Ireland missionary at this time, this singular event, in all of its spiritual melodrama, played a significant role in Nangle's gradual evangelical development, for it suggests that an inner spirituality was central to his conversion experience.

¹³⁸ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), p. 7.

¹³⁹ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism", pp. 44-45.

¹⁴⁰ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 36.

Another aspect of Nangle's conversion experience was his circle of friends. Since Arva was near Athboy, Nangle frequently visited his native parish. Besides calling on his father, he often stopped by the home of Dr James Adams, 'a lover of everyone whom he regarded as a true follower of Jesus Christ.'¹⁴¹ There, he met Dr Neason Adams, who had a profitable medical practice in Dublin, and who had been taking a spirited interest in the spread of the Irish Gospel to the native Irish. The two established a lifelong friendship, which would later be cemented on Achill, for in the future the kindness of Neason Adams would often counteract Nangle's petulance. While making these visits to the Adams home, Nangle also met his future wife, Eliza, daughter of Henry Warner of Marvelstown, Co. Meath. The couple married in 1828, and they would be together until her early death in 1850.

After two years in Arva, ministering to a large, and at times, openly hostile farming population, Nangle was forced to resign his curacy because of ill-health. To complicate matters further, his family had fallen on hard times, resulting from a drawn out and costly legal battle concerning the family estate, so the unfortunate young curate faced both poverty and poor health.¹⁴² On resigning his curacy, Nangle lost his stipend and sheepishly returned home to Athboy to recover and to draft a circular letter to the bishops of the Church of Ireland, drawing attention to the plight of disabled curates. His plea was ignored. He then wrote to Sir Robert Peel, who promptly responded, but offered nothing but commiseration. By 1826, Nangle was sick, unemployed,

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁴² Irene Whelan, 'Edward Nangle and the Achill mission' in Raymond Gillespie and G. Moran, (eds.), *'A various country': essays in Mayo history 1500-1900* (Westport, 1987), p. 119.

and frustrated with his chosen profession, yet he remained steadfast in his unqualified hatred of Catholicism.

From late 1826 until 1829, Nangle, infirm and disaffected, began a protracted period of convalescence. In his hour of need, Nangle, apparently out of options, called upon his newly made acquaintance, Dr Neason Adams, who allowed him to recuperate at his beautiful home on St. Stephen's Green in central Dublin. Adams feared the worse for his debilitated friend, who was having difficulty in breathing. 'One lung was gone', Adams sadly diagnosed, 'and the other one is going'.¹⁴³ This kind of crisis figured in many an evangelical conversion, for by coming to terms with their mortality, a true Christian would be regenerated, or 'born again'.¹⁴⁴ In this case, Nangle appeared to be well on his way to spiritual re-birth. When the Rev. J.R. Carson, a family friend of Adams, paid a visit, Nangle's spiritual countenance, which shone brightly despite his weakened condition, left a lasting impression:

He was lying on a sofa in the drawing room quite unable to hold a conversation, except on his fingers. His *Dactylogy* struck me, but the heavenly expression of his countenance struck me much more. His very looks seemed to be lighted up from the indwelling of Christ...he was indeed a temple of the Holy Ghost.¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, those, like Nangle in 1826, who had only experienced a partial conversion, often prayed for a physical ailment to complete the regenerating process.¹⁴⁶ If Nangle's health would return, it was probably reasoned, he would arise even stronger in the ways of Christ.

Since Nangle's delicate state of health confined him indoors, this allowed him to dedicate ample time to reading. At some point during his

¹⁴³ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 41.

¹⁴⁴ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 41.

¹⁴⁶ Ian Bradley, *The call to seriousness* (London, 1976), p. 21.

confinement, he read a work by a Scottish Baptist, Christopher Anderson, entitled, *Historic sketches of the native Irish*, which his biographer argued changed the young man's life.¹⁴⁷ While reading Anderson's book, which among other things told of the need to proselytise the Catholics of Ireland with an Irish translation of the Bible, Nangle innocently came across the following passage describing Achill Island:

Achill, or Eagle Island, so named from the great resort of eagles thither, is the largest of the Irish Isles, being thirteen English miles long, by nine or ten abroad, but no minute description of it has ever appeared. Although the island contains 4,000 souls, it and three others are united with Burrishool on the mainland.¹⁴⁸

Anderson's immediate effect inspired Nangle to learn Irish. And he was able to acquire at least a rudimentary knowledge in a short time. The long-term influence of the book was not clear, but it did encourage Nangle to ponder the possibility of bringing a Protestant mission to a supposedly untouched corner of Catholic Ireland.

With his health partially restored, Nangle, perhaps inspired by Anderson, journeyed off to the Scottish Highlands to recuperate further and to reassess his career. He prayed to God for a full recovery, promising, 'to devote himself to the service of Christ among some portion of the Irish-speaking population'.¹⁴⁹ Evidently the mountain air and intense prayer did him much good, for he returned to Dublin, seemingly totally converted and committed to a militant brand of evangelical Protestantism.

When Nangle had been working as a curate in Athboy and Arva, Irish evangelicalism had become 'beaucratished' in Dublin. This was seen in the

¹⁴⁷ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Anderson, *Historical sketches of the ancient Irish and their descendants; illustrative of their past and present state with regard to literature, education, and oral instruction* (Edinburgh, 1828), p. 168.

¹⁴⁹ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 44

large number of societies that sprang up, dedicated to the improvement of the 'native Irish' through education and Scriptural instruction. Akenson refers to this time as the 'era of graceful reform' within the Church of Ireland.¹⁵⁰ Most of the leading lights in these groups were Trinity-educated and 'possessed of that self-conscious awareness of having been called upon to answer the demands of 'true Christianity', the hallmark of the regenerated Christian.¹⁵¹ Since most of the offices of the evangelical societies were located on Sackville Street, one of Dublin's most fashionable thoroughfares, evangelical men and women perhaps interacted with each other on a daily basis. John Perceval, the temporarily mentally ill son of Spencer Perceval (the Prime Minister who was assassinated in 1812) commented on the Dublin evangelicals: 'Religion is not amongst them a matter of form or ceremony, it is the *motive and end of their life*'.¹⁵² Therefore, Dublin, in the late 1820s, was the place to be for those seeking the company of highly motivated evangelicals.

When Nangle returned to the city sometime in 1829, he immediately became involved with the Dublin religious societies. Although Nangle had spent much time reading during his time of convalescence, his name does not appear on the subscription lists of the leading evangelical journals in Ireland – *The Christian Examiner*, *The Christian Herald*, and *The CMS Missionary Register*. This suggests that perhaps Nangle was not fully involved in the world of vital religion before his return to Dublin (or possibly, that he could not afford the luxury of a subscription). However, in 1829, he arrived onto the

¹⁵⁰ Donald H. Akenson, *The Church of Ireland*, pp. 71-145. Irene Whelan thinks this period one of 'Quiet Progress' within the Church of Ireland, *Evangelical religion*, p. 275.

¹⁵¹ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 178.

¹⁵² John Perceval, *A narrative of the treatment experienced by a gentleman during a state of mental derangement designed to explain the causes and nature of insanity* (London, 1840), reproduced in G. Benson, (ed.), *Perceval's narrative: a patient's account of his psychosis 1830-1832* (London, 1962), p. 13.

evangelical scene in Dublin. He accepted a position as secretary of the Sunday School Society for Ireland and shortly thereafter he became literary assistant to the Religious Tracts Society, founded by Thomas Parnell (and whose brother William was the grandfather of Charles Stuart Parnell). Parnell's efforts in the case of evangelicalism had earned him the affectionate nickname, 'Tract Parnell', as his 'pockets bulged with tracts' which he distributed to Dublin homes.¹⁵³ As a literary assistant, Nangle learned the craft of setting type, printing and publishing, and of composing polemical tracts geared towards the city's growing evangelical audience. His literary efforts and command of language won him the praise of his peers. He took a small house in the southern suburbs, on the Monkstown Road, where 'short simple services' were held at various times of the day.¹⁵⁴ These popular gatherings were advertised in the front window, acting as a supplement rather than as a substitute for the more formal services held in evangelical places of worship like the Bethesda Chapel.¹⁵⁵ Fully recovered from his three-year illness and his isolation from the developing world of Irish evangelical Protestantism, Nangle doggedly carried out his newfound work. By 1830 Nangle had become firmly established within the evangelical community in Dublin and assisted in preparing for the push westward.

¹⁵³ J.B. Atkins, *Life of Sir William Howard Russell* (2 vols, London, 1911), i, p.7.

¹⁵⁴ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 44.

¹⁵⁵ Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession*, p. 273.

Chapter Two

Economy and Social Structures in Mayo before 1831

Ireland is the singular country of Europe where the Conqueror and the Conquered have not incorporated and where for these eight hundred years there has existed and still exists two almost distinct races of inhabitants.

-General David Dundas (1802)¹

Everything in Ireland was either Catholic or Protestant – newspapers, colleges, hospitals, banks, shops, and professional advisers. The distinction was not applied to horses; but almost to everything else.

-Terence de Vere White (1973)²

The state of rural society in Co. Mayo before 1831 is important to establish before we examine the history of the Achill Missionary Settlement, not least because this highlights the underlying tensions prevalent in the county before the arrival of Edward Nangle. It is quite evident that the sectarian tensions seen in other parts of Ireland at this time, often fuelled by an acute millenarianism, were found in Connacht, although to a much lesser degree than in richer agricultural regions like north Munster. While the principal purpose of this chapter is to place Achill within the broader social and religious context of the early nineteenth century, national developments, especially changing concepts of Irish national identity, are also considered.

The Mayo Economy before the Famine

During the eighteenth century, the rural population of Co. Mayo relied on the sale of cattle, sheep and wool to dealers from the east and south of the country to pay their comparatively low rents.³ Other products, like flax and oats, were also sold to merchants trading with Ulster or English markets, while potatoes were cultivated and kept as the main source of sustenance for the

¹ Report on Ireland, Mar. 1802 (N.A.I., Reports 240, WO 55/1549 (1)).

² Terrence De Vere White, 'The Freemasons' in T. Desmond Williams (ed.), *Secret societies in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), p. 54.

³ Desmond McCabe, 'Land and social order in Mayo' (Ph.D. Thesis UCD, 1991), p. 8.

family. Richard Pococke, who explored the western Irish seaboard in 1752, noted that the inhabitants of Achill Island principally reared sheep and made a comfortable living by trading wool with French merchants, who visited the island fortnightly.⁴ Although Pococke did not visit the island, he described the customs of the islanders as he viewed Achill from atop Mount Tarman, which rises above Clew Bay:

All their vessels are made of wood, most of them cut out of solid timber, their stools are long and narrow like a stillion, and their table is a long sort of stool about twenty inches high and broad and two yards long; their food chiefly oat cakes baked on the griddle and potatoes with their butter milk...They have here a French potato with a purple blossom, it is something like an apple, but is watery and not so good as the other kinds. However the potato does best in sandy and I believe boggy grounds, and the cold and moisture of the potato is a good corrective of the heat of the oaten diet.⁵

While the Mayo economy was predominantly pastoral up to the 1750s, in the second half of the eighteenth-century, in response to the changes in the demand for cereal products internationally and to meet the challenges of an expanding population, local agriculture became more diversified.⁶ By 1812 the sale of yarn, linen cloth, oats, wheat, barley, poitin, kelp, herrings, and wool kept the Mayo economy relatively buoyant.⁷ Writing from Lackan, Co. Mayo, James Little, the Church of Ireland rector, recalled that in the years before 1800, 'the generality of peasantry found themselves raised from great poverty'.⁸ Another writer, James McParlan, noted that in 1802 around Claremorris: 'there was all over the county a great improvement in the neatness and dress of both sexes'.⁹ When Oliver Kelly, later to become the Catholic archbishop of Tuam, served a coastal parish situated between

⁴ George Stokes, *Pococke's tour in Ireland in 1752* (Dublin, 1891), p. 93; Constantia Maxwell (ed.), *A tour in Ireland with general observations on the present state of that kingdom made in the years 1776, 1777, and 1778 by Arthur Young* (Belfast, 1983), pp. 83-84; Irish Folklore Commission, vol. 1330, p. 458.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶ Eric L. Almquist, "Mayo and beyond: land, domestic industry, and rural transformation in the Irish west" (Ph.D. Thesis Boston University, 1977), pp. 142-170.

⁷ McCabe, "Land and social order in Mayo" (appendix 1); Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland: County Mayo from the Plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge, 1994).

⁸ James Little, 'Little's diary of the French landing in 1798', in *Analecta Hibernica* (xi), Jul. 1941, p. 72.

⁹ James McParlan, *Statistical survey of the county of Mayo* (Dublin, 1802), p. 89.

Westport and Newport in 1806, he recalled that the people there 'were extremely comfortable', making a living by spinning flax into linen.¹⁰ As long as agricultural prices remained high and country people generated a reasonable income, landlords, some of whom were Catholic, could enjoy a steady growth in their rental income from year to year. However, all this dramatically changed after 1814.

High wartime provision prices meant that rents were promptly paid. After 1814 landlords experienced great difficulty in collecting rents, as agricultural prices fell.¹¹ Problems were exacerbated with the failure of the small Bank of Tuam in December 1814, which resulted in a severe loss for those holding its notes, and more widely a contraction of local credit facilities.¹² As the relative prosperity experienced in wartime Mayo dried up, landlords in Mayo (as elsewhere) were forced to offer abatements in rent beginning in 1816.¹³ On the estate of Sir Richard O'Donnel, which covered most of Achill Island, rents were reduced by 15 per cent between 1816 and 1826, in effect restoring the levels of 1805.¹⁴ Although initially these reductions in rent alleviated the pressures on the larger landholders and graziers, smallholders on tillage land benefited as well.¹⁵ John Bernard Trotter, who visited Achill in October 1817, recorded the effects of the post-war agricultural depression on the island: 'The little society lived contented, far from the world, undisturbed by its noise or folly, and unallured by its wealth. They, however, feel the distress of the times; their produce brought little; and the rent, which they paid in one sum, in common, was become too

¹⁰ Testimony of Archbishop Oliver Kelly, *Second report from the select committee on the state of Ireland, 1825*, H.C. 1825, ix, p. 247.

¹¹ Henry Blake and family (attributed), *Letters from the Irish highlands* (London, 1825), p. 43.

¹² Desmond McCabe, 'Land and social order in Mayo', p. 13.

¹³ Report from the select committee on agriculture with minutes of evidence, appendix and index, H.C. 1833 (612) V, pp. 315-352.

¹⁴ O'Donnel estate rentals 1814-1816 and 1826-31 (N.L.I. MS 5821 and N.L.I. MS 6745) cited in Denis McCabe, 'Land and social order in Mayo', p. 13.

¹⁵ Report from the select committee on agriculture with minutes of evidence, appendix and index, H.C. 1833 (612) V, pp. 315-352.

high'.¹⁶ By 1820, therefore, the region was showing signs of acute depression, relieved only by the continuance of rural linen manufacture.

The boom in Mayo textile production that continued until the early 1820s saved the region from full-blown economic catastrophe. In 1802, James McParlan, who investigated the county's economy, had reported that many farmers grew flax throughout the province and that linen production was increasing specifically in Mayo.¹⁷ A number of landlords were actively involved at promoting the cultivation of flax and the provision of linen markets. For example, a landlord who started a linen market in Claremorris also distributed flax seed among the local poor.¹⁸ While the export of linen had increased in Connacht in the early 1790s, especially from Sligo, exports fell rapidly after 1800. However, by 1805, Newport had eclipsed Sligo before falling behind again after 1810. Around 1814, as agricultural prices plummeted, linen exports from both Sligo and Newport increased dramatically, thereby staving off the worst effects of the post-war economic crisis. Between 1815 and 1824, the estimated acreage of flax grown in Mayo was about 5 per cent of the national flax average, and up to the latter year, the county's market sales of locally manufactured cloth remained high.¹⁹ Furthermore, while Castlebar was the leading market town for linen sales in Mayo, the Clew Bay area, which included Achill, led the county in non-agricultural production between 1816 and 1821.²⁰ While Achill did experience an economic downturn in 1817, Trotter noted that the people remained relatively comfortable, probably due to textile production: 'The people of this island are extremely intelligent. They converse with ease on

¹⁶ John Bernard Trotter, *Walks through Ireland in the years 1812, 1814, and 1817; described in a series of letters to an English gentleman* (London, 1819), p. 478.

¹⁷ James McParlan, *Statistical survey*, p. 31-33.

¹⁸ Trustees of the Linen Board, *Minutes (Report of a tour of inspection through the provinces of Leinster, Munster, and Connacht by Peter Besnard* (Dublin, 1817), p. 58 cited in Eric Almquist, "Mayo and beyond", p. 148.

¹⁹ Eric Almquist, "Mayo and beyond", p. 145.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

most usual subjects; have a love for information; are respectful, but not mean to superiors; are tolerably educated, reverence the law, and are quiet and loyal.'²¹ Even the parish priest of Achill, Father Macmanus, who entertained Trotter on his visit, displayed the pleasant characteristics of a country gentleman:

He was a very young man of modest and pleasing address, and gave us all the refreshment in his power to offer...His conversation was correct and liberal; and his small library, containing, among others, some historical French works, seemed the chief society he could have in this sequestered spot!²²

While the income derived from spinning was modest, it had crucial implications for local Mayo society, for it allowed small landholders, especially those that cultivated less than five acres, to make up the rent.²³ However, in 1825, when the new technology of water-powered spinning was successfully developed in Ulster, the export of yarn to that province from Mayo almost came to a standstill.²⁴ Moreover, the re-imposition of U.S. tariffs on the import of cloth from Ireland in May 1824 closed another market for the Mayo linen trade.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, when yarn and cloth exports from Mayo shrivelled up during the 1820s, panic set in. Although further rent abatements and a minor recovery of corn prices from 1824 sustained the economy for a short time, it was not enough to overcome the long-term effects of the failed textile industry.²⁶ Consequently, some estates fell into disorder as tenants in abandoned holdings had made their way to towns like Westport and Castlebar in search of employment. Cattle prices also fell during the 1820s, and certain regions in Mayo, like Ballycroy which depended on cattle rearing,

²¹ Ibid., p. 476.

²² John Bernard Trotter, *Walks through Ireland*, p. 470.

²³ Denis McCabe, 'Land and social order in Mayo', p. 14.

²⁴ Eric Almquist, "Mayo and beyond", p. 150.

²⁵ *Mayo Constitution*, 17 Jan. 1831.

²⁶ Denis McCabe, "Land and social order in Mayo", p. 17.

were in very bad shape by the 1830s.²⁷ John Lyons, the dean of Killala and parish priest of Kilmore-Erris from 1823 to 1845, summarised the decade of economic devastation in North Mayo:

It is not ten years since there was a great many respectable persons – the holders of old leases and substantial farmers residing in this parish...there is scarcely a remnant left...Their cattle are fewer, their dress more shabby, the diet more scanty and their means to pay rent and taxes limited. In many instances, asses were substituted for horses, and cows exchanged for a few ragged sheep. Second-hand clothes or rags take the place of comfortable frieze.²⁸

According to contemporary reports from travellers, conditions in western Mayo in general and on Achill in particular had dramatically deteriorated by the end of the 1820s. Roads were broken-down and bridges were crumbling, barely standing in a dilapidated and neglected state. The writer W.H. Maxwell, who arrived on Achill in 1829 with a hunting party, remarked that a coastguard's cabin, which stood in striking contrast to the 'filth and misery of the surrounding hovels', offered the only evidence of cultivation upon the island.²⁹ Although the courtesy and manners of the people delighted Maxwell during his visit, the poverty prevalent throughout Achill shocked him.

A new poverty perhaps best describes the socio-economic situation of Mayo in the years immediately before 1830. Although market agriculture and textile production were important, perhaps the strongest social structure of nineteenth-century Mayo was a primitive land system called rundale – known in other parts of Britain as 'runningdale,' 'runrig,' 'reudal,' or 'rig and rennal.'³⁰ While this land tenure system had definite roots in medieval times, rundale persisted in western Mayo until the late 1800s, largely because it suited well the needs of the Mayo poor. Rundale was a system of joint occupation, where land was divided into small patches and was subsequently distributed among co-tenants; or as a county surveyor from Castlebar told the

²⁷ Patrick Knight, *Erris in the Irish highlands* (Dublin, 1836), p. 79.

²⁸ *Castlebar Telegraph*, 15 Apr. 1835.

²⁹ W.H. Maxwell, *Wild sports of the west* (2 vols, London, 1832), i, p. 182.

³⁰ Eric Almquist, "Mayo and beyond", p. 90.

Devon Commission, which investigated the occupation of Irish land in 1845: 'One or two persons in each townland take the land from the landlord, and divide it among the other persons'.³¹ Farmers had usufruct rights to several patches of land of varying quality in different localities within the larger plot. In practice, this meant that a landlord would agree on a lease with a tenant, who in turn would rent out portions of his plot to others, usually family members or close associates. Every two or three years, the headsmen (heads of quarters), who were the acknowledged arbitrators and organisers of the community's agricultural life, would redistribute the land, with each tenant receiving a *collop*, or the grazing area for one cow, for each 30s of rent paid.³² In Achill and Erris in 1844, there were in most townlands 'two or three looked upon as heads or chiefs (of quarters) and everything is done under their direction'.³³ John Patrick Lyons described this system to the Devon Commission:

Generally four men in the village take the land, and become what they call head of quarters; and then they take in with them a certain number of other tenants to become co-partners; but the four men are the parties who are generally responsible to the landlord. They are the persons who determine the numbers of *sums* and the quantity of tillage land to which each of the tenants is entitled in proportion to the rent to which he is liable.³⁴

Although rundale had disappeared from other regions of Ireland even before the nineteenth century, it persisted in Mayo, largely because it provided a means by which premium grazing land, which was difficult to obtain, could be shared. Besides grazing, farmers raised barley on their small plots, principally for the illegal distillers; oats for export markets; flax for local linen manufacture; and potatoes for consumption.³⁵ As the nineteenth century progressed, the proportion of the land devoted to potato cultivation grew

³¹ *Report from Her Majesty's Commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect of the occupation of land in Ireland*, H.C., 1845, xix, I (hereafter cited as the Devon Commission), vol. 2, p. 441.

³² Devon Commission, H.C. 1845, I, [616], xx, p. 410.

³³ Devon Commission, H.C. 1845, II, [606], xix, p. 416, 441.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

³⁵ Eric Almquist, "Mayo and beyond", pp. 176-178; Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, p. 57.

steadily, thereby choking the export market and transforming tenants into single-crop subsistence farmers.³⁶ Furthermore, in this period of rapid population expansion, the rundale system allowed growing families to subdivide their plots into thirds or quarters in order to provide for their children, who would otherwise consider emigration. In 1791 the population of Mayo has been estimated to be 140,000 persons; in 1821 it had grown to 293,112 and in 1831 it reached 366,328 – an increase of just over 150 per cent in 42 years.³⁷

Rundale appears to have been widespread in western Mayo, especially on the O'Donnell estate. There during the 1790s 'leases [were] generally for three lives...[were] made to the people of a whole village, or...to twenty [villagers] joined in one lease'.³⁸ While Almquist is uncertain about the extent of rundale in Mayo during the early nineteenth century, he has estimated that 'common tenants' on the O'Donnell estates in 1788 accounted for 40 per cent of rent income.³⁹ A large portion of Achill, which made up most of the O'Donnell estate was therefore held in 'common'. John Trotter, visiting Achill in 1817, blamed the people's poverty on the rundale system and pejoratively wrote of its shortcomings:

The fertile ground is let in a sort of tenantry in common: the hamlet divides a portion of the land among the inhabitants and all are bound in one lease to pay a certain rent (sum) which equalled the amount of grass a full grown cow could eat in one season. As a result of this there is less improvement and continual discord. A portion of land can be given to a stranger or inherited, a new division is then called for which the landlord may grant and the whole hamlet is then thrown into confusion.⁴⁰

According to Table 1, based on material from the Ordnance Survey namebooks for 1838, 51,454 statute acres out of 51,522 in the parish of Achill

³⁶ Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, p. 57.

³⁷ David Dickson, Cormac O'Grada and S. Daultrey, 'Health tax, household size and Irish population change 1672-1821', *PRIA*, Section C, Vol. 82C, No. 6 (Dublin 1982), Appendix Table I, p. 178; *Census of Ireland 1831*, pp. 316-321.

³⁸ Patrick Knight, *Erris*, p. 102.

³⁹ Eric Almquist, "Mayo and beyond", pp. 83-84.

⁴⁰ John Bernard Trotter, *Walks through Ireland in the years 1812, 1814, and 1817; described in a series of letters to an English gentleman* (London, 1819), p. 478.

were under rundale.⁴¹ The remaining 58 acres probably referred to the lands held by the Achill Missionary Settlement, formally established in 1834. The coming of Edward Nangle, therefore, would have surely upset the traditional methods of land management on the island.

Unsurprisingly, the common ownership of the land led to many disputes among co-tenants. An observer in 1812 took notice of the 'continual wrangling and pertinacious litigation, for trifles, scarcely worth a straw', while Frederick Cavendish, the proprietor of the Castlebar-based newspaper, the *Telegraph*, told the Devon Commission that rundale and the frequent redistribution of plots led to incessant fighting.⁴² Since tenants needed access to various plots throughout the larger holding, established thoroughfares were needed to avoid the trampling of planted crops. This created many problems, as tenants driving cattle to various fields often stomped over their neighbour's land, creating a dispute that could last for generations. In 1830, near Aglish, a man attempted to block off a path near his house frequently used by his neighbours. His neighbours, citing tradition, responded 'that the route had been the pathway for 50 years'.⁴³ Emotions on this subject ran high and parties were difficult to reconcile.

While disputes over the tenure of land and access to arable pastures were frequent, trespass was the archetypal difficulty created by rundale – and was the major motive in assault in Mayo before the Famine.⁴⁴ People, however, were not always the main target of attack. While farmers feared that roaming cattle and sheep would uncontrollably damage crops underfoot, they saved their strongest antipathy for pigs, the mainstay of cottiers in Mayo after 1800.⁴⁵ In September 1828 two pigs, belonging to Martin O'Hara of Aglish,

⁴¹ Ordnance Survey Namebooks 1838, Co. Mayo.

⁴² E. Wakefield, *An account of Ireland: statistical and political* (2 vols, Dublin 1812), i, p. 271; *Devon Commission, Minutes of Evidence*, Pt. II, p. 243.

⁴³ *Mayo Constitution*, 17 May 1830.

⁴⁴ Desmond McCabe, *Land and social order in Mayo*, 134.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

were stoned to death by his neighbours the McOwens, for foraging in their fields.⁴⁶ Another incident occurred in a Murrisk village in September 1833, when neighbours chopped off the tails and ears of two pigs belonging to Sarah Durkan.⁴⁷ Such trespasses, and the manner in which they were resolved, had the potential to create long-lasting animosity between neighbours.

Sectarianism and Violence in Mayo, 1820-1834

As evident in the above examples, during the pre-Famine period, Mayo experienced varying degrees of interpersonal violence that frequently grew out of tensions in peasant social and agricultural life.⁴⁸ While some agrarian outrages sprang from the well of sectarianism, the majority of rural disturbances in Mayo after the Napoleonic wars were rooted in economic grievances. Opposition to tithes, priests' fees (which included payments for baptisms, marriages, last rites, and private masses), grand jury and vestry cesses, rent levels, the price of grain, and the export of grain during times of extreme scarcity became common gripes in Mayo, particularly after the drop in food prices and the collapse of the textile industry. Like other Irish counties, agrarian violence regularly disturbed Mayo during the half-century before the Famine, and while the causes of these rural tensions have been difficult to pinpoint, they were often explained in sectarian terms.⁴⁹

Sectarianism was a nagging problem in rural Ireland throughout most of the nineteenth century. As S.J. Connolly has pointed out, 'relations between Catholics and Protestants in the first two decades of the nineteenth century were strangely mixed in character'.⁵⁰ Since 1798, many Irish Protestants had looked askance upon their Catholic neighbours and during the

⁴⁶ *Mayo Constitution*, 11 Sept. 1828.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 Sept. 1833.

⁴⁸ Desmond McCabe, "Land and social order in Mayo", p. 53.

⁴⁹ Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics* (Dublin, 1981), p. 34.

⁵⁰ S.J. Connolly, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-1830' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland under the Union 1801-1870* (Oxford, 1989), p. 74.

1820s, especially after Daniel O'Connell began to raise the political aspirations of Catholics, the social barriers between the two main religious groups became even more pronounced. As in the previous century, gangs that came together to violently address local grievances caused a large percentage of the criminal activity in the Irish countryside. Whiteboys, Ribbonmen, Threshers, Terry Alts, or whatever title was adopted by illegal agrarian secret, oath-bound societies, almost always involving an element of anti-Protestant sentiment, meant only one thing to Irish Protestants, whether a landlord, a minister, or a common labourer – sectarian aggression. Sectarian lines stiffened when police officials, who before 1836 were generally members of the established church or some other Protestant group, combated agrarian crimes with a bias of their own.⁵¹ The Catholic population, therefore, often translated any measure taken by the Irish administration to suppress agrarian outrage at this time, as a form of sectarian oppression.

During the second half of the eighteenth-century, Connacht had been considered the quietest corner of the nation, the province least affected by sectarian discord.⁵² However, following 1798, religious bitterness surfaced in many parishes throughout north Connacht, after General Humbert had landed his expedition of 1,100 men near Killala, Co. Mayo on 22 August 1798. On his arrival, the French general had distributed pamphlets containing a moving proclamation headed, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Union!' Yet, while such rhetoric defended liberty and inspired rebellion, what compelled Mayo farmers to turn their pikes against local authority figures were regional pressures, age-old grievances, sectarian fears, as well as the opportunity to settle scores and, perhaps, to rid the region of Protestants.⁵³ This suggests that, despite some

⁵¹ S.J. Connolly, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-1830', p. 82; James Donnelly, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock: millenarianism and sectarianism in the Rockite movement 1821-24' in Samuel Clarke and James Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants: violence and political unrest 1780-1914* (Madison, 1983), pp. 127-135.

⁵² Desmond Bowen, *Souperism: myth or reality?* (Cork 1970), p. 34.

⁵³ Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, p. 76.

contemporary testimony to the contrary, sectarianism did exist in Mayo even before 1798. Although the initial outpouring of bitterness between Protestants and Catholics following 1798 resulted from perceived injustices during the crisis (like the hanging of a Mayo-born parish priest for offering civility to the French invaders) shortly thereafter sectarianism became blatant.⁵⁴ Even a typical Church of Ireland clergyman, like James Little, who had established deep roots in the Connacht countryside, related that the warm relations generally enjoyed between Protestants and Catholics in Mayo during the eighteenth century had been dramatically altered with the defeat of the French in 1798. 'Now for the first time only', Little wrote in his diary, 'parties assumed here that character which in Ireland they are so certain to fall into, that of Protestant and Catholic.'⁵⁵ Although most of the sectarian brawling in Ireland before 1820 had generally confined itself to Ulster, in particular the squabbles between Orangemen, and their Catholic counterparts, the Defenders – later the Ribbonmen – religious antagonism evidently migrated south and west as the new century progressed. The 'Second Reformation', set in motion by Archbishop Magee's charge to his Dublin clergy in 1822, did much to accelerate the process. In June, 1825, the archbishop noted that the distinction between Protestants and Roman Catholics was now more present in people's mind.⁵⁶

In characterising the relations between Protestants and Catholics in the early years of the nineteenth century, Maxwell, who spent a substantial amount of time in Ballycroy, Co. Mayo told a story he had heard from a Mayo priest: when asked how he got on with the neighbouring minister, the priest responded: 'Poorly enough. This reformation work has put the country

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 35; Sheila Mulloy, 'Father Manus Sweeney (1763-99)' in Gerard Moran (ed.), *Radical Irish priests 1660-1970* (Dublin 1998).

⁵⁵ James Little, *Diary of the French Invasion*, *Royal Irish Academy Library* (Dublin, 1798).

⁵⁶ Testimony of Archbishop William Magee, *Fourth report from the select committee on the state of Ireland, 1825*, H.C. 1825, ix, p. 793.

asunder.’ In somber tones, the priest waxed lyrically about bygone days when religious affiliations went unnoticed: ‘I mind the time in Connacht when no man clearly knew to what religion he belonged; and in one family, the boys would go to church and the girls to mass, or, may be, both would join and go to whichever happened to be nearest.’⁵⁷ Such an idealised image may have been closer to the gentry and the middle classes, much less so in the case of the lower orders. There, religious discord was commonplace. Especially in Ulster, where a deep tradition of bitterness existed between Orangemen and Catholic groups, sectarian conflict was well known among the rural poor.⁵⁸

Underpinning the swelling discord that seemed to sweep the country was pride in one’s religious affiliation that began to be expressed publicly, even influencing commercial relationships. In County Kerry, displays of Orange insignia by members of the Meath militia stationed in Tralee in 1805 led to a heated exchange of insults and a riot.⁵⁹ Nine years later anti-Protestant rhetoric was evident in Connacht as notices posted up in counties Longford, Roscommon, Sligo, and Mayo requested Catholics to cease business dealings with Orangemen, or with any Protestants other than a few named individuals.⁶⁰ By the early 1820s sectarian anxiety was given a public face with events like the dressing-up of the William III statue by Orangemen, whose 12 July commemorations annually brought Dublin to the brink of civil disturbance.⁶¹

Many contemporary observers felt that violence was endemic to Ireland. In 1836 George Cornwall Lewis was convinced that ‘in a large part of Ireland there [was] still less security of person and property than in any

⁵⁷ W.H. Maxwell, *Wild sports of the West*, ii, pp. 96-97.

⁵⁸ S.J. Connolly, ‘Mass politics and sectarian conflict’, p. 80.

⁵⁹ Brigade-major Daniel Mahony to – 18 July 1805 (N.A.I., SOC, 1805 1031/30).

⁶⁰ (N.A.I., SOC, 1814 1544/49, 64, 84, 95); S.J. Connolly, ‘Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-30’, p.80.

⁶¹ *Freeman’s Journal* 14 July 1821; *Op. cit.*, 12 July 1822; *Patriot* 14 July 1821; Jacqueline R. Hill, ‘National festivals, the state and ‘Protestant ascendancy’ in Ireland, 1790-1829’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxiv, no. 93 (May 1984), p. 46. In 1821, the Lord Mayor of Dublin quit the Orange Order after his request not to decorate the William III statue on 12 July was ignored. For the 12 July celebrations the following year, Dublin’s Lord Mayor called in the military to prevent Orangemen from decorating the William III statue.

other part of Europe except perhaps the wildest districts of Calabria and Greece.⁶² Desmond McCabe's study of culture and violence in nineteenth-century Mayo concludes that pre-Famine society in Ireland was indeed brutal: the homicide rate between 1829 and 1845 (2.4 per 100,000) was four times the present day rate (0.6 per 100,000 in 1984).⁶³ While the degree of rural violence in Mayo was relatively insignificant when compared with other seriously disturbed counties such as Roscommon, Tipperary, Limerick, Clare, or Westmeath, during the early nineteenth-century Mayo did experience a fair amount of agrarian tension.⁶⁴

Although not to the same extent as in other counties, agrarian protest groups, like the Threshers and Ribbonmen, disrupted Mayo society in the decades before the Famine. Wearing white smocks and blackening their faces, they raided the countryside for arms, composed threatening notices and administered oaths to formalise bonds of loyalty. Although violent, these groups were widely accepted by the local population. Those who refused to comply with their demands were vulnerable to attacks on their person, animals, or property, yet those who cooperated received protection and security. Unsurprisingly, agrarian protest groups also contributed to sectarian tension in the region, as many of their grievances were rooted in religious feelings. For instance, attempts by landlords to install Protestant tenants could have murder as a consequence.⁶⁵ While access to land and disputes between farmers over land ownership only really surfaced after the Famine when a transformed society experienced new tensions between large and small farmers, the most bitter issues that brought about agrarian protest and violence before the Famine were 'payments', which were, in the words of Denis Browne, MP for Mayo, 'all kinds of payments, whether of tithes, industry,

⁶² George Cornewall Lewis, *Local disturbances in Ireland* (London 1836), ix.

⁶³ Desmond McCabe, "Land and social order in Mayo", p. 55.

⁶⁴ Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, p. 87.

⁶⁵ Tom Garvin, *Evolution of nationalist politics*, p. 35.

labour or farming'.⁶⁶ Instead of dividing the rural poor, however, these concerns unified them.⁶⁷

A large portion of agrarian outrages carried out by the Threshers, who operated from 1805 until 1819, and by the Ribbonmen, active in Mayo from 1820 until after the Famine, were in opposition to the fees and tithes demanded by the clergy – both Catholic and Protestant. The Thresher and Ribbon movements both developed out of Defenderism, which was, of course, a Catholic counterblast to the Orange organisation in Ulster in the late eighteenth-century.⁶⁸ As mentioned before, priests, with no other source of income, charged for baptisms, marriages, last rites, private masses, and they expected hearty cordiality when giving confession in private homes.⁶⁹ Many Catholic poor objected to these fees. For instance, in October 1806 James McPhadeen was accosted one night by a horde of Threshers, who forced him to carry a threatening message to the parish priest, demanding him to lower his fees.⁷⁰ Oliver Kelly, Catholic archbishop of Tuam, told the select committee inquiring into the state of Ireland in 1825 that 'many Catholics felt that the demand of the priest upon them was many, that they could not answer them'.⁷¹ The payments to priests, especially in times of extreme distress, were enormously unpopular among the poorer inhabitants of the county. Winning over the rural poor, Threshers, and later Ribbonmen, employed the threat of terror to coerce priests into accepting 'fair' payments from their flock. In a

⁶⁶ W. Ridgeway, *A report of the proceedings under a special Commission, of Oyer and Terminer and goal delivery for the counties of Sligo, Mayo, Leitrim, Longford and Cavan, in the month of December 1806* (Dublin, 1807), p. 134.

⁶⁷ Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics*, p. 90.

⁶⁸ J. Joseph Lee, 'The Ribbonmen,' in T.D. Williams (ed.), *Secret Societies in Ireland* (Dublin and New York, 1973), pp. 26-35; Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics*, p. 38. The name Ribbonism was itself given to the society by outsiders, who described the manner in which the group wore coloured ribbons to differentiate between friend and foe.

⁶⁹ S.J. Connolly, *Priests and people in pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845* (Dublin, 1982), pp. 48-52; Blake, *Letters from the Irish highlands*, p. 100.

⁷⁰ W. Ridgeway, *Report of the proceedings under a special Commission*, pp. 136-145; Capt. William Smith to Col. O'Hara, 14 Feb. 1822 (N.A.I., SOC, 2291/3).

⁷¹ Testimony of The Most Reverend Oliver Kelly, Titular Archbishop of Tuam, *Second report from the select committee on the state of Ireland, 1825*, H.C. 1825, viii, p. 259.

celebrated instance in the parish of Kilcolmen in 1806, Threshers forced the priest to accept the following service fees: 'half a guinea for marriage, 19s. 1d. for christening and 1s. 1d. for mass'.⁷²

Similarly, the rural poor often despised the Anglican clergy. Especially after 1816, when the Mayo economy spiralled downwards, the payment of tithes to the established church became a significant burden for many. While Threshers often avoided direct confrontations with Protestant ministers, their proctors, who collected the tithe, usually suffered the brunt of the violence. Since the potato and hay crop in Mayo were exempt from the tithe, and since cash was scarce, grain and flax, the major sources of income for the small farmers, became the major target of the tithe proctors.⁷³ Threshers intimidated proctors as they went about their business and often burned grain taken as payment for the tithe. The collection of the tithe was oftentimes subject to bribery and the source of great profit for the proctor.⁷⁴ Lord Rosslyn, who owned an estate in Mayo, observed in 1806 that the excessive earnings of the proctors caused the greatest consternation.⁷⁵ By 1820, the collection of the tithe had become such a risky business, that whoever was brave enough to act as proctor, 'takes care to pay himself well from the produce of the country'.⁷⁶

Before 1831 the issues behind the agitation of agrarian groups like the Threshers were primarily economic, not political or sectarian.⁷⁷ It must be remembered that both priests and tithe proctors were treated with equal reproach by Threshers and later Ribbonmen, mainly because their fees were considered too excessive.⁷⁸ This implies that most country people, regardless

⁷² William Ridgeway, *A report of the proceedings under a special Commission*, pp. 232.

⁷³ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-70* (Dublin 1978), p. 157.

⁷⁴ Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Mayo*, p. 93

⁷⁵ Lord Rosslyn to Lt. Gen. Lloyd, 6 Feb. 1806 (N.A.I., SOC, 1091/47).

⁷⁶ Denis Browne, 23 Jan. 1820 (N.A.I., SOC, 2715/9).

⁷⁷ Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Mayo*, p. 91.

⁷⁸ Devon Commission, xix, Testimony of Archbishop Oliver Kelly, p. 259

of their poverty or religious affiliation, accepted some sort of payment to both the priest and parson. Interestingly, during the 1820s as the Mayo economy sank, the payment of fees became less and less a pressing issue for the peasantry. This probably had something to do with the Tithe Composition Act (1823), which did away with the contentious annual valuation of crops by permitting clergymen and parishoners to negotiate a fixed twice-yearly payment. Consequently, Denis Browne, MP for Mayo, described the state of Connacht in 1824 as ‘perfect tranquillity’; yet he was wary of a potentially more dangerous problem – the unsettled mind of the Irish rural poor:

I never knew more tranquillity than exists there; at the same time that I must say, there is a sort of violent agitation of mind, that I never saw equalled in that country; that I think a great deal more dangerous than any night walkings, or any of that folly and nonsense under the name of ribbon-men and white-boys.⁷⁹

According to Denis Browne, like the salamander in fire, Ireland only prospered during wartime, and like many sharing his social standing, he nervously anticipated a massive social clash – perhaps a civil war – between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland.⁸⁰

Catholic Emancipation

While religious discord and agrarian violence, which was often justified by sectarianism, strained social structures in Connacht after 1800, another movement, the concerted drive for Catholic Emancipation during the 1820s, undoubtedly irritated religious sensitivities in the region. Maxwell, who travelled extensively throughout Connacht during the 1820s, captured well the uneasy mixture of Catholic political aspirations and open-air religious discussion as he described the scene at the Ballinasloe fair in Co. Galway, where ‘saints’ and cattle-dealers carried on a smart trade in ‘sheep and proselytes’:

⁷⁹ Devon Commission, xix, Testimony of the Rt Hon Denis Browne, p. 28.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

From a short gentleman, with soiled linen and an impeded delivery, I learned the gratifying fact that the spread of the Gospel was progressive in California; and, farther, that a Moravian Missionary had baptized a second cousin of the King of Siam. The latter annunciation elicited a thunder of applause, and a young lady with a lisp pinched my elbow playfully, and requested me to propose that a piece of plate be transmitted to the converttee. Now pinching one's elbow on a five minutes' acquaintance is alarming; I accordingly levanted, leaving *Lipsy* to propose the plate in person. I observed in my retreat a mob assembled round the chapel, and pushing through a crowd of ragged urchins, established myself in the doorway; within, there was a meeting of Radical Reformers; a tall man pouring a philippic from the altar, in which he made an awful example of the King's English, and in his syllabic arrangements differed totally from modern orthoepists. The gist of the oration went to prove, that Catholic Emancipation was a humbug—concession a farce—and luck, or grace, would never visit this unhappy island, until Mr. Cornelius Cassidy, of Killcooney-house, was sent to represent us in the Imperial parliament.⁸¹

While this was the time of Catholic Emancipation, which brought with it the monster political rally to the countryside, it was also the time when the 'Second Reformation' moved west, dragging with it another novel sight to Connacht – the 'Biblicals'. During the 1820s in places like Newport, the townspeople were made aware of the 'Second Reformation', as the town's rector, William Baker Stoney, redoubled his preaching efforts each Sunday: 'Going to church, you could be lifting pamphlets off the road. Everywhere you'd walk, there was nothing but papers, giving down about the Word of God, the English Church.'⁸² The religious tension in the west owed much to the campaign for Catholic Emancipation, especially between 1823 and 1826, when Irish Protestants, who feared further social, political, and religious marginalisation, became alarmed by the growth and support for the movement in Ireland.

Even before 1823, when Richard Lalor Shiel and Daniel O'Connell put their differences aside, Irish Protestants feared the growing political strength of the Catholic poor. For some of these worries, they had only themselves to blame. The Catholic Relief Act of 1793, introduced by the Irish Parliament, granted the 40/- freehold franchise to Roman Catholics. This act forever

⁸¹ W.H. Maxwell, *Wild sports of the west*, ii, pp. 22-23.

⁸² Irish Folklore Commission, Volume 1330, p. 465.

changed the Irish political landscape, for it not only allowed a substantial number of Catholics into the electoral process, it tricked the Protestant landed interest in Ireland into believing that the Catholic vote could be easily controlled. Sir Laurence Parsons, later second Earl of Rosse, was one of only a handful that opposed the 1793 bill, as he claimed that it was political suicide for the Protestant interest in Ireland. Yet, its attractions to politically minded landlords were many. At a very small cost, a politically ambitious landlord could enfranchise the Catholic tenants on his estate by registering them as 40/- freeholders.⁸³ In a region like Mayo, where most of the land was held in common, landlords could easily manufacture loyal 40 /- freeholders by simply parceling out small holdings and giving them a lease of 21 years and a life.⁸⁴ In Mayo, the number of 40/- freeholders increased from 1,000 to roughly 8,000 in 1803, wholly from the efforts of the landlords.⁸⁵ In enfranchising Catholics, landlords assumed that their tenants would vote according to the landed interest, yet while this was the case early on, it gradually became clear that Catholics could use the vote to influence elections.

Another political event that forced Irish Protestants to question their security was the ultimate rejection by Irish Catholics of the Catholic Relief Bill of 1814, which was introduced by Henry Grattan the previous year and promoted by George Canning, who later became prime minister. This bill offered emancipation, yet contained two important safeguards: the government would have the power to approve or reject candidates for Catholic bishoprics in Ireland; and the Catholic clergy would receive support from the state. While Catholics in England and aristocratic Catholics in Ireland supported Grattan's bill, it was swiftly rejected by Daniel O'Connell and his followers, who were able to convince the hierarchy of its demerits. Denis Browne had

⁸³ P.J. Jupp, 'Irish parliamentary elections and the influence of the Catholic vote 1801-1820' in *Historical Journal*, vol. X (1967), p. 184.

⁸⁴ Devon Commission, xix, Testimony of Archbishop Oliver Kelly, p. 251.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

always been a firm advocate of conditional Catholic Emancipation, and he supported Canning's relief bill.⁸⁶ However, this brought opposition from O'Connell, who desired unconditional emancipation. Foreshadowing the future drive for Catholic Emancipation, he took his campaign to the people, and warned the bishops that if they accepted this relief bill, they would soon find themselves without a congregation, for the people would refuse to follow 'vile slaves of the Castle'.⁸⁷ Grattan and his supporters were unable to overcome this negative backlash, and subsequently the relief bill failed. This rejection was a serious display of Catholic power and a fine example of O'Connell's imposing leadership, which effectively showed that true power in Catholic Ireland lay with the people.

For many Protestants at the end of the war, the prospect of a popular mass movement, well regulated by O'Connell and the priests, seemed like a real possibility, especially if the 40/- freeholders could be persuaded to vote against the landlord's wishes and for the Catholic interest. The Catholic freeholders had been playing an important part in Irish politics since 1802, and by 1818 the outcome of elections in sixteen counties, including Mayo, were determined by Catholic interests.⁸⁸ Since Protestant landlords naturally desired to protect their own interests, they usually listened to Catholic electoral demands, and after 1807 at least one leading candidate in constituencies where a strong Catholic interest existed supported Catholic Emancipation.⁸⁹ Consequently, it appeared that the interests of the 40/- freeholders and the landlords overlapped, at least on the issue of emancipation. However, supporters of Catholic Emancipation sent to Westminster, like Denis Browne from Mayo, were only willing to accept it along with certain conditions, like state support for the Catholic clergy, which O'Connell felt

⁸⁶ Thorne, R.G., *The history of parliament: the House of Commons, members A-F* (London, 1986), pp. 279-280.

⁸⁷ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 315.

⁸⁸ P.J. Jupp, 'Irish parliamentary elections', pp. 186-187.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.

grossly compromised the authority of the Catholic Church in Ireland. In February 1824, when giving evidence to the House of Commons select committee investigating the cause of disturbance in Ireland, Browne declared that state provision of the Catholic clergy must accompany the passage of Catholic Emancipation.⁹⁰ Bolder demands, thought O'Connell, were needed in order to secure Catholic Emancipation. These steps, orchestrated by Daniel O'Connell during the 1820s, helped increase the tensions between Protestants and Catholics in the country.

Both Protestants and Catholics in Ireland felt that the campaign for Catholic Emancipation created religious unrest throughout the country. If anything, the growing aspirations of Catholics brought Protestants into closer contact with one another, both socially and politically.⁹¹ While most evangelicals within the established church possessed a deep resentment of the ecclesiastical structures and doctrinal beliefs of the Church of Rome, they never really feared a political attack from Irish Catholics, since most of them were still disenfranchised. Yet the political mobilisation of Catholics, in particular the 40/- freeholders, through the efforts of O'Connell and the organisation of the Catholic Association (founded in May 1824), transformed the confident position of the established church after the Union into one of defensive entrenchment. Irene Whelan has claimed that the single biggest nightmare of the evangelicals was for Catholic Emancipation to triumph and to undermine the 'Protestant presence in Ireland.'⁹² At the height of the campaign, Archbishop Magee expressed the fears of like-minded Irish Protestants, who saw the struggle in cultural and political terms:

I do not believe that the Roman Catholic population attach to that specific object which is now looked upon as 'Catholic emancipation' any value of any moment. I consider that they look to it as a means, and that they have a greater object behind it; it is *their* country, *their* property, *their* religion. All

⁹⁰ Testimony of the Rt Hon Denis Browne, *First report from the select committee on the state of Ireland, 1825*, H.C. 1825, viii, p. 29.

⁹¹ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 318.

⁹² *Ibid.*

this is incessantly forced upon them by persons who have a commanding influence over them.⁹³

In the above passage, Magee alluded to perhaps the biggest complaint the evangelicals lodged against Roman Catholicism: the influence of the priests over the people. The persuasive powers of the priests were seen in various elections in Ireland between 1800 and 1826. Reports from an electioneer at the 1818 general election in county Galway informed the chief secretary that more priests than usual voted.⁹⁴ In Mayo, during the pivotal general election in 1826, John McHale, co-adjutor bishop of Killala, was credited with the defeat of the veteran Denis Brown, who had been representing Mayo since the 1790s. The county, however, returned two MPs, James Browne, the son of Denis; and Lord George Charles Bingham, who were both in favour of O'Connell's brand of Catholic Emancipation, without a poll.⁹⁵ The Catholic clergy, therefore, could be a vital factor in electoral contests, much to the chagrin of conservative Protestants.

Support for the Catholic Association was stronger in Leinster and in Munster than in Ulster or Connacht. This is important to keep in mind when assessing the influence of Catholic political grievances upon religious discord in Mayo at this time. The changes in the social structure of early nineteenth-century Ireland were essential for the Catholic Association's success. The rise in literacy; the formation of a commercially vibrant Catholic middle class; and the increase in the knowledge of the English language, all vital processes, were less advanced in Connacht, and therefore the province did not participate in the movement as fully as the others. For example, Connacht, containing about 20 per cent of the Catholics in Ireland, contributed only £1,408 to the Catholic rent by March 1825, while Munster and Leinster, with about 30 per

⁹³ Quoted in Walter Alison Phillips (ed.), *History of the Church of Ireland from the earliest times to the present day* (3 vols., London, 1933), iii, 293.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.

⁹⁵ Fergus O'Ferrall, *Daniel O'Connell and the birth of Irish democracy, 1820-1830* (Dublin, 1985), p. 133.

cent each, contributed £6,571 and £7,043 respectively.⁹⁶ But after 1823, more and more of the Catholic 40/- freeholders began to oppose their landlord's directions. In Tuam, Archbishop Kelly frequently consoled those freeholders who felt a sense of moral guilt in supporting their landlords against the greater Catholic interest.⁹⁷ Landlords were often accused of intimidation by their opponents, threatening to withhold access to the bog or to deny tenants permission to cut 'sea wrack'. Since the land was often held jointly, all on the holding, therefore, had to vote according to the landlord.⁹⁸

More evidence that the Catholic question filtered down to the popular level can be seen in the writings of Anthony O'Raftery. The verses of Anthony O'Raftery, the Mayo-born blind poet who spent his life around Loughrea, Co. Galway, contain many references to the exploits of Daniel O'Connell at the expense of Protestant evangelicals, and 'The men of false Bibles', who fulminated against the Church of Rome.⁹⁹ A stanza from one of Raftery's poems, *The Catholic Rent*, urges the rural poor to contribute money to the Catholic Association and imagines O'Connell as the protector of Ireland who, along with the saints and apostles, will defend the Irish race from the foreign invaders:

I call ye, ye people, and be not under reproach;
I shall praise you for ever if ye pay the Catholic rent,
It is very little on us in the month is a farthing a week,
And do not earn for yourselves scandal or shame.

It is a little thing in the rent, and it will free the land,
Tithes shall be called for, as used to be done ye before;
There shall be right and law for ye in respect to country and
land,

There is no danger of us forever, so long as O'Connell lives;
Believe ye with truth, the saints and the apostles,
It is Raftery who has explained and put down this recitation,
Who says the foreigners shall be scattered.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ S.J. Connolly, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-30', p. 90.

⁹⁷ Devon Commission, xix, Testimony of Archbishop Kelly, p. 252.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Douglas Hyde, *Abhrain ata Leagtha ar an Reachtuire, or songs ascribed to Raftery, being the fifth chapter of the songs of Connacht* (Shannon, 1973), p. 259.

¹⁰⁰ Douglas Hyde, *Abhrain ata Leagtha ar an Reachtuire*, p. 123.

From these verses it is clear that the Catholic Church and religion are imagined as the sources of strength and hope for the Irish, and the investment in the Catholic Association will lead to the destruction of their enemies – the Protestants. Elsewhere, Raftery portrays the political struggle for Catholic Emancipation as a pitched battle between the forces of Catholicism and Protestantism, with the former representing the powers of good, the latter of evil. When O’Connell defeated Vesey Fitzgerald in the famous Clare by-election in 1828, confirming the collapse of proprietorial control over the Catholic 40/- freeholders, Raftery composed a ballad entitled *O’Connell’s Victory*, which celebrated the event as a victory for Catholicism over the enemy, Protestantism:

Guns and firing and bonfires
 Shall we have to-morrow, and it is time,
 Since O’Connell has gained victory over the enemy,
 Blossoms shall ripen and there shall be fruit on the trees.¹⁰¹

On another occasion, the poet reveals his true feelings, for the defeat of Protestantism in Ireland would parcel the removal of the English:

Sweeter than it all to me would be the English to be overthrown.¹⁰²

Raftery’s verse, which expresses a deep hatred for Protestantism, along with its geographic source – England – must spring from some of the popular attitudes of men and women in Connacht during the 1820s. Raftery himself was extremely impoverished, and years later, Douglas Hyde, who collected and edited his surviving work, acknowledged his strong personal attachment to the rural poor, whose political and religious voice was Catholic.¹⁰³ Moreover, and perhaps more important in understanding Raftery’s ballads, was the poet’s certainty that the writers of Scripture prophesied the defeat of Protestantism in Ireland:

On observing the SIGNS, I see FEAR for the fanatics

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 277.

¹⁰³ Douglas Hyde, *Abhrain ata Leagtha ar an Reachtuire*, pp. 283-284.

Who fast not on FRIDAYS but JEER at the Catholics;
Success is DENIED them, DEFEAT shall be absolute
As Peter and JESUS have spoken.¹⁰⁴

Such dabbling into the interpretation of Scripture fit in well with the prediction and prophecy climate that was becoming current.

Millenarianism and Sectarianism in Connacht During the 1820s

While Nangle studied at Trinity College from 1819 until 1823, there was little reason to be optimistic about the general state of Ireland – especially the state of the west. The agricultural depression that followed the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars had serious implications for the Irish economy.¹⁰⁵ Because England no longer needed wartime volumes of Irish agricultural produce, the fall in food prices lowered the living standards of those who had profited from the wars and adversely affected the rural population, whose continued numerical growth put immense pressures on resources. To make matters worse, the poor harvest of 1821 threatened to convert this poverty into widespread starvation, which in turn made the countryside ripe for the spread of sickness and disease.¹⁰⁶ Archbishop Kelly of Tuam confirmed that the tragedy had even reached remote places like Achill Island, Co. Mayo and that the inhabitants there, ‘are perishing in such numbers, from starvation, that many of them are found along the roadside, dead’.¹⁰⁷ The looming threat of a huge economic recession, coupled with the heightened fear of Famine and pestilence, helped to widen the gulf between Protestants and Catholics, making many among the lower Catholic orders in rural farming communities susceptible to popular millenarianism.¹⁰⁸ Millenarianism, a classic response by a disenchanted portion of the population to the perceived failings of the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁰⁵ Louis M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972), p. 102.

¹⁰⁶ James Donnelly, ‘Pastorini and Captain Rock’, p. 127.

¹⁰⁷ *Patriot* 11 July 1822.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the millenium* (London, 1974), p.45.

established social order, was evident in Ireland during the early 1820s and contributed much to the decay of inter-confessional relations.

There was a growing despair that the union between Great Britain and Ireland had failed to unite the people in social harmony and to the Irish rural poor the economic, religious and political system imposed by an alien, Protestant minority threatened, if anything, their existence.¹⁰⁹ In saying this, it is easy to see that any conflict between the Irish authorities and the general population could be translated into a dispute between Protestant and Catholic. Thus it should come as no surprise that the popular millenarianism in Ireland at this time took the form of preparation for a forthcoming struggle between Protestants and Catholics, one in which the latter, the oppressed majority, would rise up and destroy the former. The evidence and appeal of an apocalyptic catharsis is seen in parliamentary proceedings on the disturbed state of Ireland, the police and military reports of the time, the miracles of Prince Hohenlohe, and in Pastorini's prophecies, which had the affect of bolstering confidence in Irish Catholics and instilling fear in the minds of Irish Protestants, further breaking down inter-confessional good-will.

Before entering into a discussion of millennial activity in Ireland, a general overview of millenarianism is appropriate. Millenarianism conjures up images of anarchy and violent communities dissatisfied with their condition, trying to usher in a new era of ease and riches.¹¹⁰ Theologically, millenarianism is concerned with the timing of the second advent of Christ, or the time when Christ will return to earth to pass judgment on man. In the Christian tradition, there are essentially two types: pre-millennialism, which holds that Christ will return to earth and reign for a period of one thousand years, after which the just will be saved; and post-millennialism, which

¹⁰⁹ Galen Broeker, *Rural disorder and police reform in Ireland, 1812-36* (London and Toronto, 1970), p. 1.

¹¹⁰ D.N. Hempton, 'Evangelicalism and eschatology' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31 (October 1980), p. 181.

believes that the second advent of God on earth will occur after a thousand year period of death and destruction. Both strains have appeared at various times and in different geographic regions over the last two centuries, and while they both are treated as religious events, millennialism can easily cross over to become a secular political movement.¹¹¹ Although no established set of social conditions can predict a millenarian movement, acute fluctuations within a society, in particular those which produce intense individual or collective anxiety, have in the past promoted a fertile social landscape for millenarian movements.¹¹²

Much scholarship on millennialism has been done in recent years. Michael Barkun, in his impressive work, *Disaster and the millennium*, suggests that when a powerful culture expands into a relatively stable, static society, using seemingly limitless military and economic firepower, the millenarian reservoir begins to fill. According to Barkun, this social cauldron, at least within Western Judeo-Christian societies is made up of

precisely those groups whose expectations have frequently been frustrated: religious, racial, and ethnic minorities; the lower middle class; artisans and shopkeepers; lower-echelon clergy; and the peasantry. At various times and in varying degrees, each of these groups has found its opportunities thwarted and its legitimate expectations juxtaposed with decreasing resources for their fulfillment.¹¹³

Barkun's analysis is quick to mention that while some depressed conditions produce volatile millenarian activity, others, at least as bleak or bleaker than the Irish situation in the early 1820s, were only able to muster apathy. Since real communities do not exist in social vacuums, discovering the precise cause of a millenarian outbreak is extremely difficult. If anything, Barkun's model

¹¹¹ George Shepperson, 'The comparative study of millenarian movements' in S.L. Thrupp ed., *Millennial dreams in action: studies in revolutionary religious movements* (New York, 1970), p. 45.

¹¹² Norman Cohn, *The pursuit of the millennium: revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the middle ages* (New York, 1970), p. 282; Norman Cohn, 'Medieval millenarism: it's bearing on the comparative study of millenarian movements' in S.L. Thrupp ed., *Millennial dreams in action: studies in revolutionary religious movements* (New York, 1970), pp. 40-42; Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the millennium*, p. 63.

¹¹³ Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the millennium*, p. 36.

would indicate that conditions in Ireland, especially in rural areas during the first half of the nineteenth century, were susceptible to this type of millennialism.

The unstable commercial period after the wars with France brought about much uncertainty within the Irish farming community as agricultural prices plummeted.¹¹⁴ Threatened with widespread starvation after the bad harvest of 1821 and thwarted politically with the failure to achieve Catholic relief, a new disaffection was evident. Cracks in the people's confidence with the political process most notably began to appear after 1820, when another bill offering Catholic emancipation passed through the House of Commons, only to be vetoed by the Lords in 1821. Exasperated Catholics felt that they deserved a representative political voice; yet, owing to the prejudices of the ruling class, this was denied them. S.J. Connolly has agreed that the buildup of tensions between Protestants and Catholics undoubtedly began before the 1820s, adding that hostility towards a supposed Protestant oppressor was a marked feature of popular attitudes in early nineteenth-century Ireland. This edginess, he argued, was brought to the surface rather than created by the combined social and economic tensions of the early 1820s.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, John Wolffe suggests that the quarter century after 1780 'saw a substantial receding of anti-Catholicism and that its nineteenth-century history needs to be viewed primarily as a revival rather than a continuation'.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the savage suppression of the 1798 rebellion, and later, the fall of Napoleon, helped make British rule in Ireland appear impervious to human efforts of overthrowing the established order. Denis Browne, brother of the Marquis of Sligo, told the 1824 parliamentary committee that in his region of Mayo and Galway, even the Protestant poor were addressed as 'Mister' as a 'mark of

¹¹⁴ Louis Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland*, pp. 101-104.

¹¹⁵ S.J. Connolly, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-20', p. 83.

¹¹⁶ John Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade in Britain 1829-1860* (Oxford, 1991), p. 8.

distance, and a mark of difference'.¹¹⁷ Although this implies that Catholics in this part of Mayo treated Protestants with surface respectability, it only reinforces that an imagined cultural distinctiveness kept the two confessional groups divided. The events of the 1820s not only creased these cultural lines of demarcation, but the latent millenarianism in the air brought Protestants and Catholics into closer contact with one another, exposing their differences.

Ireland in the 1820s, therefore, was an ideal breeding ground for strange and unusual beliefs. At this time, the celebrated Catholic apologist, James Warren Doyle (JKL), bishop of Kildare and Leighlin reported of the miraculous healing powers of Prince Hohenlohe, dean of Bamberg, in his 1823 pastoral letter. In June 1823, a woman named Maria Lalor, who came from a 'respectable' family in Doyle's diocese, miraculously recovered the use of her speech through the ardent prayers of the prince.¹¹⁸ Doyle and Dr Daniel Murray, archbishop of Dublin, widely publicised this event along with the story of a Carmelite nun from Dublin, who had also been cured by Hohenlohe's fervid supplications. When Hohenlohe visited Ireland later that year 'the anti-Catholic press of the day was not slow in overwhelming with obloquy Prince Hohenlohe, Dr Doyle, and Dr Murray'.¹¹⁹ To further show his disapproval of Catholic prelates, Robert Daly, a Trinity graduate and the rector of Powerscourt, Co. Wicklow, preached a sermon against the spreading of false miracles in the parish church to coincide with Prince Hohenlohe's Irish visit.¹²⁰ Doyle, an highly intelligent and resourceful man, had used the stories of Hohenlohe's supernatural remedies as a shrewd affectation to control the eccentricities within his diocese; yet, another display of Irish Catholic 'folk

¹¹⁷ *Minutes of evidence taken before the select committee appointed to inquire into the disturbances in Ireland, in the last session of Parliament 13 May-18 June 1824*, p. 335, H.C. 1825 (129) vii, 28-29.

¹¹⁸ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 63.

¹¹⁹ W.J. Fitzpatrick, *Life, times and correspondence of Dr Doyle Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin* (2 vols, Dublin, 1861), i, 252.

¹²⁰ Isabella Madden, *Memoir of the late right rev Robert Daly, DD., Lord Bishop of Cashel* (London, 1875), p. 104.

religion', the enchanting prophecies of Pastorini, which began to appear on the popular level with increasing frequency after 1820, did not bode well for the bishop who in opposing their dissemination, desired to curb the extravagances of his flock.

Pastorini's prophecies, as outlined in the *General History of the Christian Church*, began to acquire an enthusiastic and popular following among poorer Catholics in reaction to the deplorable social, economic and religious conditions of the time. Signor Pastorini was the pseudonym of an English Catholic bishop and mathematician, Charles Walmesley, when he first published the *General History of the Christian Church* in 1771. The first Irish edition appeared in Dublin in 1790 and later editions were printed in Belfast (1816) and Cork (1820).¹²¹ Pastorini calculated the seven seals described in Revelations to correspond with historical events. For example, the first seal, or first age of Christ's church on earth, lasted 320 years from Jesus' birth until the rise of the Emperor Constantine. In applying this crude chronology, Pastorini predicted that sometime between 1820 and 1825, three centuries after the inception of the fifth age, which began with the rise of Martin Luther, the sixth age of Christ's church would begin, with God's unmerciful wrath being poured upon all heretics.¹²² Although respectable Catholics, like Daniel O'Connell, distanced themselves from these prophecies, Pastorini had acquired a large following. Doyle deprecated the renewed fascination with folk-religion in his 1825 pastoral letter, which instructed his flock to ignore 'profane, irreligious books and pretended prophecies'.¹²³

Because Pastorini was a Catholic bishop, his spirited readers assumed that all non-Catholics would be wiped out in the foretold cataclysm.

¹²¹ James Donnelly, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock', p. 110; Copies of these editions are in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

¹²² [Charles Walmesley], *The general history of the Christian church from her birth to her final triumphant state in heaven, chiefly deduced from the Apocalypse of St. John the apostle, by Sig. Pastorini* (Dublin, 1794), p. 441.

¹²³ James Warren Doyle, *Pastoral instruction for the Lent of 1825* (Carlow, 1825), p. 19.

Unfortunately, he died in 1797 and was unavailable to offer further clarification in the 1820s. Consequently many impoverished Irish Catholics, in light of Pastorini's prophecies, forecast a coming struggle with Protestants, in which the latter would be destroyed with the help of divine intervention. The 'belief that the oppressors are about to be cast down, even annihilated, with the help of supernatural beings', blended well with Pastorini's eschatology.¹²⁴ The verse of Anthony O'Rafferty, who often wrote with apocalyptic imagery, made reference to this popular prophecy: 'As Pastorini wrote that the day is not far from us / When the Gall shall be shuffled, and stretched out with no one / to lament them'.¹²⁵ Concerned Irish Protestants braced themselves for an inevitable clash with their Catholic neighbours, whose growing numerical majority and rising political aspirations heightened fears of massacre and full-blown rebellion. Although reports of a Catholic rebellion had been circulated since 1813, the unstable economy and increasing sectarianism after 1822 added new urgencies.¹²⁶

George Stanley Faber, who had risen to prominence earlier in the century as a notable interpreter of Biblical prophecy with his *Dissertations on the prophecies* (1806), attempted to assuage Protestant fears, claiming that Pastorini scandalously misread Scripture, especially Revelations. Faber beckoned the most frightened to 'study the Scriptures, move particularly to the prophetic parts of God's holy word...and when they have compared this character with facts recorded in impartial history...they will see that this is the

¹²⁴ Norman Cohn, 'Medieval millenarianism', p. 41. For another study which examines millenarianism and the wrath of a supernatural being upon the established social order see, Michael Ada, *Prophets of rebellion: millenarian protest movements against the European colonial order* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1979).

¹²⁵ Douglas Hyde, *Songs ascribed to Rafferty*, p. 275.

¹²⁶ George Devenish to Bishop of Elphin, 4 Sept. 1813 (N.A.I., SOC, 1813 1538/19, enclosed); Bishop of Elphin to William Gregory, 5 Aug. 1813 (N.A.I., SOC, 1813 1538/20). Evidently, just being a Protestant put you in danger, for in Bishop of Elphin to William Gregory, 13 Aug. 1813 (N.A.I., SOC, 1813 1538/23), the Bishop, Power le Poer Trench, reports that, 'a poor woman was on last Monday night about two miles from hence, much abused merely for being a Protestant'.

best interpreter of prophecy.'¹²⁷ Soon others discredited Walmsley, for there was no shortage of players to assert the Protestant reading of Revelations.¹²⁸ Despite these reassurances, fear overcame Protestants like Adam Clarke, president of the Irish Methodist Conference, who observed in June 1823, 'I have no doubt that a general massacre of the Protestants is at the door'.¹²⁹ In September of that year, Peter Roe, vicar of St. Mary's in Kilkenny and military chaplain to the many regiments stationed in the town, held a conversation with a local man, who had fought in the 1798 rebellion. He told Roe that 'the people expect that in the year 1825, all the Protestants will either be converted to the true Church...or be put to death.'¹³⁰ Over a year later, more reports from Killashandra, Co. Cavan, echoed such sentiments when the master of the post office there sensed the growing trepidation among local Protestants to be 'in consequence of the increasing confidence (of the disaffected) in the fulfillment [sic] of Pastorini's prophecy'.¹³¹ Edward Nangle must have encountered similar stories while he served in both Athboy and Arva, meeting the men who went door-to-door distributing Pastorini's prophecies to the curious Catholic population 'at eight pence and to such as are not able to pay...gratis'.¹³²

Donnelly, in his seminal article on 'Pastorini and Captain Rock' has already traced the effects of Pastorini's prophecies upon rural violence in Irish society during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.¹³³ He dismissed the argument put forward by Patrick O'Farrell that in Ireland before and after 1800, any chance of a millenarian movement was quashed and displaced by

¹²⁷ George Stanley Faber, *Remarks on signor Pastorini's prophecy from the apocalypse of St. John* (Dublin, 1823), p. 12.

¹²⁸ A graduate of Trinity College, et. al., *Prophecies of Pastorini analysed and refuted* (Dublin, 1823).

¹²⁹ W.R. Ward (ed.), *The early correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1820-1829* (London, 1972), p. 90, in S.J. Connolly, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict', p. 82.

¹³⁰ Peter Roe to Henry Goulburn, 22 Sept. 1823 (N.A.I., SOC, 1823 2506/11).

¹³¹ R. Anderson to Sir E.P. Lees, 11 Dec. 1824 (N.A.I. SOC, 1824 2622/20).

¹³² A. Tyrell to Henry Goulburn, 12 Dec. 1824 (N.A.I., SOC, 1824 2608/22).

¹³³ James Donnelly, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock', pp. 102-139.

the weight of a fierce anti-British feeling felt among the Catholic population.¹³⁴ Donnelly, in manipulating O'Farrell's thesis, sees anti-British feeling as the keystone of millennialism in Ireland.¹³⁵ This antipathy displayed towards British culture inevitably carried with it religious overtones linked to constructions of nationality. In a recent article, Brown adds an Irish dimension to the works of Jonathan Clark, Linda Colley and others that have drawn attention to the centrality of Protestantism in shaping British identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹³⁶ These recent studies have revealed the shared beliefs that Providence guided the destinies of the British state, inspired a commitment to the union of church and state, and justified a creed that saw Roman Catholicism as the main threat to traditional British liberties.¹³⁷ While it would be foolish, even naïve, to assume that Protestantism alone overshadowed other cultural badges of British national identity in the early years of the nineteenth century, it did help to place within the minds of Britons the notion that in the end God favoured them over their Catholic rivals.¹³⁸ Even though most were perhaps unaware, the amalgamation of Protestantism with British national consciousness was evident by the early 1800s, as the national anthem confirms just how closely interlinked patriotic identity was to religion.¹³⁹ After digesting its meaning one is led to believe that God is a Protestant:

God save our noble King
 God save our great George our King,
 God save the King.
 Send him victorious

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 104; Patrick O'Farrell, 'Millennialism, messianism, and utopianism in Irish history' in *Anglo-Irish Studies*, ii (1976), pp. 53-54.

¹³⁵ James Donnelly, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock', p. 104.

¹³⁶ Stewart J. Brown, 'The new reformation movement in the Church of Ireland, 1801-1829' in Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller (eds.), *Piety and Power in Ireland 1760-1960: essays in honour of Emmet Larkin* (Notre Dame, 2000), p. 182.

¹³⁷ J.C.D. Clark, *English society 1688-1832* (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 4; L. Colley, *Britons: forging the nation 1707-1837* (London, 1992), especially ch. 1; Robert Hole, *Pulpits, politics and public order in England 1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1989), especially chs. 2, 13.

¹³⁸ Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation*, p. 29.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God Save the King

Lord our God arise,
Scatter his enemies
And make them fall:
Confound their politicks,
Frustrate their knavish tricks.
On him our hopes are fixed
save us all.¹⁴⁰

However, conditions in Ireland differed from England, Scotland or Wales. Religious and political distinctions, coupled with geographical distance, made the stretching of the short, tight skin of 'Britishness' over the Irish nation almost impossible. Since a body of water cut the Irish off from the rest of the United Kingdom, they were doubly separated by the collective prejudices of the English, Scottish, and Welsh, which made it extremely difficult for the Irish to break into the British club.¹⁴¹ The Irish Protestant was becoming increasingly allied, culturally and socially, with English ways of life yet politically he was suspicious of the world of Westminster.¹⁴² Although the Irish Protestant imagined himself a 'loyalist', he never held a great affection for English politics.¹⁴³ Protestants in England saw their counterparts in Ireland, in spite of their caprice, as at least intelligent and rational enough to cope with unruly Catholic behaviour. Needless to say, contemporaries from both Irish and English camps acknowledged a cleft between them. Thomas Wyse, who later became a Catholic MP from Waterford after emancipation,

¹⁴⁰ Cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴² Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 128; When John Wesley visited Ulster in 1756, he was pleased to see that English landscaping, buildings and mannerisms had been transplanted to Ireland: 'No sooner did we enter Ulster, than we observed the difference, the ground was cultivated just as in England, and the cottages not only neat, but with doors, chimneys and windows', as quoted in David Hempton, 'Evangelicalism in English and Irish Society, 1780-1840' in Mark A Noll, David Bebbington, George A. Rawlyk (eds.), *Evangelicalism: comparative studies of popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1790*, p. 169.

¹⁴³ Marianne Elliot, *Watchmen in Sion: the Protestant idea of liberty*, Field Day Publications (Field Day Pamphlet no. 8 1985), p. 13.

realised a psychological fissure that made mutual understanding between the Irish and English almost futile:

The most that can be expected is a strong but transient sentiment, ruffling for a moment the surface, but then leaving the depths as dead and sluggish as before. The Irish mind, like the waters of the Mediterranean is easily aroused and calmed, the English, like those of the Atlantic, requires something more than a passing gust of agitation to rouse it from the abyss wherein it had been reposed.¹⁴⁴

While temperament and psychology perhaps stood between Protestants in Ireland and England, the Irish Protestant distinguished himself from his Catholic neighbours by noticeably withdrawing from their society. Irish Protestants married their own to avoid assimilation and controlled the nation's resources and most powerful political institutions, keeping the Catholic poor in economic dependence. This imagined garrison was given substance with the brick and mortar of the country big houses, whose walled estates kept the Catholic world outside and away at a safe distance. The only Catholics likely to be within these walls were servants or teachers. Within this womblike environment, arrogance and notions of superiority developed, which made the Irish Protestant gentry, although a minority, feel certain that all wisdom and authority derived from them, much to the consternation of many Irish Catholics, as Alexander Knox perceptively observed:

In passing, it is worth noticing that almost all Protestants when discussing the Catholic question display a clear if sometimes unconscious conviction of their own superiority. Theirs it was to give and patronize, theirs to discuss how the Catholic ought to be educated, theirs to judge what the Catholic was fit to receive and when it should be granted...The superiority, the Protestant was convinced was based not on mere legal or even economic and social grounds, but was the moral superiority inherent in men who held the soundest theological and philosophical principles.¹⁴⁵

This sense of superiority was increasingly resented by Catholics in the post-Union period, most visibly as they pressed for total relief in the 1820s.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Wyse, *Historical sketch of the late Catholic Association of Ireland* (2 vols, London, 1829), i, p. 190.

¹⁴⁵ Alexander Knox, *Essays on the political circumstances of Ireland, written during the administration of Earl Camden* (London, 1798), p. 183.

For those, like members of the Orange Order, who expressed their patriotism and loyalty to Britain by publicly commemorating William III's victory over James II, the yoking of Britishness with an aggressive Protestantism inevitably led to heated confrontations with Irish Catholics.¹⁴⁶ Although the first religious census was not carried out until 1834, Protestants had long realised that the relative importance of Catholics was growing. The union of the two established churches in England and Ireland in 1801 had given determined evangelicals within the Protestant establishment powerful encouragement to challenge the religious balance and to begin a process of assimilating the Irish into the British nation through conversion to the established faith.¹⁴⁷ The renewal of the idea that the evangelising of the native Irish was part of a 'civilising' mission was perhaps best expressed by Power le Poer Trench, archbishop of Tuam, when he endorsed the Hibernian Bible Society, saying that it promoted not only the reformed faith, but 'British influence and British benevolence'.¹⁴⁸ Unsure as to the precise numerical disparity between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, evangelicals in the first quarter of the nineteenth century carried with them a positive determination that with hard work the task of mass conversion could be accomplished. However, in hindsight, such hope was forged in *naïveté*. Seen in this light, the evangelical movement in the Church of Ireland in the early nineteenth century was in many ways an attempt to integrate the Irish population into a Greater Britain, consolidating the political union by bringing the Irish into cultural and religious conformity as well.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ *Freeman's Journal* 14 July 1821.

¹⁴⁷ Some saw the Act of Union as a Protestant union for the fifth article includes the important phrase that the union of the two churches was, 'an essential and fundamental part of the Union.' The argument was later made, therefore, that the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 effectively made the Act of Union null and void.

¹⁴⁸ J. D'Arcy Sirr, *Memoir of the Hon and most Reverend Power le Poer Trench, Lord Archbishop of Tuam* (Dublin, 1845) p. 495, as cited in Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁹ Stewart J. Brown, 'The new reformation movement', p. 182.

Opposition to Britishness and a profound reluctance to accept the 'British benevolence' as described by Archbishop Trench was evident in the heightened animosity directed against Irish Protestants outside Dublin. Excited by Pastorini's prophecies and the miracles of Prince Hohenlohe, it took on a millenarian hue. An anonymous report from Adare, Co. Limerick, in early 1822 tellingly observed that Pastorini 'has done more towards the subversion of the British Empire than Bonaparte with all his legions'. 'The rebellion of 1798', the anonymous reporter continued, 'was such a disastrous failure because they began 25 years before it was the will of God they should'.¹⁵⁰ In examining millennialism in the 1820s, Donnelly has directed his sights largely on Munster. Yet apocalyptic anxiety, which contributed to the deterioration of Protestant and Catholic relations in general, spread very widely, including Connacht, albeit not with as much fury as in Munster. A few examples of millenarian anxiety before 1825 may help to delineate the environment there, and the precarious religious environment in Connacht before Nangle's arrival in 1831.

Protestant Paranoia in Connacht, 1824

While most agrarian disturbances in Ireland during the early nineteenth century dealt with specified and limited goals such as the regulation of rents, wages, the protection of tenants threatened with eviction, accessibility to land, and the payment of tithes, 'outrages' after 1820 increasingly smacked of sectarianism. Sectarian animosity, therefore, was not limited to popular ballads or prophecies. Parts of Connacht became caught up in the religious rancour surrounding the prophetic year of 1825, which brought huge agrarian disturbance to the countryside, ranging from mild annoyance to the eruption of physical violence. On Sunday 12 June 1825, an unruly crowd assembled at Instarrt (sp?), Co. Roscommon which brought Protestant services to a

¹⁵⁰ 'Indigator' to [?] 29 Jan. 1822 (N.A.I., SOC, 1822 2350/30).

standstill, 'making so much noise, that the congregation could neither hear, nor pay attention to the Preacher'.¹⁵¹ In a Sligo jail in 1820, a Roman Catholic chaplain was reported to have told prisoners that the Protestant religion preached sin and immorality, supposedly comparing the Bible to 'an Apothecary's shop in which there was some good medicine but much poison'.¹⁵² The Rev. John McKraig, agent of the Irish Baptist Society, reported a spate of outrages in 1823, telling how relations between Protestants and Catholics in Ballina were quickly degenerating. The reason for this, McKraig asserted, was not due to Protestant aggression but to the proselytizing efforts of a parish priest, who 'is lurkingly gaining among the most illiterate parts of the Protestants in this town at the same time swearing by all that is good, that unless they quit the Church and the Baptists, and go regularly to Mass, their end will be eternal damnation'.¹⁵³ McKraig is an interesting witness: a native of the Scottish Highlands, he had only learnt English four years before; in 1820 he had come over to Ireland to work with the Baptists, initially being welcomed by the whole Ballina community. However, beginning in February 1823, his associations with local Catholics had taken a turn for the worse. Earlier that month, an unruly party fired upon a minister from the area as he returned from an evening with the bishop of Killala. McKraig himself was accosted by a man armed with a stone who threatened to 'knock out' his brains.¹⁵⁴ These assaults shocked the beleaguered Baptist, leaving him with no logical explanation for the sudden downward slide of religious toleration in Mayo. In coming to terms with this

¹⁵¹ Lieutenant Colonel Wedderbrim to William Gregory, 16 June 1825 (N.A.I., SOC, 1825 2730/16); Captain Clarke to Lieutenant Colonel Wedderbrim, 15 June 1825 (N.A.I., SOC, 1825 2730/16, enclosed.)

¹⁵² William Armstrong to Power le Poer Trench, 26 Feb. 1820 (N.A.I., SOC, 1820 2172/8, enclosed).

¹⁵³ John West to William Gregory, 2 June 1823 (N.A.I., SOC, 1823 2502/15); John McKraig to John West, 20 May 1823 (N.A.I., SOC, 1823 2502/15, enclosed).

¹⁵⁴ John McKraig to John West, 20 May 1823 (N.A.I., SOC, 1823 2502/15, enclosed). The *Dublin Evening Post* of 14 Dec. 1824 reports that a Methodist minister was attacked in a similar manner on the streets of Kilrush, Co. Clare.

apparent sea-change in Protestant and Catholic relations, McKraig was quick to lay the blame on Pastorini, being convinced himself that the next time the two religions met, 'it is evident they must and will meet sword in hand'.¹⁵⁵

Sectarian tension and anxiety associated with the predicted cataclysm of 1825 continued to diffuse throughout Connacht. In early July 1823, an angry mob attacked the residence of Sir Ross Mahon, at Castlegar, Co. Galway. Castlegar, located near Ahascragh, was a post-town and parish 30 miles east of Galway town lying in the Elphin diocese. Just before the Famine, William Thackeray included a sketch of the town in his Irish travel book:

You come to a glimpse of Old England in the pretty village of Ahascragh. An oak-tree grows in the neat street, the houses are a time [sic] and white as the eye can desire, and about the church and the town are handsome plantations, forming on the whole such a picture of comfort and plenty.¹⁵⁶

Devout Catholics frequented Ahascragh to visit a holy well dedicated to the memory of the town's patron, St. Cuan. Local and visiting Protestants often ridiculed Catholic pilgrims who visited this well 'creeping on bare knees, five, fifteen, twenty times, and so on, saying multitudes of paters and aves'.¹⁵⁷ A constabulary station was also located in the town and attracted sectarian animosity when a contingent of constables was attacked on their way to Sunday service.¹⁵⁸

Although nobody was physically harmed in the 1823 assault on Castlegar, windows and other property were smashed with large sticks and stones. The underlying occasion for the attack it seems was the primary school that Mahon had set up, which offered primary education, complete with instruction using an English version of the Bible. Sir Ross Mahon had always

¹⁵⁵ John McKraig to John West, *op. cit.*.

¹⁵⁶ William Thackeray, *The Irish sketchbook* (3 vols, London, 1843), iii, pp. 112-113.

¹⁵⁷ Caesar Otway, *A tour in Connacht: comprising sketches of Clonmacnoise, Joyce Country, and Achill* (Dublin, 1839), p. 159.

¹⁵⁸ S. Pendleton to William Gregory, 28 February 1820 (N.A.I., SOC, 1820 2171/84).

thought of himself as a well-liked landlord and, unlike Lord Farnham, he had never attempted to interfere with the religious convictions of his tenantry. He practiced what he preached in donating monies towards the building of a Catholic chapel at Ahascragh and granting one acre of adjoining land for the parish priest's use.¹⁵⁹ His brother, the Rev. James Mahon, dean of Dromore, blamed the attack on the very parish priest who had been assisted financially. He was

in the habit of publicly declaring at Chapel since we opened this school – He has prevented any from going to Mass who has sent their children to it, and has told them that he would not admit them to confession or attend them on their dying bed – In short he has pronounced excommunication against all who send their children or go themselves to the school.¹⁶⁰

Although Dean Mahon, writing from Dromore, found it difficult to believe that the parish priest at least tacitly condoned the attack on the house, he made it clear to his brother that a despairing and unruly spirit existed amongst his tenantry. Over time he had become convinced that the 'ignorance' and 'superstition' of the people, which had been fed from the parish priest's pulpit, had rendered the Catholics in the area unruly. If Sir Ross Mahon truly desired order and tranquility on his estate, his brother suggested that the poorer Catholics needed to be instructed in the Scriptures. The dean attempted to distance himself from religious bigotry, yet he could not resist striking a blow against the Roman Catholic church:

I really do think it would be highly advisable that you should assemble your tenantry and speak to them, using all the influence in your powers to guard them against principles which I see clearly have crept in amongst them – Mr. O'Connell's speech and other inflammatory papers have been lately circulated amongst the very lowest class with industry and they are impressed with a belief in the truth of Pastorini's Prophecy of the destruction of Protestants in the course of the year 1825 – you know that I have never been an advocate of orange principles, or intolerant towards those who differ from us on religious points, but I must willfully shut my eyes if I did not see increasing discontent, hatred on the part of the Catholics to their Protestant neighbours – Whatever may be done to ally [sic] their antipathy to us in this our day, I am fully persuaded that no scheme of permanently tranquillising the country will be blessed but that of spreading the Gospel and using the means within our reach of making the people

¹⁵⁹ Sir Ross Mahon to William Gregory, 4 July 1823 (N.A.I., SOC, 1823 2501/33).

¹⁶⁰ James Mahon to Sir Ross Mahon, n.d. (N.A.I., SOC, 2501/33, enclosed).

acquainted with the word of God – They must be brought to the knowledge of this before they can be brought under obedience to it, and in my humble judgment, nothing but fixed religious principles instilled into their mind will ever ensure the subjection of the people of Ireland to the powers that be. When they learn from Scripture that the rulers are of God's appointment and are taught of God through the spreading of his word that in obeying them, they are fulfilling his commandment and they will obey not out of constraint but for conscience sakes. The people must be rescued from the tyranny and bondage which accompany their Church government – they must be convinced of the error of the Catholic religion – They must see the gross imposture practiced towards them for the purpose of keeping them in ignorance – In short, their minds must be opened and enlarged before they can be such a nation as religion alone is wanted to make them – I know very well that this idea is ridiculed, but it is not the less founded.¹⁶¹

These ideas for rendering Ireland governable through a religious transformation were not shared by the High Church party within the established church, who preferred the perceived peace and quiet of former times.¹⁶² The mention of Pastorini in the dean's letter is interesting, for the circulation of cheap, mass-produced copies of the prophecy was more common in Leinster and Munster rather than in Ulster or Connacht.¹⁶³ The perceived methods of control and intimidation used by the parish priests and the millenarian expectations of the year 1825 it seems both infuriated and frightened the dean, hardening his conviction that Scriptural education was the most trustworthy means of restoring order to Irish rural society. Mahon shared a view held by a growing number of Protestants that the priests desired to control every aspect of their parishioners' lives, stopping at nothing to accomplish this; in the words of Gideon Ouseley,

they are always *semper idem*, always the same, ever at enmity with and opposed to everything...They are uniformly intolerant and could they but have their will would be as bad as those in the darkness of Spain and Portugal, etc. They can never bear competition in religion...They want an entire monopoly.¹⁶⁴

Although Dean Mahon does not explicitly point to a deficit of 'Britishness' in his brother's tenants, he posits a link between political disaffection and ignorance of the Scriptures. Protestantism as we have seen was a key

¹⁶¹ James Mahon to Sir Ross Mahon, n.d. (N.A.I., SOC, 2501/33, enclosed).

¹⁶² Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 67.

¹⁶³ S.J. Connolly, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict', p. 80.

¹⁶⁴ Cited in W.R. Ward, *Religion and society in England, 1790-1850* (London, 1972), p. 118. I am indebted to Desmond Bowen for this source.

ingredient in the conception of Britishness in the early nineteenth century, and the brand espoused by Dean Mahon carried with it fervent evangelical overtones'.¹⁶⁵ Paranoia, bordering on xenophobia, is also evident in the letter, and the repetitive use of the pronoun 'they' sharpens the imagined boundaries between Irish Catholics and Protestants in Dean Mahon's mind.

Instead of discouraging attendance at Mahon's school, the attack had the reverse effect of galvanising support and sympathy for the benevolent Sir Ross Mahon, as some local inhabitants, mostly Catholic, raised a subscription of £100 to bring the assailants to justice.¹⁶⁶ Tranquility returned to the area as the parish priest, in a fit of indifference, seemingly acquiesced to public pressure by refusing to mention 'one word either for or against the school'.¹⁶⁷ In the end, serenity returned to Castlegar as quickly as it had faded, and no further outrages from Ahascragh were reported for the rest of the summer.¹⁶⁸ However the sectarian germ had already spread a few miles south and infected the region around Garbally, Co. Galway.

Unsurprisingly, millenarian chills and Protestant paranoia became more pronounced towards the end of 1824. Contagious fears of a widespread Catholic rebellion grew within the minds of otherwise reasonable Protestant men. To some like Richard le Poer Trench, the second Earl of Clancarty, a 'dreadful explosion among the Romanists' seemed eminent.¹⁶⁹ Clancarty had retired to his family seat at Garbally in 1823 after a distinguished career as a diplomat. He had served in both houses of Parliament during the first decades of the Union and had worked extensively in the Netherlands as British ambassador to The Hague after the Napoleonic Wars. He further gained prestige in being named as one of the four British plenipotentiaries to the

¹⁶⁵ David Hempton, *Evangelicalism in English and Irish society, 1780-1840*, p. 171.

¹⁶⁶ Sir Ross Mahon to William Gregory, 15 July 1823 (N.A.I., SOC, 1823 2501/35).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Major D'Arcy to William Gregory, 8 July 1823 (N.A.I., SOC, 1823 2501/34).

¹⁶⁹ Earl of Clancarty to Henry Goulburn, 30 Nov. 1824 (N.A.I., SOC, 1824

Congress of Vienna, and later was created Marquis of Heusden by the king of the Netherlands in 1818. Throughout his career, Clancarty was friendly with Viscount Castlereagh but unlike Castlereagh, he held a deep-seated suspicion of Irish Catholics, especially of the hierarchy, yet he was prepared to offer them political concessions on condition of 'good behaviour'. In 1823 he retired to Garbally, accepting the appointment to become the lord-lieutenant of Co. Galway. By the marriage of his sister Anne to William Gregory, the Irish under secretary, he was closely connected to Dublin Castle.

By November 1824, Clancarty was writing in very agitated terms, fearing a large-scale Catholic rebellion. He complained to the chief secretary, Henry Goulburn, about the government's apparent inability to deal with such a threat. This criticism inaugurated a flurry of letters sent between Garbally and Dublin Castle. Although Clancarty provided no hard evidence for Castle authorities, he was certain that Catholics planned a rebellion, 'evinced itself in midnight massacre, – or insurrection; or both; the brunt of which will, in the first instance at least, be principally directed against the lives and properties of His Majesties loyal Protestant subjects resident in this part of his Dominions'.¹⁷⁰ His alarming tone suggests that Protestants in the Garbally region were afraid to step outside of their homes lest they fall victim to Catholic blood lust. Clancarty grew increasingly impatient with the government's apparent ineffectiveness in suppressing agrarian outrages, which convinced him that nothing was being done to prevent the predicted massacre, leaving local Protestants, 'in a greater or less degree upon their own resources'. Using the creativity and initiative of an experienced European diplomat, Clancarty told Goulburn of his plan to raise and equip

at my own expense, from such of my own tenants and others in the neighbourhood of my Estates, in this County, in whose loyalty to the Crown and attachment to my family I can confide – a number of men not exceeding

¹⁷⁰ Earl of Clancarty to Henry Goulburn, *Op. cit.*

500 – for the defence of my own properties, and, if possible, also for the defence of the adjacent County.¹⁷¹

Only somebody with the social standing of Clancarty could petition for such a policy, even though the tradition of volunteer armies in Ireland was not quite forgotten. Dublin Castle quickly, yet politely, refused this request and in response recommended that depositions taken by local magistrates be sent to Dublin, so that the situation could be assessed and acted upon according to proper administrative procedure. However, Clancarty was far from finished with the matter and his frustration with Castle bureaucracy was revealed in a second letter to Goulburn, which sarcastically complained that such depositions ‘always in Ireland, under similar circumstances, most hazardous to the informant, and therefore of rare and difficult attainment, are nevertheless requisite to induce my Lord Lieutenant to give sanction to legal and constitutional measures of defense!’¹⁷²

Without any substantial evidence to support the claims of a massive Catholic uprising in Co. Galway, other than perhaps Pastorini’s prophecy, Clancarty unleashed his sarcasm, yet Castle authorities were quick to realise a certain arrogance behind these unusual demands. Goulburn, in refusing to acquiesce to Clancarty’s pressure, requested magistrates in Connacht to relay to him any signs of insurgency. Those who replied confirmed that the stories of imminent Catholic uprising were completely unfounded, and that while poorer Catholics might be prone to agrarian unrest and in giving credence to capricious prophecies, there certainly was no sign of rebellion against the established order.¹⁷³ Goulburn, out of respect for Clancarty, informed the lord lieutenant of Clancarty’s plan to raise a personal army, but made it clear to his superior that assembling such a force, however small, would set a regrettable precedent and, ‘if sanctioned by His excellency, in your Lordship’s case and

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Earl of Clancarty to Henry Goulburn, 5 December 1824 (N.A.I., SOC, 1824 2624/30).

¹⁷³ Anonymous, n.d. (N.A.I., SOC, 2731/2).

on the ground, which you have stated, must be extended over the whole of Ireland'.¹⁷⁴ Subsequently, Goulburn informed Clancarty that the only viable option at the present moment was to request an increase in the size of the army in the area. As the new year approached, such a response personally annoyed Clancarty and increased both his paranoia of Catholic rebellion and disenchantment with Dublin Castle.

Fear of widespread bloodshed and of an uprising against Protestants did not stop here. They seized the attention of Clancarty's brother, Power le Poer Trench, the Archbishop of Tuam, during the final months of 1824. He wrote that Protestants were afraid to go to church and that they were barricaded in their homes, sensing a Catholic uprising was close at hand. 'I know that the Protestants in this town and neighbourhood', he wrote from the archbishop's palace in Tuam, 'are in the greatest alarm, nothing but daily rumours of war and bloodshed and the prophecies of Pastorini industriously circulated and read'.¹⁷⁵ In 1813, while the bishop of Elphin, Trench had expressed similar concerns about a widespread massacre, as sectarian rivalry stiffened when Catholics, under the direction of a parish priest, boycotted Protestant shopkeepers.¹⁷⁶ Now, after a decade of religious antagonism in Connacht, the fear of Catholic aggression once again reared its head and commanded the archbishop's attention. These concerns intensified as the Protestants within his archdiocese grew more and more anxious as the fateful year of 1825 approached. Trench became irate with the Catholic priests as they remained taciturn, refusing to speak out against Pastorini, which in his view only encouraged Catholic aggression. He was equally dissatisfied with Goulburn's reaction to the worsening situation. At this time, Dublin Castle

¹⁷⁴ Henry Goulburn to Earl of Clancarty, 15 December 1824 (N.A.I., SOC, 1824 2624/30).

¹⁷⁵ Power le Poer Trench to Henry Goulburn, 14 December 1824 (N.A.I., SOC, 1824 2624/28, enclosed).

¹⁷⁶ Power le Poer Trench to William Gregory, 5 Aug. 1813 (N.A.I., SOC, 1813 1538/20).

had been contemplating the suppression of the Catholic Association, whose agents, mostly parish priests, had been diligent in collecting the Catholic Rent and in promoting the drive for Catholic Emancipation through sermons and articles written for newspapers. Trench assumed that if the political fervour of the Irish priesthood concerned Irish authorities and forced them to consider introducing coercive legislation to curb clerical activities, then they should take the threat posed by Pastorini's predictions just as seriously. Unfortunately for Trench, Goulburn's answer was identical to the one given to his brother, as the chief secretary requested hard evidence of a Catholic rebellion before further action could be taken.¹⁷⁷

In the end, the predicted massacre of Irish Protestants never happened. While this permitted some Irish Protestants once again to sleep better at night, the damage done to the relations between Protestant and Catholics during the build-up to 1825 added to the growing chasm of distrust between the two groups. As Daniel O'Connell continued to succeed in mobilising Catholic political energies in the drive for emancipation, Irish Protestants prepared for the worst; many felt that the granting of unconditional Catholic relief would be the death knell of the Protestant position in Ireland. Hence, even after 1825, inter-confessional relations grew progressively tenser.

These examples taken from the *State of the Country* papers show that parts of Connacht had been caught up in the popular millenarianism that had been witnessed more dramatically in Munster. The economic meltdown after the Napoleonic Wars, the prolonged frustration of Catholics in being denied an equal political voice, and the looming threat of starvation and disease after 1821 contributed considerably to these sectarian tensions. To Catholics it seemed that Protestants were possessed of seemingly limitless access to the economic and political firepower of the British system, and saw themselves as

¹⁷⁷ Henry Goulburn to Power le Poer Trench, 28 Dec. 1824 (N.A.I., SOC, 1824 2624/28).

marginalised and cast off to the periphery of society. As long as these sectarian groups were left alone to go about their respective business, it seemed, they were able to co-exist alongside each other with little difficulty. However, once they collided with each other – whether by aggressive proselytising efforts, like at Kingscourt, or through the expectations of popular prophecies – the fallout produced by this friction was usually very unpleasant. The limited degree of Irish Catholic millenarianism that heated the rural countryside at this time was able to have such an impact only because the Protestant and Catholic communities in Ireland in the normal course of affairs came into intimate contact. The economic slide after 1815 reminded the Irish tenant farmer of the historical grievances associated with his class, while their reading of Pastorini justified sectarian aggression. The disruptions of the 1820s only reaffirmed what was already known, but had been rarely expressed before with such force: that Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics saw themselves as different from each other and mutually antagonistic.

Another reason why so many evangelicals in the Church of Ireland refused to show any toleration of their Catholic neighbours was because of this ‘siege mentality’, which had been sharpened by the changing politics of the 1820s and the increasing number of attacks on Protestant by-standers. When Protestant zealots went to battle against Roman Catholicism, they believed that they were at war with the forces of antichrist, a battle in which no quarter could be given. Ireland’s rapidly growing population and miserable economic situation, as well as the linking of religion with nationalist interests further destabilised the security of the broad Irish Protestant community.¹⁷⁸ It was against this backdrop that the evangelicals within the Church of Ireland carried out their work in Connacht, and especially after 1830, representatives of this group, like Edward Nangle, were perhaps naïve in thinking that one could improve and protect the Protestant interest and incorporate Irish culture into

¹⁷⁸ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 83

the British nation by changing the religion of the people. The 1820s were years of expanding evangelical activity within the Church of Ireland, set in motion by William Magee, and this carried with it a more aggressive and confrontational approach to the Roman Catholic population.¹⁷⁹ Even moderate Protestants would have agreed that Irish Catholicism, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, consisted of a set of values, a culture, and an historical tradition, that stood in stark contrast to the followers of the minority religion.¹⁸⁰ Later in the decade Nangle would become entangled with the most vehement upholders of the 'No Surrender' tradition of Protestant supremacy while he convalesced from his illness in Dublin, but he arrived at this juncture after his experiences as a young curate in Arva. Irene Whelan has correctly pointed out that these were the years of 'Catholic emancipation, the introduction of the national system of education, the looming threat of the tithe war and the Church Temporalities Act', in understanding his unqualified hatred of Catholicism, but there was definitely something more to the picture.¹⁸¹ If anything, the conflicts and confrontations between the Protestant order and the Irish Catholic population demonstrated that Catholicism was not only the majority religion of the people, but it was the majority culture as well. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the various Protestant clubs and Bible societies that sprang up in Dublin met the fiercest opposition when they attempted to expand into the countryside. So when Nangle and his fellow evangelicals raised the Bible as the figurative hammer 'breaking up the rock of truth into small stones, and throwing them at their neighbours', they should have perhaps realized that in their endeavours, they would inevitably have to shatter a few windows.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession: radical evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815-1835* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 156.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁸¹ Irene Whelan, 'Edward Nangle and the Achill mission', p.119.

¹⁸² This wonderful phrase was taken from W.H. Lecky, *The religious tendencies of the age* (London, 1860), p. 8.

Chapter Three

Foundations: Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission 1831-1852

It lieth under a dark gray cloud, which is evermore discharging itself on the earth, but like the widow's cruise, is never exhausted. It is bounded by the south and east by Christendom and part of Tipperary, on the North by Donegal, and on the west by the *salt say*. Its gentry are a polished and religious race, remarkable for their punctuality in pecuniary transactions, and their freedom from a litigious or quarrelsome disposition. The prevailing mode of belief among the upper classes is *anythingism*, that of the people, pure Popery.¹

-W.H. Maxwell relaying a description of Connacht from a contemporary travel journal (1829).

You are settled in the Isle of Achill, which is an Island off the Coast of Mayo?

I am.

What induced you to settle there?

The extreme destitution of the inhabitants in every point of view, both Temporal and Spiritual.

When did you arrive there?

I arrived in the island in July 1834.

In what character did you settle yourself, – as a clergyman of the Established Church, or merely as an ordinary Inhabitant?

As a Clergyman.

Did you undertake to give Spiritual Ministrations there?

Yes.²

– from Edward Nangle's testimony before the *Select Committee of the House of Lords on the plan of Education in Ireland* (1837).

The Achill mission was the logical outcome and practical expression of the 'Second Reformation' ideology which, as discussed earlier, was planted in Trinity College, Dublin by some of its Fellows at the turn of the nineteenth-century; grew within the minds of a number of its graduates; and blossomed in the second quarter of the century. Frustrated by the failure of national evangelization – especially after the Bible was removed from the classroom of the National Schools in 1831 – Dublin-based evangelicals, who had established a plethora of Biblical and religious societies during the 1820s, looked to the impoverished, underdeveloped, and mainly Irish-speaking

¹ W.H. Maxwell, *Wild sports of the west. With legendary tales and local sketches* (2 vols, London, 1832), i, 21-22.

² *Minutes of evidence taken before the select committee of the House of Lords on the plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 378. (hereafter referred to as *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*).

counties of the Atlantic seaboard as a last-ditch effort to bring both Protestantism and prosperity to the indigenous population. In many ways, therefore, the missionary colony founded by Edward Nangle at Dugort on Achill Island was the high-water mark of this vigorous Irish evangelicalism, which had migrated from Dublin to the west and south-west after 1830.³

The Irish West was poor. The extreme temporal and spiritual destitution in the West grabbed the attention of evangelicals like Nangle. In July 1831, *Blackwood's Magazine*, a general cultural periodical appealing to the top ranks of society, painted a sombre picture of the state of Ireland:

The Irish seem to be utterly unteachable in the most ordinary lessons of prudence – all experience is lost upon them, and we would be almost constrained to look upon them as a doomed people – as a race foreordained to wretchedness, were it not that we know that they enjoy a great deal of happiness when potatoes are plenty and the sun shines merrily above their heads.⁴

Since both the Catholic and established church authorities had long neglected the spiritual needs of people living in remote areas like Achill, Dublin-based religious and educational societies acknowledged that west Connacht was the best place to continue the evangelical work started in the middle 1820s. While the Baptists and Methodists had been targeting Irish-speaking regions west of the Shannon for missionary work since the mid eighteenth-century, the established church had mostly concentrated its resources in or around Dublin. Their success and the lack of the physical manpower of the Catholic Church in parts of the province made the far west particularly attractive to ambitious evangelical expansionists.

The population boom further helped to make the West attractive to religious zealots, as Roman Catholic priests found it increasingly difficult to

³ Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission, 1834-1852" in Raymond Gillespie and G. Moran (eds.), 'A various county': essays in *Mayo history 1500-1900* (Westport, 1987), p. 113."

⁴ "Ireland and the Reform Bill" in *Blackwood's Magazine*, xxix (July 1831), p. 52.

attend to the spiritual needs of their expanding flocks. In Patrick Corish's words, 'too few chapels, too few priests, too many people too wretched to come what were often long distances in their rags'.⁵ In 1800, there were roughly 1,850 priests in Ireland (a figure which included curates and regular clergy not employed in parishes) and 26 bishops for the 3.9 million Irish Catholics, or a ratio of one priest for every 2,100 Catholics.⁶ While the shortage of Catholic clergymen affected all parts of the country, some regions were hit harder than others. For instance, in 1834-35, the relatively well-off diocese of Ferns had one priest for 1,941 Catholics – whereas at the same time in Tuam, where the rate of population growth was faster than in other areas, the number of Catholics for each priest was 4,199.⁷ By the eve of the Famine the numbers entering into the Irish Catholic priesthood failed to keep pace with the rise in population. In the far west, particularly in the archdiocese of Tuam, the supply of parish priests and church facilities were especially lacking. Archbishop Oliver Kelly of Tuam, when he gave evidence on the state of Ireland in 1825, admitted to a select committee of the House of Lords that it was difficult for Catholics in Connacht to receive adequate religious instruction, saying that it was common for congregations to travel up to six miles in the most inclement weather to worship in one of the few scattered chapels provided for them.⁸ While this shows the resilience of the Catholic laity, it clearly reveals the dreadful state of the church in Tuam. Nor had the

⁵ Patrick Corish, *The Irish Catholic experience* (Dublin, 1989), p. 187.

⁶ Emmet Larkin, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75" in *American Historical Review*, 77, no. 3 (June 1972), p. 626.

⁷ S.J. Connolly, *Priests and people in pre-Famine Ireland 1780-1845* (Dublin, 1982), p. 35. Connolly bases his findings for 1834-35 from a return furnished to the Commissioners of Public Instruction by the Catholic bishops in May 1835. For more, see *Commissioners of public instruction, first report* (1835), Appendix II.

⁸ *State of Ireland: Minutes of evidence taken before the the Lords' select committee inquiring into the circumstances which had led to disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom*, 1825, IX (181) (521).

established church shown any more concern for their western communicants. In Connemara, the parish of Ballinakill, which measured roughly forty by twenty Irish miles, with a total population of 42,000 souls, had only one Protestant church at Clifden, served by one clergyman and aided by two curates provided by the archbishop of Tuam.⁹

Due to the neglect of both the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland, orthodox religious knowledge, particularly among the lower classes of society, suffered. Although Protestant communities had been established in rural Connacht before the nineteenth century, numbers were thinly spread. Yet English travellers to rural Connacht before 1800 were pleased to find enclaves of native Irish-speaking Protestants. According to Richard Pococke, who toured Ireland in 1752, Protestant communities flourished on the coast: 'even to the present day the sea-board parishes contain a more numerous Protestant population than those inland'.¹⁰ Such Protestant areas on the western coast, which had carved niches for themselves within predominantly Catholic areas, continued into the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

In the pre-Famine West, elements surviving from earlier religious traditions remained; thus one cannot overestimate the influence of priest or parson upon the spiritual lives of the people. On the islands, trust in charms, belief in fairies, and the fear of curses mixed with a rudimentary Christianity to produce insular beliefs in the healing powers of holy clay and the power to change the weather by correctly performing 'stations' at designated holy wells. For instance, on Achill Island, people never corked bottles of holy water,

⁹ *Reports of Commissioners on ecclesiastical revenue and patronage, Ireland: Third report*, 1836, XXV (246), 512-13; Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-1870* (Dublin, 1978), p. 203.

¹⁰ George Stokes (ed.), *Pococke's tour in Ireland in 1752* (Dublin, 1891), p. 5.

fearing they might explode.¹¹ In cases of illness among both animals and people, 'fairy doctors', who offered a folk medicine based on herbal remedies and a claim to special anatomical knowledge, often 'hurried many to an untimely grave...'.¹² James Johnson, who travelled to Achill in 1844, mentioned that a "medicine woman" cured the sick by having patients swallow a musket ball, which passed through their system, allegedly taking away the illness with it.¹³ Charms, like the remedy for backache, were commonplace and illustrate the close connection between folk and Christian beliefs:

May Peter take it, and take it Paul,
May Michael take it, and take it John,
May Moleesha take it, may Mweelin take,
This pain from my back, this savage ache.¹⁴

The fact that the Catholic church strenuously attempted to discourage such folk traditions and that Protestant evangelicals used them as evidence to prove the weakness of Catholic catechesis strongly suggests that what was involved was not merely a colourful folk tradition, but a body of beliefs and practices which made up a very real part of the religious life of large numbers of Irish men and women in the areas where literacy and English-speaking had made least impact.

Despite the prevalence of folk beliefs, access to formal education was in high demand. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the various evangelical societies in Dublin were convinced that the most effective way to convert the Catholic population to the reformed faith was through education. Since the inhabitants of the western Irish coast appeared to be the most bereft

¹¹ Irish Folklore Commission, Volume 1349, p. 328.

¹² S.J. Connolly, *Priests and people*, p. 103.

¹³ James Johnson, *A tour in Ireland with meditations and reflections* (London, 1844), p. 21.

¹⁴ Douglas Hyde, *The religious songs of Connacht: a collection of poems, stories, prayers, satires, ranns, charms, etc.* (2 vols, London and Dublin, 1906), ii., p. 389.

both of education and of Christianity's basic tenets, the evangelical societies in Dublin decided during the late 1820s to redirect their efforts outside of the metropolis. Besides the Association for Countenancing Vice and Promoting the Christian Religion and the London Hibernian Society, whose activities were covered in chapter one, several other proselytising societies should be mentioned: the Baptist Society for Promoting the Gospel, founded in April 1814; and the Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their Own Language, founded in 1818. Both of these societies concentrated their resources on converting the native Irish by establishing schools whose teachers were expressly to use the Irish language. Neither the Baptist nor the Irish Society desired to preserve the Irish language but planned to use it as an efficient vehicle for reaching the most Irish souls. In the mid-1820s, the Baptist Society claimed ninety-five day schools, the Irish Society about fifty.¹⁵ A third proselytising society, the Sunday School Society for Ireland, founded in 1809, derived a large percentage of its operating costs from other evangelical organisations. Initially the Sunday School Society limited its activities to distributing spelling and religious books, yet it soon became a significant proselytising agency, claiming more than 150,000 children in school in 1835.¹⁶

Another group, the Society for the Education of the Poor in Ireland, more popularly known as the Kildare Place Society, refrained from blatant proselytism, at least during its early years. Founded in 1811, the Kildare Place Society offered non-denominational education for poor children; however, by the early 1820s it became anathema to high-ranking Catholics, including

¹⁵ *First report of the Commissioners of Irish education inquiry*, p. 31, H.C. 1825 (400), xii, 82-84.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-65.

Daniel O’Connell, who charged it with covert proselytism. During its first meeting, the Kildare Place Society declared its policy on religious instruction: ‘That for the accomplishment of the “great work” of educating the Irish poor, schools should be upon the most liberal principles, and should be divested of all sectarian distinctions in Christianity’.¹⁷ Although the Bible was read ‘without note or comment’, doctrinal matters were to not to be raised in the classroom.

Since its schools were non-denominational and because it catered to the Irish poor, the Kildare Place Society was able to seek government assistance. After 1816, parliamentary grants poured in. The following table, compiled from numbers presented in the *Report from the select committee on foundation schools and education in Ireland (1837-1838)*, shows the amounts given by parliament to the Kildare Place Society from 1816 until 1831:¹⁸

Table 1: Amount given to Kildare Place Society by the Government, 1816-1831

Year	Amount (£)	Year	Amount (£)
1816	6,000	1827	25,000
1817	9,663	1828	25,000
1818	5,538	1829	25,000
1820	5,538	1830	18,750
1825	22,000	1831	30,000
1826	15,000		

By 1820, the Kildare Place Society, supported by government grants, boasted

¹⁷ H. Kingsmill Moore, *An unwritten chapter in the history of education, being the history of the society for the education of the poor in Ireland, generally known as the Kildare Place Society, 1811-1831* (London, 1904), p. 9.

¹⁸ *Report from the select committee on foundation schools and education in Ireland*, p. 11.

of having 381 schools throughout the country, providing primary education to 26,474 scholars.¹⁹

Ireland seemed to be on the verge of a national education system breakthrough, but Daniel O'Connell, who served on the KPS board of managers, along with other lay Catholic leaders withdrew their support from the society. O'Connell and his cadre wished to see the policy of bible reading 'without note or comment' amended to suit Catholic sensitivities. When the managing committee resisted these charges, and when the Kildare Place Society began granting part of its income to various Protestant proselytising societies beginning in 1820, the fight began in earnest. While Catholic activism – led by the Catholic Association, O'Connell, Bishop James Doyle, and John MacHale (then a priest at Maynooth), failed to rout the Kildare Place Society – it did succeed in bringing the question of national education in Ireland into the public spotlight, and ultimately lead to the appointment of a royal Commission to investigate the issue in 1824. Another result of Catholic pressure was a weakening of the Bible and proselytising societies in and around Dublin.

On the popular level, the KPS had been grouped with the other proselytising societies. "Blind" Raftery, whose poems and songs were popular in Co. Mayo during this time, wrote the following bitter lines condemning the Bible schools, fearing that they would turn the Irish into Protestants:

Their bible on their lips and at their finger tips!
But they'll pay for it all hereafter.
A blind unlettered man expounds to you his plan,
Raftery, whose heart in him is burning,
Who bids ye all to know that none to heaven can go
On the strength of their Luther's learning.²⁰

¹⁹ George L. Smythe, *Ireland: historical and statistical* (London, 1844), p. 232.

²⁰ Douglas Hyde, *Op. cit.*, p. 267.

Eventually the government was forced to investigate the heated question of education in Ireland and appointed a commission of inquiry, which sat from June 1824 until June 1827. Over this period, the commission issued nine reports and finally recommended state-sponsored, non-denominational education for Ireland. Shortly afterwards the National Board, established in 1831, was brought into effect. National education was the death-knell of evangelical ambitions in the contested arena of education, for as one writer has commented: 'The main result of the introduction of the National System was to bring about a dramatic increase in the educational resources of the Irish Catholic church, by creating a network of schools funded by the state but under the direct control of its clergy'.²¹ Before it, Catholic parents in poorer dioceses often had little choice but to send their children to Protestant-backed schools, which offered instruction in the Bible, "without note or comment"; now, after 1831, they could opt for state sponsored schools, which in effect were controlled by the Catholic clergy.

Coupled with the Catholic Relief Act of 1829, the system of national education represented a breakthrough for Irish Catholics in poorer parts of the country.²² Besides slowing the progress of the 'Second Reformation', national education forced evangelical organizations to consider other long-term plans, since political and educational developments made a reformation at the national level impossible. Henceforth, resources and manpower would be redirected to schemes and particular geographic areas where success seemed most probable. As a result, after 1831, the largely Irish-speaking western seaboard became the next logical target in the broader evangelical strategy of bringing the Word of God to the native Irish.

²¹ S.J. Connolly, *Priests and people*, p. 86.

²² Irene Whelan, "Nangle and the Achill Mission", p. 115.

Archbishop Power le Poer Trench

Although the political climate and increasing unpopularity of the Bible societies and the KPS help to explain some of the reasons for the shift of resources from the Irish metropolis to the west, another factor was the band of dedicated evangelicals already operating in parts of Munster and Connacht. Missionary work, like the sort carried out on Achill from 1834, could not be conducted without the express approval of a bishop, parish rector or lay patrons. The most aggressive evangelicals ended up in dioceses where the bishop shared their theology, and the most evangelically disposed region in the 1820s and 1830s was unquestionably the archdiocese of Tuam.²³ This was largely, but not exclusively, because of Power le Poer Trench, who served as the archbishop of Tuam from 1819 until his death in 1839, and found himself a crucial opportunity to promote the cause of the 'Second Reformation' during his episcopacy.

Like many of his evangelical contemporaries, Trench, a Trinity College graduate, came from a rising family that had attained success and reputation through support for the Union and the ultra-Protestant cause. His father, William Power Keating (1741-1805) had married Anne Gardiner, the sister of Viscount Mountjoy in 1762 and after a lengthy political career was later elevated to the peerage with the title of Baron Kilconnell in 1798. His upward social climb continued when he was made first earl of Clancarty in 1801, allegedly for his role in suppressing the 1798 rebellion, but at least in part because of his support of the Union.²⁴ His eldest son, Richard, succeeded to the earldom, while his second son, Power later became archbishop of Tuam and another son, Charles, became archdeacon of Ardagh.²⁵

²³ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 71.

²⁴ J. D'Arcy Sirr, *A memorial of the most honorable and most reverend Power le Poer Trench, last Archbishop of Tuam* (Dublin, 1845), p. 3.

²⁵ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 567. A complete account of the Trench family is given in *A memoir of the Trench family, compiled by Thomas Richard Frederick Cooke-Trench* (Privately printed, Dublin 1896).

Power le Poer Trench had indicated his interest in proselytising Irish Catholics as early as 1823, yet at the outset of his career as a clergyman he had frowned upon the evangelicals. He found ultra-Protestant preaching obnoxious and detrimental to the cordial relations which existed between Protestant and Catholics in his native diocese of Tuam. However, when he received his first Episcopal appointment as the bishop of Waterford and Lismore in 1802, he quickly established a reputation for attention to duty which rivalled that of his most vigorous evangelical colleagues. Besides the maintenance and improvement of church buildings, the regulation of church services and the enforcement of clerical residence, Trench befriended local Catholics and when transferred to the diocese of Elphin in 1810, he sponsored outdoor relief schemes during the intense famine and typhus epidemic of 1816-1817.²⁶ Although Catholics generally appreciated Trench's efforts within his diocese, Michael Dillon, a Catholic and dispensary physician, who worked with Trench during his tenure as bishop of Elphin, observed that his religious mood had undergone a marked change since 1810:

When his lordship first came to Elphin, that weak and mistaken zeal for proselytism which has obtained the approval of some otherwise good men, was not much encouraged by him; but at the close of his sojourn here he seemed to partake a little of that religious feeling which appears to me not so well calculated to secure the happiness of mankind as its advocates on either side seem to think. He thought and acted, I believe, from the dictates and impulse of good conscience. What he said and felt arose not from any selfish or mean principle, but were, I believe, intended to promote the religious and moral good of his neighbours.²⁷

Irene Whelan has identified two events that occurred in 1816 which may have helped push him into a more evangelical mindset. The first was the death (resulting from complications in childbirth) of his beloved sister, Emily, wife to Robert La Touche; and the second was his correspondence with William Digby, archdeacon of Elphin. His sister had been a religious zealot; Trench

²⁶ J. D'Arcy Sirr, *A memorial*, pp. 45-56.

²⁷ Quoted in J. D'Arcy Sirr, *A memorial*, pp. 46-47.

attended her deathbed, and thereafter grew more attached to her evangelical opinions. Shortly after her death, he began intense theological conversations with Digby, whose robust evangelicalism had helped to transform the area around Boyle in County Roscommon into a hive of Biblical discussion among the Protestant community.²⁸ Digby evidently wielded great influence over his diocesan superior, and just before he was transferred to Tuam Trench acknowledged his gratitude to the archdeacon for instilling within him the virtues of 'vital Christianity':

He is full of zeal in God's service, and I confess that if it pleases God ever to make me a Christian, he had been much the means of my hitherto weak and feeble conversion. If ever I shall be a child of God, I shall, humbly speaking, in a great measure be his son in the gospel.²⁹

So by the time the Prince of Wales nominated Power le Poer Trench to the See of Tuam in 1819, he had it seems already undergone an evangelical 'conversion' while bishop of Elphin; however, he still retained a High Church demeanour. When made archbishop, he brought with him an impeccable reputation as a man of charity and a fair-minded friend to Catholics – at least according to his biographer, J. D'Arcy Sirr.³⁰ His accession opened enormous and exciting possibilities for the expansion of evangelicalism throughout a diocese that was probably the most backward in Ireland – in material terms – as well as the country's most Catholic.³¹ Protestants in Tuam warmly welcomed their new archbishop with high expectations for they were getting, in the words of a sympathetic admirer, someone 'numbered with the most useful, most single-minded, and the most holy ministers of our Church'.³² As archbishop, he promised to take advantage of every opportunity 'of promoting the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', only ordaining those

²⁸ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", pp. 572-573.

²⁹ J. D'Arcy Sirr, *A memorial*, p. 92.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

³¹ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 576; Donald H. Akenson, *The Church of Ireland*, p. 165.

³² Richard S. Brooke, *Recollections of the Irish Church* (2 vols, London 1877), i, p. 140.

who showed a clear commitment to spreading the Gospel; and his actions prove him to be a man of his word. From early on, it became obvious that the only way to succeed in the Tuam archdiocese was to share Trench's ideology, which he expressed early on:

We are proselytisers. We plead guilty to this terrific and unpardonable charge. Nay, if we were not proselytisers we could lay no claim to the name of Christians...Am I to be told that for fear of offending an unscriptural church I am to join in league with its priesthood to close the pure simple unnoted book of inspiration, to withhold the Book of God from his condemned and perishing creatures?³³

Immediately, Trench procured livings for zealous curates, solicited the aid of evangelical landlords, organised regular clerical meetings, sanctioned the opening of Bible schools and allowed scripture readers, employed by the Irish Society, to read the Bible to Catholics within the Tuam archdiocese. Furthermore, much emphasis was placed on preaching in the Irish language, and Trench himself resolved not to receive into the ministry those 'who shall not be capable of reading to, and addressing the people in their own native tongue'.³⁴ Despite his successful campaign for the establishment of an Irish Chair at Trinity College, this ambition for an Irish literate clergy fell through when the supply of Irish-speaking ministers could not meet the demand.³⁵ Within a short period of time, Trench had assembled an impressive vanguard of evangelical foot soldiers operating throughout his archdiocese: the Rev. Charles Seymour in Clifden, Co. Galway; the Rev. William Baker Stoney in Newport, Co. Mayo; the Rev. Thomas Burgh in Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo; the Rev. Giles Eyre in Galway; and the Rev. Brabazon Ellis in Roundstone, Co. Mayo. In almost every case, these young clergymen were recent graduates of Trinity College.³⁶ They cooperated with each other and worked with their diocesan superior to forward the progress of the 'Second Reformation' during

³³ J. D'Arcy Sirr, *A memorial*, p. 487.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 565.

³⁵ Henry Joseph Monck Mason, *History of the origin and progress of the Irish Society established for promoting the education of the native Irish, through the medium of their own language*, (Dublin, 1846), p. 40.

³⁶ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 587.

the mid-1820s in a region which had been seriously neglected by both the Roman Catholic and established church.

By 1830, Trench had approved of a Connacht Home Mission Society to better coordinate the movement among his clergy to remedy the spiritual destitution of his archdiocese, in particular the area along the western frontier. In accordance with the traditional outlook of the established church, Trench looked upon his clergy as ministers of Christ to all who lived in his archdiocese, regardless of religious persuasion.³⁷ This inevitably brought him into conflict with the Catholic clergy, in particular John MacHale, who was the bishop of Killala (1825-1834) and later succeeded Oliver Kelly in 1834 as archbishop of Tuam. The immoderate attacks of MacHale and others helped to solidify Trench's commitment to an evangelical ethos, which he had earlier attempted to discourage. Consequently, sectarian controversies which spread throughout Connacht at this time can be largely attributed to the work of the provocative evangelical clergy deployed by Trench.

The combination of several trends in the 1820s, therefore, propelled discussion among the leaders of the evangelical movement about moving their operations to the underdeveloped west. Since it appeared that Catholic Emancipation and national education had invigorated a militant Irish Catholicism that was endeavouring to undermine national evangelization and the ultra-Protestant cause in general, committed Church of Ireland evangelicals like Trench, entertained the possibility of establishing Protestant settlements to serve as a bulwark against their Catholic neighbours.

The Protestant Colonisation Projects

Catholic Emancipation, national education, the looming threat of the Church Temporalities Act (which would reduce the number of Church of

³⁷ Desmond Bowen, *Souperism, myth or reality: a study in souperism* (Cork, 1970), p. 154.

Ireland bishoprics in 1833), and the early rumblings of the tithe war created a climate of fear among many Irish Protestants who, after 1829, felt abandoned and alienated by London. In the eighteenth century the Penal Laws had kept Irish Catholics from acquiring property, barred them from many of the learned professions, prohibited them from serving in public office, and deprived them of the elective franchise. Recent concessions granted to Catholics by parliament made many within the Irish evangelical party question their own security. A telling sign of this was the large numbers of Protestants that were leaving the country – between 1829 and 1833 94,000 according to the *Dublin University Magazine*.³⁸ ‘The country is not bleeding merely, it is sweating blood’, claimed the same writer in assessing the significance of the supposed Protestant emigration from Ireland.³⁹

Partially to stop this “bleeding” of Protestants and also to protect those that remained behind, a group of influential landlords, clergyman and laymen – all notorious anti-Catholics – established the Protestant Colonisation Society in November 1829. The management committee included no strangers to ultra-Protestantism: the Earl of Enniskillen; Lord Mountcashel; Lord Lorton; Marcus Beresford; Colonel Blacker; N.D. Crommellin; and Thomas Anthony Lefroy. Others, notably William Magee, the archbishop of Dublin, Viscount Dungannon and Lord Farnham, acted as vice-presidents.⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, the names of these individuals, most of them Trinity graduates, are found throughout the membership lists of various other Dublin-based Bible and education societies. Taking its inspiration from a work published in Edinburgh in 1828, “An account of the poor colonies and agricultural workhouses of the Benevolent Society of Holland”, this society sought to

³⁸ *Dublin University Magazine*, March 1833, p. 266.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Address and prospectus of the Protestant colonization society from the meeting of December 18, 1829.*

settle Protestant families on reclaimed land under the cooperative principle.⁴¹ Without delay, evangelical luminaries from England, like the bishops of Bath and Salisbury, the Duke of Newcastle, and the Earl of Winchelsea lent their support. Although land improvement and agricultural efficiency were high priorities, the settlements established under the auspices of the Protestant Colonisation Society were envisaged to become missionary centres from which the work of Bible readers, preachers and schoolteachers would infiltrate the surrounding areas. While the society made overtures of promoting political stability and material progress, the rhetoric employed by one of its founders approximated cultural imperialism: 'Protestant colonies would be found most useful in preserving the connection between this country and England. The poorer class of Irish Protestants were in truth the chain that bound conquered Ireland to the conqueror England; and it was as much the interest of England as of Ireland to encourage those Protestants by whom this connection was preserved'.⁴²

Two projects were quickly undertaken by the Protestant Colonisation Society, one at Aughkeely, Co. Donegal, and one at Kilmeague, Co. Kildare. The distance between the two places suggests that the Protestant Colonisation Society did not target a specific geographic region nor was it particularly concerned with teaching the Bible in the Irish language. Aughkeely, a town land between Letterkenny and Stranorlar, rested on the estate of Sir Edmund Hayes of Drumbo Castle.⁴³ Homesteads with up to twenty-five or thirty acres were to be made available to Protestants at the agreeable rent of fifty shillings a year. While families from Scotland and England were invited to settle at Aughkeely, most of the twelve households formed by 1832 came from

⁴¹ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", pp 600-601; Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission", p. 120.

⁴² *Dublin Evening Post*, 26 Nov. 1829.

⁴³ *Protestant colonization Society of Ireland: Transactions...at a public meeting of subscribers...*, (Dublin, 1832), p. 25 as quoted by Irene Whelan in "Evangelical religion", p. 604.

elsewhere in Ulster.⁴⁴ Aughkeely never amounted to much and subsequently dropped from the pages of evangelical historiography.⁴⁵

On the other hand, the experimental settlement founded at Kilmeague, Co. Kildare, situated near the Jesuit establishment of Clongowes and Maynooth College, on the property of Sir Gerald Aylmer, achieved greater success and notoriety. Its rector, the Rev. Charles Preston, arrived in the parish around 1828 and with the assistance of the Protestant Colonization Society, made available sixty acres of land at thirty shillings per acre. Despite much resistance, which included threats of physical violence and “exclusive dealing” from local Catholics led by the parish priest, Preston was able to expand the Kilmeague settlement to eighty families in the decade before the Famine.⁴⁶ Evidently, Preston did not intend to make Kilmeague into a refuge for converts, for all of the colonists had previously been Protestant; rather he desired to open its doors to those ‘who had been driven from the neighbourhood in which they had first been settled, and to whom, if the asylum at Kilmeague had not been opened, there remained no alternative but emigration’.⁴⁷ In 1845, journals reported that the tensions between Protestant settlers and local Catholics at Kilmeague had subsided: ‘War and strife has been succeeded by peace and concord; and perhaps there is no part of Ireland in which differing religionists now live more peaceable together, than in this district, where they were at first so much divided’.⁴⁸

Around this time, in 1834, another organisation, the Island and Coasts Society, an adjunct of the Irish Society, sprung up and helped bring increased awareness of the Bible to the roughly 50,000 inhabitants scattered upon the

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁵ Irene Whelan, “Evangelical religion”, p. 604.

⁴⁶ *Christian Examiner* June 1845, p. 738.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 739.

⁴⁸ “Protestant Conversions in Ireland” in *Dublin University Magazine* xxv (June 1845), p. 738.

islands along the western and south-west coasts.⁴⁹ While the connection between this society and the Achill Mission is unclear (for Nangle and his sympathisers make no reference to this organisation early on), it does demonstrate the evangelical party's intense preoccupation with the West after 1829. The lifelong secretary of the Islands and Coasts Society, Henrietta Pendleton, led the way in this largely female venture, which raised funds for its projects by writing letters to potential benefactors. Pendleton was a native of Fathom near Kingscourt and was married to the Rev. E.C. Pendelton, a missionary employed by the Irish Society to work on Farnham's estate, who also served as the first secretary of the Achill Mission Committee.⁵⁰ Besides canvassing for support, agents of the Island and Coasts Society undertook the training and education of future scripture readers, who would be later deployed along the western Irish coast. Although an ambitious project, Pendleton's work appears to have gone largely unnoticed outside of evangelical circles.

Aimsir Nangle: The Nangle Mission, 1831-1840

Before Nangle took up residence on Achill in August 1834, little was known about this remote western island – Ireland's largest – which arose from the Atlantic, just beyond Croagh Patrick. Achill and the surrounding Connacht landscape had already captured the interest of eighteenth-century travellers to Ireland, who were drawn to the allure of exploring a remote and little understood Irish wilderness. This became more pronounced in the years after 1800.

The Achill Mission was, as we have seen, not the only colonization project pursued by evangelicals; nor was it the first attempt to bring

⁴⁹ Alfred Clayton Thiselton, *A memorial of the life and labours of Mrs. Henrietta Pendleton, forty years honorable secretary of the Irish Islands and Coasts Society* (Dublin, 1875), p. 7.

⁵⁰ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 626.

Protestantism to Achill, for the Baptists had established a short-lived school there in 1830.⁵¹ However, it was definitely to be Ireland's largest and most successful home mission. Nangle's first opportunity to explore the scene of his future missionary labours arrived when he and his wife Eliza joined an expedition aboard the *S.S. Nottingham*, which left Dublin on its way to Westport in 1831 carrying a cargo of Indian meal to help ease the suffering caused by a regional famine in the West and to bring back an accurate report of the poor's condition. Influential Protestants within Dublin evangelical circles, notably Thomas Parnell of the Religious Tract Society, and Henry Monck Mason of the Irish Society, sponsored the voyage. Since the steamer travelled around the northern coast, Achill would be passed along the way; and on the fourth day at sea, Achill Head came into view amidst blustery weather conditions. This was Nangle's first glimpse of the island, as his biographer dramatically points out: 'The storm continued to blow with increasing fury – fit emblem of the moral and spiritual storms which were yet to be encountered in connection with the Achill Mission'.⁵² Captain Bibby, the *Nottingham's* skipper, fought through the storm and docked in Clew Bay, not far from Westport.

With the *Nottingham* safely in port, Nangle, a little-known figure in Irish evangelicalism at the time, made the acquaintance of the contentious rector of Newport, the Rev. William Baker Stoney, who had come on board to collect a portion of the shipment which had been entrusted to him for distribution in his parish.⁵³ Nangle and his wife spent the night with Stoney, who suggested that Nangle visit Achill before returning to Dublin. Stoney established an instant rapport with Nangle and told him of the severe distress experienced by the Achill people as well as the need for a resident minister on the island. The non-resident incumbent of Achill, the Rev. Charles Wilson,

⁵¹ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 12.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

lived in Newport and received £100 annually in tithes; however, he was too infirm to even visit the island and too poor to hire a curate.⁵⁴ Determined to see and judge the condition of the people for himself, Nangle set out for Achill the next day, stopping at Newport for the night. The following day, accompanied by his wife and a Scripture reader, Nangle set off from Newport for Achill Sound where they arrived late in the evening. The following morning Nangle encountered his first Achill village, which basically consisted 'of a congeries of hovels thrown indiscriminately together, as if they fell in a shower from the sky'.⁵⁵ Apparently, the islanders' homes were as primitive as their husbandry:

The cottages in Achill, as in most parts of the west of Ireland, consist of only one room, in which there are two doorways, opposite to each other; the one on the lee side being left open, while that to windward is closed; this is done by means of a moveable straw matting, fitting to the doorway, and shifted as occasion requires. In the worst of these cottages, it is only through these apertures that daylight is admitted into the interior.⁵⁶

As there was no road, the party made their way on foot, by a horse track, which wound around the rugged Atlantic coast, leading them to the coastguard station at Bullsmouth, where they were entertained by the chief officer. The following day, they visited Dugort and Keel, a journey that lasted until nightfall. Nangle had evidently been thinking for some time about setting up a missionary colony resembling those of the United Brethren (Moravians);⁵⁷ after talking to some of the inhabitants in Irish, he became convinced that he had stumbled upon the ideal location:

⁵⁴ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 411.

⁵⁵ Caesar Otway, *A tour in Connacht: comprising sketches of Clonmancoise, Joyce Country, and Achill* (Dublin, 1839), p. 353.

⁵⁶ John Barrow, *Barrow's Ireland* (London, 1836), p. 3.

⁵⁷ The Church of the United Brethren came into being upon the estate of Count Nicolas Zizendorf in Upper Lusatia, Moravia, in 1727. Named Herrhut (literally "the House of the Lord"), this community was the center from which Protestant revivalism radiated all over Europe and across the Atlantic. When the massive influx of settlers onto Zinzendorf's estate became a threat to the Hapsburg regime, restrictions were placed on the numbers allowed at Herrhut. Because of this, missionaries were forced to other Protestant nations that accepted them. The United Brethren influenced the work of the Wesleys and became known as the first Protestant missionary church with a worldwide vision.

I had long determined to devote myself to missionary work among the native Irish on the plan of the United Brethren; and these encouraging appearances, which in the sequel proved to be, with few exceptions, deceptive, along with the intense destitution of the islanders both temporally and spiritually, decided me in fixing upon Achill as the field of my intended enterprise.⁵⁸

After fully witnessing the desperate physical condition of the islanders, their ignorance and the failure of either the Catholic or established church to provide adequate spiritual resources for them, Nangle aimed to take advantage of the situation by building a Protestant missionary colony on Achill.

Fully invigorated, he hurried back to Newport to enquire into the best means of making his dream a reality. He first spoke with Stoney, now considered 'a Christian friend', about establishing a Protestant mission on Achill; he then visited Sir Richard O'Donnel of Newport House, the main proprietor of Achill, whose family had purchased the island from Thomas Medlycott in 1798, and obtained a tract of mountain land at the nominal rent of one pound per annum for 'three lives, or else for thirty-one years'. Since O'Donnel wished to increase the value of his property, Nangle's plan for improving both the spiritual and material condition of the people seemed to offer a cheap and low-risk strategy to protect his investment. Greatly encouraged by this quick succession of events, Nangle expeditiously returned to Dublin to solicit more support for his proposed missionary settlement. At this point, Robert Daly, the rector of Powerscourt, Co. Wicklow and later bishop of Cashel, enthusiastically embraced Nangle's plan for improving the 'spiritual condition of the Irish peasantry' and subscribed fifty pounds on the spot.⁵⁹ In addition, a 'Christian Lady' anonymously lodged a sum of £390 into

⁵⁸ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 54.

⁵⁹ Isabella Madden, *Memoir of the late right Rev. Robert Daly, D.D., Lord Bishop of Cashel* (London, 1875), p. 190.

Nangle's account.⁶⁰ Daly, a native of Connacht and acknowledged evangelical leader, then assembled an impressive group of Irish evangelicals, forming the Achill Mission Committee, 'for conducting in the island of Achill, the first missionary settlement which had ever been established among the native Irish, using the Irish language'.⁶¹

However Nangle's enthusiasm was not shared by all. Writing in 1864, Nangle said that many influential evangelicals in Dublin regarded his project 'a wild speculation, originating in a romantic'.⁶² Some of the harshest disapproval came from personal friends who questioned his motives, which sacrificed the interests of his family and risked cutting himself off from all prospects of professional advancement.⁶³ Despite the doubts of better-known Irish evangelicals, who warned Nangle that 'you will not be six weeks in the island until the priests have blown you into the Atlantic', he remained undeterred in his task, convinced that 'God is stronger than the priests'.⁶⁴

The name of Edward Nangle looms large in any discussion on the spread of Protestant evangelicalism during the second quarter of the nineteenth century to remote places like Achill – too large perhaps. For though he was a major influence in what could be called the colonial stage of the 'Second Reformation', his pugnacious personality has tended to overshadow the role played by other individuals and groups. From the beginning, Nangle probably realised that he would need some sort of a formal support structure; this was provided by the Achill Mission Committee. The membership of the Achill

⁶⁰ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 59.

⁶¹ *AMH*, July 1837.

⁶² Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 56.

⁶³ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort, Achill Island, 1831-1861: the rise and fall of a missionary community* (Dublin, 2001), p. 10.

⁶⁴ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 57.

Mission Committee shows the undertaking to have been the design of influential Church of Ireland evangelicals, most of whom had Trinity connections. Among the founding members were Robert Daly; Joseph Henderson Singer, Nangle's former tutor from Trinity and later bishop of Meath; Caesar Otway, editor of the *Christian Examiner*; E.P. Brooke; William Baker Stoney; and lay members John Palliser, sometimes lieutenant of the Waterford artillery militia; George Wilson; and James Irvine.⁶⁵ The lay members of this committee most probably provided the initial cash for the operation. Although the latter were little known in evangelical circles, Daly, Otway, Singer, and Stoney had been to the forefront of Irish evangelicalism during the 1820s. After its inaugural meeting, the committee asked Daly to draft an introductory letter to Archbishop Trench, whose sanction and support was necessary before Nangle could settle on Achill as an officiating clergyman. Soon afterwards Trench responded with wholehearted approval, which allowed the committee to move forward with plans to secure land for the colony at the foot of Slievemore, reputedly some of the worst in the island, near the village of Dugort in a mountainside area called "Finsin" by the local population. Nangle reported that the land was so soft, to use a local expression, 'a hare could not walk over it'.⁶⁶ The land acquisition was achieved with much difficulty, for the sitting tenants at first refused to give up possession; however a deal was eventually struck and the committee ended up paying ninety pounds for 130 acres of uncultivated bogland to former tenants as well as agreeing to pay a yearly rent of £1 to the head landlord.⁶⁷ Local folklore mentions that this transaction generated animosity between the Achill

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

⁶⁶ *AMH*, Oct. 1864.

⁶⁷ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p.59-60.

Mission Committee and the inhabitants, and many relocated and established the village of Dooagh.⁶⁸

With the legal arrangements completed by the summer of 1833, the committee next hired a steward, an Englishman named Charles Bridger, to oversee land reclamation and the building of two small houses on the proposed site for Nangle's family and staff. Evidently, the tensions which had arisen from the land buy-out had relaxed when locals, who needed work, realized the temporal benefits presented by the mission; Bridger hired at least twenty local men to reclaim land and construct the missionary buildings.⁶⁹ Shortly afterwards, in November 1833, the committee sent a schoolmaster and a Scripture-reader to the fledging settlement to commence work among the local population. When Nangle, who was formally made director of the settlement's operations in 1834, took up permanent residence on 30 July 1834, he commanded what became the most ambitious, notorious and far-reaching missionary endeavour attempted in Ireland. In the project, he was joined by his family, three more Scripture-readers and the Rev. Joseph Duncan, a little known and elderly clergyman. Since the colony was extra-parochial, answerable only to the diocesan, Nangle did not receive tithe payments, but was dependent on voluntary support; he received £150 annually from the Achill Mission Committee. Free from tithe and enjoying the unbridled support of the powerful Trench, he had every reason to be optimistic.

The events which led to the foundation of the Achill colony in 1834 strikingly illustrate the close connections between the various support centres of Irish evangelicalism: in Kingscourt, where Nangle had encountered the

⁶⁸ Irish Folklore Commission, volume 1348, pp. 4-6; 291; 297; Irish Folklore Commission, volume 1349, p. 263.

⁶⁹ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 404.

agents of the Irish Society and Lord Farnham's moral agent, William Krause; in Dublin, where he had lived and worked with the evangelical community there; and in Tuam, where he had found episcopal sanction for his project.⁷⁰ With the appearance of brick and mortar at the Achill missionary settlement, the intellectual face of the 'Second Reformation' movement found concrete and practical expression. Inspired with substantial support from Dublin and English sources, Nangle set off for Co. Mayo.⁷¹

Between 1834 and 1852, during which time Edward Nangle lived permanently on Achill, the missionary settlement was at its most dynamic. Unfortunately most of the mission records have been lost; yet Nangle's biography, official reports of the missionary settlement, travellers' accounts, provincial and national newspapers, local folklore, and the correspondence of the Catholic hierarchy help us to piece together the conflicts and confrontations that beset the Achill missionary settlement during this time of relative strength.

It was not until the summer of 1834 that the infant settlement could accommodate Nangle and his entourage, the interval between his first visit to Achill and his permanent move there being mostly spent in Ballina, Co. Mayo. There he worked in connection with the Religious Tract Society, distributing polemical pamphlets critical of the Catholic church and preaching throughout the district with the permission of Dr Hamilton Verschoyle, the bishop of Killala. In January 1833, Nangle spoke at a meeting of the Bible Society in Ballina.⁷² From the early days of the 'Second Reformation', the town had become a hotbed for the missionary work of Presbyterians, Methodists and

⁷⁰ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 627.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷² *Ballina Impartial*, 7 Jan. 1833.

Baptists; in fact, Bowen has described Ballina as the melting pot of the religious world in the west of Ireland during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁷³ In 1835, the parish of Ballina comprised of 1,159 Church of Ireland residents, 13,408 Catholics, 5 Presbyterians, and 23 other Protestant dissenters, according to the 1834 religious returns.⁷⁴

1831 had been a year of very general distress in Co. Mayo, especially in the Ballina area, and the local relief activists had sought food supplies from outside.⁷⁵ Catholic priests fought bitterly with evangelical missionaries resident in the area for control over administering relief to the local population. Traditionally relief distribution had been handled by the local Protestant gentry and clergy.⁷⁶ Soon after the outbreak of famine and cholera in 1831, the Rev. James Allen, a Baptist minister working in the neighbourhood, who served as treasurer of the Ballina Dorcas Society, a local relief group, tried to channel funds from the recently established Ballina relief committee to families immediately connected with the Baptist Society's schools in the district. However, as the distress spread in 1831, overwhelming the efforts of the local Protestant-run relief agencies, Catholics, led by John McHale, bishop of Killala, fought for more control and influence over the handling of relief. MacHale then charged Allen with planning to use the relief funds for proselytising purposes and demanded his expulsion from the relief committee.⁷⁷ In reaction, Allen charged Catholic members on the local relief committee with monopolising funds and reserving them for use in the town,

⁷³ Desmond Bowen, *Souperism, myth or reality*, p. 217.

⁷⁴ *First report of the Commission on public instruction (Ireland). With an appendix*, 1835, p. 53d, H.C., 1835, xxxiii.

⁷⁵ Georgina Clinton, "A benevolent society? Local relief committee membership in Ireland 1817-52", (Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1999), p. 79.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-84.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

thereby neglecting his co-religionists in the country.⁷⁸ Local Protestants, who possessed the most wealth, political clout, and relief experience showed their solidarity and closed ranks with Allen, who had to choose between giving in to MacHale or running the risk of losing all relief.⁷⁹ Nangle, living in Ballina at the time, then predictably traced the tensions between Protestants and Catholics in the area to MacHale's doorstep. Two years later, in an attempt to establish himself as a polemicist, he incurred the Catholic bishop's wrath with the publication of *The ancient Catholic faith defended*, which questioned MacHale's spiritual office and attacked his interference in relief measures in Ballina. This set in train an exchange of polemical jousts that would continue for many years.

With the missionary settlement fit for habitation by mid-summer 1834, Nangle left Ballina in late July and proceeded to Achill, where he arrived by boat at Dugort Bay to a warm welcome, which included a large traditional bonfire on the beach.⁸⁰ The only other Protestants living on the island before Nangle's arrival were a band of coast guards along with their families. Two slated houses, the first ever seen on the island, and another small building, which served as the missionary church, greeted Nangle and his colleagues. A small group of cottages, which were to accommodate the converts, lurked behind the three infant constructions. Writing about his first year on Achill three decades later, Nangle described the rather limited living conditions:

our accomodation was very limited; we had but one small room, which served me as a parlour, drawing room, and study during the day, and at night it was occupied by Mr Duncan as a bed chamber, — a necessary arrangement, which was, however, attended with a double disadvantage, as

⁷⁸ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 628.

⁷⁹ *Seventeenth report of the Baptist Irish Society* (Dublin, 1831), appendix, p. 48.

⁸⁰ *Minutes taken before the select committee of the House of Lords on the plan of education in Ireland* (1837), p. 404.

Mr Duncan could not retire to rest until we vacated the apartment for the night, nor could we come down in the morning until he had risen and completed his toilet.⁸¹

Reference has already been made to the Annual Reports of the Achill Mission. Unfortunately, only eight of the Annual Reports, written by Nangle for the committee in Dublin and for the mission's patrons, have survived; these were for years between 1835 and 1850. In the earliest extant Report, the second, published in July 1836 and covering the activities for 1835, the directors of the Dublin committee are listed along with the methods and strategies of fund-raising (which included promotional tours of England).⁸² The Second Report listed the life members and the committee of the Ladies Auxiliary Island Association, whose secretary, Henrietta Pendleton, helped to provide Scripture Readers for the Achill Mission. When read with caution and bearing in mind the intended audience, these surviving reports tell a great deal about the operations of the Achill Mission.

At the outset, Nangle revealed a three-step plan to bring Protestantism and prosperity to Achill: the establishment of a primary school system; competent and responsible estate management; and of course Bible reading. A rolling programme of conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism, was, however, the strategic objective, or in his own words, 'it has been planned with a view to promote their interests both in time and eternity'.⁸³

While spiritual improvement was important to Nangle, he also paid close attention to the temporal lives of the islanders, as he believed that Achill had been left out of the 'physical and moral improvements of other parts of the country'. Like many ultra-Protestants in both England and Ireland at the time, Nangle believed that spiritual regeneration and temporal well-being were closely joined: 'There is an intimate association between man's temporal

⁸¹ *AMH*, October 1864.

⁸² *Second report of the missionary society for Achill and other islands off the Irish coast* (Achill, 1836), p.1. (Cited as *2nd Report* hereafter).

⁸³ Edward Nangle, *Protestantism in Ireland. The substance of a sermon, preached in the Octagon Chapel, Bath, on Sunday, July 5, 1835, on behalf of the Protestant missionary settlement in the island of Achill* (Bath, 1835), p. 30.

happiness and the knowledge of true religion'.⁸⁴ Hence, in following this line of reasoning, Nangle linked the prevalence of Catholicism in Ireland with the supposed economic backwardness of the country, 'attributing the literary and moral deficiencies of our Roman Catholic countrymen, not to any particular dullness or depravity in them, but to the baneful influence of the Romish priesthood'.⁸⁵ In Nangle's opinion, Ulster, Ireland's most well-to-do province, prospered because of its Protestant majority.⁸⁶ Most historians of Britain and the United States agree that the growth and spread of evangelicalism during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was closely associated with the ideas of progress that radiated from industrialisation and the wide acceptance of middle-class values.⁸⁷ In Ireland, the grand projects attempted at Kingscourt and to a lesser extent in the settlements fostered by the Protestant Colonisation Society suggest that this spirit of 'improvement' drew from the same well; however, while other parts of Britain and the United States at this time re-organised society to meet the demands of industrialisation, in Ireland this was done to improve and manage agricultural estates more efficiently.⁸⁸ So, by bringing the 'Second Reformation' to Achill, Nangle unavoidably brought with him nineteenth-century ideas of "modernisation" and progress – notions which in theory demanded tighter estate management and stricter control of the lives and conduct of the tenantry. On Achill, those who wished to leave the Catholic Church for Protestantism would not only be expected to receive Jesus Christ as their saviour, they would also have to 'turn their swords into ploughshares' and contribute to the operation of a well-ordered agricultural estate.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

⁸⁵ *Christian Examiner* Apr. 1836, p. 235.

⁸⁶ Edward Nangle, *Protestantism in Ireland*, p. 33.

⁸⁷ Harold Perkin, *The origins of modern English society, 1780-1880* (London, 1969), pp. 2779-286.

⁸⁸ Irene Whelan, "Nangle and the Achill Mission", p. 117.

Nangle quickly commenced work at the Dugort settlement and made no secret of his proselytising ambition. Even at an early stage, he expected opposition to his mission from the Roman Catholic clergy. To counteract the influence of the priests and to replace Catholicism with a rigid Protestantism on Achill, Nangle's strategy drew on both his past experiences and contemporary proselytising models. Primary schools were soon established to instruct the youth; land reclamation work schemes were offered to energize the island's sluggish economy; and Scripture readers were deployed to read the Bible in Irish to the population at large. Since Achill lacked any institutions of primary education, any obvious opportunities for economic growth, and the Bible, Nangle's basic short-term plan was to introduce material progress, supplemented with a well-grounded Scriptural Christianity, to the island. While the proselytising of Achill and later of the entire western sea-board remained Nangle's long-term objective, he began by addressing the basic short term needs of the island.

Before Nangle's arrival, one pay school, attended by twenty or thirty children, had operated on the island.⁸⁹ Less than four months later, the mission's first school opened at Slievemore on 23 December 1834 with forty-three children in attendance. The National Schools, which had been set up in 1831, were anathema to Nangle, who insisted that Scriptural education must be included in any nationwide plan for primary education: 'This is the clear expression of the divine will, and therefore the exclusion of the Holy Scriptures from our national schools, is legalized rebellion against God's authority'.⁹⁰ Before 1831 hedge schools had provided the early source of education on the island. Subsequently, three mission schools sprang up in Dugort, Cashel and Keel. Nangle boasted of this initial success when he

⁸⁹ John Barrow, *A tour round Ireland through the sea-coast counties* (London 1836), Appendix I., p. 7.

⁹⁰ Edward Nangle, *Scriptural education. A sermon preached on behalf of the Castlebar schools, on Sunday, March 17, 1839* (Achill, 1839), p. 11.

testified before the House of Lords committee in 1837, telling the panel that the combined attendance at his schools had reached 420 children by the spring of 1835.⁹¹ He also boasted that a teacher at the Slievemore mission school, Michael McGreal, a native of Westport, had converted to the Protestant faith. Although McGreal came from outside Achill, his proficiency in Irish won many Catholic children over to his classroom.⁹² This led to another attack upon the mission, for there was a great deal of dispute over who actually inhabited the colony; the priests avowed that the occupants were not locals, but rather converts and Protestants brought in from different parts of Ireland to boost their numbers. Charles Bridger, the steward of the missionary settlement, corroborated these accusations by testifying that the intense opposition of the priests forced him to employ labourers from Westport, thirty-two miles away.⁹³ Furthermore, the quality of the converts was called into question. Martin Connolly, a controversialist and close associate of MacHale, replaced the relatively mild-mannered John Keaveny as the parish priest in Achill in 1836, and wryly commented in that year that Nangle's few converts were 'the poorest and most wretched creatures even in Achill – they had no land, no provision, no cattle, no means; no, not even rags to cover them'.⁹⁴

In introducing a Protestant educational system to Achill, Nangle chose to target children rather than the adults, for he thought it too late to effect much inner spiritual reform with men and women who had spent their entire lives as Catholics:

It is among the rising generation that we hope to reap the most abundant harvest...for while the adults are engaged in agricultural work, the children, being all located around us, even infants of a tender age can attend our schools, while all are preserved from that ordeal of annoyance, and insult,

⁹¹ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 380.

⁹² Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 67.

⁹³ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 426.

⁹⁴ *Christian Examiner* April 1836.

and violence, to which their location among a Romish population would daily expose them.⁹⁵

Nangle hoped that besides receiving a well-rounded Protestant education, complete with Biblical instruction, the children would exercise a beneficial influence on their parents by repeating to them what they had learned.⁹⁶ While optimism remained high for the adults, Nangle mortgaged his hopes to the future by investing a substantial portion of the mission's energy and resources into primary education.

The able-bodied adults would carry out Nangle's second step in his missionary plan – land reclamation and the construction of settlement buildings. In 1845, when testifying before the Devon Commission, Nangle made it clear that all who worked for the missionary settlement, regardless of religious affiliation, would have to earn his keep:

The principle is, that if a man does no work, he cannot eat; there are no drones in the hive. If a man does not earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, he must take himself out of this.⁹⁷

Charles Bridgier told the Devon Commission that land reclamation on Achill was back-breaking work, claiming that the cost of reclaiming one acre was eight to ten pounds.⁹⁸ Because this work was so labour intensive, Nangle had to offer incentives, which he explained to the Devon Commission:

We allow £5 for the building of a house according to a model of our own, and it cannot be done cheaper; and when that house is finished, the person occupying it pays us 8s. a year for it. If we let them in, and they have reclaimed land with it, we charge them 20s an acre for it. For all the land they reclaim they have it three years free, and after at 15s. Under ordinary circumstances I should think that too high a rent, but when I take into consideration their ability to pay their rent by labour, it is not too high.⁹⁹

Since steady work on the island was difficult to procure, the employment offered by Nangle was at first welcomed by the impoverished islanders.

⁹⁵ Edward Nangle, *The Achill Mission and the present state of Protestantism in Ireland, being the statement of the Rev. Edward Nangle at a meeting of the Protestant association in Exeter Hall, December 28, 1838* (London, 1839), pp. 8-9.

⁹⁶ *Eighth report of the Achill Mission, for the year ending December 31, 1841. With a report of the Achill Orphan Refuge, up to the same period* (Achill, 1842), p. 5. (Cited as 8th Report hereafter).

⁹⁷ Devon Commission, xx, p. 432.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

Native Catholic labourers worked alongside the Protestant colonists, an arrangement which summoned forth, in the words of one of Nangle's sympathisers, 'the grateful and affectionate feelings of the poor islanders'.¹⁰⁰ In order to build upon land reclamation work, Nangle also intended to introduce the manufacture of coarse linen and cloth, and the knitting of stockings. A weaver was hired, and settled in one of the cottages. Since the sowing of flax had already been introduced to Mayo many years earlier, Nangle perhaps wished to follow the example of Sir Richard O'Donnel, who had established a modest industry on his estates. The settlement purchased the coarse cloth, which was used for home consumption, in Westport or Castlebar, while it was hoped to find a market for the stockings in Dublin.¹⁰¹ From these details, (given in the *Annual Reports*), it appears that Nangle wished to instil a work ethic into the Dugort area, transforming the settlement into a new and unique village community on the island.

Other early developments included the construction of a corn mill with a kiln for drying the corn and a tuck mill for thickening frieze in 1838. The mill and kiln were also used for converting oats, purchased in Westport, into meal that was sold to the islanders, thereby providing an additional source of income for the mission. Between 1 October and 31 December 1839, the return from the mill and farm was £127.¹⁰² Nangle obtained a perpetuity lease from Richard O'Donnel for the site on which the two mills were located, with each mill expecting to cost upwards of £200, of which only £40 had been received by the time the building commenced.¹⁰³ Although Nangle set up a fund for the construction of the mills with subscribers to the *Achill Missionary Herald*, the £99 he raised fell far short of what was needed.¹⁰⁴ This was not the only

¹⁰⁰ John Barrow, *A tour*, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ *2nd Report*, p. 7.

¹⁰² *6th Annual report of the Achill Mission for the year ended 31 December, 1839 with a report on the orphan refuge for the same period* (Achill, 1840), p. 3, (Cited as the *6th Report* hereafter).

¹⁰³ *AMH* Aug. 1838.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

instance of Nangle and the mission staff starting a project before sufficient funds had been raised – a rushed approach to development that caused the mission many financial headaches.¹⁰⁵

A shop which had been established for the sale of clothing, ‘as are used by the peasantry’, operated from 1838, and additional buildings, including four small slated houses on the site of the mill, went up at this time.¹⁰⁶ Other improvements, like the completion of a road through the bog and farm, the fencing off of four acres of land, were accomplished by 1840.¹⁰⁷ The last of these improvements demonstrates a radical re-organising of the land in Dugort, which before was held in common under rundale. Nangle despised the rundale system, which he considered one of the greatest hindrances to rural prosperity.¹⁰⁸ He firmly believed that the land should be striped, divided, and organised according to modern English standards. While the settlement was able to provide much needed work for the area, the improvements made on the mission lands may have generated friction with the local population.

To receive a cottage at the missionary settlement, certain conditions had to be met. Early on, these rules and regulations were clearly set down: ‘We likewise built a number of small cottages and when persons presented themselves, expressing a desire to be sheltered from the tyranny of the Roman Catholic priests and their police, and to receive Scriptural education for themselves and their children, we let them one of these cottages, with a plot of ground attached to it, at a fair rent’.¹⁰⁹ Initially the annual rent was £2 5s. per Irish acre.¹¹⁰ This obviously implied another requirement: it was compulsory that one had to openly avow Protestantism, a practice that the priests found most obnoxious. When explaining these practices to the House of Lords select

¹⁰⁵ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁶ *6th Report*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰⁸ Devon Commission, xx, Testimony of Edward Nangle, p. 439.

¹⁰⁹ *Achill Mission and the state of Irish Protestantism*, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 394.

committee in 1837, Nangle declared that the abandonment of Catholicism was an essential prerequisite in gaining admission to the colony: 'The place is intended as a refuge for persons wishing to be protected from the tyranny which every one acquainted with the state of Ireland knows is practiced upon those persons who leave the Church of Rome'.¹¹¹ Although the colony frequently gave employment to Catholics in the vicinity of Dugort, this only happened in times of extreme distress, which Nangle said occurred each year since 1834.¹¹² Inevitably, this left Nangle wide-open to charges of bribery from his enemies, for a family's material position on Achill, in regards to provisions, lodging and clothing could be greatly enhanced simply by leaving the Catholic church. The priests, in their accusations, had effectively trapped Nangle: if he gave only spiritual ministrations, he was accused of ignoring the people's impoverished condition; if he gave temporal assistance as well, he was accused of bribery, or later called, 'souperism'. However, Nangle defended his stipulations and shrewdly remarked that the decision to leave the Catholic church to settle at the colony was a gruelling one, for by leaving the "religion of their fathers", converts suffered total social ostracism, one of the most powerful weapons in the Catholic priest's arsenal:

As soon as ever a man professes himself to be a Protestant the stream of kindness is cut off from him completely. The sufferings of our poor people have been very great in consequence of the exclusive dealing established in the island, and the refusal even of their fellow countrymen to speak to them; frequently when they meet them on the road they make the sign of the cross, saying, 'The Cross of the Christ be between me and harm,' and they draw back as if the convert to Protestantism carried a deadly pestilence about him.¹¹³

Common, everyday courtesies were taken away from the convert, and on a remote island like Achill, where social ostracism threatened one's economic

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 394.

¹¹² Devon Commission, xx, p. 432.

¹¹³ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 394.

livelihood; the decision to convert, or to work for the mission, was a difficult one indeed.

The record of the Dingle Mission – where converts to Protestantism experienced a similar policy of social exclusion – chillingly relates the ill-treatment of those who ‘went over’ to the Protestant faith, in essence becoming social pariahs, expelled from the majority community. When a convert, Donagh Dunlevy, died after a tragic boating accident, his family wanted him buried in the Catholic cemetery, yet the Protestant missionaries resisted these efforts. In the keen Dunlevy’s death was used by his family to hit back at those who had seduced him during life, and who now had abducted his soul in death:¹¹⁴

Ah, Donagh, Donagh can it be,
And hast thou left us so
The gem, the flower of thy race
With heretics to go?

Later in the keen, his widow, who had also converted, is disowned and further reminded of her continuing social exclusion from the Dingle community, for although she inherited her husband’s earthly possessions, she could never be included in the family, for Protestant blood flowed in her veins:

His gatherings and his earnings all
They way belong to thee
But we his kindred flesh and blood
Deep, deep in him are we.¹¹⁵

This suggests how both sides of the sectarian divide in Dingle, and presumably in other areas where Protestant missionary settlements were established, imagined themselves to be caught up in an intense struggle between the forces of good and evil. These lines express a policy of separateness, whether behind

¹¹⁴ Robert F. Dunlop, “Religious conflict in Ireland during the middle years of the nineteenth-century: a theological assessment” (M.Litt. thesis. Trinity College, Dublin, 1994), p. 129.

¹¹⁵ John Gayer, *Trial at Tralee for a libel in the Kerry Examiner*, 20 March 1845 (Dublin, 1845), p. 42.

the walls of the colony or by withdrawing social civilities from those who joined the other side. They also show that both religious communities saw themselves resisting outside attacks, which sharpened the respective lines of demarcation.

Finally, the third step of Nangle's missionary strategy was to use the mission as a base of operations for Scripture readers, who would actively engage the local population in Bible discussion. Unlike the earlier settlements established at Augheely and Kilmeague, Nangle wished to expand his operations outside the colony and to bring local Catholics into the Protestant fold.¹¹⁶ Apparently the Scripture reader was a novel adjunct to the 'Second Reformation' movement, for when Lady Franklin visited Achill with her husband in September 1835, she felt the need to clarify the designation to her readership: 'The Scripture-readers are men originally of the peasant class, of good character, and carefully instructed in the knowledge of the Scriptures, whose business it is to enter the cottages, whenever they are willingly admitted, and read the Bible to the poor'.¹¹⁷ A critic of the Protestant mission detected a hint of desperation when Nangle employed 'the lowest of tradesmen...to read the Bible to the unreading Catholics'.¹¹⁸ Regardless of their social standing, Scripture readers were an integral part of the mission. When Nangle took up permanent residence on Achill, four scripture readers – two from Co. Sligo and two from Westport – joined him and immediately commenced their work. Nangle paid these men £24 per year and although each reader was free to read whatever selection from Scripture they desired, Nangle required them to record what they had read in a journal, which was turned in after each day's work.¹¹⁹ One of the first Scripture readers employed by Nangle, Thomas Ralph, a native of Sligo and a convert from Catholicism,

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 398.

¹¹⁷ John Barrow, *A tour*, appendix i., p. 2.

¹¹⁸ George Ensor, *Letters showing the inutility and showing the absurdity of what is rather fantastically termed "the new reformation"* (Dublin, 1828), p. 34.

¹¹⁹ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 489.

explained to the Lords Committee in 1837 that he had met Nangle near the town of Ballinor, Co. Sligo, on which occasion he was persuaded to come to Achill to read Scripture to the native Catholics. Although the four Scripture readers spoke and read Irish fluently, they all came from outside of Achill, making them strangers to the locals.

The surviving Annual Reports contain much information on the mission's accounts, especially the early years, as well as the methods used by Nangle and the committee in Dublin for raising funds. For instance, the report for 1835, which was audited by Robert Daly and W.H. Porter, included an abstract of the cash account, income and expenditure for that year. The report also contained a record of the cash received into Nangle's hands up until 20 April 1836, which totalled £1,662 11s. 9d., as well as a note about the expenses drawn from this source of income: 'this account contains an acknowledgement of money, entrusted to my stewardship only; any sums which passed through my hands and are now mentioned here, will be acknowledged in the report of the committee'.¹²⁰ Since the Achill Mission was largely dependant on voluntary subscriptions for survival, the Reports record information on the mission's benefactors. The names of donors, along with the amounts either subscribed or donated, are listed in each report. Sometimes the contributions were given for specific purposes (i.e. for reclaiming land, to relieve distress on Achill, to build a church, to aid the orphanage and dispensary), while others appear to have been in the form of annual subscriptions. Still, others were collected by Nangle following sermons given in both Ireland and England.¹²¹ In 1835, £739 11s. 8d. in contributions came in from Ireland, while £923 0s. 1d. arrived from England.¹²² While the total amounts are listed, which helps to present a clearer picture of the mission's income, it is not always clear from the accounts

¹²⁰ *2nd Report*, p. 55.

¹²¹ *2nd Report*, pp 41-43.

¹²² *Ibid.*

whether the contributions received for specific purposes were used for those purposes, or whether they went into a general fund from which expenses for the administration of the mission were drawn.¹²³ Yet, they do reveal the type of expenditure incurred by the mission, which tells us a great deal about its operations.

Since the Achill Mission was largely dependent on voluntary contributions, Nangle was constantly busy with fund raising. This meant that Nangle, usually accompanied by an evangelical companion, often travelled throughout Ireland and England, preaching sermons, which were followed by collections. At the beginning of 1838, he went to England to solicit contributions and to raise the public profile of the Mission. Writing to his wife, Eliza, from Amersham in England, he outlined his preaching tour:

I mean to leave London on the 14th. I propose to visit Ashby, Birmingham, and Wolverhampton on my way to Liverpool, so I expect to reach home about the 1st of February. I think I shall have to come to England again in May, when I can visit Exeter, Bath, Clifton, Oxford, Cambridge, Hereford, and Chester.¹²⁴

Nangle also proposed to visit Clevedon, Cheltenham, Sheffield, Reading, Altringham, Kendal, Stafford, and Manchester.¹²⁵ The promotional stops did much good, as the Reports indicate that they helped to raise over £2,700 between 1835 and 1839.¹²⁶

Despite forecasts of failure and the difficulties of acclimatising to life on a rain-drenched and wind-swept island, the Achill missionaries pressed on with their work. By the spring of 1835, physical signs of progress were apparent. The settlement stood in stark contrast to the dilapidated dwellings in the nearby village of Dugort and consisted of five two-story stone buildings, which included St. Thomas's, the colony church. All of the settlement lodgings had slated roofs, a novel sight in the island's landscape. Fifteen

¹²³ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort*, p. 16.

¹²⁴ Seddall, pp. 307-308.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

¹²⁶ *First Report, Second report, Third Report.*

families, inhabiting eight cabins, lived on the mission ground, and Nangle's mission schools teemed with 420 children.¹²⁷ Upon the thirty-two acres of bog reclaimed during the first year, 'the colony garden exhibited a variety of vegetables never seen in Achill before; two additional houses had been completed, others were in progress'. Although Father Connolly, the parish priest of Achill, contested that the settlement had only reclaimed a paltry four acres of wasteland and that, 'the side of Slievemore is still barren and the money contributed by English sources has amounted to nothing', the mission's appearance seemed to contradict the priest's testimony.¹²⁸

The earliest travelers to the missionary settlement attributed Nangle's success to his use of the Irish language in missionary work. One traveler to Achill remarked that, 'A simple Irishman cannot believe that any heresy or falsehood can be preached to him in those accents to which his infant ear was first opened. The man who utters them, whether native or stranger, has his love and confidence at once'.¹²⁹ Nangle, when he gave evidence to the *House of Lords Select Committee* in 1837, testified that the natives of Achill attained great pleasure in hearing the word of God expounded in their own language.¹³⁰ However, the affection bestowed upon the missionaries by the local population was to be short-lived and did not withstand against the concerted invective soon delivered by the Catholic clergy.

Despite such promising beginnings, social and religious strife was an inevitable result of Nangle's aggressive missionary work.¹³¹ While Nangle desired to bring Scriptural education along with temporal improvement to Achill, he also brought with him the sectarian strife that now transformed the island into a sectarian minefield. While he would never admit that his actions provoked the violent reactions from the islanders, he conceded that life had

¹²⁷ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 380.

¹²⁸ John Barrow, *A tour*, appendix, p. 7.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹³⁰ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 404.

¹³¹ Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission", p. 123.

been peaceful before his arrival and that the people of Achill were known for their generosity and benevolence.¹³² The consequences of an adversarial, denunciatory missionary strategy, even when linked to a zealous spirituality, compassion for the poor, and ambitious land improvement schemes, became clear as local attitudes hardened and indignation towards the settlement deepened.

The first step taken by the Catholic clergy to counter the early successes of the missionary settlement was to establish rival schools under the auspices of the National Board of Education. John Gallagher, a native of the island, wrote of this in his journal: 'The priests at last were stirred up to look after the education of the rising generation and succeeded in getting grants from the government to build school houses'.¹³³ Although John MacHale had vigorously opposed the national schools, he approved their operation on Achill. He allowed the clergy under him to take government money under the regulations of the commissioners of national education.¹³⁴ This meant that national schools could commence on the island. Father Connolly, the parish priest, subsequently became the superintendent of the island's national schools and as a result, the opposition to Nangle's schools unintentionally provided not one, but two types of primary education on the island.¹³⁵

Because of this competition school facilities in certain parts of the island increased substantially within a very few years. In the summer of 1835 there were already eight full-time primary schools in Achill: four run by the Mission, three national schools and the other a newly established permanent

¹³² *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 399.

¹³³ Autobiography of John Gallagher, National Library Ireland MSS 19,846-19,847, p. 13.

¹³⁴ D.H. Akenson, *The Irish education experiment: the National System of Education in the nineteenth century* (London and Toronto, 1970), p. 207.

¹³⁵ *The inquisition in the jury-box: an appeal from Irish Protestants, for British protection against priestly oppression and injustice. A correct report of the trial of two men, at the Castlebar Sessions, Jan. 8, 1836, for an assault on a scripture reader, connected with the missionary settlement in the island of Achill* (Dublin, 1836), p. iv.

hedge school.¹³⁶ However, the fruits of this sectarian competition were not distributed evenly throughout the island; national schools were established in close proximity to Nangle's, thereby leaving villagers where no school existed destitute of all means to educate themselves. Nangle contended that the National Schools were founded solely in opposition to the mission schools, ignoring the real education needs of the children.¹³⁷ Whatever the case, this running battle took its toll on Nangle's schools after 1835, as two of them were forced to shut down, with overall attendance plummeting from 420 to 80 in a matter of months.¹³⁸

Throughout the early years of the mission, confrontation between the missionaries and the Catholic priests was a constant theme. A stanza from a hymn used in worship by the Protestant congregation recounts both the sectarian tensions on the island and the aims of Nangle's missionary staff:

Break, break the chains that round them twine
Release from error's snare
And banish every falsehood far
From Achill's Isle for e'er.¹³⁹

Although initial reports suggest that relations between the missionaries and the islanders were cordial, when the mission schools began teaching Catholic children, the priests quickly realised a significant threat to their authority. Nothing galled Nangle more than the Catholic priests, whom he felt had enslaved the poor: 'The mass of the population being too degraded to think for themselves, agree in believing, without inquiry, whatever the priests tell them, and if there are a few, who, in heart, dissent from the dominant superstition, the iron despotism of Popery constrains them to imprison their convictions in their own bosom'.¹⁴⁰ Such rhetoric only provoked Nangle's

¹³⁶ Kenneth McNally, *Achill* (Dublin, 1973), p. 186.

¹³⁷ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 380; Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 70.; *Ordnance Survey Name Books Mayo, Ordnance Survey, Ireland Co. Mayo no. 97 from Achill to Ballintober* (Dublin, 1838), p. 127.

¹³⁸ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 380.

¹³⁹ *AMH* Oct. 1847.

¹⁴⁰ *AMH* Jul. 20, 1838.

enemies, and consequently the resistance to the Achill Mission picked up steam. In the spring of 1835, the Rev Martin Hughes, parish priest of Newport, Co. Mayo, preaching from the altar, called the Protestants on Achill heretics. On Achill, from the altar of the Catholic chapel in Dookinelly, Connolly fulminated against the Protestant church, commanding the Catholics on the island to cease all contact with the missionaries, even forbidding them work for the settlement or to send their children to Nangle's schools. Shopkeepers were told not to buy from or sell to Protestants, and to treat Catholics working for Nangle in the same manner. Those who subscribed to the *Achill Missionary Herald* frequently read complaints like the following:

But the people are not only encouraged to assault our converts, they are commanded to withhold from them the common courtesies and charities of life. They are forbidden to admit them into their houses, to buy or sell with them, or even speak to them. In consequence of these nonchristian and inhuman commands, our poor people and their pastor are hooted at and insulted wherever they appear; the most provoking epithets, such as 'Jumper and Devil,' are liberally bestowed upon them.¹⁴¹

Similar 'exclusive dealing' tactics had been used by Catholic priests to check the spread of Protestantism, and in places like Askeaton, Co. Limerick during the 1820s this strategy had met with moderate success.¹⁴² On Achill, to combat the missionaries 'an inquisition was organised, and an inquisitor appointed in each village, to report the names of persons working on the mission grounds, or sending their children to its schools; they were published in the chapel of Achill and Newport; and the most frightful imprecations were pronounced from the altar on all who had connexion with the colony'.¹⁴³ It was alleged by Nangle, probably with some truth, that Connolly instructed his congregation to hoot and shout abuse at the missionaries. Those who disobeyed the priest's wishes were subsequently cursed from the altar, 'that

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² *The inquisition in the jury-box*, p. iv; Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion", p. 440; Isabella Madden, *Memoir of the late Right Rev Robert Daly*, p. 103.

¹⁴³ Baptist Wriothlesley Noel, *Notes of a short tour through the midland counties of Ireland, in the summer of 1836, with observations on the condition of the peasantry* (London, 1837), p. 171.

the tongue might drop out of any one that did not shout'. Children attending Nangle's schools were to be met upon the roads, 'and cut into inch pieces'.¹⁴⁴

Although the evidence varies on the manner in which the Achill people complied with these alleged demands, Nangle never grew tired of drawing attention to the persecutions suffered by himself and his associates. Reports of physical attacks and threats against persons attached to the Mission frequently generated a great inflow of funds from supporters in England and Ireland.¹⁴⁵ The biddings of the priests, he claimed, had made it unsafe for the missionaries to travel alone. Apparently, such persecution followed Nangle and his staff even to the most unlikely places: 'On one occasion, a party of ruffians endeavoured to break open the door of a public house, into which I had retired with some of the people belonging to our settlement, and they were only restrained from executing the frightful threats which they uttered against us, by the proprietor of the house, who feared that he would be held responsible for any injury which we might receive while under his roof'.¹⁴⁶ Fearing for his life, Nangle always carried a loaded weapon with him when leaving his home.¹⁴⁷

Despite the material improvements received from the missionary settlement and the reading of Scripture in Irish, a service that the islanders greatly enjoyed, it appears that the majority of people eventually turned against Nangle and his missionary staff. Lady Franklin, the wife of the well-known explorer Sir John Franklin, visited Achill in September 1835 and commented on the capricious temperament of the islanders, a temperament that she thought instigated the sectarian tensions rampant throughout Irish society. Like Nangle, she praised the forbearance of the local people in times of distress; however, 'the Irish mind', she explained, 'with all its fine and

¹⁴⁴ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, p. 408; *Christian Examiner* Apr. 1836, p. 237.

¹⁴⁵ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁶ *Christian Examiner* Apr. 1836, p. 237.

¹⁴⁷ John Barrow, *A tour*, appendix, p. 4.

endearing qualities, is easily excited, prone to violence when its passions and prejudices are roused, above all – and this is its worst property – exceedingly disposed to sympathize with, or submit to, the arm of power, and to side with the strongest'.¹⁴⁸ While Lady Franklin's patronizing tones might offend modern audiences, Nangle concurred whole-heartedly. He declared that when the poor islanders were left to themselves, they expressed kindness and goodwill towards the Protestant colony. But when priests like Connolly and Hughes interfered and pronounced inflammatory sermons against the colony, the people's passions were heated and they were persuaded to oppose the missionary settlement. Inevitably Father Connolly, the butt of Nangle's invective, offered a different explanation for the religious strife on the island, placing the blame wholly at Nangle's feet:

[Nangle's] posse of ignorant fanatical preachers, who are sent through the parish and armed with fire-arms and Bibles, abusing the religion of the people and heaping calumny on their clergy, promising bribes in the shape of clothes and money to the naked and half-starved people of Achill, exhibiting pictures representing a mouse gnawing the sacrament of the Eucharist, supplied with scales for the purpose of weighing the consecrated host,...forcing controversy on the ignorant peasants, &c. &c. until Mr. Nangle has by these similar and unwarrantable means completely succeeded in destroying the peace, harmony and Christian feelings for which Achill, until his arrival, in the worst of times was remarkable and distinguished.¹⁴⁹

After 1835, the battle lines had been drawn and both sides remained deeply entrenched, refusing to give quarter. Fearing that any concession would signify defeat, Nangle and Connolly continued to bicker and to plead their respective cases in the Irish press.

Unfortunately, Nangle's assistants usually bore the brunt of the social strife that boiled over from this religious cold war. In November 1834, a few months after Nangle had arrived on Achill, two Scripture-readers were brutally assaulted, one had to be "blooded" by a local healer.¹⁵⁰ Since sectarian conflict had previously been unknown on Achill, the incident had, it was

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Martin Connolly to Thomas F. Kelly, 25 Oct. 1835 as quoted in *Education in Ireland*, p. 375.

¹⁵⁰ *Inquisition in the jury-box*, p. 12.

claimed, occupied the public mind 'for a long period'.¹⁵¹ In October 1835, Thomas Bulfin of the Constabulary office in Castlebar wrote to Major John Warburton, Inspector General of police, about an assault on John Gardiner, a Scripture Reader employed by Nangle.¹⁵² When the Castlebar Petty Sessions finally heard the case in January 1836, absolving the assailants of guilt for this attack, Nangle sought redress in the court of public opinion, publishing the legal proceedings in pamphlet form. On another occasion, an enraged crowd beat the Rev. Joseph Baylee, who had replaced the ailing Joseph Duncan as Nangle's assistant in January 1836, to 'within an inch of his life' with a heavy cudgel after he preached an inflammatory sermon.¹⁵³ Later that year, two rowing boats belonging to the settlement were vandalised, with Nangle attributing the outrage to, 'the religious feelings that prevail in the island'.¹⁵⁴ News of the continuing social discord on Achill eventually reached Parliament, when an altercation involving two Scripture-readers was mentioned in the House of Lords.¹⁵⁵

Despite these social tensions, during the first three years of the colony's existence the trappings of modern civilization were introduced to Achill – two varieties of primary education, land reclamation, improved estate management, an energized Catholic clergy, and of course, evangelical Protestantism. Modern medicine was another innovation that Nangle introduced into Achill. Before Nangle arrived, no doctor lived on the island – a woman, 'half witch, half doctress' tended to the sick.¹⁵⁶ In autumn 1835, the foundation stones were laid for the home and dispensary of Dr Neason Adams. He arrived along with his wife, leaving behind a lucrative practice in

¹⁵¹ Captain Thomas Bulfin to Major Warburton, 9 Jan. 1836 (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1836 21/6).

¹⁵² Captain Thomas Bulfin to Major Warburton, 17 Oct. 1835 (N.A.I., Outrage Paper, Mayo 1835 21/6).

¹⁵³ Edward Nangle, *Achill mission and the state of Irish Protestantism*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁴ Report of Constable Lewis, 16 Aug. 1836 (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1836 21/9).

¹⁵⁵ Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission.", p. 124.

¹⁵⁶ Caesar Otway, *A tour*, p. 353.

Stephen's Green, Dublin and took up permanent residence at the missionary settlement, where he remained until his death in 1859. Nangle's biographer, Henry Seddall, recorded Mrs. Adams' initial impression of life on Achill:

I am writing with my window open to allow an escape for the smoke; my hearth filled with wet sods; scarcely any fire; a big pot on a stand with rice, meal, and bones; our bed; a large horse on which clothes are spread; a shelf stuffed with a miscellaneous collection of indescribable varieties and thickly covered with ashes. Two of the rooms are converted into a printing office. Joyce and Gardnier, scripture-reader, have no other home. Lendrum, his wife and six children are all domesticated in the same house.¹⁵⁷

Although Archbishop MacHale questioned Adams's motives for coming to Achill – even calling him incompetent – all parties agreed that the doctor's presence was a great benefit to the island. He was lauded as the “St. Luke of Achill”, and his compassion spanned sectarian barriers as he opened his dispensary twice a week to offer medical instruction to eager youths, spending his spare time conducting an infant school at the settlement. Apparently, Adams treated the sick and infirm regardless of religious affiliation; it was the opinion of a visitor in 1844 that the colony would have shut down long ago if not for the bridge that Adams had built with the local population.¹⁵⁸ However, even Dr Adams felt the bite of sectarian discord, as Father Connolly prohibited a former patient to sell potatoes to the doctor.¹⁵⁹

Despite these modern improvements, which Nangle had both directly and indirectly brought to Achill, the ‘Second Reformation’ on the island did not begin in earnest until a printing office was built in December 1835. One of the first pieces of equipment acquired by the colony was a printing press, which sympathetic friends from London and York gladly donated.¹⁶⁰ Shipping the press to Achill, along with both English and Irish type, was a daunting task, for high winds forced the hooker that transported the press to be moored

¹⁵⁷ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 62.

¹⁵⁸ James Johnson, *A tour in Ireland with meditations and reflections* (London, 1844), p. 239.

¹⁵⁹ *AMH* June 1839.

¹⁶⁰ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 83.

in Achill Sound for some days.¹⁶¹ Writing in 1865, Nangle described the arrival of the press to the island:

Tuesday – The hooker, with our printing press on board, came into the bay. It blew so hard that we could not unload the cargo. The men on board the boat had difficulty in mooring her: having secured her as best they could, they took to the small boat, and at the peril of their lives made for the shore, leaving the hooker to the mercy of the wind and the waves. We expected that she would have broken from her moorings; however, her cable held fast, and towards evening the gale subsided, so that they were able to bring her out of the bay into the harbour. A few days after the boat again came into the bay, and her cargo was safely landed, it was an interesting sight to see the children of some of the converts carry the lighter parts of the printing press up to the settlement, where they were to be used for emancipating others from the ignorance and bondage from which they had been delivered. We are indebted for this gift to some friends in London and York. We believe that the great day of final account alone will disclose the amount of good accomplished by its instrumentality.¹⁶²

Although the arrival of the printing press was a major occasion, no details of the press itself survive in any known correspondence.¹⁶³ Nangle and William Pugh, who was employed as printer, could now produce the propaganda necessary for the mission's proselytising work. The printing office, therefore, was supervised by an experienced printer, assisted by five apprentices, four of whom were orphans educated at the settlement. Soon afterwards, the missionary settlement was churning out controversial pamphlets, religious tracts, hymnbooks and educational material to fuel the proselytising march. Further publicity was given to Nangle's evangelical work on Achill when he published the first number of the *Achill Missionary Herald and Western Witness*, a monthly newspaper that fulminated against popery and priestcraft, highlighting the battle between Protestantism and Catholicism on Achill. The publication date, 12 July 1835, was hardly coincidental. The preface to the first edition further revealed the intents and purposes of the *Achill Missionary Herald*:

While our paper shall bear a faithful and uncompromising testimony against the superstition and idolatry of the Church of Rome, it shall also proclaim

¹⁶¹ R.S. Maffet, "The Achill Press" in *The Irish Book Lover*, ii, no. 5 (December 1910), p. 65.

¹⁶² *AMH* Apr. 1865.

¹⁶³ Kenneth McNally, *Achill*, p. 95.

the glorious truths of the Gospel, and the progress of the Redeemer's spiritual kingdom; and believing, as we do, that the Church of England is based on the authority of Scripture, and is the most effective instrument, in this country, for arresting the progress of error and forwarding the cause of truth, our paper shall stand forward in its defence against the motley host of its adversaries.¹⁶⁴

This journal disseminated news of the mission's accomplishments to a considerable readership in England and Scotland and seized the attention of potential travellers to Ireland, whose fascination with Nangle's missionary work made Achill an imperative stop during their tours. Between 1835 and 1845, almost every Irish travel book of note published an account of an Achill visit.¹⁶⁵ Each month, the Achill printing office printed 2,000 copies of the *Herald*, which consisted of twelve closely printed quarto pages. Agents in London, Liverpool, Bath and Dublin collected annual subscriptions of four shillings for the *Herald* from interested readers. While working for the Religious Tracts Society during the late 1820s and early 1830s, and later as editor of another noted evangelical journal, *The Protestant Penny Magazine*, Nangle had acquired the necessary skills and experience to oversee the publication and distribution of a monthly periodical. Furthermore, by taking advantage of a recently passed law, which allowed all newspapers to be dispatched free of charge through the post-office, he was able to save money, which was then invested in improving the mission grounds.¹⁶⁶ At the close of 1837, nearly three years after Nangle's arrival, the missionary settlement began to show some of the noted hallmarks of evangelical commitment – good organisation and the effective use of propaganda – and the mission's printing press became Nangle's most effective weapon against Catholic invective.¹⁶⁷

The output from the printing office soon included thousands of sheets of printing for the settlement's immediate use. For instance, 2,000 copies of *The confessions of a French priest*, which contained 245 pages; 5,000 copies

¹⁶⁴ *AMH* 12 July 1837.

¹⁶⁵ Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission", p. 125.

¹⁶⁶ 1 *Victoria*, c. 34. [Ire.] (1838).

¹⁶⁷ *AMH* Aug. 27, 1840.

of two sermons in reply to the address of the Hon. and Rev. George Spenser; and 1,000 copies of Neilson's *Irish grammar* were among the first items printed. While the settlement used much of this printed material, Nangle also intended to make a profit with the printing press. In 1841, an appeal was made to friends of the mission, who had printing requirements for circulars, tracts, pamphlets or books, to place their orders with the mission and the work, when finished, would be sent by mail to Dublin without charge for carriage. Nangle hoped that this would render the settlement less dependent on voluntary support, it not fully self-sufficient.¹⁶⁸ In order to bring in more funds and to defray the cost of maintaining the printing office, Nangle raised the annual subscription of the *Herald* to 5s in 1841, explaining to his subscribers that

there are various other financial details with which we need not trouble our readers, what we have said may suffice to show them that our paper could not be conducted on a lower rate of subscription without a forfeiture on the part of the proprietor of the moderate remuneration which he has a right to expect in return for the capital sunk and the time expended in the establishment and conduct of his paper.¹⁶⁹

The arrival of the printing press in Achill led to the development of a form of tourism. To accommodate the growing number of visitors to the island, who had read about the missionary settlement in publications like the *Achill Missionary Herald*, a hotel was built as part of the colony proper in 1839 and arrangements were put in place to shuttle guests between Achill sound and Dugort. Labourers employed by the colony continued to improve the roads throughout the island and by December 1838 forty acres of wasteland had been reclaimed from the wilderness. Caesar Otway, who edited the *Christian Examiner*, visited Achill at this time and his observations corroborate reports of the mission's progress:

turning a corner of the road, and ascending an eminence, the Protestant settlement came into view, and truly it was a contrast to the congeries of wigwams called Dugorth; it consists of a long range of slated buildings

¹⁶⁸ *9th Annual report of the Achill Mission for the year ended 31 December, 1842 with a report of th Achill orphan refuge up to the same period* (Achill, 1843), pp. 3-4. (Cited hereafter as *9th Report*).

¹⁶⁹ *AMH* May 1841.

fronting the south-east, and with its rere [sic] to Slievemore, that rises in great loftiness to the north-west, ornamented by a sort of predemented building in the centre, having a handsome broad esplanade in front, on the other side of which extend some well-cultivated, well ordered gardens.¹⁷⁰

Although Otway praised the material advances on Achill, he feared that they had come at too high a social cost, for Nangle's provocative methods of converting Catholics to Protestantism had created an irreparable divide on the island, polarizing relations between Protestants and Catholics. Otway, hardly an enemy to ultra-Protestantism, urged Nangle to proceed with more sensitivity and compassion towards Roman Catholics, asking the missionaries, 'might not a gentler and less offensive attack be made on the false doctrines and superstitions of Rome, and be attended with better effects; or might not it be still better to preach the Gospel without controversy, and show by a holy and circumspect life and conversation that *here* was a more excellent way?'¹⁷¹ In a lengthy yet insightful response, a defensive Joseph Baylee, assistant missionary to Nangle, justified the hard-line methods employed by the Achill Mission:

Their colony, he said, was established in *direct* hostility to popery; that it lost all claim to a religious and proselytising establishment if they treated that *gently*, which like the nettle, a thing that when only touched *lightly* stung the hand severely, but when grasped lustily, might be plucked and eradicated without injury. Moreover, he said, it might be well for those who sat at home at ease, who saw Romanism, as it were, tired out and painted like Jezebel, looking so alluringly fine at her window, to speak softly of the gaudy mischief; but those who saw it roaming in all its recklessness and poisonous vigour, in the places where it may do as it likes; it was for them only to know how best to oppose it, and wrestle against it with success.¹⁷²

Otway also questioned the credibility of Nangle's reports that claimed that the priests had successfully orchestrated the 'exclusive dealing' prevalent on the island. While Otway did encounter some ill will from local Catholics, for the most part they warmly saluted him as he passed along the roads. For instance, Archbishop Trench had been in Achill only two days before Otway arrived, and when Otway approached Achill Sound, two locals stopped what

¹⁷⁰ Caesar Otway, *A tour*, pp. 356-357.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 425.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 426.

they were doing and calmly asked if Otway was the Protestant archbishop. Otway blushingly denied being the archbishop and continued on his way; however, he was shocked that a Catholic countryman, who would receive the priest's curse by speaking with a Protestant, would even contemplate talking with a heretic archbishop.¹⁷³ On another occasion, while travelling throughout the island, a man politely greeted Otway and his party, which was headed by Baylee, who took the opportunity to question the passer-by: 'suppose your own religion (says Mr. Baylee) is not the true one'. The man respectfully responded with, 'Oh! Sir, God bless you; let me alone. How could the like of me argue with a minister like you. I leave that all to the priest. Here I am as you see, a *loy-man*, (pointing to the loy, over his shoulder,) but no *lawyer*'. Otway felt that Nangle often exaggerated tales of Catholic aggression.

While Nangle's activities undoubtedly created much of the sectarian controversy on Achill, some of the tension was also caused by Dr John MacHale, archbishop of Tuam. In a letter written during Pentecost in 1835 and addressed to Lord John Russell, then British Home Secretary, MacHale lashed out at the missionary settlement in general and at Nangle in particular. He branded Nangle a 'demon of fanaticism' and blackened the colony by rubbishing reports of its progress, and by denying it had given any benefits to the people of Achill: 'The poor English are swindled out of their money to remove from Ireland the imaginary dearth of the Word of God, and the Irish are exposed to the annoyance of fanatics who trade upon their misery, and who cannot endure that their corporal wants should be relieved without mixing with the scanty refection a spiritual poison'.¹⁷⁴ In a second letter, written for the bishop of London, MacHale boasted that he and his associates had successfully extinguished the flame of Protestantism on Achill, claiming that the missionary settlement was another one of the numerous 'failures of fraud

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 344.

¹⁷⁴ *Tyrawly Herald*, Apr. 1835.

and fanaticism' of the established church.¹⁷⁵ Since the missionary enterprise largely depended on voluntary contributions from sympathetic patrons, Nangle invariably refuted these statements. He wasted no time in answering MacHale, claiming credit for escalating the religious war, professing to have left the priests 'foiled and defeated from the field of contest'.¹⁷⁶ Since the priests on Achill refused to engage Nangle in public discussion, he used this disputation with MacHale to generate support and awareness for his wider evangelical mission. Consequently MacHale inadvertently helped to generate the publicity that ultimately put Achill on the evangelical map.

MacHale added to the religious and social tensions on Achill by paying a personal visit in September 1835. He demonstrated his authority by arriving with a party of thirteen priests, leading some of the locals to compare MacHale, attired in full archbishop dress, with St. Patrick.¹⁷⁷ This visit was unprecedented for an archbishop of Tuam, and by the time he left, the islanders' religious sensibilities had been considerably stirred. Allegations of assault against the missionaries began after MacHale's visit.

Controversy surrounded many aspects of MacHale's visit. The teacher at the National School in Dugort, a man named O'Donnell, came under constant fire from Nangle and his staff for leading a banner-waving procession to greet MacHale. Nangle asserted that he bore a banner with the inscription, 'Welcome Religion and Liberty', which Nangle understood as a political gesture, advocating the Catholic Church and Repeal of the Union. Since National School teachers were forbidden to publicly show political preferences, Nangle complained to the National Board, demanding O'Donnell's immediate dismissal. Subsequently, Father Connolly, superintendant of the national schools on Achill, defended O'Donnell and repudiated Nangle's charges. While Connolly admitted that O'Donnell carried

¹⁷⁵ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 73.

¹⁷⁶ *AMH* 24 July 1837.

¹⁷⁷ W. Noel, *Notes*, p. 181.

some sort of flag while leading the welcoming procession, he downplayed the political overtures and turned the tables by accusing Nangle of inciting civil disturbance by forcing religious controversy among the islanders:

This could not surely be called party business, particularly in Achill, where all the natives are Catholics; there were no party tunes, no party colours, no revolutionary mottos; in fact, nothing calculated to give offence or annoyance to anyone, except indeed that, in spite of lies, calumny, and bribery, all the people were unanimous in testifying their reverence and esteem for their Bishop.¹⁷⁸

The excitement surrounding the archbishop's visit did not stop there, as Nangle and some of his associates testified that both Connolly and MacHale told a congregation that, 'the Protestant religion began in Hell, and that it would end in hell'.¹⁷⁹ A Scripture Reader, Thomas Ralph, himself a native of Connacht and a convert, told the select committee that investigated national education in Ireland that hostility against him and his colleagues noticeably intensified after MacHale's visit. He declared that the priests had justified outrages against Protestants in the eyes of God. For the most part, the assaults consisted of 'shouting and hooting and throwing stones after us, and calling us names; and calling us devils'.¹⁸⁰ Although Ralph could not recall ever being hit by a stone, he feared walking outside of the settlement on his own. Ralph's testimony puzzled the committee, for they could not account for the fact that amidst such apparent turmoil the mission buildings were left unscathed.

Some years after MacHale's visit, Archbishop Power le Poer Trench paid a long anticipated visit to the missionary settlement on 18 May 1838, thereby giving much needed episcopal recognition to Nangle's work. Trench's visit to Achill, apparently the first ever by a Protestant prelate to the island, contrasted with MacHale's parade three years earlier, and if not for the lengthy coverage in the 20 June edition of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, his visit would have gone unnoticed. By this time Trench was an elderly man in

¹⁷⁸ Martin Connolly to Thomas F. Kelly, 20 Sept. 1835, PP, pp. 373-374.

¹⁷⁹ *Plan of education in Ireland, 1837*, VIII, Part 1, pp. 434, 435.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

the last year of his life, yet he confirmed twenty-eight young people at the settlement, nineteen of whom were alleged to be the children of converts. Previously, in 1836, Father Connolly had claimed that only twelve adults and twenty-three children were permanent residents at the colony; however Nangle hotly disputed this, publishing the names of sixteen families, totalling sixty-four individuals, who had been 'rescued from the errors of popery'.¹⁸¹ Trench delighted in the work and progress of the missionary schools, having satisfactorily examined ninety-four children in their religious knowledge, and 'sparkled with almost youthful brilliancy' when he boasted of the missionary church being filled with upwards of 120 people worshipping God according to the Anglican rite.¹⁸² Before his departure, the archbishop donated to the newly opened orphanage, and took his leave in the highest of spirits, ebullient with the missionary work being conducted on Achill.

Not to be outdone by his established church counterpart, MacHale planned a second personal visit to Achill for October 1838. To pave the way for his return, he deployed to Achill a tough-minded priest, the Rev. Patrick Harley, who was reported to have publicly cursed from the altar several named persons from the settlement, and at the same time forbade people to speak to them or have any dealings with them.¹⁸³ Consequently, Harley's homilies kept the island in a state of excitement. For instance, the Rev. William Roche, the Roman Catholic curate of Achill, was tried and convicted of assaulting with a whip John O'Connor, one of Nangle's schoolteachers, at Bulls' Mouth in August 1838.

By the time MacHale landed in Achill on 5 October, accompanied by his entourage, the tension between the locals and the converts, who were now being labelled 'Jumpers', had reached a new level. In keeping with the

¹⁸¹ *AMH* 20 May 1838.

¹⁸² Caesar Otway, *A tour*, p. 345.

¹⁸³ Edward Nangle, *Doctor MacHale in Achill, the old religion defended. A sermon preached, on the occasion of Dr. MacHale's visit to Achill, in the mission church* (Dublin, 1838), p. 17.

strategy of 'exclusive dealing', which had been in effect since at least 1835, MacHale and his travelling companions passed by the missionary settlement in silence as they paraded their way around the island. On the following Sunday, while Nangle preached a sermon at the capacity-filled missionary church, explaining his reasons for ignoring MacHale's ecclesiastical title, MacHale addressed a large concourse of people who had assembled to hear mass at the village of Menane. Dr MacHale claimed that the Protestant colony was Satan's work and dreamed of the time when Achill would return to the Elysian days before Nangle's arrival: 'This island was like the garden of our Saviour when these cursed people came to it, and I hope I shall have my prayer from our Saviour and the Blessed Virgin that this island shall again be as it formerly was'.¹⁸⁴ Prior to his departure, the archbishop instructed the people to erect a monument as a memorial to his visit and to continue to show forbearance in the face of 'bribery' and 'irreligion'. This shows that while MacHale received criticism from the hierarchy for his apparent lack of concern for the proselytizers in his archdiocese, he was prepared to take action on his own terms.

Just before MacHale's second visit, in May 1838 Nangle had gone to Dublin to adjudicate in a public disputation between the Rev. Tom Maguire, one of the most reputed Catholic apologists of the day, and the Rev. Tresham Dames Gregg, the Protestant champion debater. For five days from 29 May until 2 June 'sporting Father Maguire' and 'Thrash 'em' or 'Trashy' Gregg debated questions of religious and ecclesiastical authority under the joint chairmanship of Nangle and his Catholic counterpart, the Rev. Justin McNamara, parish priest of Kinsale. Maguire, described as a rather homely man, was a natural orator, whose 'eloquence had a flavour of the Leitrim bogs', its 'rustic simplicity' adding charm to a 'fervid flow of skillful

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

reasoning'.¹⁸⁵ Allegedly, Archbishop Trench had offered Maguire £1,000 and a living worth £800 a year if he would convert to the established faith; however, Trench hotly denied the charge and won £50 in damages in the Court of Common Pleas.¹⁸⁶ While Gregg resembled Father Maguire in his populist appeal, Gregg came from a wealthy family. When the two disputants terminated the public debate on day five, Nangle charged McNamara with removing Maguire prematurely, thereby forfeiting victory to the Protestants. Writing just after the debate, McNamara explained that no final date had been agreed upon and that by the last day, 'the spirit of truth was lost in the madness of faction and fanaticism'.¹⁸⁷ Back in Achill, Nangle caught word of McNamara's vituperations and responded by recycling his thoughts on Catholicism:

You belong to a church which denounces an exclusive trust in Jesus, for the pardon of sin, as a heresy, and encourages its deluded followers to trust in creature righteousness, and dead men's intercessions, besides consecrated wafers, holy vestments, rings, cords, scapulars, medals, and a variety of other amulets, with holy salt, holy water, blessed clay, blessed ashes, blessed palm, blessed candles, and a long catalogue of other holy and blessed trumpery, which, but for the dishonour done to Christ, and the ruin occasioned to immortal souls, might provoke the most melancholy to laughter.¹⁸⁸

The excited battle between McNamara and Nangle almost overshadowed the debate between Maguire and Gregg, which had ended with both sides claiming victory.

After MacHale's second visit, the island's peace was disturbed almost daily and the six constabulary men stationed on the island struggled to maintain public order. Yet it appears that the local inhabitants had been increasingly stirred up before 1838. In February, 1837, Fergus Ferrall, the chief constable at Newport-Pratt, had reported several minor incidents

¹⁸⁵ Richard Lalor Sheil, *Sketches of the Irish bar* (2 vols. New York, 1854), p. 111-112.

¹⁸⁶ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 108

¹⁸⁷ Justin McNamera to Edward Nangle, 8 June 1838.

¹⁸⁸ Edward Nangle to Justin McNamera, 27 June 1838 printed in *AMH* 23 July 1838.

between the missionaries and the local population on Achill. In his report, an exasperated Ferrall stressed the importance of remaining impartial in such a boisterous environment:

The Chief Constable begs to say he finds it remarkably unpleasant to act between these conflicting parties who declaim each in their time so loudly against the police one for giving, and the other for refusing and he begs to add he shall endeavour to act as disinterested a part as he possibly can between the belligerents while their animosity continues.¹⁸⁹

In July of that same year, there was a report of Father Connolly along with his assistant, William Roach, assaulting Baylee and his school children in a classroom at Bullsmouth.¹⁹⁰

To restore order to Achill, Nangle appealed for restraint, reminding those on the settlement that God would protect them, since they were 'secure in the providential care of our heavenly father'.¹⁹¹ Inevitably, the outrages resulted in loss of life. In December 1838, just after MacHale's second visit, Francis Reynolds, chief officer of the coast guard there, was allegedly murdered in the village of Keel. The incident highlights the misunderstandings between Catholics and Protestants on Achill and like most events it generated two separate accounts, which were invariably divided along confessional lines. Nangle's version claimed that Reynolds on the night in question took it upon himself to pursue a group of assailants, who had been pelting him with stones, into the home of one James Lavelle. For his trouble, Reynolds had his skull fractured by a blow from a farming implement and later died from the injury. On the other hand, the story passed down by Catholics on Achill claimed that Reynold's wife, a Catholic, had become friendly with Lavelle's children and would visit them while her husband worked. One stormy night, Reynolds arrived at Lavelle's home in a drunken

¹⁸⁹ Report of Fergus Ferrell, Feb. 1837, (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo).

¹⁹⁰ N.A.I. Outrage Papers, Mayo, 1837.

¹⁹¹ *AMH* Oct. 20, 1838.

state, looking for his wife and brandishing a sword. When Reynolds refused to leave, Lavelle struck him over the head with the fatal blow.¹⁹²

The official report on the incident filed by George Dwyer, the inspecting constable who investigated the death, stated that Reynolds had been provoked into entering Lavelle's home by an unidentified party of men. Since Reynolds had been clamping down on illicit distillation on the island, he had fallen out of favour with many of the locals, including Martin Lavelle, the indicted man's brother, who had profited from selling illegal poteen. Tensions between the two increased on 25 November 1837, when Reynolds forcibly removed Lavelle from the site of the shipwrecked *William and George*.¹⁹³ Because Reynold's wife had overheard Martin Lavelle say, "I am the last man mad Reynolds will beat", it appeared that her husband had been the victim of a retribution attack. Despite the efforts of Dr. Adams, 'The kind, benevolent and humane physician to the Protestant colony', Reynolds died just before the new year.¹⁹⁴

The jurors at the Castlebar assizes ruled that James Lavelle acted in self-defence and he was acquitted of murder. Predictably, Nangle spiritedly protested against the court's decision, but to no avail. Although Nangle disagreed with the ruling, Reynolds's death and the other incidents that reached the national press continued to attract support for the missionary settlement within British evangelical circles. Soon afterwards, Nangle set up a relief fund to benefit Reynold's widow and their children. In his work Nangle believed that he was not only doing God's duty but the nation's: 'If I remained passive and unconcerned while all these abominations are rife in my country, conscience would accuse me of an utter destitution of real zeal for God's glory, and genuine charity towards my fellow men'.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore,

¹⁹² Irish Folklore Commission, Volume 1348, p. 295.

¹⁹³ George Dwyer to James Dombain, 12 Jan. 1839 (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1839 22/54, copy enclosed).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ *AMH* 28 Aug., 1838.

the scuffles and increasing reports of violence on the island after 1838 made it necessary to hold a petty sessions court once a month at Achill Sound, which heard its first case in 1840.¹⁹⁶

One such incident that was immediately politicized occurred in March 1839. Nangle complained on behalf of Henry McLoughlin, an employee at the colony, that the latter's windows had been broken by stones thrown by unknown assailants. Nangle believed that this assault had been orchestrated by the Catholic clergy on the island, and an award of £20 for information was offered by the chief constable.¹⁹⁷ While the Catholic clergy did indeed complain of intimidation from the missionary settlement, they rarely pursued legal avenues to settle disputes, Nangle never hesitated to contact the authorities, as the Outrage Papers from Dublin Castle reveal.

Spiritual worship at the missionary settlement reflected the sectarian conflict on the island. When Nangle preached a sermon at the Octagon Chapel in Bath in 1835, he asked for the congregation's assistance to combat their enemies, who 'have stirred up all their energies, to root out Protestantism from Ireland; those who should be its guardians, are, we hope unwittingly, leagued with them in the impious enterprise'.¹⁹⁸ The first two stanzas of a hymn used by the Protestant community on Achill, *For the Converts and Their Minister*, which appeared in the *Achill Missionary Herald* in February 1845, build upon this sense of the embattled faithful, and asks God to protect the converts that sought refuge at the missionary settlement:

Great Shepherd of thy chosen sheep,

¹⁹⁶ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 115.

¹⁹⁷ N.A.I. Outrage Papers, Mayo, 1839.

¹⁹⁸ Edward Nangle, *Protestantism in Ireland. The substance of a sermon, preached in the Octagon Chapel, Bath, on Sunday, July 5th, 1835, on behalf of the Protestant missionary settlement of Achill* (Bath, 1835), pp. 33-34.

The little flock in safety keep;
That faithful, persecuted band,
Who nobly strive in Erin's land.

Rome's priests and altars they despise
For Christ is precious in their eyes;
Esteeming life itself but dross
For him who died upon the cross.¹⁹⁹

Such a message was hardly irenic. With topical hymns, the besieged missionaries, whose work was supported by only a minority of established church clergymen, sought to legitimize their operations by securing Protestant roots in Achill, where its cultural soil was catholic. This Protestant tradition of the hymn, espoused by Nangle and his colleagues, encompassed specific theological formularies, creeds, and doctrines that directly opposed Catholicism; 'by singing about them in simple words an individual or congregation reinforces these tenets of faith and accepts the hymn in which they are enclosed as their peculiar cultural heritage'.²⁰⁰ The intention, therefore, was to supplant an imagined Catholic cultural tradition with a robust evangelical Protestantism, which looked to the death of Jesus on the cross, rather than the priest, to understand eternal salvation. At the heart of these hymns was the familiar two-pronged strategy of denouncing Catholic error, and replacing it with sound Protestant doctrine.

Despite the determined efforts of MacHale, the colony stabilised and continued to expand. When John O'Donovan, the antiquarian who worked for the Ordnance Survey of Ireland, visited Achill in 1838, he observed that although the islanders were 'shrewd and intelligent, and well able to understand the motive of Nangle in telling lies of them', they were able to co-

¹⁹⁹ *AMH* 27 Feb. 1845.

²⁰⁰ Leon B. Litvack, "Irish hymns of the nineteenth-century: psychology, theology, sociology and song", paper delivered at N.U.I. Maynooth, July 1992, cited by Robert Dunlop, "Religious conflict in Ireland", p. 155.

exist alongside the Protestant colonists.²⁰¹ Apparently, the state of the missionary settlement and the practical forbearance shown by Nangle in the face of priestly opposition allowed the Catholic O'Donovan to make surprising positive judgement. His portrait of the colony in 1838 reveals that two Protestant schools had been restored, bringing the total again to four, and that the colony expanded into outlying areas, even purchasing the nearby island of Innishbigle from Sir Richard O'Donnel to accommodate settlers:

The missionaries sustained much personal violence and danger but have at length succeeded in obtaining the respect and kind feelings of a large proportion of the inhabitants. They have made very great improvement in the lands of the Colony, have erected a small church, 7 substantial slated residences, an Infant school, printing office, etc. Their boys, girls and infant schools now contain over 110 children, 40 of these are at present preparing for confirmation by his Grace the Archbishop of Tuam. They have four other schools open in other localities in the neighbourhood... A strong Protestantism unaccompanied by unkind feelings towards Romanists has been infused into the congregation collected there. The church is well attended and a great spirit of inquiry aroused. The efforts of the missionaries are extended to several miles around. The Island of Inishbigle has this year been added to the colony. There are 50 families in the Colony (all Protestant, and with the exception of the 2 ministers, 1 physician, steward, 4 Scripture readers, 2 carpenters) all cottiers.²⁰²

As expected, the success of the mission was hotly debated. The Rev. James Dwyer, who had replaced Martin Connolly as the parish priest in Achill earlier in 1838, along with his curate, the Rev. William Roche, denied Nangle's claims that fourteen children of Catholic parents were being fed and educated in the Protestant faith at the colony's fledgling orphanage, which had been built in 1838. In response, Nangle admitted that Dwyer was correct; the orphanage refuge did not hold fourteen children – it held twenty-one: all coming from Catholic households.²⁰³ In offering proof, Nangle presented

²⁰¹ John O'Donovan, *Letters relating to the antiquities of the county of Mayo containing information collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1838* (Dublin, 1926), i, p. 346.

²⁰² *Ordnance Survey Name Books, Ordnance Survey, Ireland Co. Mayo no. 97 from Achill to Ballintober* (Dublin, 1838), p. 127.

²⁰³ Edward Nangle to the editor of the *York Courant*, 22 Oct. 1838 as published in *AMH* 20 Nov. 1838.

certificates signed by missionary staff testifying to the existence of the orphanage and also to the Protestant schools which had been re-established on the island. Although Nangle's pen is not the most reliable source, it did appear that the colony had regained its earlier dynamism. Apparently Connolly had been replaced by Dwyer in order to 'arrest this current of vice and immorality that has been turned into this island, and remove the danger that must result to its peace from being thus made the theatre of religious strife and contention...'.²⁰⁴

In the absence of comprehensive census records for the Achill missionary settlement, its true size is uncertain. According to the religious census undertaken for the Commissioners on Public Instruction in 1834, there had already been some seventy-six Protestants, mostly coastguardsmen, their families and some other officials, living on Achill before 1834.²⁰⁵ In 1842, Nangle gave the population of his settlement as:

Total number of families	54	individuals	311
Families originally Protestant	13	individuals	56
Families originally Catholic	51	individuals	255
Orphan children of Catholic parents	100		
Orphans apprenticed in the colony	9		

Nangle supplemented these figures by claiming that of the Catholic families mentioned above, thirty, containing one hundred and fifty-five individuals, were converted by the immediate instrumentality of the mission, and within this group, twenty-seven families, which included one hundred and thirty-five individuals, were natives of Achill, or the surrounding district. In his published findings, Nangle did not include converts from Catholicism who had

²⁰⁴ *AMH* 20 Aug. 1838.

²⁰⁵ *First report of the Commissioners of public instruction in Ireland*, H.C. 1835, xxxiii, p. 32d.

emigrated to different parts of Ireland, England, or North America, nor did he include the original Protestants on the island, the coast guardsmen and their families. In 1842, Nangle claimed that the mission had the spiritual charge of nearly 500 souls.²⁰⁶

The number of Protestant families at the settlement increased from thirteen in 1842 to forty-six families by 1843. Over the same period, the number of original Catholic families increased from fifty-one to fifty-nine of the total number of families. The number of families who were originally Protestant, therefore, increased more than the number of families who were originally Catholic. Unfortunately Nangle's figures do not explain the increase in the number of Protestant families (described as being natives of Achill and the surrounding district) from thirteen in 1842 to forty-six in 1843, but it is possible that they were people brought in from Newport and Westport due to the exclusive dealing policy. These people might have been described as coming from a surrounding district.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, the number of former Roman Catholic families increased by eight (fifteen persons) compared with an increase of thirty-three Protestant families (129 persons) in the two years covered by Nangle's figures. Although the total population of the settlement increased by 144 between 1842 and 1843, such a large growth can only be explained by immigration into the settlement as Protestants from outside seem to have been placed there.

²⁰⁶ *9th Report*, p. 45.

²⁰⁷ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort*, p. 32.

However, the census of 1841 gives Dugort a population of 319 (157 males and 162 females).²⁰⁸ It divided the townland of Dugort into three divisions: Dugort, Dugort East, and Dugort West; Nangle's figures presumably referred to the entire area. The population figures for the Dugort divisions (*Table 1*) as reported in the census of 1841 are as follows:

Table 1: Population of Dugort Townlands

Townland	1841		
	Male	Female	Total
Dugort	157	162	319
Dugort East	21	17	38
Dugort West	183	165	348

Source: Census of 1841

Since the census of 1841 gives the population of Dugort as 319 (157 males and 162 females), we can safely assume that the Mission was included in these figures.²⁰⁹ If we compare Nangle's figures for 1842 with the census of 1841, then the population of the settlement in 1842 was close to 420, including those who were originally Protestant or Catholic plus the orphans, thereby showing an increase of 101 in one year or at most a year and a half.²¹⁰

The 1841 census was the first to give separate figures for the townlands of Dugort. Here, Dugort was divided into three areas or townlands: Dugort, Dugort East and Dugort West. These divisions were also used by the Ordnance Survey and in Griffith's Valuation of Tenements as well in

²⁰⁸ *The census of Ireland for the year 1851, Part I: showing the area, population and the number of houses, by townlands and electoral divisions, Vol. IV, Province of Connacht, County of Mayo*, H.C. 1852-3, xcii, p. 568, (cited as *1851 Census* hereafter).

²⁰⁹ *The census of Ireland for the year 1841, Part I: showing the area, population and the number of houses, by townlands and electoral divisions. Vol. IV, Province of Connaught, County of Mayo*, H.C. 1842-3, vcii, p. 568. (Cited as *Census of Ireland, 1851* hereafter).

²¹⁰ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort*, p. 32.

subsequent censuses.²¹¹ Some of Nangle's numbers were probably taken from both Dugort East and Dugort West, but since we have no way of knowing this, his figures are open to question. Here, modern research conducted by Mealla Ní Ghiobúin is helpful. Using the Church of Ireland registers from Achill parish for the years 1838-1845, Ní Ghiobúin has charted the settlement's population growth before the Famine. An examination of the baptisms performed in Dugort from 1835 to 1845 reveals that there were more males than females baptised (*Table 2*). In addition, during the same time span, the total number of burials (29) compared with the number of baptisms (141) shows the distinctive age profile at the settlement (*Table 3*). As Ní Ghiobúin points out, the total number of baptisms in the colony between 1838 and 1845 was eighty-two, and the total number of burials over that same period was twenty-seven – an increase of forty-five baptisms over burials.²¹² This does suggest a vigorous growth in population. While these figures imply a population expansion within the colony, they do not indicate from where newcomers came.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., p. 34.

Table 2: Baptisms in Achill parish: 1835-1845

	Colony/Dugort	Outside Colony	Unclear	Total
Male	49	27		
Female	33	22		
Total	82	49	10	141

Source: Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, Dugort, Achill Island, 1831-1861, p. 33.

Table 3: Burials in Achill, 1838-1845

	Colony/Dugort	Outside Colony	Orphan Colony	Total
Male	13	1	6	20
Female	6	1	2	9
Totals	19	2	8	29

Source: As above, p. 34.

Towards the end of 1838, Nangle had to make some personnel adjustments at the missionary settlement, as Archbishop Trench decided to transfer Joseph Baylee to another outpost in Connemara. Baylee's replacement, Thomas de Vere Coneys, was a recent Trinity graduate who spoke Irish fluently. Although de Vere Coneys would only remain on Achill a short time (he became the first professor of Irish at Trinity College in 1839), in his time he worked diligently as Nangle's assistant and did much to win over some islanders by reading aloud the Irish Bible. But before long, he too became caught up in the religious conflict on the island when a crowd pelted him with stones as he left a home in Dooega.²¹³

²¹³ Report of Outrage by Fergus Ferrall, Chief Constable, 11 Aug. 1839 (N.A.I. Outrage Papers, Mayo 1839 21/7117).

In January 1839, the violent storm which devastated much of Ireland unleashed havoc on the missionary settlement, unroofing buildings, uprooting trees and overturning boats. The storm's fury became imbedded in the popular mind of the islanders, and since it occurred a year after Reynold's death, it was aptly named, 'Reynold's wind'. Another storm – of the sectarian kind – was also stirring in the island. During the winter, the National Board stopped supporting its schools on Achill, which were managed by the Catholic priests, because MacHale refused to display the 'general lesson', or a copy of the ten commandments that was required to be posted on the classroom walls of all National Schools. By the summer, MacHale's opposition to the National System reached top form, and subsequently national schools on the island were shut down, thereby giving Nangle exclusive control over primary education on Achill.²¹⁴

Thomas de Vere Coneys added to the tempest when he went to Duniver to read the Scriptures to a coast guard and his family. While engaged in this work, a Catholic priest named Joseph Bourke approached the man's house and challenged de Vere Coneys to a public debate on the authenticity of the Protestant Bible – in Irish. Hungry for a theological showdown, the Protestant missionary accepted Bourke's challenge; however, the two parties could not agree on a time or venue, so Father Dwyer and Nangle decided to take up the discussion in the form of letters between themselves, subsequently to be published in the *Achill Missionary Herald*. This was not the first time the two had met in polemical discussion, for a year earlier, Nangle had

²¹⁴ D.H. Akenson, *The Irish education experiment*, p. 207.

published an attack against Dwyer and the celebration of the Catholic mass.²¹⁵ Naturally, Dwyer was cautious about proceeding, especially since Nangle had been partly responsible for botching the debate in Dublin between Maguire and Gregg a year before, yet he agreed to a programme that allowed each side to defend six beliefs held by their respective churches. Although the debate began cordially enough, it soon broke down into a exchange of *ad hominem* attacks. When Nangle would claim, 'the Protestant Church teaches and follows no doctrine or discipline which is not warranted by Scripture', Dwyer retorted that his co-religionist's letters were 'the most puerile, talentless, and ridiculous, that ever emanated from the pen of any Protestant clergyman'.²¹⁶ This discussion, which Nangle dubbed, 'the most important event which has occurred in the history of the Mission since its commencement', ended almost as quickly as it started when Dwyer began accusing Nangle of misprinting his letters and consequently ceased sending correspondence to the mission press in early 1840.²¹⁷ Once again, Nangle cleverly drew a priest into a polemical debate seemingly against his better judgment, gaining much publicity at the expense of his foe.

By 1839, the missionaries, having successfully established, maintained and expanded the settlement at Dugort, desired more local autonomy from the central committee in Dublin. In the mission's *Sixth report* for the year ended 31 December 1839, Nangle laid out the benefits of more local control over the affairs of the Achill Mission:

The directors in Dublin feeling that their distance from the field of operation, the slowness of communication, and their limited knowledge of local circumstances, greatly hinders their efficiency in managing the

²¹⁵ Edward Nangle, *The novelties of the Romish mass*, p. 23.

²¹⁶ *AMH* 20 Feb. 1840.

²¹⁷ *AMH* 21 Sept. 1839.

Mission, have transferred their responsibility as directors to the court of local management, consisting of the two missionaries, Captain Dyer, R.N., Dr Adams, and the steward. They still continue to act as guardians of the Mission, the duties devolving upon them and us by this change in our system of management are defined in a document which will be found in the appendix; it was drawn up by one of our members and approved by our former board of directors.²¹⁸

Because of this new development, in January 1840, new rules for the governing of the Achill Mission were drawn up by the Board Committee in Dublin, and by the Court of Local Management, based on Achill. The Board in 1840 were the same people who had formed the original committee seven years earlier.

Local affairs of the missionary settlement were to be managed by Nangle; the Rev. Edward Lowe (who had become Nangle's assistant that year); J. French; Captain Dyer; and Dr Neason Adams. While the new arrangement gave the local committee on Achill more control over the everyday affairs of the mission, it still had to answer to the Board of Guardians in Dublin. For instance, the guardians in Dublin controlled the remuneration of the missionaries in Achill, and when a guardian visited the missionary settlement, the local Court of Management was required to assemble in order to present the current state of affairs – secular and spiritual – on the island. Moreover, the local court at Dugort had to meet weekly, keep a record of subscribers as well as a regular account of income and expenditure, and subsequently report back to the Board of Guardians. Each February the reports of the Mission were sent to Dublin, where they were carefully audited by 'two gentlemen unconnected with the board of guardians or court of local

²¹⁸ *6th Annual report of the Achill Mission for the year ended 31 December, 1842 with a report of th Achill orphan refuge up to the same period* (Achill, 1843). (hereafter referred to as *6th Report*).

management.’²¹⁹ By 1841, therefore, the missionaries, both directly involved with work on Achill and with administrative duties in Dublin, had made some necessary adjustments to continue their project.

The Catholic community on Achill was not immediately hostile to neighbours who ‘went over’ to the other side but with the determined intervention of traditional leaders, the priests, mixed feelings crystallized into collective resentment. On the other hand, the Protestant missionaries, under Nangle’s leadership, desiring to maintain purity in their beliefs, created a *cordon sanitaire* for their own protection, keeping out Roman Catholicism and sealing in pure Protestant truths. This made recurrent conflict unavoidable.

²¹⁹ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort, Achill Island*, Appendix 1, p. 69.

Chapter Four

Consolidation and Expansion: Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission, 1840-1850

There seems to be a general, a universal nisus or impulse throughout the whole human race – the desire of converting others to our own opinions – especially our theological opinions. I have no doubt that it is based in philanthropy and honest zeal; but it may not always be practised with judgment, or eventuate in happiness. The main spring of proselytism is the conviction that our own creed is the only true one, and that by converting others to it, we save their souls alive.¹

– James Johnson on proselytism (1844)

Believe my son in God, purely,
Do not take God's name without cause,
Keep the holiday as is proper,
Give your father and your mother honour.
Do not kill, steal, or commit adultery,
Or [give] false witness in any case,
Do not covet a wife who is not your own,
Another person's children or goods.²

– The Ten Commandments.

Dugort where in ages dreary,
Nangle bold apostle came,
To comfort the sick and weary,
Wastes of darkness to reclaim.³

– Schools manuscripts collection, Irish Folklore Commission.

In his evidence to the Devon Commission in 1844, Nangle stated that before he arrived on Achill, 'there was not so much as a cart on the island; there are now several.'⁴ This was one example of the modern improvements brought to Achill by the Protestant missionaries. By 1840, Nangle and his determined missionary staff could boast of having achieved many of their

¹ James Johnson, *A tour in Ireland with meditations and reflections* (London, 1844), p. 236.

² Douglas Hyde, *The religious songs of Connacht: a collection of poems, stories, prayers, satires, ranns, charms, etc.* (2 vols, London and Dublin, 1906), ii., p. 323.

³ Irish Folklore Commission, *Schools Manuscript Collection 1937-38*, (Achill), 85-86.

⁴ *Report from Her Majesty's Commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect of the occupation of the land in Ireland*, H.C., 1845, Testimony of Edward Nangle, XX, p, 430. (Hereafter referred to as the Devon Commission).

stated objectives. In just over five years, the Mission had improved the material condition of Dugort and its vicinity by introducing a striking variety of modern services – primary education, a printing press, improved roads and agricultural practices, the constabulary, the petty sessions, and robust architecture. For the education of the orphan children of Roman Catholic parents, in March 1838 Nangle built the ‘Achill orphan refuge’, or asylum for orphans, which consisted of four cottages, holding up to twenty-five children. A stanza from a hymn composed by a member of the Missionary staff describes the purpose of the orphanage:

And shelter’d now in Achill’s Isle,
A Christian home I share;
And the poor outcast orphan child,
Is saved from Satan’s snare.⁵

A married couple supervised each of the cottages, which cost £10 apiece to construct.⁶ Yet another improvement was a house of recovery, built in March 1838, which consisted of a nurse-tenders’ apartment, a bathroom, and two rooms for convalescent patients. Nangle appealed to the readers of the *Achill Missionary Herald* to fund this project, but building had gone on before the necessary funds were collected.⁷

Along with these improvements, Nangle was also responsible for the introduction of a re-invigorated Catholicism to the island: his activity on Achill spurred the Catholic Church into action, forcing it to provide regular religious services to accommodate the spiritual needs of its previously neglected communicants. Furthermore, to facilitate the newly planted tourist

⁵ Achill Mission Press, *Hymns, selected and arranged for the use of the children of Achill* (Achill, 1852), p. 138.

⁶ *Sixth Annual report of the Achill Mission for the year ended 31 December, 1842 with a report of th Achill orphan refuge up to the same period*, p. 7. (hereafter referred to as *Sixth Report*).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

industry, a weekly jaunting-car service from Westport to the hotel at the settlement was established in May 1840; a year later, the Mission hospital was operational just in time for the reception of patients who were suffering from an acute outbreak of scarletina and fever.

Another result of the Missionary settlement was the opening in 1842 in Dugort of a post office, which employed post boys to convey mail – especially copies of the *Achill Missionary Herald* – to the outside world. This led to the commencement of a mail car service between Dugort and Newport at a cost, including the car, of £80. With the expected influx of English travellers, Nangle figured that such a service could make a profit for the Mission.⁸ Mail was delivered to Newport every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday by a mail car that could also carry 4 passengers. Although it is not clear if the service was profitable, the fares were as follows: Dugort to Achill Sound, 1s; Dugort to Mulranny, 2s. 6d; Dugort to Newport 3s. 6d. The settlement, therefore, helped to better connect Achill with the mainland.

These physical developments on the island had become necessary in response to the fight back by the priests, whose continued sermons and homilies from the altar had forced the colony to become a self-sufficient community:

That our object in carrying on so much secular work is to afford inquirers and converts from Popery the means of supporting themselves by their own industry while they and their children are receiving instruction in Scriptural truth. This plan is not the carrying out of any abstract theory, but it was forced upon our adoption by the persecuting intolerance of the Romish priests, who the moment an individual was found to question their authority, or the truth of their doctrines, stirred up all their influence to deprive him of the means of support.⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Eighth report of the Achill Mission, for the year ending December 31, 1841* (Achill, 1842), p. 4. (hereafter referred to as *Eighth Report*).

Following the failure of the potato crop in 1838, the Mission appealed for funds to relieve the subsequent distress in Achill. The money received was used to improve the infrastructure of the settlement. Mission buildings were repaired and workers were hired to enhance the roads, reclaim land, erect fences, and to build a bridge. The total amount received for the distress fund in 1838 was £436. 19s. 7d, and the amount paid to 140 local labourers was £406. 14s. 4d, leaving a balance of £30. 5s. 3d.¹⁰ All of these works directly benefitted the Mission.

Nangle, of course, attributed these temporal advancements more basically to the advance of Protestantism in Achill. On the religious front, his plan for the spiritual reclamation of the people was slowly beginning to pay dividends. According to Nangle's eighth annual report, fifty-six families, totalling 365 individuals, now lived in the settlement and of these, 45 families, or 209 individuals, were former Catholics. While many were sceptical, claiming that Nangle had brought in the majority of these converts from other parts of Ireland and England in order to attract the notice of wealthy patrons, he certified that 92 of the residents were natives of Achill or of the surrounding district.¹¹

The mission to the island's youth also appeared to be succeeding, for in 1841 the average number of children in Nangle's schools each year amounted to 230 and the orphanage teemed with 100 children.¹² Again, the Protestant schools on Achill infuriated the priests, for teachers at Nangle's schools were paid on average £20 per annum, while national school teachers on Achill received roughly £8 each year.¹³ In 1837, the first issue of the *Achill Missionary Herald* carried an advertisement for a headmaster at one of the Mission schools at a whopping yearly salary of £150.¹⁴ Insult was added to

¹⁰ *Sixth Report*, pp. 38-48.

¹¹ *Eighth Report*, p. 16.

¹² *AMH* Nov. 1841.

¹³ Kenneth McNally, *Achill* (Dublin, 1973), p. 186.

¹⁴ *AMH* July 1837.

injury because Nangle's school teachers, who taught reading, writing and arithmetic, lived rent free in Mission housing.¹⁵ Even though Nangle and his colleagues had experienced many difficult trials since 1834, they had reason to be pleased with their accomplishments by the early 1840s.

While Nangle's innovations forced even his greatest enemies to concede that the Protestants were a modernising and competitive force on the island, opponents of the missionary enterprise claimed that the benefits derived from these improvements were unevenly distributed, or benefited only the Mission, for most of the island's 6,000 destitute inhabitants still struggled through a ramshackle existence. The reason for this poverty, according to Nangle, was the exceptionally backward agricultural practices of the islanders. In testimony before the Devon Commission, Nangle spoke out against the system of rundale. He gave details of how the Mission enclosed areas reclaimed from the bog with a turf fence; dug and levelled in the old bog holes; cut drains; burned lime and land; raised and put out gravel; manured the fields; and planted seed. Nangle expected the example set by the colony workers would lead to wider improvements in local agriculture.¹⁶

Edward Newman, a naturalist who visited the missionary settlement in 1839, complained that the Mission, despite its accomplishments, had fallen short in improving general conditions on the island:

The island of Achill is more like a foreign land than any I have visited; the natives reside in huts, which a good deal resemble those of the Esquimaux Indians; they are without chimneys or windows, and the roof seems continuous with the walls: the interior is generally undivided, and is tenanted by men, women, children, pig and poultry, and often goats and cows.¹⁷

Newman, himself a Protestant, harshly criticised the Mission's neglect of Achill's half-starved population and reserved the most scathing denunciations

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁶ Devon Commission, Testimony of Edward Nangle, XX, 430-433.

¹⁷ Edward Newman, *Notes on Irish natural history, more specifically ferns* (London, 1840), p. 6.

for Nangle, whom he censured for unjustly assaulting the moral character of his Catholic neighbours. Newman praised the virtuous character of the islanders, who left the defenceless Mission farms and private property unmolested in times of extreme scarcity. He further recommended that religious and political agendas be removed from any large-scale scheme to ameliorate the condition along the western Irish sea-board, and be replaced by the unselfish efforts of 'men who took a human view of the human wants and human failings of these poor islanders'.¹⁸ Despite such biting comments, Nangle continued his vitriolic attacks on the Catholic Church and its adherents, whom he dubbed the dupes of Romish intrigue.

Making significant contributions to the temporal and spiritual development of the island, Nangle's "crusade" began to pick up momentum despite opposition, which even included agrarian protests. In February 1840, a party of up to eighty 'Whiteboys' threatened one of Nangle's schoolmasters, demanding school children and their parents to cease all dealings with the Mission.¹⁹ While the magistrates who investigated the incident claimed that a local grievance involving the coastguard and the schoolmaster caused the altercation, Nangle made the unlikely claim that MacHale had employed these men and he maintained that the harangues of priests like Dwyer had charged the people with an intense hatred of Protestants, encouraging this outrage.²⁰

In June 1840, Father James Dwyer fell ill of fever and went to Tuam to recuperate – returning to Achill in September.²¹ MacHale temporarily

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Nangle to Tyler Hamilton 20 Feb. 1840 (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1840 21/3019).

²⁰ Daniel Cruice to Thomas Drummond 21 Feb. 1840 (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1840 21/3021); *AMH* 30 Apr. 1840.

²¹ *AMH* 25 June 1840.

replaced Dwyer with a more even-tempered priest, Father Michael Gallagher, a native of Achill. Although Gallagher was more soft-spoken than his recent clerical predecessors, he continued the policy of 'exclusive dealing', which had created much confusion and hardship for the fledgling missionary settlement. Nangle interpreted Dwyer's illness, which had incapacitated him at the height of their polemical dispute, as a sign of divine approval of his work and he subsequently asked those connected with the Mission to redouble their efforts. News, though obviously slanted, of the settlement's gains and Catholic losses continued to reach potential benefactors in Scotland and England through the pages of the *Achill Herald*, whose monthly circulation reached 3,150 by the end of 1840. Nangle assured his readership that he would use their generous contributions towards 'consuming the kingdom of antichrist, and building up the gracious kingdom of God our Saviour in the hearts of His people'.²² He replied to his critics, both Catholic and Protestant alike, by claiming a clear conscience: 'We are not aware of having advocated any error in principle, nor censured any particular in the conduct of an individual, otherwise than as truth and righteousness demand'.²³ So by the end of 1840, with the short departure of Dwyer and the settlement's population rising – a plot of grassland and cattle were purchased to feed the growing number of colonists – Nangle's missionary enterprise enjoyed for the first time a spell of relative stability.

However, his rigid and unaccommodating attitude towards what he saw as Catholic error continued and kept him in controversy. Before his illness, Dwyer had been in England, calling upon affluent Catholic families to

²² *AMH* 31 Dec. 1840.

contribute to the building of two new chapels on Achill. Although Dwyer's fund-raising tour failed to elicit an enthusiastic response, construction of the chapels went ahead during the summer of 1840 and by New Year, one of the structures in the village of Dookinelly began to resemble a place of worship. While tensions between the colony and the priests had somewhat abated after Gallagher's arrival as parish priest, rancour again rose to the surface when Nangle's missionaries were accused of defacing the recently built shell of the Catholic chapel in early 1841. Dwyer charged a schoolmaster, Michael Daly; the Mission's printer, William Pugh; and a policeman, Michael Godfrey, with an attack on his 'persecuted and maligned parishioners'.²⁴ A stipendiary magistrate, Daniel Cruice of Belmullet, Co. Mayo, who had been taking an interest in Achill's sectarian battles, investigated Dwyer's charge that Daly, Pugh, and Godfrey had met in a public house, became intoxicated, and then set out to deface the Catholic chapel.²⁵ During the investigation, Nangle testified that Daly and Pugh were decent people, however it was clear that both drank excessively and Nangle offered to take action to discipline the perpetrators. Since their drinking session took place on the Sabbath, a day of rest, Nangle demoted Daly to a superintendent at the Mission's orphanage, and fired Pugh; Godfrey was temporarily demoted to a second-class constable by his superiors.²⁶ Since both sides were unable to reach a legal settlement, the case was referred to the next Petty Sessions at Achill Sound. The damage done to the chapel was negligible – Gallagher testified that one shilling would be

²³ *AMH* 31 Dec. 1840.

²⁴ James Dwyer to Viscount Elrington Feb. 17, 1841 (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1841 21/1925 enclosed).

²⁵ James Dwyer to Daniel Cruice 27 Feb. 1841 (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1841 21/1925 enclosed).

²⁶ Minutes of Investigation, (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1841 21/1825 enclosed).

sufficient compensation – and Dwyer’s best material witness was a young boy; the defendants were acquitted. Yet it was clear that the mistrust between the two religious groups on the island remained. The already bad relations deteriorated further, when Nangle’s post boy, James Heneghan, reported that an embittered Catholic had set his mailbag afire shortly after the trial.²⁷

Eventually more and more public figures became entangled in the controversies centering on Nangle. Since the Missionary settlement received ample publicity from the circulation of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, which had its annual subscription price raised from four to five shillings to meet production costs in January 1841, and from the various reports in national and provincial newspapers, many curious visitors to Ireland yearned to see what Nangle’s apostleship in the fastness of Connacht had accomplished. After the well-known accounts of Caesar Otway and John Barrow, many wished to witness Nangle’s sabre-rattling antics in person. Most admitted to having an overall good impression of the neat, well-cultivated missionary village, with its white-washed buildings and slated roofs, but some sightseers felt uncomfortable, even embarrassed, by the conduct of the Protestant missionaries. Two persons in particular, Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall, the well-known Irish travel-writers, wrote a disparaging account of the Achill Mission in a large and very popular work entitled, *Ireland, its scenery and character*, which was published in 1842.

The Hall’s principal object in visiting Achill was to examine the ‘Protestant colony’, which had received mixed reports of the evidence regarding the work in progress: ‘By one party it has been “cried down” as a

²⁷ Abstract of report of outrage 12 Mar. 1841(N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1841

bundle of fire-brands; and by another it has been “cried up” as a sanctuary for the oppressed – the germ of a great tree that was destined to overshadow Ireland with its protecting branches’.²⁸ Their initial reaction to the colony was one of great disappointment, for they arrived during an outbreak of contagious fever, thereby finding little of the neatness and cleanliness that they had imagined to expect. They also found the printed Mission reports, which contained the published accounts, to be very ‘confusing’.²⁹ Like the naturalist Edward Newman three years earlier, the Halls bore witness to the exceptional fortitude of the local Catholic population, who, despite enduring extreme privations, seemed to resist the blandishment of the Protestant missionaries. The people they met had been starving since the end of July, yet they patiently endured their sufferings rather than submit to what they considered ‘a degradation’ in accepting Nangle’s assistance. ‘Such fortitude we do believe’, remarked the Halls, ‘to be without parallel in the history of any ‘ignorant and unenlightened people since the creation of the world.’ To the Halls, the missionary experiment on Achill had been a hoax on the British public, and in their opinion, Nangle’s unfeeling methods had produced much evil, ‘—prejudicing the cause of Ireland, and far more, that of RELIGION’.³⁰

The Halls saved their fiercest criticisms for the orphanage asylum, which they believed contributed most to the bitter discord that bitterly polarised Achill society. As they approached the island, the Halls encountered a boy named Hart, a former orphan, but when he upset the missionary-in-chief, he was expelled from the settlement. Adorned in rags which he had worn

21/6261).

²⁸ S.C. Hall, *Ireland, its scenery and character* (3 vols, London, 1842), ii, p. 394.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 396.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 400.

when he first came to the orphanage, and carrying three shillings given to him by Nangle for the journey, the young boy had set out for county Sligo, where his grandfather lived, when he ran into a shocked Mr. and Mrs. Hall, who convinced Hart to return with them to the colony to plead for Nangle's forgiveness. When they presented the penitent Hart to the notorious missionary, Nangle refused to take him back – assigning no other reason but that 'he was a bad boy'. This 'bitterness of spirit' saddened the Halls, who remarked that such insensitivity 'forms the grand barrier to the improvement of the country'. The Halls's personal dislike of Nangle and the stony-hearted treatment of this boy undoubtedly underlay their scathing disapproval of the Achill Mission, which they unhesitatingly tagged 'a complete failure'.³¹

Nangle never forgave the Halls for their criticisms and before the ink of the first edition of *Ireland, its scenery and character* was dry, he arose to defend his reputation in a pre-emptive letter addressed to the travel-writers, which was immediately published in the *Achill Missionary Herald*. He argued that the Halls had only spent two hours at the settlement, and therefore could have formed only a tourist's perception of Mission operations: 'The oracular confidence with which tourists speak of the state of society in places which they have passed through in their hasty march is highly reprehensible'.³² Furthermore, they visited the settlement after five in the evening, when the Mission schools had been finished for the day, thereby failing to judge properly the quality of the children's education. Nangle also drew attention to the material development the Mission had been responsible for, such as the

³¹ S.C. Hall, *Ireland, its scenery and character*, p. 399; Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission, 1834-1852", in Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (eds.), 'A various county': essays on Mayo history 1500-1900 (Westport, 1987), p. 126; Desmond Bowen, *Souperism, myth or reality?* (Cork, 1970), p. 94.

building of schools, a place for worship, a hospital, a mill and kiln, as well as essential labour for the people, who had been abandoned by their priests. To charges of misappropriating voluntary contributions, Nangle affirmed that all of the funds contributed from the Mission's patrons went into the maintenance and construction of Mission buildings and to the payment of its employees. Yet, he never contradicted the number of native converts, which the Halls, upon consulting the Mission's *Eighth report*, reported as 92. In response to Nangle, Samuel Carter Hall mentioned that two converts had returned to the Catholic Church in 1842, yet Nangle reminded his readers that in that same year, three converts had died strong in the Protestant faith and had been buried in the settlement's cemetery. At the height of his feud with the Halls, which went on into early 1844, Nangle claimed that it was never his intention to 'Protestantise' Achill, nor to be satisfied with merely converting the local population: 'The most its framers ever expected was to draw some of its inhabitants out of the apostate church of Rome to Christ; and to afford a shelter to persecuted converts from other parts of the country'.³³ Perhaps this was a slight shift in the Mission's policy, but it is safe to say that Nangle adapted to the harsh conditions surrounding him.

Holding firm to his initial observations, Hall asserted that any gains made by the Achill Mission in no way justified the irreparable harm done to the relations between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, which had resulted from the callous proselytising of insular communities. He argued that the unfortunate consequence was that liberal minded Protestants bore the brunt of Nangle's misdeeds:

³² *AMH* 28 July 1842.

It is this unhappy disposition that creates an evil of immense magnitude, and keeps out of the bosom of the church, a number infinitely greater than your Mission will ever conduct into it; for while the benefit you confer – small as it is – is limited to a single district, the injury inflicted by your want of meekness, temper and judgment, is sustained, more or less, by every Protestant of Ireland. It is largely bruited, by the adversaries of the established church, to justify hostility utterly opposed to the spirit and letter of Christianity, and furnishes indelible proof that intolerance and bigotry are not confined to one party in Ireland.³⁴

Strangely enough, Hall and Nangle did reach some common ground, for both agreed that the conversion of the majority Roman Catholic population of Ireland to Protestantism was a worthy ambition; however, Hall disapproved of ‘the mode in which it is conducted, and not to the motive in which it may have originated’.³⁵

Grist for Nangle’s propaganda mill may not have been provided by faultfinding parties like the Halls, yet the bad publicity which resulted from their chastisement of the Missionary settlement only hardened Nangle’s resolve.³⁶ The Halls hoped that Nangle’s work would be seen as an aberration, rather than as representative of the Protestant clergy in Ireland. In response, Nangle published a letter, endorsed by 58 clergymen from the Tuam archdiocese, all of whom approved of his work on Achill.³⁷

Despite the Halls’ attack, the missionary settlement received a modest public relations boost when an English visitor, James Johnson, arrived in 1844 to judge for himself in the controversy between the Halls and Nangle. Johnson described himself as “no great admirer of the system of proselytism”, and had mixed feelings about Nangle’s missionary station. He felt uncomfortable in meeting the now notorious head missionary, at first thinking he might present himself as a proselyte in order to acquire a night’s lodging.³⁸ Quickly abandoning this idea, he made the acquaintance of the benevolent Dr Adams, who immediately procured decent accommodation for the traveller,

³³ *AMH* 27 Dec. 1842.

³⁴ S.C. Hall to Edward Nangle, 9 Jan. 1843, printed in *AMH* 23 Feb. 1843.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Desmond Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 95.

³⁷ *AMH* 29 Feb. 1844.

³⁸ James Johnson, *A tour in Ireland*, p. 237-238.

complete with a blazing turf fire and interestingly enough, 'some excellent potin [sic]'.³⁹ Like Nangle, Johnson believed that little attempt should be made at converting adults, and he warmly commended the Protestant education that the children received in the Mission schools; however, he warned against the language and tone of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, which 'seizes on an expression in Scripture, purporting that Christ came not into the world to introduce peace, but the sword! Let it beware of such literal interpretations – for a sword may cut two ways!'⁴⁰ Johnson advised Nangle to substitute mild persuasion for angry denunciation in carrying out his Mission; like Hall, he concurred that 'neither persecution nor ridicule will ever convert either Protestant or Catholic to the opposite creed'.⁴¹ He saw the sectarian battle on the island as a clash of personalities between 'John of Tuam and Edward of Achill, two church militants of the first water', whose fulminations and fiery propaganda had trapped the islanders in an unfortunate crossfire.

While published reports of Nangle's missionary work generated great interest throughout Britain, private accounts from other Protestant visitors also shed light on its temporal and spiritual operations. James Henthorn Todd, a Fellow of Trinity College, paid a visit to the Achill Mission in August 1844. The account of his visit to Achill is fascinating. Although both Todd and Nangle agreed that only the Church of Ireland, with its apostolic foundations and scriptural theology could be accepted as the true Catholic church of Ireland, the former found with his High Church leanings the manner in which Nangle conducted religious services on the island disconcerting in the extreme. Shortly after arriving on Achill from Belmullet, Todd met Nangle, along with the Rev. William Baker Stoney, who was recovering from an

³⁹ Ibid., p. 241.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 245.

illness at the settlement. The local inhabitants, who had allegedly been told by the priests to refuse dealings with Protestants, gave Todd a rude welcome, as they unwillingly ferried him across the sound. The description of Todd's first meeting with Nangle and the immediate events that followed give invaluable insights into the daily life at the colony:

Nangle was extremely civil, and showed us all over the place. We drank tea with him in the evening and afterwards he took us into the church, as I thought for evening prayer; there was a good congregation and Nangle got up into the reading desk and without gown or surplice, but just as he was, he gave out a hymn which was sung through by the children – he then read a chapter from the first epistle of St. Peter and concluded with a long extempore prayer, into which he introduced tawdry attacks against Popery, calling it an execrable superstition, damnable idolatry and other choice and savoury appellations and so ended the service, which was exactly similar to the worship of the Dissenters – Now if Mr. Nangle is allowed to introduce into his Church (which I presume is licensed by the Bishop) these Presbyterian and Cromwellian novelties, I would be glad to know why I may not introduce wafers and crucifixes, and now and again in a quiet way say mass?⁴²

Todd was startled by Nangle's off-hand service, which seemed rife of Methodist – perhaps even Arminian – influences. Moreover, during divine service at the Missionary church 'a couple of very painful hymns were sung, which were disturbing to hear, on the most deep and solemn subjects, expressed in language which sung as it was, gave me, at least a most painful feeling of the irreverence and unreality of such worship'. The performances in Irish, he continued, evidently were not much better:

They have Irish hymns also, which they sing to it Irish melodies and to such tunes as "begone dull care"; and "Drink to me only with thine eyes". Bishop Ken's morning hymn done into Irish was sung this morning in the school to the tune of "A meeting of the Masters". This is excessively disagreeable; for one finds it very difficult to connect sacred associations with such tunes: The children however and natives who have never heard them sung to any other words do not of course feel this – but to me the sensation was that of ludicrousness mingled with a painful feeling as if sacred things were parodied.⁴³

⁴¹ James Johnson, *A tour in Ireland*, p. 245.

⁴² J.H. Todd to _____ Aug. 11, 1844 (T.C.D., Todd Correspondence, no. 148).

⁴³ James Henthorn Todd to _____, 11 Aug. 1844 (T.C.D., Todd Correspondence, no. 148).

While the bulk of Protestant hymnody in nineteenth-century Ireland was confessional and pietistic, a particular variety appeared on Achill that was laden with a reactionary polemic.⁴⁴ From the earliest days of the Achill missionary colony, hymns – both in English and in Irish – had been an integral feature of Protestant worship on the island. When Lady Franklin visited in September 1835, she noted that during morning service, ‘there is a hymn sung in Irish’, which was followed by a similar ceremony in English later that evening.⁴⁵ In 1844, James Johnson joined some fifty or sixty men, women, and children in service at the colony, performing hymns, ‘sung to popular airs’.⁴⁶ Nangle found Scriptural justification for devotional singing in 1 Corinthians 14:15 (‘I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also’) and evangelicals in both England and Ireland were greatly indebted to the Methodists, whose heightened interest in the ‘praying and singing of hymns’ made them the harbingers of the religious revival of the nineteenth-century.⁴⁷

If made public, Todd’s criticisms would surely have wounded Nangle; however, it appears that Todd effectively concealed his annoyance at the time, for Nangle asked him to preach to the assembled congregation. Upon reflection, ‘Presbyterian and Cromwellian novelties’, according to Todd, were just a few of Nangle’s shortcomings – in particular, the state of the Mission church left him further exasperated:

⁴⁴ Robert F. Dunlop, ‘Religious conflict in Ireland during the middle years of the nineteenth century: a theological assessment’ (M.Litt. thesis. Trinity College, Dublin, 1994), p. 153.

⁴⁵ John’s Barrow, *Barrow’s Ireland* (London, 1836), appendix, p. 7.

⁴⁶ James Johnson, *A tour in Ireland with meditations and reflections* (London, 1844), p. 241.

⁴⁷ Nicolas Temperly, *The music of the English parish church* (2 vols, Cambridge, 1979), i, p. 205.

The church is fitted up with an enormous box of a reading desk capable of holding at least three parsons abreast and serves also for a pulpit; in front of this was a remarkably small communion table, surrounded by rails so contrived as to prevent the possibility of more than two clergyman being employed there at a time. The whole thing is exceedingly ugly and abominable.⁴⁸

While attending Sunday service, Todd was again shocked by Nangle's utter disregard for Anglican rubrics. One half of the service was conducted in Irish by Nangle, while his assistant, the Rev. Lowe, preached the rest in English. Todd's description of this service again demonstrates the head missionary's affinity with Methodism. Nangle must have known that Todd, a High Churchman from Trinity College, would have been uncomfortable with his version of Anglican service, which the missionaries conducted in their surplices. Todd's remarks convey his umbrage:

The communion service they read out of the desk, Epistles and Gospel and all - although the communion table was there and there seemed to be no object that I could discern in this violation of the rubric. It was communion Sunday; and the elements were administered in the presbyterian fashion. When he came to me, I stopped him and asked him to repeat the words to me, which he did. I ought also to mention that the offertory was entirely omitted, with the exception of the prayer for the church militant - his was the first time I saw the communion administered without a collection and I think it a very bad arrangement independently of it, being contrary to the Prayerbook. There are plenty of people in the congregation who would give pence of halfpence and I could certainly teach them to do so, even though they were to offer sods of turf.⁴⁹

Fearing that he would be accused of endorsing 'Popery', Todd turned down Nangle's request to preach at the service.

Although Todd agreed that the boys and girls attending the Mission schools were well taught, and that the orphanage asylum provided adequate, yet banal amusements to otherwise vagrant young boys and girls, the lack of church discipline in spiritual matters, coupled with Nangle's stubborn demeanour, dashed his hopes for a successful, long-term Protestant mission on

⁴⁸ J.H. Todd to _____, Aug. 11, 1844

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Achill. Unlike Hall, Todd, despite his own High Church proclivities, admired Nangle's ambition; yet, both Todd and Hall believed that the colony project would ultimately end in ruin:

On the whole I am somewhat disappointed at this place. I like Nangle extremely – he is evidently a most amiable and excellent man, with no inconsiderable share of talent: but the poison of his puritanism infects everything here. All is on so mean and temporary a plan – the accommodation for the children is very bad – and all the arrangements so exactly corresponding, that I scarcely look for any permanent good, unless a better spirit should spring up. He has no daily service – observes none of the holidays of the Church, except Xmas or some such holidays, and in fact there is no recognition of the church, except on Sunday and then it is more through preaching than through prayer.⁵⁰

There is no evidence that the committee in Dublin knew anything of the spiritual ministrations of the Achill colony, yet one can only imagine that men like Joseph Henderson Singer and Robert Daly, two well-known Irish evangelicals, would have been more sympathetic to Nangle's loose interpretation of the Prayer Book than was Todd. When Caesar Otway, a director of the Missionary Society for Achill visited the Mission in 1838, he paid little attention to the spiritual affairs on the island: instead, he focused on the material gains made around Dugort. We can assume, therefore, that the guardians in Dublin had little problem with the manner in which Nangle conducted religious services.

Despite these condemnations – both public and private – Nangle continued to provoke critics. While he delighted in publicising local renunciations, the conversions of Roman Catholic priests made him especially ecstatic. In September 1844, Nangle decided to extend his operations and founded the Priests Protection Society for Ireland, which sheltered and trained apostate priests while they waited for the bishop's formal license to minister in the established church. Earlier that month, Nangle and his missionary staff received a boost of confidence when the local population greeted MacHale,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

who had arrived on the island to consecrate two new churches, with apparently little fanfare or interest. Bubbling with optimism, on 29 October 1844, Dr Neason Adams, who had organised a collection for the maintenance of these converted priests, led a procession to the hamlet of Mweelin, a townland consisting of 1,444 acres that had come under the direct control of the Mission. A subsidiary missionary settlement had begun there, consisting of a twelve-cottage village, a schoolhouse, a minister's residence, a training school for scripture readers and apostate priests, and a small church - all built by 1850. The above mentioned cavalcade to Mweelin consisted of: three orphans from the settlement, two bearing open Bibles, the other a globe; three school children; three converted Catholic priests – John O'Brien, George McNamara and Solomon Frost; a Scripture-reader carrying a hammer and trowel; and Nangle along with the Rev. Edward Lowe, who had replaced De Coneys as assistant missionary earlier that month, came last.⁵¹ The assembled crowd, led by over 100 school children, sang a hymn composed for the occasion:

He rescues souls that have gone astray,
He turns their darkness into day
And guides their feet in the peaceful way
That leads to life and glory.

Lord bless this house, as a holy house,
For souls redeem'd by thy grace from Rome,
And oh! That all who may hither come,
May share in grace and joy.⁵²

Nangle ensured that these apostate priests received widespread publicity, and he subsequently published their personal conversion experiences in the *Achill Missionary Herald*. While the asylum at Mweelin was primarily

⁵¹ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle, the apostle of Achill: a history and a memoir* (London and Dublin, 1884), p. 152.

⁵² *Ibid.*

concerned with preparing Roman Catholic priests for future careers in the established church, Nangle envisaged it serving another useful purpose – the preparation of young boys from the settlement to train for the ministry at Trinity College, Dublin.

While the foundation of the Priests Protection Society and the establishment of the training school perhaps nullified the bad publicity that had resulted from the Hall's visit, other third-party reports unintentionally raised Nangle's profile in the eyes of the British public. Some of the best publicity that the Achill Mission ever obtained before the Famine came from the lips of Lord Monteagle, who brought the Mission to public notice during the parliamentary debate on Maynooth College in 1845.⁵³ The Prime Minister, Robert Peel, had created a political maelstrom within the Tory party when he proposed to detach moderate Catholics from the O'Connell-led Repeal movement by dramatically increasing the annual state grant to Maynooth from £8,928 to £26,360. To Nangle's chagrin, it appeared that the very rulers of the empire, who had taken an oath to uphold the Thirty-nine articles of the established church, were actively countenancing the triumph of Roman Catholicism in Ireland. To voice this displeasure, Nangle called a meeting at the settlement and drafted a petition to parliament, which called the Maynooth Grant, among other disparaging comments, 'an offence against public morals and decency'.⁵⁴ Nangle's protest evidently reached Monteagle, who recounted to parliament an incident on Clare Island, Co. Mayo, where two of Nangle's agents had started a violent fracas when they entered a church during mass, held up a consecrated wafer, and shouted, 'Was that the God they

⁵³ Desmond Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 95.

worshipped?'.⁵⁵ Monteagle avowed that the scene had been witnessed by a reliable source – Stephen de Vere, son of Sir Aubrey de Vere, and Monteagle's nephew – who was a magistrate and a member of the established church. Nangle fervidly denied the story and through another bitter exchange of words, forced Monteagle to retract his account and reluctantly admit that the 'wafer incident' had occurred eight years earlier in July 1837 and that the culpability of the missionaries was never proven.⁵⁶ Although Nangle's unflagging opposition to the doctrine of transubstantiation (the *Achill Missionary Herald* continued to display in each issue a woodcut of two ecclesiastics watching with horror as a mouse devoured a host) had probably caused the 1837 riot on Clare Island, his astute defence generated much sympathy in England as well as in Ireland for the Missionary settlement.

Even if Nangle indirectly benefited from the quarrels with the Halls and Lord Monteagle (contributions to the Mission increased during this time), the worst blow to the settlement's image on the eve of the Famine came from the visit of another Protestant: the American philanthropist, Asenath Nicholson. Nicholson, a New Yorker of Puritan stock, had come to Ireland on her own to distribute Bibles to the rural poor and to bring back an account of the religious state of the people for the American press. During her first stay in Ireland, which lasted from 1844 until 1845, she preferred to lodge with lower class families in order to receive an authentic and accurate account of the poor's condition. Her remarkable chronicle was not published in London until 1847; however, she visited Achill and the missionary settlement in the

⁵⁴ *AMH* 24 Apr. 1845.

⁵⁵ *Hansard's parliamentary debates*: 8th and 9th Victoria, 1845, vol. lxxxii, p. 69.

⁵⁶ Lord Monteagle to Edward Nangle, 22 June 1845, printed in *AMH* 30 July 1845.

summer of 1845, and in the process recorded one of the most valuable commentaries on Nangle's proselytising station.

Achill was the place in Ireland that she had most wanted to see: 'I had heard that it was a little oasis, where the wilderness had been converted into a fruitful field'.⁵⁷ Earlier that year, she had upset the Rev. Charles Gayer, the chief Missionary of the Protestant settlement at Dingle, Co. Kerry, and it is probable that Nangle had been warned of her liberal views even before she set foot on the island.⁵⁸ Upon arrival, the American visitor sought accommodation at a makeshift inn run by Molly Vesey, a local woman who shared with her anecdotes of life at the Mission. Although Nicholson conceded that Nangle's colony had improved the circumstances of many of the people, the poverty of the local population, which stood in stark contrast with the relative comfort of those living at the colony, deeply troubled her:

From what I was able to see for myself of the colony, I could not be so unjust as not to acknowledge heartily that much has been done and will be done to make a barren waste a fruitful field. The neat white cottages and the pleasant roads make a striking contrast with the hurdles about Molly Vesey's; but I do not speak sarcastically when I say that the manners of the people in the shop where I waited and in the parlour of Mr. Nangle, were not in so good keeping with Christian refinement as were those in the cabin of Molly. Pity that Bible Christianity should ever have a counterfeit!⁵⁹

She took issue with the meager wages paid to the labourers, for although their lot was improved by working at the settlement, their desperation put them at Nangle's mercy: 'their eightpence a day will never put shoes upon their feet, convert their stools into chairs, or give them any better broom than the mountain heath for sweeping their cabins. It will never give them the

⁵⁷ Aesnath Nicholson, *Ireland's welcome to the stranger: or excursions through Ireland in 1844 and 1845, for the purpose of personally investigating the condition of the poor* (London, 1847), p. 414.

⁵⁸ Desmond Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 96.

⁵⁹ A. Nicholson, *Ireland's welcome to the stranger*, p. 428.

palatable, well-spread board around which their masters sit and which they have earned for them by their scantily-paid toil'.⁶⁰

Notwithstanding these initial bad impressions, she attended Sunday service at the settlement, which was held in the schoolroom, rather than in the main church. Nangle showed his contempt for Nicholson by keeping her standing alone an uncomfortably long time: 'I went, saw no seat, and stood till every person except the speaker probably might have testified to the colour of my hair and eyes before I was shown one'. Although Nangle must have been aware of her presence and the reasons for the visit, he left the schoolroom before she could approach him. Refusing to accept this snub, the headstrong Nicholson went to the head missionary's house. A servant directed her to the post-office, where she cornered Nangle. Her persistence finally paid off, as he finally agreed to speak with her in his parlour. Since Nicholson's published account of this interview is the most explicit contemporary representation of Edward Nangle, it warrants lengthy quotation:

The nurse entered saying, 'Mr. Nangle has returned,' and she led me to the hall. As I passed the window, two or three young misses, the daughters of Mr. Nangle were looking through it, laughing in a low, vulgar manner. The nurse left me seated in the hall and Mr. Nangle showed me to the parlour, and handed me my letters without saying a word. I asked some questions about the colony. In a few words he told me its prosperity, and ended by saying it had exceeded all expectation.

Having seen a number of converts who had families, and could not read, I asked him if they had Sabbath schools, for adults. 'Not to teach them to read, but to read to them, and instruct them in the Scriptures.' 'Are they anxious to read the Word of God themselves?' I asked. He gave me to understand that it would be a difficult task. I then for encouragement referred him to a New York adult school, where many of the ages of forty-five, fifty and even sixty, had been taught to read. I was afterwards told that this was considered an officious dictation, as though he was incapable of managing his own affairs.

A female now entered, whose silent, fixed stare and appearance altogether led me to suppose that she was some upper servant in the house; but when she seated herself opposite to me at the table, in the presence of Mr. Nangle, her eyes still fastened on me, I ventured to break the silence by asking, 'Is this Mrs. Nangle?'... 'What brought you here?' 'Did you mean, madam, what brought me to Ireland or what brought me to Achill?' 'What

⁶⁰ Ibid.

brought you to Achill?' 'I came to see the colony and to hear from the founders of its progress and true condition, that I might tell it to my own country what good work was going on in this remote island of the ocean.' 'Let me tell you that you came on very improper business.' Mr. Nangle now walked silently out. Knowing that a 'soft answer turneth away wrath,' and that the Irish heart settles into kindness when its first effervescence has been flung off, I waited a little and asked, 'Is not the colony free of access to strangers?' 'Not without letters, madam.'

'I have letters in my hand which Mr. Nangle has had; will you read them?' 'I can read them if you want me to do so.' 'I do not madam, for my own sake. I have not the least anxiety to change your opinion concerning myself.' 'Do you not think the Virgin Mary can do more for you than anybody else?' The question, with the tantalizing manner in which it was put, was so disgusting, that I hesitated whether to answer. I had never before been treated by any female with such vulgarity and so little courtesy...After a short pause she added, 'You say you come to get information of the colony, and I should say you come to ask charity.' 'What occasion have I given you for this supposition? Have I asked charity; does my apparel seem improper, like a beggar?' 'Your dress looks well enough.' I arose, and said, 'Mrs. Nangle, if these letters be true, I would ask you, as you profess to be a Christian, should you like to be treated as you have treated me in your parlour this morning, or have your children treated thus?' I hope my children will never go about the world carrying letters as these.'⁶¹

The suspicion that the Nangles had for Nicholson was nothing short of paranoia. This scene aptly describes the mentality of many of the Achill missionaries, for they believed themselves to be under constant attack by the Catholic priests and fellow-minded Protestants who disapproved of their missionary scheme.⁶² Nerves at the colony were especially sensitive at this time, for just before Nicholson's visit in 1844, a conspiracy to burn down the settlement had been revealed by a local man named Francis McHugh, who claimed that he had refused to take an initiation oath of a group planning the colony's destruction. When Nangle pressed charges, the priests predictably defamed Nangle's witness and charged the missionary-in-chief with scandalising Achill's Catholic community:

That the Rev. Mr. Nangle has indicted eleven of the most simple and inoffensive of our fellow parishioners for the supposed crime of being prepared on a certain night of the next month to attack and destroy the

⁶¹ A. Nicholson, *Ireland's welcome to the stranger*, p. 426-427.

⁶² Desmond Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 99.

Settlement, all on the testimony of one unfortunate individual whose life clearly shews what amount of credit may be attached to his evidence.⁶³

Because the accused men were eventually acquitted, Nangle, unsatisfied with the course of justice, trusted nobody and the arrival of an unwelcome American stranger, who had earlier befriended Father Mathew, perhaps intensified his defensive behaviour. Normally, Nangle would report such a visit *ad nauseum* within the pages of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, yet he only reserved one modest paragraph for Nicholson displaying both his antipathy towards her and his growing paranoia: 'It appears to us that the principal object of the women's mission is to create a spirit of discontent among the lower orders, and to dispose them to regard their superiors as so many unfeeling oppressors'.⁶⁴ He slandered her reputation, claiming her to be 'an emissary of some democratic and revolutionary society'.

Before the Famine the Achill Mission, therefore, had become a permanent fixture on the western landscape. Although after thirteen years, Nangle perhaps fell short in making Achill into the Irish-speaking mini-Switzerland of his dreams, it had achieved extensive renown as an economically self-sufficient community, which demonstrated to the poverty-stricken islanders the benefits of the traditional Protestant virtues of cleanliness, industry, sobriety and good management.⁶⁵ More importantly, Nangle's organisational skills, which had been sharpened through years of combating clerical opposition, made him an extremely valuable resource on the island, for he was best able to coordinate the administration of relief in

⁶³ Roman Catholic Clergy and laity of Achill to Thomas Philips, 30 Dec. 1843 (N.A.I., Outrage Papers Mayo 1844 21/1432).

⁶⁴ *AMH* 29 May 1845.

⁶⁵ Irene Whelan, "The stigma of soupierism" in Cathal Poirteir (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine* (Cork, 1995), p. 138.

times of crisis. Ironically, a Famine had first brought the beleaguered missionary to the West of Ireland in 1831 – eventually leading to the foundation of the mission – and now, in 1845, Nangle and his missionary staff were the best prepared and best equipped on Achill to confront the ravages which resulted from the complete failure of the potato crop.

Famine: The Achill Mission 1845-1854

In the summer of 1845, the *Dublin University Magazine*, a constant ally to Edward Nangle, happily reported that the Achill Mission had by then exceeded all expectations: ‘We now advert to cases of a different kind, in which the Christian missionary boldly threw himself upon an uncultivated territory, in the wildest and the most popish part of Ireland, and trusted entirely to his own energy, and that strength which ever will be given to his faithful servants by the Most High, when they boldly enter upon the path of duty with an unfeigned reliance upon the Divine protection’.⁶⁶ Like most British millennialists during the first half of the nineteenth-century, Nangle was convinced that the ‘days of trial and persecution are fast approaching. In a word, we are persuaded that we are on the eve of those great events foreshown in Revelation XI under the emblem of the slaying and resurrection of the witnesses...’.⁶⁷ Since he attached prophetic significance to current events, and because he viewed the Maynooth grant of 1845 as a sign that ‘political movements both at home and abroad are joining with the Papacy to inflict the prophesied wound upon Christ’s church’, he interpreted the Famine as

⁶⁶ “Achill Mission” in *Dublin University Magazine* xxv (June 1845), p. 739.

⁶⁷ *AMH* 30 July 1845.

nothing less than a divinely sent scourge to chastise a sinful nation.⁶⁸ Although Mayo was only moderately affected by the potato blight in the autumn of 1845, Thomas L. Wood, the inspecting chief officer of the coastguard, reported from a visit to Achill in December that the blight had appeared in the northern part of the island. Nangle knew that it was only a matter of time before the rot would spread throughout Achill: in the summer of 1846, before the second year's crop, his anxiety began to be disclosed in the pages of the *Achill Missionary Herald*.⁶⁹ Naturally enough, Nangle, as an evangelical minister of the Irish Church, felt it his duty to accomplish two things during this time of threatened calamity: to grasp it as an opportunity to help prepare God's people for the second coming; and to secure eternal salvation for those still in the clutches of the Papacy by awakening them to the errors of their ways.

Among the 'national sins' in Nangle's opinion that incurred God's wrath were the government's conciliatory approach to the Catholic church and the increasing violence in Irish society, which in his mind had gone largely unpunished. In writing, he warned liberal members of parliament to reconsider their recent concessions to Catholicism: 'If those guilty of offending God do not repent their sin, he will be visited on the day of judgment'.⁷⁰ Nangle used the Mission's printing press to disseminate his opinions, blaming Catholicism as 'the grand *radical* cause of the fearful

⁶⁸ *AMH* 29 Oct. 1845; John Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade in Great Britain* (Oxford, 1991), p. 122.

⁶⁹ *AMH* 23 Aug. 1846.

⁷⁰ Edward Nangle, *Britain's sin and judgement: a sermon preached in the church of St. Nicholas, Galway, on Sunday, August 6th, 1843* (Achill, 1843), p. 6.

subversion of moral order which prevails in this country'.⁷¹ Since God had admonished entire nations for unpunished murders in Biblical times, he wrote, the Irish nation must pay a similar collective penalty for the rise in unchecked aggression: 'a single arm may strike the blow, but that arm is moved by the national mind'.⁷²

According to Nangle, Catholicism underpinned all of Ireland's troubles. Yet he was quick to realise that his first duty as one of God's ministers was to use his talents, through the instrumentality of the Achill Mission, to provide relief to the poor islanders. And this he did, regardless of religious conviction. Following the first re-appearance of blight on the island in August 1846, Nangle, partly with voluntary contributions and partly with his own funds, ordered a shipment of Indian meal, valued at £3,000, to have available at the settlement for the coming winter, 'at a fair price'.⁷³ Since he could not pay for the cargo straightaway, Nangle, along with the Rev. Charles Seymour, later made rector of Achill in 1847, went to England in order to raise funds to cover the costs of the shipment. Throughout this excursion, which included visits to London and Bath, the missionaries constantly complained of the huge increase in the price of provisions in Ireland. Although Nangle endorsed economic policies of non-interference, he acknowledged that some degree of governmental regulation was required at this time to avoid a full-blown catastrophe and to control escalating food prices: 'We should not wish to see the merchant deprived of his fair profit, but neither do we wish to see

⁷¹ Edward Nangle, *Scriptural education. A sermon preached in behalf of the Castlebar schools, on Sunday. March 17, 1839* (Achill, 1839), p. 13.

⁷² *AMH* 26 Aug. 1846.

⁷³ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 158.

the poor oppressed'.⁷⁴ Ultimately, the trip to England proved successful, although it left Nangle in a 'shattered state of health', which required him to recuperate in Dublin before heading back to Achill.

Meanwhile conditions on Achill had rapidly deteriorated. During the early days of the Famine, Robert Peel's central relief Commission (which had been established in November 1845) along with hundreds of local relief committees that came into being during the spring of 1846, shared joint responsibility for the efficient distribution of relief.⁷⁵ The most active member of the central relief Commission was Sir Randolph Routh, the head of the commissariat branch of the army in Ireland. From February 1846, the commissariat established a network of food depots, and one of these was a building on the settlement; it was to serve as one of the seventy-six sub-depots along the south and west coasts of Ireland, which would distribute Indian meal under the superintendence of the inspecting officer of the coastguard and the police.⁷⁶ Nangle did not have any control over the depot at the settlement; and since its stores were often empty (indeed it was closed by Routh during the autumn of 1846) he purchased meal from places like Newport and Westport at a great personal cost in order to feed the islanders. Although the Mission had brought numerous temporal benefits to the island, Nangle felt powerless as the blight continued to spread, threatening to destroy the potato crop that had been stockpiled for the coming winter months. The following excerpt from the

⁷⁴ *AMH* 25 Nov. 1846.

⁷⁵ James Donnelly, "Famine and government response, 1845-6", in W.E. Vaughan (ed), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union, 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989), p. 278.

⁷⁶ Thomas P. O'Neil, "The organisation and administration of relief, 1845-52", in R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (eds), *The Great Famine: studies in Irish history 1845-52* (Dublin, 1994), p. 216.

Achill Missionary Herald of September 26, 1846 reveals the desperation of the islanders:

We are credibly informed, so great is the distress, that instances have occurred where persons, on coming to the store, have actually offered to sell their beds, or some other articles of furniture, so that the cravings of their starving offspring might for a moment be alleviated.⁷⁷

By October, 1846, the island was overrun with panic. With the commissariat depot at the settlement still closed, Nangle and his missionary staff, in order to alleviate the people's anxiety, hired the most destitute islanders to work on the settlement farms and petitioned Dublin Castle to send relief to Achill from the Westport relief depot immediately. Although Thomas L. Wood, who served as the commissariat clerk in Dugort, was permitted to make a few sales of Indian meal 'but only to the point which is absolutely necessary for the preservation of human life', this was not enough to stave the hunger.⁷⁸ In anticipation of the imminent disaster, Nangle had forwarded a memorial to the Board of Works, the primary body responsible for administering outdoor relief during the early years of the Famine, back in April 1846 in which he explained the need of a pier on the island in order to create employment, encourage fishing, and to dock large ships, which carried essential provisions.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the Board of Works was slow to respond – no doubt overwhelmed by requests for relief from all over the country – and subsequently three hookers, each loaded with ten tons of Indian meal, lost nearly half their cargo while attempting to negotiate Achill's treacherous coast during a December storm in 1846.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Dr

⁷⁷ *AMH* 26 Sept. 1846.

⁷⁸ Lister to Thomas L. Wood, 29 Oct. 1846 (B.L., War Office Papers, 63/121), as quoted in Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The great hunger* (New York, 1980), p. 139.

⁷⁹ Edward Nangle to Captain Kennedy, 15 Apr. 1846 (N.A.I., Famine Relief Papers, RLFC3/1/1525).

⁸⁰ *AMH* 20 Dec. 1846.

Neason Adams, seemingly acting out of frustration, wrote a letter in October 1846 to Thomas Reddington, the Under Secretary, drawing attention to the plight of the sick, aged and infirm, especially the one hundred orphans at the settlement, and hoped that a shipment of Indian meal could be sent forthwith to the government store on the island from the larger depot at Westport.⁸¹ Reddington, a Catholic landowner from Co. Galway, who held the highest post in government by any Catholic since the seventeenth century, acknowledged Adams's letter and promptly forwarded it to Sir Randolph Routh.⁸² Earlier in October, Routh, a committed *laissez faire* liberal, had heard testimony from an Achill delegation, complaining about the high cost of food in the district. The results of this meeting informed Adams of what kind of a response to expect from the government. In answering the delegation, Routh offered his regret, yet he refused to interfere with market forces, determined to act in accordance with the enlightened principles of political economy.⁸³ Following this line, in July 1846 the Board of Works, with permission from the lord lieutenant, had made available £77 to the Achill Relief Commission to build and improve the roads on the island, thereby ensuring that the poor used money earned for food.⁸⁴ In November, Adams

⁸¹ Neason Adams to Thomas Reddington, 19 Oct. 1846 (N.A.I., Famine Relief Papers, RLFC3/2/21/33, enclosed).

⁸² Thomas Reddington to Neason Adams, 29 Oct. 1846 (N.A.I., Famine Relief Papers, RLFC3/2/21/33, enclosed).

⁸³ *The Nation* 17 Oct. 1846; Donal Kerr, 'A nation of beggars'? *priests, people, and politics in Famine Ireland 1846-1852* (Oxford, 1998), p. 37; Routh advised the delegation to read and study Edmund Burke's *Thoughts and details on scarcity presented to... William Pitt in the month of November 1795*.

⁸⁴ R. Pennefather to Achill Relief Commissioners, 4 July 1846 (N.A.I., Distress Papers CSORP 1846 3044); William Stanley to Achill Relief Committee, 11 July 1846 (N.A.I., Distress Papers, CSORP 1846 3214).

informed Dublin Castle that this strategy was completely inappropriate, as 'These poor creatures are almost unable to walk to their work'.⁸⁵

Since the Achill Relief Committee, set up in June 1846, had ceased to meet from 15 August 1846, owing to the ongoing sectarian mistrust on the island, both Nangle and Adams agreed that the Mission had to administer the majority of relief to Achill, especially since the government seemingly refused to offer any useful assistance.⁸⁶ In February 1847, the settlement employed 2,912 labourers – 740 being Catholics; fed 600 children two meals a day, including 100 orphans; and raised various voluntary subscriptions to relieve the Famine victims.⁸⁷ Although these numbers suggest mass conversions on Achill, the large numbers of Protestant labourers mentioned here most probably came to the island from neighbouring areas to find work at the Mission. Since Thomas Plunket, who succeeded Trench, becoming bishop of the united dioceses of Tuam, Killala, and Achonry in 1839, only confirmed 400 converts in the summer of 1849, most of the Protestants employed by Nangle at this time likely came from outside Achill. Due to these impressive relief efforts, in February 1847 Nangle boasted that nobody on Achill had yet died from starvation; however, it would have been extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to have maintained this intense level of relief, especially since the price of food continued to sky-rocket.⁸⁸ Although Nangle grew impatient with the government's non-interference policy, he wrote to Sir Randolph Routh, praising the attributes of private charity: 'So far by God's

⁸⁵ Neason Adams to Thomas Reddington, 11 Nov. 1846 (N.A.I., Famine Relief Collection, RLFC3/2/21/33, enclosed).

⁸⁶ Neason Adams to Thomas Reddington, 29 Oct. 1846 (N.A.I., Famine Relief Papers, RLFC3/2/21/33, enclosed).

⁸⁷ *AMH* 24 Feb. 1847.

⁸⁸ *AMH* 27 Jan. 1847.

blessing on the efforts of private benevolence, we have had no death from starvation in this island.’⁸⁹ However, in the same correspondence, Nangle informed Routh that he intended to cut back the amount of relief the Mission had been administering, as the government relief stores on the island had been filled to capacity in January. He felt that the Mission had done enough for the moment, and that if further distress occurred, the government, which kept depots closed, would be to blame: ‘Should any such calamity unhappily occur, I think it right to release myself from all participation in the responsibility by informing you of my intention [to cease administering relief].’⁹⁰

Although Nangle did his utmost to alleviate the suffering of the afflicted islanders, opposition to the colony continued to increase. Yet the Mission’s relief efforts continued ‘notwithstanding the most savage denunciation, and the most brutal outrages, which the Roman priests have stimulated the people to practice towards the converts.’⁹¹ Catholics and Protestants alike questioned Nangle’s motives and each shipment of meal procured by the settlement gave birth to many skeptics. Besides the vexed question of national education, the capacity of the Protestant colonies, like the ones at Dingle and Achill, to provide material relief in times of scarcity was the source of the most bitter controversy between Protestants and Catholics ever since the early days of the ‘Second Reformation’, and it was during a famine in Dingle in 1831 that the sinister term ‘souper’ first entered into

⁸⁹ Edward Nangle to Sir Randolph Routh, 20 Jan. 1847 (N.A.I. Famine Relief Papers, RLFC3/2/21/34).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ “Achill Mission” in *Dublin University Magazine*, xxv (June 1845), p. 741.

common usage.⁹² Unsurprisingly, charges of 'souperism', or the exchange of spiritual allegiances for temporal advantage, quickly fell upon evangelicals like Nangle. Already, in desolate places like Kinsale, John Murphy, the Catholic bishop of Cork, had warned Paul Cullen, the rector of the Irish College in Rome, of Protestant proselytisers, who had been taking advantage of the difficult times to carry out their work: 'Proselytism is already beginning. Immense funds are being made up in England by the Exeter Hall party avowedly for the purpose and here in Kinsale, the fanatics and the houses of the poor, with food, tempt them and surely they comply with their conditions'.⁹³ Others, like Edward Maginn, coadjutor bishop of Derry and the first student to attend the Irish College in Paris after the French Revolution, warned Cullen about the activities of 'the fanatics in Dingle and elsewhere', who used porridge to seduce poor Catholics from the faith of their fathers.⁹⁴ After visiting Ireland in 1847, Tobias Kirby, who succeeded Cullen as rector of the Irish College in Rome, informed Propaganda Fide of the conversions taking place in Connacht, Cork, and Kerry and urged its secretary, Cardinal Giacomo Filippo Fransoni to warn the Irish bishops to resist 'any effort of the Protestants who give the poor a morsel of bread with one hand and kill their immortal souls with the other'.⁹⁵ The English Catholic magazine, *The Tablet*, on 5 June 1847 trumpeted serious charges of souperism against Nangle, claiming that the money pouring in from England was being used to cajole Catholics into joining the missionary settlement: 'No one gets anything

⁹² Irene Whelan, "The stigma of souperism", p. 140; D.P. Thompson, *A brief account of the change in religious opinion now taking place in Dingle and the west of the County Kerry* (Dublin, 1846), p. 28.

⁹³ John Murphy to Paul Cullen, 30 Jan. 1847 (I.C.R., Cullen Papers, MS 1310).

⁹⁴ Edward Maginn to Paul Cullen, 1 Apr. 1847, (I.C.R., Cullen Papers, MS 1363).

⁹⁵ Quoted in Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 142.

whatever that does not go to the Protestant school and conform to the Protestant formula. In short, it is given at the Protestant clergyman's discretion to starve poor Catholics into Protestantism or, failing that, to let them starve'.⁹⁶

Since the attacks from Catholics were becoming increasingly more vicious, Nangle concluded that his Mission was succeeding. Even before the Famine's onslaught, there was evidence that conversions on Achill were already on the rise: 'the number of converts has steadily and progressively increased; the external circumstances of the colony have flourished; the church has been repeatedly enlarged for the accommodation of the increasing flock to hear the word of God'.⁹⁷ When the national and provincial press accused Nangle of engaging in 'souperism', he flatly denied the allegations: 'Very many have applied to us for permission to read their recantations in our church, but all such applications have been steadily refused...Now is the time for instruction, not proselytism. This is a distinction which should never be lost sight of and all our proceedings should be framed with constant reference to it'.⁹⁸ Even the hymns used during public worship in the missionary churches at this time contained themes of liberation in the face of numerous obstacles:

Hasten where our altar's free,
Call on us to bend the knee.
Far from blood-stained Popery
In freedom's happy clime.

Better far to boldly brave
The foreign foe, the whelming wave,
Then live a fool, or die a slave

⁹⁶ *The Tablet*, 5 June 1847.

⁹⁷ "Achill Mission" in *Dublin University Magazine*, xxv (June 1845), p. 741.

⁹⁸ *AMH* 31 Mar. 1847.

To Romish knavery.⁹⁹

Since these sources emanate directly from the parties on the island, it is impossible to say which side was correct. Yet, local anger directed at Nangle appears to have been generated more by the suspicion that he had access to much more money than was admitted to and that these funds were retained for proselytising purposes, when they should have been used for relief.¹⁰⁰ Dominic McLoughlin, a member of the Achill Relief Committee, which had reconvened in February 1847, claimed that subscribers had provided Nangle with a total of £7,800 in relief funds during the previous year – an amount that would have provided 900 families with £8 each for the entire year; whereas Nangle made available no more than 3d. per man per day, and 2d. per child for food and employment. In the pages of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, Nangle responded that the real income for the year in question was actually £3,384, out of which he provided £2,534 pounds in relief expenditure, leaving a remaining balance of £850 with the treasurer. In his defense, Nangle noted the soaring cost of provisions as the Famine increased in its severity, a useful fact that his critic had failed to consider.¹⁰¹

McLoughlin and other members of the Achill Relief Committee had previously incurred Nangle's displeasure when they had prevented him from joining when it reconvened early in 1847. When the Irish poor law of 1838 was amended in 1847, which permitted the granting of outdoor relief to vulnerable groups such as the sick and disabled, and widows with two or more legitimate children, the principal clergymen of each denomination along with the three highest rate payers were supposed to serve on local relief

⁹⁹ *AMH* 25 Apr. 1852.

¹⁰⁰ *AMH* 29 Nov. 1847.

committees. Although Nangle should have qualified on both accounts, his name was absent from the official list that was sent to Dublin Castle.¹⁰² Furthermore, Nangle's anger with the relief committee grew when it became public that Dominic McLoughlin had travelled to England in the winter of 1847 without the committee's consent in order to raise funds to support the island. Upon McLoughlin's return, Nangle castigated him further for failing to provide details of the subscriptions collected. Matters worsened as McLoughlin baldly accused Nangle of engaging in souperism: 'Were not some children at your school dismissed and refused relief because their parents would not sign some document about popery and the Blessed Virgin?' Predictably, Nangle denied this allegation and challenged anyone to name one person who had been denied relief from the Mission; however, he admitted that parents of children attending his schools had to avow, in writing, that Catholicism was idolatrous.¹⁰³ In addition, Nangle also proclaimed that the relief committee marked the names of converts, denying them government relief, and that McLoughlin, who owned land in Achill, practised souperism himself, when he dispossessed poor families on his holdings who had called at the Mission infirmary when sick.

Invariably, others questioned the credibility of Nangle's complaints of a Catholic proselytising campaign. Earlier in 1847, Nangle, in the pages of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, had attacked Richard Lynch, a Catholic and manager of the British Relief Association depot in Westport. The British Relief Association, founded in London on 1 January 1847 to relieve 'the very numerous class of the sufferers...who are beyond the reach of the

¹⁰¹ Ibid; Irene Whelan "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission", p. 129.

Government', had offered to feed needy Irish children who attended schools in existence before 1845. Since the Achill Mission schools had been able to provide for their own children, Lynch, with the backing of the Marquis of Sligo, decided to use the limited resources of the British Relief Association to aid the priest's schools on the island. Fearing that Catholics would in turn send their children to the island's priest's schools, Nangle protested to the Marquis of Sligo against Lynch's undertaking, which threatened the existence of the Mission schools. The Marquis of Sligo, who held Lynch in the highest esteem, rebuffed Nangle's complaint, replying that because resources were limited, some National Schools in the area were also excluded. In a letter sent to Nangle on 11 January 1848 and subsequently published in the *Achill Missionary Herald*, the Marquis showed that he was no friend of the Achill Missionary colony, 'I will not assist you [Nangle] in displaying yourself as an oppressed and persecuted Missionary...I will not attempt to bandy abuse with one so well skilled in it – though you have forfeited the respect due to your sacred calling, by being a minister of strife, and not of peace, – whose whole business it is to ferment religious divisions and bitterness'.¹⁰⁴ Earlier, in 1839, Nangle had angered the Marquis of Sligo, who had befriended many Catholic priests in west Mayo, by charging him with neglecting his Protestant duty, infecting other landlords with his "evil example".¹⁰⁵ Unfazed by these chiding remarks from such a distinguished man, Nangle proceeded to group the Marquis of Sligo with those who had been conspiring with Catholics against both Protestantism and the missionary work on Achill: 'Every reader of the

¹⁰² *AMH* 28 Sept. 1847.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *AMH* 31 Jan. 1848.

Bible knows that this is an old accusation against God's faithful ministers; it was a charge brought by the enemies of God against prophets and apostles – I consider it an honour and privilege to be included with them in the same censure'.¹⁰⁶ Unsurprisingly, Nangle found justification through this type of condemnation, which he interpreted as evidence of divine favour.

Unfortunately, the degree in which Nangle engaged in souperism is impossible to establish, but by knowing his personality before the Famine, and by highlighting his attitude to the opposition, it is reasonable to assume that whatever relief came to Achill via the Mission's gates was given first to potential or nominal converts.¹⁰⁷ Catholic priests like Michael Gallagher, unable to muster adequate relief for the starving population on Achill, felt impotent against Nangle's seemingly limitless access to funds from wealthy English contributors, who wholeheartedly condoned the conversion of Irish Catholics to the established faith. Another priest, Michael O'Sullivan, had also told Paul Cullen of the significant gains made by the Protestant Missions in Achill and Dingle: 'The fanatics are busy with the work of Proselytism whenever they can act with impunity. I regret to state that they have been least too successful in the Western part of the country and in Kerry'.¹⁰⁸

In December 1847, at the Famine's height, Nangle operated thirty-nine schools, while the priests managed only four of their own schools. A despondent Gallagher told Father Thomas L. Synnott, the director of the Catholic Central Relief Commission in Dublin that 'poverty in the area has

¹⁰⁵ Edward Nangle, *Scriptural education. A sermon preached in behalf of the Castlebar schools, on Sunday. March 17, 1839* (Achill, 1839), p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁸ Michael O'Sullivan to Paul Cullen, 15 Apr. 1847 (I.C.R., Cullen Papers, MS 1372)

compelled the greater number of the population to send their children to Nangle's proselytising, villainous schools; he has at this moment one thousand children of the Catholics of the parish attending...They are dying of hunger and rather than die, they have submitted to his impious tenets'.¹⁰⁹ Apparently, a contribution from Daniel Murray, the archbishop of Dublin, provided some breathing room for Gallagher, whose parishioners did not 'succumb to his [Nangle's] infectious tenets and it must be a source of gratification to your illustrious Archbishop to hear that I am enabled to state to him the impious efforts of Nangle to pervert my starving people have of late been much frustrated'.¹¹⁰ Soon, Nangle's name became synonymous with Protestant proselytising activity in Ireland, for even priests in distant towns, like Dunmore, Co. Wexford, compared the town parson to the Achill Missionary: 'We have to contend with a Protestant clergyman named Blundell, who, in his way is making as great efforts to proselytise as ever Nangle did'.¹¹¹ Peter Fitzmaurice, parish priest of Omery and Ballindoon, Co. Mayo, vicar forane in the Tuam diocese, commented that many who worked for men like Nangle were of the worst classes and that these zealous Protestants, determined to expose Catholicism as a sham, were merely, 'changing bad Catholics...into good Hypocrites'.¹¹² Since Nangle firmly believed that 'Gratuitous relief is ruinous to a people', and as funds were limited, he invariably attracted those most in need; in September 1847 he lowered the daily wage paid to his labourers to 1/2 stone of meal a day – with children receiving two meals daily

¹⁰⁹ Michael Gallagher to Thomas L. Synnott, 5 Jan. 1848 (D.D.A., Murray Papers).

¹¹⁰ Michael Gallagher to Thomas L. Synnott, 14 Apr. 1848 (D.D.A., Murray Papers).

¹¹¹ Patrick MacLoughlin to Thomas L. Synnott, 15 Apr. 1848 (D.D.A., Murray Papers).

¹¹² Peter Fitzmaurice to Thomas L. Synnott, 10 June 1848 (D.D.A., Murray Papers).

in the Mission schools.¹¹³ He claimed to have employed all who applied for work at the settlement, accepting one from each family, thereby ensuring that relief was evenly distributed.

Although Nangle's relief efforts helped many, accusations of souperism were almost inescapable given the fierce sectarian competition which had become commonplace on Achill even before 1845. Undoubtedly, the Mission's relief efforts saved many lives on the island, for many would have certainly perished during the worst period of the Famine. Letters written by people from the villages of Duninver and Bull's Mouth and published in the *Achill Missionary Herald* expressed thanks for the relief Nangle provided before the government began to sponsor outdoor public works in September 1847.¹¹⁴ Other benefits introduced by the colony, like the infirmary run by Dr Adams, "the Saint Luke of Achill," and the Mission schools, which fed many children, were undoubtedly appreciated on the island. Unfortunately, Nangle's irascibility and obsessive feud with the "villainous minions of antichrist" shaded the almost heroic efforts the Mission made to help those in need within the minds of innumerable Irish men and women.

The Famine and the gargantuan task to combat its ravages also help to illustrate the deep divide which existed between the respective mindsets of Nangle and his adversaries. Nangle's steely determination to carry out his Mission often prevented him from understanding local attitudes. For instance, on one occasion in March 1847, at the Famine's height, when the *John of Rush* landed at Dugort with provisions for the distressed islanders, Nangle thought

¹¹³ *AMH* 29 Sept. 1847.

¹¹⁴ *AMH* 24 Apr. 1848.

that it would be necessary to protect the supplies with armed officers.¹¹⁵ After it became evident that such policing was unnecessary, a mollified Nangle attributed the orderly unloading of the cargo as a sign of the people's goodwill.¹¹⁶ However, a different interpretation could see that perhaps the stigma of soupism kept the supplies safe, for as was said of the Protestant Mission in Dingle, Co. Kerry, 'even the dogs wouldn't take the soup'.¹¹⁷ Outrage reports from coast guard officers stationed near Achill during the Famine support this, for they demonstrate that during periods of extreme distress, desperate inhabitants along the western seaboard frequently plundered relief ships which navigated Blacksod Bay, while leaving provisions bound for Dugort unmolested.¹¹⁸

Since Nangle regarded the potato Famine as a scourge sent from God to punish the Irish for their national sins, it is not surprising that he also attributed the substantial gains made by the Mission to the same agency. Despite cutbacks in the number of meals given to children attending Nangle's schools after the winter of 1847, Bishop Thomas Plunket, who had taken a lively interest in the events on Achill, was able to satisfactorily examine over 2,000 children, the majority having Catholic parents, during his three day visit in September 1848.¹¹⁹ Opponents, always skeptical of the reports that Nangle published in the *Achill Missionary Herald*, maintained that as long as the Famine's end was not in sight, families weakened by the tragedy would continue to send their children to Nangle's schools to ensure that they were

¹¹⁵ Dunlop to Rear Admiral Hugh Pigot, 27 Mar. 1847 (N.A.I. Outrage Papers Mayo 1847 1334).

¹¹⁶ Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission", p. 131.

¹¹⁷ D.P. Thompson, *A brief account of the change in religious opinion*, p. 35.

¹¹⁸ Wood to Keane 17 Aug. 1847 (N.A.I., Outrage Papers, Mayo 1847 1345).

¹¹⁹ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 164; *AMH* 25 September 1848.

fed. Once again, harsher critics continued to question the authenticity of Nangle's converts and to assert that they were actually Protestants brought in from other parts of Ireland; however, it is unlikely that the 2,000 children inspected by Bishop Plunkett were imported to the island, whatever about the 400, of which 372 were Catholic, that he confirmed a year later.¹²⁰ As expected, Nangle always maintained that these conversions were genuine and undeniable proof of the supremacy of the true religion of the Bible over Catholic chicanery.

Other outward signs, besides the number of Protestant schools on the island and the number of converts reported by Nangle, indicated that the Mission was flourishing. Between 1838 and 1851, 105 died Protestant on the island, the majority being buried in the settlement's cemetery.¹²¹ The story of a woman who interrupted her brother's funeral service at the colony, made off with the corpse, and had it interred in the Catholic cemetery further underlines the bitter divisions on the island and the importance of being identified with a particular camp – even after death.¹²² Since Nangle believed that the Famine represented “a great seed time” for the spread of Protestantism, the growth of the Protestant community on Achill, which now included a second generation of communicants, filled him with confidence and the assurance that ‘in due time there will be an abundant harvest’.¹²³ To accommodate the swelling numbers of Protestants, Charles Seymour, the island's rector, received permission from Richard O'Donnel, the island's principal landlord, in August

¹²⁰ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 165; *AMH* 24 Sept. 1849; Irene Whelan, “Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission”, p. 130.

¹²¹ Achill church register MFCI (Microfilm Church of Ireland) Reels 33,34, National Archives, Dublin.

¹²² Irish Folklore Commission, Volume 1438, p. 218.

¹²³ *AMH* 26 May 1849.

1848 to build a parish church at Achill Sound. He also obtained forty acres on the mainland, near Ballycroy, for a glebe along with a parish house. Since the Mission's coffers were empty, Nangle and Seymour promptly travelled to England once again to solicit support and commenced a massive letter writing campaign to raise funds for the expansion project. One year later, 1,300 men, women and children assembled for the laying of the foundation stone for the parish house at Achill Sound, celebrating the Mission's success by singing hymns in the Irish language.¹²⁴

Hymns, like the one mentioned above, were an effective instructional tool used by Nangle to transmit spiritual truths to his mostly illiterate congregation, which looked to the head missionary for comfort from the persistent harangues of the priests and justification for their conversion. Moreover, because of its brevity and simplicity, a hymn's effect was immediate. Apparently, congregational singing was a popular activity at the missionary settlement, and the singing of spiritually uplifting hymns, whose language was usually clear, precise, and succinct, also served as a welcomed emotional supplement to the sombre tone of Nangle's sermons, which regularly droned on against Romish error and warned of the world's inevitable doom. Congregational singing at the Mission churches served at least two functions: first, it was an emotional release from the dark reality of their subsistence living and secondly, they efficiently transmitted Protestant doctrine in an enjoyable manner. Some of these hymns focused on the individual's inner spirituality, while others addressed the concerns of a religious community under siege.

¹²⁴ *AMH* 24 Sept. 1849; Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 168.

Eventually, combating the Famine's fury took its toll on Nangle. He occasionally left Achill for his Dublin residence, 14 Holles Street, in order to recuperate, leaving the chief missionary duties to his assistant, Edward Lowe. In 1849, Dr Adams, now assisted by a surgeon, Dr Robert Moritz, continued to provide essential medical assistance during what was 'another year of unparalleled distress'.¹²⁵ Yet Nangle's sojourns to the Irish capital did not suggest that he was abandoning the colony, especially since it had just begun to reap the greatest rewards. But the Mission, burdened by debt, struggled to pay its labourers and staff, and the Irish Islands and Coasts Society agreed to ease some of the pressure and encourage expansion by paying the salaries and rents of the school-teachers, who taught in thirty-four Mission schools – with five in the Ballycroy area.¹²⁶ While this created much needed positive publicity, the greatest boost to Nangle's confidence at this time came from the pen of John Gregg, the evangelical minister of Trinity Church, who was considered to be, 'the most popular preacher in Dublin'.¹²⁷

John Gregg, who could preach with equal fluency in both English and Irish, had been won over to the evangelical fold through the preaching of B.W. Mathias, the minister at the Bethesda Chapel, often called "the Cathedral of Methodism", on Dorset Street in north Dublin. In 1839, devout evangelicals recognized his preaching talents and built Trinity Church for him, the chapel of ease to St. Thomas's Church, whose rector was Archdeacon Thomas Magee, son of William Magee, former archbishop of Dublin and acknowledged instigator of the 'Second Reformation' in Ireland. Prominent

¹²⁵ Neason Adams, *Statement of funds, etc., received from England, Scotland and Ireland for the Achill hospital and dispensary for the sick, aged, and infirm* (Achill, 1849), p. 3.

¹²⁶ AMH 27 May 1849.

people like Lord Morpeth and Lord Palmerston often attended service at Trinity Church, the latter even offered Gregg the living of All Souls' Marylebone, which he politely refused due to his deep involvement with Irish affairs.¹²⁸ In addition to his impressive accomplishments – he became bishop of Cork in 1862 – Gregg was an unwavering defender of the Protestant Mission to the Roman Catholics of Ireland, which explains the reason for his visit to Achill in September 1849, 'to test the opinions I had formed by seeing and hearing for myself'.

The first thing that struck Gregg upon arrival was the noticeable "dullness" of the adults and eager willingness of the children to learn. A man, seemingly ignoring the 'exclusive dealing' orders of the priests, offered to carry Gregg's luggage to the colony for a little money and the events which immediately followed are suggestive of the new influence of Nangle's schools on the island:

He was the dullest Irish peasant I ever met; he was a Roman Catholic, but without bigotry or prejudice. He talked Irish almost exclusively. I tried to teach him the prayer, "O God give me the Holy Spirit, for Jesus Christ's sake;" but he could not commit it to memory; he always broke down before he came to the end. I tried at least fifty times, but it would not do – he scratched his head and seemed angry with his brains, but they would not work. The children as we came along seemed to wonder at his dullness; they picked up the prayer at once, and repeated it in English and Irish.¹²⁹

When Gregg questioned these children about the 'leading truths of Christianity'; they answered with 'accuracy and readiness...like persons in whose mind were embedded the great truths of the Scripture, as if they rejected the Romish errors with scorn and contempt'.¹³⁰ The answers of these

¹²⁷ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 69.

¹²⁸ R.S. Gregg, "*Faithful unto death*": *Memorials of the life of John Gregg, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross* (Dublin, 1879), p. 180.

¹²⁹ John Gregg, *A Missionary visit to Achill and Erris, and other parts of the county of Mayo* (Dublin, 1850), p. 15.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

children, who all had spent some time in Nangle's schools, were in stark contrast to the responses of a young girl, who instead of going to school, busied herself with minding her family's cows. To Gregg, she was 'a specimen of what thousands in the Island would continue to be, only for the blessing of God on the preserving and self-denying efforts of the missionaries'.¹³¹

Gregg was also profoundly impressed with the efficiency of the Mission farms, which he happily reported employed both Protestant and Catholic labourers. The orderliness and neatness of the missionary settlement's physical structure gave the colony an air of superiority and refinement, standing in unmistakable contrast to the random rundale patterns elsewhere:

There were many comfortable farmhouses and cottages, all built since the Mission commenced. I met several decently-dressed and respectable-looking people all along the road; and children also, with all the hilarity of youth, flocking in numbers to school. The colony itself gives one the idea of entire civilization and comfort. There are several well-built houses, with vegetable and flower-gardens in front. All this reposing under Slievemore, with a southern aspect...and everything in the houses and manners of the people was in keeping with the comfortable appearance of the place.¹³²

The Mission schools and other institutions of the colony equally heartened Gregg, for there now existed five Protestant places of worship: Dugort, Bull's Mouth, Achill Sound, Mweelin, and more recently, in Duagh, three of them licensed by the bishop, which offered divine service to the one thousand persons professing Protestantism before 1850.¹³³ Apparently these churches were regularly filled to capacity on Sundays with 'orderly and anxious congregations', who would eagerly listen to Nangle's sermons, which he preached in both English and Irish. Gregg supported Nangle's plan to train

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 16.

¹³² Ibid., p. 17.

local boys in both modern agricultural methods and the Scriptures at the school in Mweelin and he castigated those Protestants who 'are still very cold and unfriendly to the Mission'. Since Gregg represented the strong convictions of the uncompromising evangelical strand of the established church his compliments, which perhaps exaggerated the Mission's achievements, should come as no surprise; however, his comments undoubtedly encouraged Nangle and further publicised his success to the greater Protestant world. Moreover, while Nangle's detractors would say that the hundreds of conversions during the Famine years were feigned, (and it seems that many of those who converted either emigrated or 'jumped' back to Catholicism as soon as conditions improved), they never took issue with the numbers Nangle and Gregg reported.

We must keep in mind that on Achill, especially during the terrible years of the Famine, nothing created more controversy or affected relations between the Catholic Church and the missionary settlement than actual conversions. Nangle knew this; and what was particularly galling to the Catholic priests on the island in the period from 1834 until 1850 was that the overwhelming majority of conversions on Achill were from Catholicism to Protestantism. Sometimes parish priests may have contributed to the very process they so opposed. It seems that clergymen like Father Dwyer and Gallagher estranged themselves from the people and pushed disaffected Catholics into Nangle's camp. The Catholic priests demanded payment before providing the sacraments, "masses" and funerals, thereby undermining their trust. 'There is scarcely an incident in life', an islander told Harriet

¹³³ John Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

Martineau', 'in which the priest, and consequently his fee, is not mixed up'.¹³⁴ A Catholic man on Achill told John Gregg that the priest would only read the last rites to his dying wife if he was paid for the service.¹³⁵ Others became disillusioned when the sprinkling of holy water upon infected potatoes failed to counteract the blight, or when the blessing of Blacksod Bay failed to increase the number of herring caught by fishermen. Such observations came via suspect witnesses. A more impartial source, taken from the Irish Folklore Commission, concerns an Achill priest who recommended the planting of turnips rather than seed-potatoes during the Famine. Those who disobeyed the priest were said to have had a good potato crop and subsequently 'went over' to Nangle.¹³⁶ Never missing an opportunity to chastise the priests, Nangle capitalised upon such blunders by telling the people to put their faith in God, not man: 'Surely God is angry with the land; the potatoes would not have rotted unless He sent the rot into them'.¹³⁷ In his sermons, Nangle put a melancholy emphasis on the earth being no place for abiding joy, and God being a terrible judge of mankind's sins. Such a theology suited well the mixed mood of depression and desperation which came down upon the people during the Famine, and it is probable that at least some of Nangle's success came from preaching a message which resonated with the pessimistic mood of the time.

Since many Catholics attributed the conversions on Achill to the cold realities of the Famine, most figured that apostates would "jump" back when conditions improved or, if all else failed, during their last days; it was a threat

¹³⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Letters from Ireland* (London, 1852), p. 106.

¹³⁵ John Gregg, *A missionary visit*, p. 20.

¹³⁶ Irish Folklore Commission, Volume 1348, p. 425-425.

¹³⁷ *AMH* 24 Feb. 1847.

to the whole community if converts refused to return to Roman Catholicism on their deathbed. The fact that so much consequence was attached to the deathbed declaration of converts shows how important the issue was to contemporaries.¹³⁸ The *Achill Missionary Herald* carried monthly reports of those who died strong in the Protestant faith, while priests like Father Dwyer and his curate James Henry contested each claim. The island's folklore contains many accounts of deathbed conversations, with some of the dying being forced by family members to accept either the parson or the priest.¹³⁹ One story tells the intensity of the island's sectarian competition as priest and minister squabbled over who would administer the last rites to a group of shipwrecked sailors.¹⁴⁰ Since the authenticity of a conversion is impossible to establish, discovering one's religion at the time of death is extremely useful; and between 1845 and 1850, sixty-nine people called for Edward Nangle during their last hours.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 154.

¹³⁹ Irish Folklore Commission, Volume 1229, p. 23, 46-47; Volume 1329, p. 404-405; Volume 1015, p. 282-283.

¹⁴⁰ Irish Folklore Commission, Volume 1329, p. 405.

¹⁴¹ MFCI (Microfilm Church of Ireland) Reels 33,34 (Burials), National Archives Ireland.

Chapter Five

After the Famine: The Catholic Counter-attack

By 1848, it seemed patently clear that a significant missionary breakthrough was occurring in parts of Ireland. Paul Cullen, who acted as the papal representative for Irish ecclesiastical affairs, had visited Ireland in the summer of 1847 in order to assess the condition of the Catholic Church, especially in the south and west. The advances made by Protestant proselytisers, especially within MacHale's archdiocese of Tuam, shocked Cullen and before he returned to Rome, he requested that the Irish clergy send to him any information regarding the progress of Protestant societies. Lengthy accounts given by parish priests, curates, and bishops, like Cornelius Egan of Ardfert, who apologised for the widespread conversions in his diocese, only raised his concern.¹ Mary T. Collins of the Presentation Convent in Dingle wrote to Cullen on 4 February 1848 to report the death of Charles Gayer, the head missionary of the Dingle Mission, whom she feared would be replaced by 'a Parson from Achill, the heart of proselytism'.² On 13 June 1848 James Maher, Cullen's uncle and parish priest in Carlow, told his nephew that in Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Kerry, and above all, in Connacht, conversions were taking place by the hundreds.³ To fight these zealous Protestants, Cullen needed the bishops to be united, and since neither he nor Rome desired to force MacHale into taking action except through gentle persuasion, especially as the debate on the Queens Colleges threatened to rip the Catholic hierarchy

¹ Cornelius Egan to Paul Cullen, 14 Sept. 1847 (I.C.R., Cullen Papers MSS 1467 Papers); Cornelius Egan to Paul Cullen, 16 Feb. 1848 (I.C.R., Cullen Papers MSS 1765).

² Mary T. Collins to Paul Cullen, 4 Feb. 1848 (I.C.R., Cullen Papers MSS 1525).

³ James Maher to Paul Cullen 13 June 1848 (I.C.R., Cullen Papers MSS 1605).

into opposing factions, Cullen decided not to press the issue at this time; however he kept a watchful eye on the progress of proselytism in the archdiocese of Tuam, which was fast becoming scandalously known as a second 'Protestant Ulster'.⁴

Writing in the Fifteenth Report of the Mission, Nangle noted that the Famine continued into 1848 and that a large portion of the island remained uncultivated. However, this did not stop the inflow of religious tracts and Bibles into the island, for at the height of the Famine, the Hibernian Bible Society provided 278 Bibles, 1,400 testaments and 1,475 portions; while the Trinitarian Bible Society distributed an additional 3,000 portions through the Mission schools.⁵ Once again, charges of souperism were launched against the missionary staff, as the feeding of large numbers of children in the Mission schools continued. When the hungry children arrived for their lessons, which covered Bible lessons and other subjects, Nangle and his staff would provide them with two meals a day until the summer of 1847, when the children were given one meal daily due to the extreme conditions.⁶ Nangle made clear his intention to have all the children in the orphanage and the asylum for destitute children brought up as Protestants. While this practice infuriated many, it has to be said that the efforts made by Nangle to raise funds enabled him to purchase Indian meal and seed for distribution which certainly saved many lives that would otherwise have been lost.

⁴ Desmond Bowen, *Paul Cullen and the shaping of modern Irish Catholicism* (Dublin, 1983), p. 174.

⁵ *Fifteenth Annual report of the Achill Mission for the year ended 31 December, 1848 with a report of th Achill orphan refuge up to the same period* (Achill, 1849), p. 7, (hereafter referred to as *Fifteenth Report*).

⁶ *Fifteenth Report*, p. 6.

At the end of 1848, Nangle reported thirty-four Mission schools in operation.⁷ These schools were under the supervision of the rector of Achill, Charles Seymour, who lived at the missionary station established at Mweelin. Edward Lowe, Nangle's assistant, ran the orphanage asylum, which had previously been managed by Dr Adams. Divine service was now regularly celebrated in five missionary stations throughout the island: the settlement in Dugort; in Mweelin, where a new church had been built; Bullsmouth; Achill Sound; and most recently at Dooagh, a village five miles from the settlement. Besides Sunday service, lectures were held in more remote areas of the island. These lectures, given by the missionary staff, consisted of Gospel instruction and lessons on Protestantism. Evidently, these were poorly attended.⁸

The accounts for the year ending 31 December 1848 reveal that the Mission received income from the colony farms, including rents; revenue from the Mweelin and Innisbiggle farms; the mail car service; the publication and sales of the *Achill Missionary Herald*; the hotel; the settlement shop; and commercial printing. On the expenditure side, a schooner and hooker were bought to facilitate the distribution of relief provisions. Other expenses included repairs to the Mission farms, and one and half years rent for an office in Dublin. The total expenditure for the year 1848, according to the accounts, amounted to £2,688. 14s. 11d.⁹

Despite MacHale's complaints against Nangle, which appeared widely in the Irish press, and the claims made by priests on Achill denying the advances of Protestantism in the area, the missionary settlement had become,

⁷ AMH Dec. 1848.

⁸ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort, Achill Island 1831-1841: the rise and fall of a missionary community* (Dublin, 2001), p. 53.

⁹ *Fifteenth Report*, p. 3

on its own terms, extremely successful. During the final months of 1848, the *Achill Missionary Herald* corroborated the reports which were being sent to Cullen in Rome and told its readers that people were finally beginning to decry popery and to turn against the priests *en masse*. As expected, Nangle claimed that the truth of the Gospel had been the crushing blow that had been dealt to the Catholic Church on Achill, and after fourteen hard years on the island the people were finally ready to listen to him, having lost confidence in their priests:

Our neighbours now recognise the hand of God in the fearful visitation which has affected them for three years and divested them of all their property; this conviction has wrought such a change in them that the Christian teacher is now sure of a welcome in every house.¹⁰

Although the schools at Ballycroy had been given up, 1,800 children still attended the other mission schools which had now been established in every village on Achill.¹¹ When John MacHale visited the island in the summer of 1850, Nangle reported that 196 were confirmed in the Protestant faith that year – 30 under the age of 20 – compared to the 400 confirmed by Bishop Plunket the previous year. In mentioning this to the readership of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, Nangle claimed that he had won over the youth of the island, one of his earliest missionary objectives. MacHale's visit to the island had produced little excitement, although the *Freeman's Journal* reported a total change of feeling in favour of the Catholic archbishop. Instead of preaching exclusive dealing, which he did in both 1835 and 1838, the Catholic archbishop, this time conceded some measure of defeat by enjoining the islanders to live with the Protestants in peace and tranquility.¹²

¹⁰ *AMH* 31 Dec. 1849.

¹¹ *AMH* 28 Aug. 1848.

¹² *AMH* 31 Dec. 1849.

This did not mean that Nangle was without loss. Eliza, his wife of twenty-two years, died from oedema on 19 July 1850 and was buried at the settlement. Although her illness had forced her to live in Dublin from 1848, she continued to act as the colony's book-keeper. Throughout her life, she had unflinchingly defended her husband, even making enemies of people like Asenath Nicholson along the way. She had given birth to a total of ten children, five of whom died either at birth or shortly after. The inscription on her tombstone, which reads 'Look around you', was an echo of that to Sir Christopher Wren. To honour the living memory of his wife, Nangle included a page-long feature on Eliza's achievements, which included her undying love for Protestantism, in the July edition of the *Herald*.

Despite Eliza's death, the Mission's work continued. In May 1850, Nangle reported that 1,800 children were being fed daily. The cost of feeding these children, along with the salaries paid to their teachers, amounted to £2,134, or a little over £1 per child.¹³ While the Mission's commitment to feeding and educating the Achill youth did not change, the source of its income did. Since its foundation, the Achill Mission had largely depended on the generosity of volunteer contributions for its survival. However the amount received for temporal relief in 1850 was only £1,394, and of this sum £315. 18s. 10d. was spent on relief, most of which was used for clearing up to twenty acres in order to cultivate crops for the Mission.¹⁴ Due to the decrease in the amounts received through voluntary contributions, a considerable amount of the Mission's activities were now funded from its own coffers, with

¹³ AMH 29 July 1850.

¹⁴ *Sixteenth annual report of the Achill Mission for the year ended 31 December, 1850 with a report of th Achill orphan refuge up to the same period* (Achill, 1851), p. 3. (Hereafter cited as *Sixteenth Report*).

most of the money available coming from its farms. This meant that the Achill Mission was reaching another one of its initial goals of becoming a self-sufficient Protestant farming community. This demonstrates that the policy of exclusive dealing, which had been orchestrated with moderate success by the Catholic clergy before the Famine, had fallen into abeyance, perhaps allowing the local population to purchase Indian meal and provisions from the Mission at cost price. It indicated that those who had been supporting the Achill Mission for many years, especially those from England, were no longer minded to send contributions to the west of Ireland. The Mission's fortunes, therefore, seemed fixed to the state of the local economy as well as to the attitudes of the local population.

The year 1850 brought great change to both the missionary settlement and Achill Island. To capitalise on the Mission's success and to reward its directors, Bishop Plunket, who had been greatly impressed by what the mission was accomplishing during his visits in 1848 and 1849, made Charles Seymour, the island's evangelical rector, dean of Tuam upon the death of the previous dean, John Galbraith, in November 1850. Plunket then made Nangle the rector of Achill as well as the prebendry of Faldown, Tuam, in December. Although this provided him with a secure income he gave these earnings to the Achill Mission Committee in exchange for a paid curate, the Rev. Joseph Barker, so that he could continue his missionary work on the island undeterred. Evidently Nangle's hard work and determination through the years had paid

dividends, and his first task as rector was to scrap the cultivation of potatoes on the mission lands and to educate the children about new farming methods.¹⁵

The consequences of the Famine on the missionary settlement were many. The work done by Mealla Ní Ghiobúin is again useful here. Using the census of Ireland for the years 1841 and 1851, Ní Ghiobúin was able to determine something of the impact of the Famine, especially how it influenced changes in the settlement's population. Since Nangle's pen is hardly non-partisan, the census figures provide us with more reliable evidence regarding population trends on Achill. As mentioned earlier, for census purposes, Dugort was divided into Dugort, Dugort East, and Dugort West. Unfortunately, there are no official census figures for the settlement itself. Table 3, which has been reproduced from Ní Ghiobúin's study, shows that there was a population increase of 132 in Dugort between 1841 and 1851.¹⁶ Yet, in Dugort East there was a decrease of nine. There was an even greater decrease in Dugort West, where the total population in 1841 was 348, which fell to 238 in 1851 – a loss of 110.¹⁷ This suggests that inhabitants living in and around Dugort either emigrated, moved to another location on the island, or moved into Dugort proper – perhaps the settlement.

¹⁵ *Report from Her Majesty's Commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect of the occupation of land in Ireland*, H.C., 1845, xix, testimony of Edward Nangle, p. 440. (Hereafter cited as Devon Commission).

¹⁶ *Sixteenth Report*, p. 2.

¹⁷ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort, Achill Island*, p. 33.

Table 3. Population of Dugort townlands, 1841-1851

Townland	1841			1851		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Dugort	157	162	319	215	236	451
Dugort East	21	17	38	14	15	29
Dugort West	183	165	348	116	122	238

Source: Census 1841 and census 1851

Since the population of the missionary settlement was increasing on the eve of the Famine, these figures do not perhaps show the true impact of the Famine.

From 1844 until 1861, 126 baptisms were solemnised at the missionary settlement at Dugort.¹⁸ During this same period, 56 burials were conducted at the Protestant colony. By comparing the figures in Table 4, which breaks down the number of baptisms and burials into five-year periods, it becomes clear that the number of baptisms exceeded the number of burials by 70. This shows a meagre, yet significant increase in the population at the Missionary settlement even after the ravages of Famine.

¹⁸ Achill parish baptismal register

Table 4. Baptisms and burials at the missionary settlement, 1844-1861

Colony Year	Baptisms	Burials
1844-49	66	21
1850-55	64	31
1856-61	21	7
Totals	151	59

Source: Achill parish baptism and burial register

Table 4 shows a gradual, then dramatic decline in the numbers of baptisms from 1844 until 1861; while the number of burials increased, then dropped off significantly over the same period. The highest number of baptisms (66) and the highest number of burials (31) were recorded during the Famine years. While the missionary settlement reached its height on the eve of the Famine, it was unable to maintain the population growth of the years between 1834 and 1844. There are perhaps two reasons for this: 1) the harshness of the Famine eventually took its toll over time; and 2) the orchestrated counter-attack of the Catholic Church on the island.

In the aftermath of the Famine, the Mission faced several daunting tasks.. Firstly, the committee in Dublin was concerned about the future of its holdings, for the settlement's landlord, Richard O'Donnel, had only granted a lease for three lives or thirty-one years. Since some fifteen years of that lease had already been used up by 1849, the guardians in Dublin were concerned that at the expiration of the lease, a higher rent would be demanded because of the vast improvements made to the property since the 1830s. There were also fears that if the Mission could not afford to renew its lease, the Mission might

even fall into Catholic hands.¹⁹ In normal circumstances, such an eventuality was highly unlikely. But the collapse of the Mission's head landlord put things in a different light. The economic distress created by the Famine had meant that many landlords became bankrupt. Like many other estates, Richard O'Donnel's lands ended up in the Encumbered Estates Court, which was established by the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849. Parliament passed this act in order to facilitate the sale of insolvent landed estates, thereby attempting to attract new capital into Irish agriculture. In order to block any Catholic interests in the Mission estate and to secure the property for the missionary settlement, Nangle quickly appealed for funds among friends and supporters of the Mission to purchase the lands around Dugort. The idea was to frustrate any Roman Catholic plans to purchase lands which the Mission had leased and on which the settlements were built.²⁰ His supporters responded so generously to the request that Nangle, along with the contributions of some wealthy businessmen, notably William Pike, who had been the chairman of the Committee of Birkenhead Improvements, secured the purchase of 3/5 of the O'Donnel estate for £17,500 and subsequently vested ownership in a group of trustees appointed by the Achill Mission Committee. The land purchase was completed in April 1851 and was vested in the following trustees: Nangle; Somerset Maxwell, who later became Lord Farnham; Joseph Napier MP, who was later knighted; William Brooke, the Master in Chancery; and George Alexander Hamilton, MP for Dublin.

When the sale officially went through the Encumbered Estates Court the Achill Mission became the principal landlord of the whole island.

¹⁹ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort*, p. 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

Paradoxically, the Famine had once again helped the missionary settlement to prosper and expand, but Nangle saw nothing fortuitous in this: the missionary enterprise was of God. 'It is His appointed means of accomplishing a great object'.²¹ Since Nangle believed the Famine to have been a divine visitation in response to the moral errors on the part of the people, and of a government which had endowed Maynooth, there was nothing surprising in his belief that the acquisition of the O'Donnell estate was providential.²² There was, however, an unexpected downside to the purchase. The lands were going to be slow to produce an income, and Nangle noted that those who had contributed to the purchase of the O'Donnell estate considered themselves absolved from the obligation of contributing any further pecuniary aid to the Mission.²³ The well had dried up. Since nobody expected the Mission estate to yield any sort of return for quite some time, in consequence of the devastation caused by the Famine, the missionary settlement was threatened with ruin if voluntary contributions dried up

The purchase of the major part of O'Donnell's estate on Achill did not provide the Mission with full security. Archbishop MacHale and William McCormack, a wealthy Catholic, purchased the remaining two-fifths of the O'Donnell estate, while the Marquis of Sligo retained his property on the island. By acquiring land on Achill, MacHale it seems planned to begin another assault against the Protestant settlement. *The Tablet* of June 1850 speculated about MacHale's intentions:

²¹ *AMH* 25 June 1849.

²² Desmond Bowen, *Souperism: myth or reality?* (Cork, 1970), p. 101.

²³ *AMH* Nov. 1868.

We understand his Grace intends immediately to set about building extensive religious establishments on his estate in Achill, in order to save these poor islanders from further persecution.²⁴

From 1847, he had been under increasing pressure from Cullen (who had left Rome to become the archbishop of Armagh in 1850) to check the advances being made by Protestant proselytisers in his archdiocese.²⁵ Cullen's uncle, James Maher, had previously told Tobias Kirby, who succeeded Cullen as rector of the Irish College in Rome, that there was a simple explanation for the mass defections to Protestantism: souperism.²⁶ Cullen, on the other hand, sought a more sophisticated explanation for what was happening in Connacht. Since the Protestant missionary societies had been targeting the most distressed and educationally deprived areas along the western seaboard, Cullen placed a large amount of the blame for their progress on the shoulders of MacHale, whose stubbornness had kept the National Schools out of his diocese except for a short time on Achill. In Cullen's opinion, MacHale's stance had rendered poor Catholics vulnerable to the charms of well-financed Protestant zealots.²⁷ The *Dublin Evening Post* of 11 November 1851 echoed Cullen's sentiments when an important editorial on national education expressed Catholic concerns in the West, particularly in MacHale's archdiocese:

The place they [the Protestant proselytizers] considered peculiarly suitable was the diocese of Dr MacHale archbishop of Tuam. It was there in the most Catholic population of Ireland in many parts of which a Protestant was a perfect curiosity that they planted first a colony and in the next place, that they invaded the entire diocese, North and West. They were right and they showed good generalship in their movements. They knew that education was put under ban and anathema in these parts. They knew that the National Schools were denounced by the highest ecclesiastical authority in that place. What was Dr MacHale doing all this time? Writing flashy platitudes in the newspapers making driftless harangues, or perambulating the cities we have

²⁴ *The Tablet* June 1850

²⁵ Although Paul Cullen was officially appointed Irish Primate on 27 December 1849, he did not arrive in Ireland until May 1850.

²⁶ James Maher to Tobias Kirby, 3 Aug. 1850 (I.C.R., Kirby Papers MSS 731).

²⁷ Desmond Bowen, *Paul Cullen*, p. 170.

no doubt. But surely it would not be amiss, if some portion of this restlessness and bustle had not been expended on his own diocese.²⁸

In places like Oughterard, Co. Galway, MacHale's slack supervision had, according to one of Cullen's correspondents, allowed many Catholics to go astray. There, the parish priest, William Kirwan, had abandoned his people to the wolves in becoming president of the Queen's College in Galway; after his death in 1849, no new parish priest had been appointed.²⁹ Cullen knew that if left on his own, the intractable MacHale would never conduct an effective counter-attack on zealous Protestants in places like Oughterard, or even admit that such a problem existed, preferring to handle things internally. Therefore on 16 June 1851 Cullen sent a candid report to Propaganda Fide describing a grim situation in the Tuam archdiocese.

Apparently Cullen was not the only one concerned with MacHale's refusal to recognize the seriousness of the Protestant threat, for Bernard Burke, parish priest of Westport, Co. Mayo, wrote to Tobias Kirby in late 1851 complaining of the bellicosity of the town's new Protestant rector. Burke requested that two Christian Brother teachers be sent to Westport from Waterford to curb the influence of the Protestant schools, for 'unlike MacHale, who had failed on Achill, when Nangle was not met with much opposition when he first commenced his missionary settlement', he for one was prepared to put up a fight.³⁰ This jibe had a history, for MacHale had been Burke's chief rival in the election to the see of Tuam in 1834 in succession of Oliver Kelly and although MacHale had won, Burke had been preferred by the clergy;

²⁸ *DEP* 11 Nov. 1851

²⁹ Peter Cooper to Paul Cullen, 12 July 1848 (I.C.R., Cullen Papers MSS 1619)

³⁰ Bernard Burke to Tobias Kirby, 28 Dec. 1851 (I.C.R., Kirby Papers, MS 1283).

MacHale never forgave Burke for this, which led to years of friction.³¹ Evidently, rumours that Cullen and other Catholic clergymen were unhappy reached MacHale and had some effect: after purchasing part of the O'Donnell estate on Achill, the archbishop began to invest more energy into stunting the growth of Nangle's mission.

But MacHale could not ignore Cullen's dissatisfaction, especially since the Synod of Thurles, which had met between 22 August until 9 September 1850, had singled-out Protestant proselytisers as dangerous enemies of the Catholic Church. Proselytism, the synod warned, directly threatened the people's faith and morals, and to counter their efforts, it recommended the invitation of the Vincentian Fathers and the Jesuits to give missions in affected parishes.³² Nor could MacHale disregard the Protestant hysteria that swept over both England and Ireland in the wake of the 'papal aggression' when Pius IX restored the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England, complete with territorial titles, on 29 October 1850. Cardinal Nicolas Wiseman, who, like Cullen, had become a fervent ultramontane while living in Rome for an extended period, led the papal policy in England, which many Protestants took as a direct threat to the national jurisdiction of the Church of England. Both episodes produced a considerable backlash against the Catholic Church in Ireland and England, stimulating new tales of persecution from beleaguered Irish parsons, and encouraged ultra-Protestants once again to reach into their pockets to support men like Nangle.

Initially, when Nangle came to Achill in the 1830s, MacHale had made repeated visits to the island, and deployed aggressive priests to superintend the

³¹ Desmond Bowen, *Paul Cullen*, p. 173

³² Donal Kerr, 'A nation of beggars'? *Priests, people, and politics in Famine Ireland 1846-1852* (Oxford, 1998), p. 225.

National Schools. When that failed to thwart Nangle, a system of exclusive dealing turned this siege into a community blockade, a plan which effectively broke down during the Famine. Now, bowing to pressure from Cullen, MacHale renewed combat with the Achill Mission, scrapping all notions that the proselytisers were a temporary problem and adopting a long-term strategy to counteract their gains. He proposed to construct a permanent monastery for the Third Order of Franciscans on his recently bought lands near Dugort, just west of the missionary settlement. The Franciscans, it was imagined, would employ themselves in reclaiming and tilling the mountain tract, thereby giving work to the islanders, whose souls were in danger from Mission soup and stirabout. Nangle, defiant as ever, responded with some thunder of his own, threatening to call in the Orange Order, whose organisation, determination and zeal would help him to counter the Monks with the only weapon of our warfare, the sword of the spirit 'which is the word of God'.³³ In September 1851, when MacHale's workmen began carrying stones from Mission property for the monastery site, tempers flared. Nangle took legal recourse against these men, who had even pulled down a number of unroofed houses, and requested Richard O'Donnel, now a resident magistrate, to begin proceedings against the perpetrators. The Battle of the Stones, as this altercation became known, dragged on for months and was followed with much fanfare by the local population. Eventually MacHale, unable to continue paying expensive legal costs, backed down and chose a new site for the monastery in the hamlet of Bunacurry, many miles from Dugort. Nangle, in typical self-aggrandizing fashion, claimed that the Catholic Church had balked at the Mission's

³³ *AMH* 29 Sept. 1851

strength. Although delayed, construction on the Franciscan monastery went ahead.

Before discussing MacHale's further plans to reclaim Achill from Nangle's influence, some other changes that directly affected the missionary settlement must be mentioned. When Bishop Plunket, who hardly published any of his own writings, suddenly produced a pamphlet entitled *Convert confirmations: a discourse delivered to the converts from Romanism in west Galway in 1851*, it seemed that the Protestant proselytising charge which had begun earlier in the century had reached its highest point to date. Plunket, who enthusiastically embraced Nangle's cause, continued to use his power to promote the spread of the Second Reformation throughout Tuam, Killala and Achonry. Although Plunket had helped to orchestrate considerable missionary breakthroughs in Tuam, the other two dioceses under his episcopal jurisdiction had suffered due to the large amount of attention given to Nangle. If Plunket had better understood the disposition of the clergy in Killala and Achonry, he would have realized that the vast majority of them were much more interested in avoiding sectarian discord in their parishes, preferring instead to keep people alive during the Famine.³⁴ Perhaps Plunket was shrewdly aware of the need to inject a more robust Protestantism into the Church of Ireland clergy of Killala and Achonry, for this might explain his apparently impulsive decision to remove Nangle from Achill, promoting him to the comfortable living of Skreen, Co. Sligo in the spring of 1852. In June of the same year, Nangle also remarried, his second wife being Sarah, daughter of the Rev. Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh, rector of Hacketstown, Co. Carlow.

³⁴ Desmond Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 162.

The abrupt move came as a shock to both Catholics and Protestants alike, yet Nangle did not put up a fight, placated by being permitted to stay on Achill for three months of each year. Perhaps he even engineered the move himself. Harriet Martineau, who visited Achill just before Nangle departed, expressed the view held by many that Nangle's presence would be greatly missed: 'Mr. Nangle is now about to leave the station which he has held through this long course of years. Our impression is that when he has left his work, and the results of his sojourn can be estimated with impartiality, he will be found to have borne a great deal of good'.³⁵ In the midst of Nangle's transfer to Skreen, Matilda, his third child, died suddenly in Dublin. Her remains, like those of her mother, were brought to Achill for burial. Subsequently, as a result of the shake-up, the Rev. Joseph Barker became the rector of Achill and Edward Lowe, who had been with the missionary settlement since 1844, stayed on as Barker's assistant. Why Plunket chose to transfer the man who had been directly responsible for the success of the Achill Mission up to this date is rather difficult to determine, but it almost certainly had something to do with his strategy of extending the proselytising movement northwards. If Nangle could entice his fellow clergymen and parishioners in north Connacht to accept a vigorous evangelical Protestantism, then conceivably a wider religious breakthrough could be accomplished.

Plunket did not stop at Nangle's transfer. He invited Alexander Dallas, the rector of Wonston, Hampshire, to take control of the spiritual ministrations of the Achill Mission. The cost of maintaining the Mission estate had become extremely high, especially after voluntary contributions to the missionary

³⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Letters from Ireland* (London, 1852), p. 118.

settlement steadily fell after 1850.³⁶ Dallas, a nephew of Lord Byron, was a highly intelligent and committed evangelical clergyman, who founded the Society for Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics on 29 March 1845 in order to create a comprehensive network of Protestant missionary stations throughout Ireland, especially in Connacht. Although an Englishman, Dallas had become interested in Irish ecclesiastical affairs during the 1820s, but the onslaught of the Famine brought him closer to Ireland, convinced that the pre-millennial second coming drew near. Hoping to break the influence of the priest, 'which is usually a slavish fear growing out of superstitious feeling of the most ignorant and oppressive kind and which the vast majority would rejoice to be free', Dallas petitioned Robert Peel in 1846 to enact legislation requiring clergymen in Irish-speaking districts to conduct services in Irish once a week.³⁷ This Protestant Loyola – he had served in the British army as an assistant commissary-general during the Peninsular War before undergoing a profound conversion experience – believed that the freeing of the Irish from Roman Catholic tyranny, like the return of the Jews to Palestine, was a prerequisite necessary before the return of Christ; and with sufficient financial support from like-minded English laymen, Dallas set up the ICM, with its headquarters in Exeter Hall. With his complex personality and fierce brand of proselytism, Dallas, unlike the defensive-minded colonies at Achill and Dingle, went on the offensive, attempting to take advantage of the demoralised and neglected people of the West.

In just over a year, the ICM, which was well-financed at the time, instituted several imposing and successful missionary outposts in Connemara,

³⁶ *AMH* Jan. 1851

³⁷ Alexander Dallas to Robert Peel, 1 Jan. 1846 (B.L., Peel Papers MSS 40582, folio 12-14).

particularly at Errislannon, Cong, Ballyconree and Oughterard. Meanwhile, the Achill Mission's funds were low. Since many of the reliable patrons of the Achill Mission had either grown weary of Nangle's project or had committed their money to the purchase of the O'Donnel estate, Plunket, with Nangle's backing, approached the ICM with a view to its taking control of all missionary operations on Achill.³⁸ With Nangle's transfer extending the Protestant crusade northwards to Sligo, an ebullient Dallas happily accepted Plunket's request and was entrusted with running the Achill Mission in June 1852. The ICM paid all the expenses connected with the ministry and the education work of the schools.³⁹ It also constructed, at an expense of £300, missionary buildings at Mweelin for the agricultural training school and appointed a W.J. Stewart as master there.⁴⁰

By the autumn of 1852, the organisational structure of the missionary settlement had dramatically altered: the ICM co-ordinated the mission to the Catholics on the island; an Achill Temporal Relief Committee, headed by Dr Adams, looked after the everyday administration, especially providing for the orphanage asylum; and the Achill Mission Estate, directed by its trustees, managed the business dealings. As the local population was exhausted by the Famine, many Protestants including recent converts emigrated, and with Nangle gone from the island the mission's fortunes were again waning. Going on the evidence of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, it would seem that MacHale's project to establish a Franciscan monastery at Bunacurry frightened those attached to the Protestant settlement. Apparently, the priests

³⁸ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 205; Irene Whelan, *Nangle and the Achill Mission*, p. 133.

³⁹ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 190.

⁴⁰ Irish Church Mission records, 9 and 23 June 1852, ref. Nos. 928-9, as quoted by Mealla Ní Ghióúbin, *Dugort*, p. 60.

on the island offered plots of land and £20 to induce converts living at the missionary settlement to jump back to Catholicism.⁴¹ Unsurprisingly these reports disturbed the missionaries based at Dugort.

Joseph Barker, the rector of Achill after Nangle departed for Skreen, sought to rejuvenate interest in the missionary work on Achill and to generate funds for the mission schools with plans for an agricultural school for boys and an industrial school for girls. But the Achill Temporal Relief Committee was dissolved in 1853, and Dr Adams, its treasurer, resigned and handed over control of the Mission's temporal affairs to the ICM. Despite losing control over the Mission's temporal affairs, Barker proposed a new plan to raise funds to support the children in the Mission schools: each subscriber to the *Achill Missionary Herald* was asked to sponsor a child for £2, which would provide for the child's maintenance. Barker provided a list of the eligible children attending the Mission schools. However, if a child apostatized and returned to Catholicism, the support for that child would also terminate. As usual, it is difficult to determine the outcome of Barker's innovative appeal.

Besides the building of a monastery for the Third Order of Franciscans, the second part of MacHale's strategy to wrest Achill from the Protestants was to consider inviting Catholic societies like the Vincentians or the Jesuits to conduct missions on the island. More widely, MacHale, goaded by Cullen, spearheaded the revival of the visible authority of the Catholic Church in Connacht, which included a massive church building campaign.⁴² Traditionally, the headstrong archbishop had successfully resisted outside attempt to reform affairs within his ecclesiastical jurisdiction; yet the

⁴¹ Mealla Ní Ghióúbin, *Dugort*, p. 34.

⁴² Emmet Larkin, "The Problem of Irish Clerical Avarice in the Nineteenth Century" in *Éire- Ireland*, xxiv, no. 3 (1989), pp. 37-39.

admonitions from Cullen, which Pius IX followed up with warnings of his own in the autumn of 1852, had become irresistible and forced MacHale to bend. The opening lines to the Pope's letter of 21 October to MacHale, which expressed his concerns for Tuam, showed that Cullen had kept the pontiff abreast of the Irish situation: 'Venerable brother, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction. We have just heard to our great distress that more of the faithful of your Diocese are being wretchedly deceived, misled into error, and rent asunder from the practice of the Catholic religion by the nefarious schemings and plottings of a group of crafty men'.⁴³ Although MacHale had allowed two missions in regions which had been infiltrated by the ICM – one in Clifden, Co. Galway conducted by the Rosminians; and another in Oughterard by the Vincentians – he again incurred Cullen's ire by saying that they had accomplished little. Since he never really trusted the Vincentians, branding them 'Cullenites', and because the construction of the Franciscan monastery was underway by 1850, MacHale was circumspect about permitting missions on Achill, seeing them as an affront to his authority. Both Plunket and MacHale visited the island in August 1852; the former to consecrate a new church at the settlement, the latter to confirm 49 people, a sign that as conditions improved in the wake of the Famine, islanders were returning to the Catholic church.⁴⁴ However, others took a different view, condemning both warring religious parties: 'The Catholic and Protestant zealots seem to be trying, as for a wager, which can fastest drive the people into an ignorant contempt of all faiths whatever'.⁴⁵

⁴³ Propaganda Fide Archives, Rome: *Scritture riferite nei congressi Irlanda*, (1852) XXI, fols. 258-260 as quoted in Desmond Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 142.

⁴⁴ *AMH* 27 Aug. 1852.

⁴⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Letters from Ireland*, p. 107.

To accelerate the Catholic counter-attack on the island and to exploit the apparent change in mood, MacHale succumbed to Cullen's unyielding supplications and invited the Vincentians, who by the 1850s had become the anti-proselytising instrument of choice for the ultramontanes, to conduct a mission on Achill. Enlivened by the traditional greeting of bonfires, the Vincentians, led by the famous Fathers Rinolfi and Vilas, arrived on Achill to carry out a month long mission on 30 July 1854. The Vincentians, also known as the Congregation of the Mission, were a Continental religious order founded in France during the seventeenth century by St. Vincent de Paul for the express purpose of giving parish missions as part of the broader Tridentine Counter-reformation programme. Like a blitzkrieg, their missions sought to bring a parish into rapid conformity with a desired model: negatively by the condemnation and undermining of improper religious beliefs such as the remnants of folk tradition or the indoctrination of Protestantism; and positively by creating a solid parish structure to develop and maintain the religious life of the community.⁴⁶ The immediate objective of the mission was to give people a sound grasp of orthodox religious teaching and ways to apply them to everyday life. In the long run, the Vincentians wished to restructure the parish, raising the public profile of the parochial clergy and establishing confraternities, in order to reassert the visible authority of the church.⁴⁷ These missions were extremely popular, with many keeping up diligent attendance; Achill was no exception. The first five days of the Vincentian mission were spent in Lower Achill, the most densely populated region of the island and

⁴⁶ James H. Murphy, "The role of Vincentian parish missions in the Irish counter-reformation of the mid-nineteenth century" in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxiv, no. 94 (November 1984), p. 154.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

where the missionaries were greeted by large and enthusiastic crowds. A Catholic source reported that people traveled up to twelve miles to receive sacraments at the chapel in lower Achill.⁴⁸ Attendance was so abundant that Mass had to be held out of doors.⁴⁹ A writer for *The Tablet*, the English Catholic paper, commented that Fathers Rinolfi and Vilas were able to win back many from the Protestant fold, especially some young children who had attended the Mission schools, where 'they learned how to insult the Virgin Mother of God better than they know how to read or write'.⁵⁰ While even Nangle did not challenge these reports, he dismissed them as the product of curiosity rather than a genuine interest in the Catholic religion. The second half of the mission was held in Upper Achill and the missionaries reported that 'the population of those parts is very far from having been Protestantized [sic] by Nangle and his agents'.⁵¹

Predictably, Protestants protested at the mission, beginning with a vitriolic attack on the Vincentians from the altar of the colony's church. In an address circulated to the people of Achill, Nangle, now writing from Skreen, warned the people of the Vincentian mission. He claimed that since the priests had abandoned the islanders during the Famine, and that the missionary settlement had fed the people, the newly arrived priests were not to be trusted:

Men of Achill, you and I remember the time when the priests were as scarce as sound potatoes. In the years of Famine, when you and your families were dying of hunger, the priests cared little about you; neither they nor their friends took any trouble to get food for your bodies, and it was hard to get one of them to rub their oil on the dying.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Missions in Ireland: especially with reference to the proselytizing movement; showing the marvellous devotedness of the Irish to the faith of their fathers* (Dublin, 1855), p. 276.

⁴⁹ *AMH* 19 Sept. 1854.

⁵⁰ *The Tablet*, Aug. 1854.

⁵¹ *Missions in Ireland*, p. 286.

⁵² *AMH* 16 Aug. 1854

In a fit of seeming desperation, Joseph Barker, the Protestant rector of Achill, challenged Fathers Rinolfi and Vilas and their entourage of at least nine priests to an open-air debate. The Italian visitors politely declined, refusing to give the Protestants the opportunity of portraying themselves as oppressed ministers of the Gospel. Visibly frustrated, Barker and his colleagues challenged the people outside the Catholic chapel at Dookinelly, 'ostentatiously revealing their Bibles under their arms'; but the people, one Catholic contemporary observed, had too much good sense to take any notice of them.⁵³ Nangle, who had got word of the Vincentian mission in Skreen, rushed to the aid of his beloved colony and immediately orchestrated a counter-assault, penning an address to the Roman Catholic people of Achill, pleading with them to stay away from the Catholic chapel. Meanwhile, James Henry, the fiery Roman Catholic curate, whose letters to the *Freeman's Journal* had scoffed at the 'gang of mercenaries', like so many ill-omened birds of prey, who hovered about the huts of the poor, proudly claimed to have re-converted most of Innisbigle and that with the help of Fathers Rinolfi and Vilas, he had brought back over 100 'perverts' to Catholicism.⁵⁴ By autumn, Father Henry announced that the Vincentian mission had sounded the death knell of proselytism on Achill and had, in this island, shaken to the very foundations that accursed system of proselytism which has been supported by the wealth and patronage of English zealots.⁵⁵ Adding insult to injury, Henry utilized some of the buildings formerly used for Nangle's schools for new Catholic schools.

⁵³ *Missions in Ireland*, p. 278.

⁵⁴ *Freeman's Journal* 24 Jan. 1854

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1 Sept. 1854.

In September 1854, Nangle, unable to spend much time on Achill due to his commitments in Skreen, retaliated against the Vincentian mission within the pages of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, publishing extracts from other newspapers that covered the visit of the Italian priests. Since most of the coverage of the Vincentian mission reported a re-awakened Catholicism on the island, Nangle refuted such claims, saying that, if anything, 'the visit had the opposite effect, as an islander converted to Protestantism because of Rinolfi's ostentatious preaching'.⁵⁶

On 18 December 1855, Mrs. Isabella Adams, wife of Dr Neason Adams, died. A year later, in July, the Achill Committee was notified by the Irish Church Missions of their intention to withdraw from Achill in December. The Achill Committee urged the ICM to change their minds, but this effort was of no use, as the ICM had been losing money for many years. The reason for the withdrawal of the ICM was not however purely financial, for both the ICM and the Achill Committee, which owned most of Achill, constantly bickered over ways to improve the land. Furthermore, the ICM resented the fact that Nangle, on behalf of the Achill Mission Committee, solicited for funds in England without ICM sanction, thereby giving the appearance of a gulf between the two organisations.⁵⁷ At a general meeting in October 1856 it was resolved to turn over control of the Mission's affairs fully to the Achill Committee, thereby reverting back to the situation prior to 1852.⁵⁸

With Nangle gone, the missionary settlement had lost its driving force. Yet the educational component of the Protestant mission seemed to have

⁵⁶ *AMH* 19 Sept. 1854.

⁵⁷ Mealla Ní Ghioúbin, *Dugort*, p. 61.

⁵⁸ ICM records, 1 October 1856, ref. 2403, as quoted in Mealla Ní Ghioúbin, *Dugort*, p. 61.

continued, as the 1861 Census reported that while 83.9 per cent of Catholics were illiterate, only 29.2 per cent of the Protestants remaining on the island could not read or write.⁵⁹ Although the efforts of the Protestants on Achill saved many lives during the most intense years of the Famine, the conflicts with the priests and charges of souperism still reverberated in the people's imaginations. Furthermore, the purchase of the majority of the O'Donnell estate in 1851 had over-committed the missionary settlement. Voluntary contributions, the life-blood of the Mission, were merely trickling in after 1852. The settlement's financial reports, which were sometimes published in the January issues of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, mirrored the general falling off of support for the Mission. The following amounts, which suggest a decline in the Mission's fortunes, were received respectively: 1852 (£1,995. 6s. 7d.); 1853 (£1,815. 1s. 1d.); 1854 (£1,185. 4s. 8d.).⁶⁰ Furthermore, the population of Dugort was in gradual decline after 1851. Between 1851 and 1861, the population fell by 270.⁶¹ To make matters worse, two of the Mission's trustees, Sir Joseph Napier and George A. Hamilton, became embroiled in a dispute with Nangle over the disbursement of the estate's meagre income in the 1860s, which they felt should be primarily used to improve the material condition of the Achill peasantry, whereas Nangle argued that all proceeds from the estate should go into developing and maintaining spiritual missionary work on the island. A protracted and bitter lawsuit followed and, while Nangle and his chief supporter, Bishop Plunket, were ultimately victorious, the quarrel left the Mission's administration deeply

⁵⁹ Fiona McGrath, "Emigration and landscape: the case of Achill Island", *Trinity Papers in Geography*, no. 4 (Dublin, 1991), p. 17.

⁶⁰ *AMH* Jan. 1853; *AMH* Jan. 1854; *AMH* Jan. 1855.

⁶¹ Mealla Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort*, p. 63.

divided. Subsequently both Napier and Hamilton resigned, a move that created even greater dissension throughout the Irish evangelical community, for both men were held in high esteem. The dispute forms part of the decline and fall of the Achill Mission.

I had a conversation with the Rev. Mr. Napier, who was at the time of the Achill Mission, and he told me that he had written a great number of tracts, and that he was very successful in his labours.

By the way, the Rev. Mr. Napier, who was at the time of the Achill Mission, and he told me that he had written a great number of tracts, and that he was very successful in his labours.

Although Edward Naugle spent comparatively little of his middle years on Achill, the influence of his publications upon Protestant opinion is indeed a matter. Since his contemporaries rarely cited him, it would be misleading to say that he was widely read. Still, from his early days, through the years spent on Achill and until his final years in Tipperary, Co. Wick, he took up the pen to discuss the Bible; to delineate the errors and contents of lay preaching; to write about the biblical representations provided by the Church of Rome; and, of course, to publicise the state and activities of his beloved Achill mission. Throughout, his choice diminished his writing the importance of the Bible, the availability of purity with spiritual exhortation, a more emphasis on the importance of Jesus, and as a result generalised. Consequently the activities of the Achill missionary community entered more public notice during the middle years of the nineteenth

¹ George French, *The History of the Protestant Church in the Island of Ireland* (London, 1841), pp. 100-101.
² Henry Seabell, *Journal of the Rev. Mr. Seabell, Missionary to the Achill Mission* (London, 1841), p. 211.
³ *Ireland, Past and Present* (London, 1841), p. 211.

Chapter Six

'Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come'! The writing and thought of Edward Nangle 1828-1862

The coming of Christ is to be preceded by fearful judgments, and already the first large drops that indicate the coming tempest are felt.¹

I find it impossible to endorse some of the views held and published by Mr. Nangle, although I need hardly say that in his enunciation of the grand verities of the Christian faith, and his assertions respecting the unscriptural doctrines of the Church of Rome, I am thoroughly at one with him.²

Fly ye seasons, fly still faster,
Swiftly bring the glorious day;
Jesus come, our Lord, our Master!
Come from heav'n without delay;
Take thy people,
Take, O take them hence away.³

Although Edward Nangle wrote extensively from the middle 1820s up until his final days, the influence of his publications upon Protestant opinion in Ireland is unclear. Since his contemporaries rarely cited him, it would be misleading to say that he was widely read. Still, from his early days, through the years spent on Achill and until his final years at Skreen, Co. Sligo he took up the pen to discuss the Bible; to deliberate the merits and demerits of lay preaching; to argue about the baleful superstitions practiced by the Church of Rome; and, of course, to publicise the trials and tribulations of his beloved Achill mission. Throughout, four themes dominated his writing: the immutability of the Bible, the association of popery with spiritual enslavement, a strict attachment to the atonement of Jesus, and an abstruse pre-millennialism. Undoubtedly the activities of the Achill missionary colony attracted more public interest during the middle years of the nineteenth-

¹ George French, *The kingdom of heaven is at hand; or the present crisis and the coming Lord* (London, 1862), preface by Edward Nangle, p. 5.

² Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle the apostle of Achill: a memoir and a history* (London and Dublin, 1883), p. 231.

³ *Hymns, selected and arranged* (Achill, 1852), p. 53.

century than the writings of its founder; however, Nangle managed to publish over 50 works before his death in 1883. These writings, along with the numerous contributions made to various Protestant journals – which included the *Protestant Penny Magazine*, the *Christian Examiner*, and his own *Achill Missionary Herald* – generated both favourable and critical publicity for his missionary endeavour. While ‘a carnal preacher may administer a spiritual opiate to his congregation’, Nangle, a marginalised Irish evangelical Protestant, bluntly preached what he believed, accepting the consequences.⁴ He was mindful of his pugnacious reputation: (‘I am fully aware that for speaking thus I shall be charged with bigotry and uncharitableness’); but he believed that this was a small price to be paid, for ‘it is impossible to proclaim God’s truth without incurring man’s displeasure’.⁵ Even though the influence of his polemical work cannot be known, his prose stands as written testimony to the fervent energy poured into his life’s work as a Church of Ireland missionary. Consequently, an examination of Nangle’s writings, the subject of the following pages, is essential to the understanding of his intellectual and theological outlook.

Unlike his later provocative reputation, Nangle’s early polemical career was modest. Shortly after completing the divinity course at Trinity College, Dublin in 1824, Nangle lived in a Dublin lodging-house. There an apparently trifling incident profoundly influenced and sharpened his loathing for the Roman Catholic Church. A fellow lodger sought to win Nangle over to

² Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle the apostle of Achill: a memoir and a history* (London and Dublin, 1883), p. 231.

³ *Hymns, selected and arranged* (Achill, 1852), p. 53.

⁴ Edward Nangle, *Protestantism in Ireland. The substance of a sermon, preached in the Octagon Chapel, Bath, on Sunday, July 5th, 1835, on behalf of the Protestant missionary settlement, in the island of Achill* (Bath, 1835), p. v.

the Catholic faith and gave him a defence of transubstantiation to read. Unsurprisingly, Nangle rejected this fundamental Catholic belief, and subsequently felt compelled to write a refutation of its 'revolting absurdities and blasphemies'.⁶ Although never published, his first literary work was a useful intellectual and spiritual exercise, and through it Nangle discovered a life-long aspiration to convey his thoughts in print.

Shortly thereafter appeared his first publication, *The truth as it is revealed in Jesus* (1828), the printed version of a sermon delivered in 1825 while he was serving as a curate in Arva, Co. Cavan, addressed to the Roman Catholic people of his native Kildalkey, Co. Kildare. Because his family had deep roots in Kildalkey, Nangle had grown close to the Catholics in the area; and in making this address, his main goal was to defend his father's conversion to Protestantism and to offer his own apologia for entering the Church of Ireland ministry.⁷ Fortunately for the young curate, audiences abounded, since the 1820s were a time of increased religious awareness – even in the countryside. The enthusiasm shown by the large crowds that gathered for marathon theological debates between Protestants and Catholics in places like Carlow town in 1824 and the Roman Catholic chapel in Easkey, Co. Sligo in 1825 demonstrates the appetite for public religious discussion, which also served as public entertainment. The discussion at Easkey, which Nangle attended, lasted two days and was characterised by extreme cordiality, with William Urwick, who defended the Protestant cause, saying, 'Although I conscientiously differ from the Roman Catholic clergy and people, yet I wish

⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

them well from the bottom of my heart'.⁸ In *The truth as it revealed in Jesus*, Nangle's introductory remarks, which appropriately acknowledged that 'the whole world seems to be awakening from the deep insensibility to its eternal interests' appealed to the people's curiosity.⁹ Here, as elsewhere, his Trinity training is evident, as Nangle relied heavily on logical reasoning and a defence of revealed religion to communicate his ideas. Already in 1828, Nangle was entering the wider forum of Irish theological controversy.

In another pamphlet, *The novelties of the Roman mass* (1838), he considered Scripture to be the perfect teaching aid: 'The Holy Scriptures are a complete rule of faith and morals, they teach the Christian every thing which he ought to believe, and every thing which he ought to do'.¹⁰ Since a strong Biblical faith was at the heart of evangelicalism in mid nineteenth-century Britain, such a statement is unsurprising.¹¹ He found strength and solace in Scripture: it alone could purify the heart, quicken the conscience and render life conformable to God's will. 'For what is Protestantism?' Nangle posed in 1833, 'It is just the religion of the Bible engraved upon the fleshy tablets of the heart, by the spirit of the living God'.¹² While answers to life's agonizing questions were to be found within Scripture's inspirational pages, it also acted as the final arbitrator in settling temporal disputes. In a letter published in

⁷ Nangle's father, Walter, only converted to the Church of Ireland upon marrying his second wife, Catherine, in 1796. Nangle was a product of this marriage and was subsequently brought up in the Church of Ireland.

⁸ *Authentic report of the discussion which took place in the Roman Catholic chapel at Easkey on 23 and 24 November 1824* (Dublin, 1825), p. 3.

⁹ Edward Nangle, *The truth as it is revealed in Jesus addressed to the roman Catholic inhabitants of Kildalkey* (Dublin, 1828), p. 1.

¹⁰ Edward Nangle, *The novelties of the Romish mass. A letter to the Rev. James Dwyer, Roman Catholic priest* (Achill, 1838), p. 5.

¹¹ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), pp. 1-4.

¹² Edward Nangle, *The Rev. Dr. MacHale's letter to the Bishop of Exeter, dissected in seven letters* (Dublin, 1833), p. 26.

1834, Nangle argued that all must be measured against the Bible: 'In proof that the ultimate appeal must be to the Bible, and that no man is worthy of credit, except as his doctrines must be proved by the Bible, and that it is the duty of all people to try whether the doctrines of their teachers are true or false by that unerring word'.¹³ Furthermore, his knowledge of Hebrew, Greek and Latin – acquired at Trinity – allowed him to examine thoroughly the older texts of both the Old and New Testament. Difficult questions respecting man's salvation, like "What must I do to be saved?" swelled within his mind. In searching for an answer, he simply consulted St. Paul, who said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'.¹⁴

An intense hatred of Roman Catholicism underpinned his writing. He frequently described the Pope as 'the nurse of superstition, the murderous enemy of the good, the advocate and ally of the wicked'.¹⁵ Nangle expressed this notion clearly in his early publications and asserted it throughout his life. In *The truth as it is revealed in Jesus*, he did not shirk controversy; rather, he challenged the Irish priesthood head-on, comparing their manipulation of the Bible to the chicanery of a fraudulent merchant, who in order to swindle his customers tips the scales and then refuses them the chance to measure the goods themselves.¹⁶ When priests conducted religious ceremonies in Latin, a language unintelligible to the majority of Irish Catholics, they denied them direct access to the Word of God. Moreover, he considered the celebration of the mass itself an error, for it lessened the significance of Christ's death on the

¹³ Edward Nangle, *The ancient Catholic faith defended against Romish novelties; being a reply to a pamphlet entitled imposture exposed, and a letter addressed to the inhabitants of Achill, by the Rev. John Keaveny, roman Catholic priest* (Dublin, 1834), pp. 83-84.

¹⁴ Acts 26:30, 31.

¹⁵ *Achill Missionary Herald* 27 Jun. 1844.

cross. In 1838 he wrote, 'There is no true and propitiatory sacrifice but that which Christ our Saviour offered, when he shed his blood and died upon the cross'.¹⁷ Since Catholic priests forbade the private reading of the Bible, and even went door to door to confiscate the copies that had been distributed gratis by the itinerant preachers who worked for the various Bible societies, Nangle made it his duty to bring the word of God to the native Irish. In *Protestantism in Ireland*, a printed version of a sermon preached in Bath on 5 July 1835, he castigated the priests for withholding Scripture from the people: 'Now the Romish priests prohibit the people to search the Scriptures – they hinder them by force where they can and when they cannot they endeavour to turn them from the study of these sacred prophets by persuasion'.¹⁸ Nangle, like all evangelical Protestants, believed that God spoke to His people through the Bible and if the priests withheld its divine message, then there was no chance of their attaining salvation. He further asserted that the priests' grip on their respective flocks threatened the people's spiritual well-being and thwarted their quest for spiritual truth:

Suppose our Lord Jesus were now personally on earth, going about preaching the Gospel – he comes to Ireland—you desire much to hear him, would you deem it necessary to ask permission of the priest? No, surely not. But if from his altar he warned his congregation not to presume to listen to the preaching of Jesus. Why, my dear reader, I almost hear you exclaiming, "we would then have nothing more to do with him or any such Priest." Let me then ask you, if it would be impious to deter you from *hearing* the sermons of Christ, is it not equally so to prevent you from *reading* them?"¹⁹

Not surprisingly, the Catholic hierarchy was also abhorrent to Nangle, a hostility fanned when John MacHale, the Catholic Bishop of Killala, launched an attack on the established church. He ~~berated~~ the Whig

¹⁶ Edward Nangle, *The truth as it is revealed in Jesus addressed to the Roman Catholic inhabitants of Kildalkey* (Dublin, 1828), p. 3.

¹⁷ Edward Nangle, *The novelties of the Romish mass*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Edward Nangle, *Protestantism in Ireland*, p. 35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

government over the elevation of Henry Philpotts from dean of Chester to bishop of Exeter: 'With every new administration fresh light broke in upon their [the established clergy's] views, and like obedient planets, they quietly revolved around the political centre, to which they owed their existence, reflecting the orthodox colour of every adverse creed, to which caprice of fashion gave a temporary ascendancy'.²⁰ MacHale claimed that the recent passing of the Church Temporalities Act (1833), which had reduced the number of archbishoprics in the Church of Ireland from four to two, was a marked sign that the Protestant church in Ireland had entered into a period of decline and that Philpotts's appointment was merely a symptom of a weakened and politically dependent Protestant episcopacy. MacHale's jibe, especially the remarks, 'your titles are of man's creation; but our heraldry is from Heaven' or 'the Catholic bishops are at your defiance,' helped provoke Nangle's response.²¹ In one of his better-known and widely read polemical jousts, *Dr. MacHale's letter to the Bishop of Exeter, dissected* (1833), Nangle ably defended Philpotts. After reviewing and publicising this counterblast, the *Christian Examiner* dubbed Nangle "a sturdy Protestant" and complimented the admirable and convincing way

in which Mr. Nangle puts the Gospel before his readers, and draws out the contrast between evangelical truth and Popish error. We wish, as Mr. Nangle is an able Irish scholar, that he would thus give the poor Connaught Irish the means of knowing they are misled, trampled on, and kept in error, ignorance, and degradation, by Romish priestcraft.²²

Since the site for Nangle's missionary settlement had already been procured from Sir Richard O'Donnell and construction of its buildings was well underway by 1833, this review doubly served as an advertisement for the

²⁰ John MacHale's letter to the Bishop of Exeter, printed in *Freeman's Journal*, 16 Apr. 1833.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Christian Examiner* 1833, p. 879.

Achill Mission. Caesar Otway and Joseph Henderson Singer, the latter a founding member of the Achill Mission Committee, both were heavily involved with the editing and publishing of the *Christian Examiner*, therefore, they used the two polemical letters as an opportunity to showoff Nangle's talents to the Protestant world in Britain. In rebuking MacHale, Nangle retorted that Catholicism, not Irish Protestantism, would soon crumble before the eyes of the world:

'Tis plain as noon day, to any man who will not obstinately close his eyes against facts of common notoriety, that Rome's glory is withering – that glory, which, like the phosphoric exhalation from putrid carcasses, shines only in the dark, is fast discovering the filthiness of its origin in the light of truth which is reflected in the Bible.²³

Nangle surmised that Catholicism was doomed – secular and Biblical history confirmed this. Since the early days of the Reformation in Germany, the Bible had been printed in many lands and in many languages. And now, in the 1830s, with the technological innovations in printing and the improvements in ocean navigation, Scripture was enjoying its widest readership. The proliferation of the Bible throughout the world was only one sign of the Second Coming. The political victories of Irish Catholics after 1829, according to Nangle, were pyrrhic; the Roman church was losing much ground as Protestantism spread throughout the world.

While on an emotional level Scripture penetrated Nangle's life work and hardened his anti-Catholicism, he also waved it as a weapon before his enemies. Shortly after Nangle arrived on Achill in 1834, John Keaveny, the parish priest of Achill, cursed Nangle and the other missionary agents at Dugort. In retaliation, a cocksure Nangle challenged Keaveny to find Scriptural proof of Catholicism's supremacy; and, if successful, 'we will at

once forsake the Protestant Church and join the Church of Rome'.²⁴ However, if Keaveny failed to convince, then Nangle expected the Achill Catholics to quit their church and join forces with the missionary settlement. Specifically, Nangle entreated Keaveny to provide Scriptural evidence for fourteen Catholic tenets objected to by Protestants. Provoked by Nangle's challenge, Kearney took up the gauntlet and drafted a scurrilous response, which was subsequently published in the *Tyrawly Herald*. As expected, Nangle dismissed Keaveny's Scriptural rebuttal and in another pamphlet, *The ancient catholic faith defended* (1834), asserted that the Catholic Church scandalously and dangerously moulded the Word of God to support its doctrines. In his argument, Nangle appealed to reason:

I call upon any thinking Roman Catholic to search, and try, and see whether we have truly charged the Church of Rome with altering the ancient Catholic faith, and substituting a system of man's inventions, which differs as much from the old religion taught by Christ and his apostles, as darkness differs from light.²⁵

This episode demonstrates two things: firstly, it shows the prominence of the Bible in Nangle's evangelical zeal; and secondly, it testifies to and explains his aversion for the Roman Catholic Church. He felt the Catholic Church knowingly and malevolently cheated the people in order to consolidate its control:

The true reason why the Bible is kept out of your hands, my friends, is this – what God teaches his people in that holy book is very different from what the Church of Rome teaches her votaries; and your priests are aware, that if the book of God be generally circulated and read, they cannot retain that dominion which they have usurped over your consciences.²⁶

He unremittingly encouraged his listeners to turn their backs on the priests and to read the Bible for themselves, in a language they could understand, in order

²³ Edward Nangle, *The Rev. Dr. MacHale's letter to the Bishop of Exeter, dissected in seven letters* (Dublin, 1833), p. 24.

²⁴ Edward Nangle, *The ancient Catholic faith defended*, p. 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

to 'break the yoke of sin and superstition in which Satan holds you – may he incline you to read his holy word in a prayerful spirit'.²⁷ Therefore a humble reading of the Bible, in a comprehensible language, would awaken the Irish peasantry to Catholic trickery: 'the unwarranted impositions which the Church of Rome lays upon men's consciences, and by her blasphemous additions to the word of God, she strikes at the very root of the full and free salvation which there is in Christ Jesus...'²⁸

Nangle wholeheartedly believed that man was powerless to determine his salvation. Underlying all of the bravado, the heart of Nangle's evangelical theology was the 'death of Jesus' on the cross, which atoned for all of man's sin. 'The death of Christ', he said, 'is the means by which the Father's love accomplishes its gracious purposes toward our ruined world'.²⁹ He charged the Roman Church with keeping its adherents ignorant of the atonement's importance by withholding the Bible, and he castigated the priests for interposing themselves between the believer and salvation, instead emphasizing the individual's direct relationship with God. Since he abhorred the Roman Catholic belief that some good works could absolve sin and justify one in the Lord's eyes, he found sacramentals like rosaries and scapulars (for which a plenary indulgence had been granted by Pius IX in 1847) particularly offensive.³⁰ Since God alone dispensed justice, the denial of earthly works best guaranteed a final and lasting reward: 'There is no doctrine so diametrically contrary to the merits of Christ, and the redemption of the world,

²⁶ Edward Nangle, *The truth as it is revealed in Jesus*, p. 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁹ Edward Nangle, *Protestantism in Ireland*, p. 25.

³⁰ Thomas Grimley, *Devotions, indulgences, and advantages of the scapular of the passion with meditations for everyday* (Dublin, 1849), p. 14.

thereby, as justification by works'.³¹ Because temporal works were meaningless and 'present obedience can never atone for past transgression', Nangle asserted that works must be removed from any soteriological argument.³² Since there was no ethical value in doing good works by command, Nangle believed virtuous action must be spontaneous, the consequence of regeneration rather than the cause.³³ In this manner God justifies the sinner and grafts him by faith into Christ and plants him into His spiritual garden, not because he has done good works, for he is still a sinner, but because he has the potential to do good works while living on earth. In other words, ultimately life is to be regarded as temporary and superfluous to salvation, since all long-term ends and means lie in eternity.³⁴ Once the distractions of good works were stripped from the soteriological equation, one was forced to focus on the death of Jesus. Since Nangle felt that the Bible best instructed man in the life and death of Jesus Christ, he painted the priest as an interloper, rather than an intermediary, to eternal life.

In denying good works, Nangle affirmed that man attained salvation by faith in the death of Christ. His published work relays St. Paul's message that only the 'blood of the Cross' redeems the world from sin. In Nangle's eyes, the sacrifice of the Catholic mass belittled the crucifixion's importance by conjoining it to other methods of expiating sin and attaining everlasting life. To him, 'innovations' like purgatory and extreme unction, had no foundation in Scripture and diluted the momentousness of Christ's death:

³¹ *AMH* 25 Mar. 1841.

³² Edward Nangle, *The gospel-lever applied to the overturning of romanism in six discourses* (Dublin, 1833), p. xiii.

³³ Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), p. 32.

³⁴ Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement*, p. 33.

Your Catechism adds to this all-sufficient blood, this one offering once made – the merits of saints, the works of the just, penance, the sacrifice of the mass, priestly absolution, extreme unction and purgatory. And is not this a virtual denial of the all-sufficiency of the Redeemer's blood? For having received a medicine from a physician, with an assurance that it alone will remove my complaint, I add to it the prescriptions of every quack that comes in my way; my doing so implies my persuasion, that the medicine has not that entire efficacy which the physician declared it to possess.³⁵

Such spiritual 'quackery' infuriated Nangle. There was no room for the priest's judgement within his paradigm. God, who ignored outward affectations and looked into man's inner soul, not the priest, was Nangle's only spiritual arbitrator:

But God, whose eye nothing escapes, and who esteems not so much the external appearance, as the purity of the heart, in the prohibition of adultery, murder, and theft, comprises a prohibition of lust, wrath, hatred, coveting what belongs to another, fraud and every similar vice. For being a spiritual legislator, he addresses himself to the soul as much as to the body. How often is this forgotten or overlooked by the generality of mankind; for, discarding the law of God altogether, they either follow the impulse of their lusts, or falsely and hypocritically pretending a respect for it, they dispose their eyes, their hands, and all the parts of their body, to some kind of outward observance of the Divine Law; while at the same time their hearts are entirely alienated from all obedience to it; and they suppose they have discharged their duty if they have concealed from man what they practice in the sight of God.³⁶

Nangle was greatly indebted to and influenced by the sermons of Thomas Chalmers, the Scottish evangelical who in the words of an admiring contemporary, 'began that baptism, so to speak of political economy with Christianity'.³⁷ Today, most historians know Chalmers, if they recognize him at all, as the economic wizard and early defender of *laissez-faire* liberalism, yet he was also a highly influential preacher who dexterously adapted spiritual complexities to the exigencies of the age. While he ministered in Scotland, Edward Irving, the well-known radical pre-millennialist, was Chalmer's assistant. Chalmers, advocated a strong Biblical literalism and faith in Jesus' atonement.³⁸ Moreover, he upheld that men cannot judge other men; this privilege was reserved for the Almighty: 'God is not man', Chalmers

³⁵ Edward Nangle, *The truth as it is in Jesus*, p. 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

³⁷ John Lalor, *Money and morals: a book for the times* (London, 1852), p. vii.

³⁸ Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement*, p. 56.

preached, 'nor can we measure what is due to him, by what is do to our fellows in society'.³⁹ Nangle built upon Chalmer's message in sermons denying purgatory, the sacrifice of the mass and penance.⁴⁰ Man possessed nothing God wanted, 'God owns all of us and all that we possess, so it is impossible for us to give Him anything'.⁴¹ Good works, therefore, were inconsequential. Only by believing in the atoning death of Christ could one be saved: 'Through Christ, and in consideration of his atoning death, the Holy Spirit, in his regenerating and sanctifying influences, is given to those that believe'.⁴² Such themes sat heavily on Nangle's mind and they were subsequently reiterated in his writings.

'The coming of the Lord is nigh': Pre-millennialism after the Famine

When Nangle was not picking fights with Catholic prelates, he busied himself with prophecy. Especially after 1850, he directed the bulk of his intellectual energies towards investigating Biblical prophecy's relationship to secular history. Unfortunately, Biblical prophecies were as difficult to interpret in the nineteenth century as they are now. Yet, to expositors like Edward Nangle, they made perfect sense; and the signs of the times suggested that "the coming of the Lord is nigh".⁴³ Serious minded nineteenth-century men and women frequently discovered within the pages of their Bibles the signs and forecasts of Christ's second coming. This enthusiasm for prophetic Scripture provides a measure of the distance between our time and Nangle's,

151. ³⁹ Thomas Chalmers, *Sermons, preached in the Tron Church, Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1819), p.

⁴⁰ Edward Nangle, *The gospel-lever applied to the overturning of romanism*, p. 29.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Edward Nangle, *Protestantism in Ireland*, p., 28.

for the stuff of prophecy, both explicit and implicit, was a normal intellectual activity in early nineteenth-century Britain.⁴⁴ Although many rational and moderate Christians had avoided dealing with prophetic books like Revelation, others had enthusiastically embraced them. Nangle's evangelicalism must be seen through the lens of Biblical prophecy, which influenced both his eschatology and his mission to Catholic Ireland.

While contemporary Catholics were obsessed by the prognostications of Pastorini and the miracles of Prince Hohenlohe, militant Protestants developed their brand of "folk" religion based upon Holy Scripture.⁴⁵ For Edward Nangle, all the books of the Bible met and ended in Revelations.⁴⁶ Since the end of the first century CE, when Revelations first circulated among the early Christian churches, the visions of its author, who humbly identified himself as John, have puzzled and fascinated those attempting to unlock their meaning.⁴⁷ Whether John was one of Jesus' beloved twelve apostles, as some traditions claim, or an elder in the church of Ephesus when Roman authorities arrested and exiled him to the Aegean island of Patmos, has been irrelevant to those obsessed with deciphering his unconventional images. Ultimately, his message mattered more to prophetic expositors than his identity.⁴⁸ John's message sat heavily within Nangle's thought, for the latter's Biblical literalism forced him to think long and hard about the visions of the Patmos prophet. To understand Nangle's evangelical mission and the effect prophesy had upon his

⁴³ Edward Nangle to T.D. Gregg, 5 Dec. 1837, printed in *AMH* Dec. 20 1837.

⁴⁴ W.H. Oliver, *Prophets and millennialists: the uses of Biblical prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), p. 11.

⁴⁵ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 67.

⁴⁶ *AMH* 30 Dec. 1841.

⁴⁷ An historical background to the book of Revelations can be found in Robert H. Charles, *A critical history of the doctrine of a future life* (London, 1913), especially chapters 9 and 10. Other sketches can be found in the introductions to versions of the New Testament.

behaviour, therefore, one must probe into his interpretation and application of Revelations and the other prophetic books to everyday life.

Since the tumultuous days of the French Revolution, described by Nangle as 'that frightful manifestation of human depravity'⁴⁹, pre-millennialism had gained in both coverage and acceptance in Britain.⁵⁰ A spate of sermons and academic pamphlets on Daniel and Revelations poured forth in the 1790s.⁵¹ Some of these writers were classified "historicists", who believed that the prophetic books of the Bible, like Daniel and Revelations, foretold the secular events leading up to Christ's second coming and that many of these events had already come to pass. Others were "futurists", who believed that the events these books described would occur in the future. Despite these differences, as news of the extraordinary events from France swept across Europe, students of this renewed apocalyptic literature, then mostly historicists, agreed that they were witnessing the fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelations.

To many modern readers, these prophecies seem bizarre. The prophet Daniel described a chronological progression of four grotesque animals, each symbolizing a worldly empire – the last animal adorned with ten horns (Dan. 7:7-28). In his vision the arrival of a new "little horn", which grew up on the fourth animal, "plucked up" three of the original ten horns. This "little horn" was thought to represent a king or governor, whom one day would rule by

⁴⁸ James West Davidson, *The logic of millennial thought* (New Haven and London, 1977), p. 3.

⁴⁹ Edward Nangle, *A short and simple explanation of the book of revelation of Jesus Christ* (Achill, 1859), p. 74.

⁵⁰ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism: British and American millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago and London, 1970), pp. 5-6; Eugen Weber, *Apocalypse: prophecies, cults and millennial beliefs* (London, 1999), pp. 14-17; W.H. Oliver, *Prophets and millennialists*, pp.13-15.

⁵¹ J.F.C. Harrison, *The second coming: popular millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979), p. 207.

deception and treachery for 'time, two times, and half a time'. Revelations 13 described a similar ten-horned beast, which lived for forty-two months, and Protestants like Nangle understood the "little horn" from Daniel and the beast envisioned by John to be symbolic of the same event – the tyrannical reign of the papacy for exactly 1,260 years. After the beast's demise, Christ's pre-millennial kingdom would come down and join his elect on earth to rule for a period of 1000 years.⁵²

Prophetic scholars before the nineteenth-century had argued about a fixed date for the Papacy's beginning. However, when the French ditched the *ancien regime* and replaced Catholicism with the religion of reason, enthusiastic expositors figured that the papacy had expired. When French troops under Napoleon, the son of the Revolution, invaded Rome in February 1798, stripped the politically impotent Pope Pius VI of his temporal powers, established a new republic and banished him from the eternal city, it looked like the final nail had been driven into the papal coffin. Accordingly, it seemed to some that the 1,260 years were now accomplished, and many eccentric interpreters, like Edward King (1735-1807), found the beginning of the popes' reign, by subtraction, locating it in 538 CE, when the pope's universal jurisdiction was allegedly recognized by the Emperor Justinian:

Was not this End, in other parts of the Holy Prophecies, foretold to be, at the end of 1,260 years? – and was it not foretold by Daniel, to be at the end of time, two times and half a time? which computations amount to the same period. And now let us see; -- hear; and understand.

⁵² The chronological estimate of the 1,260 days was based on what became known as the "year-day" theory. It was argued that the prophetic secrets of Scripture could be unlocked by substituting "year" whenever "day" was mentioned. When weeks were mentioned, they were interpreted as seven year periods; months were interpreted as periods of thirty years. The forty-two months mentioned in Revelations 13 were then simply figured out at 1,260 years. Using this crude mathematical system, commentators arrived at the figure of 1,260 years for the length of the papacy. In 1631, Joseph Mede used a little more ingenuity to correlate the "time, two times and half a time" from Daniel with three and one half years, or forty-two months.

This is the year 1798. – And just 1,260 years ago, in the very beginning of the year 538, Belisarius put an end to the empire, and dominion of the Goths, at Rome.⁵³

Soon after Pius VI fled Rome for Valence, lay and clerical expositors of Scripture rushed to printing houses in London and Dublin to have their manuscripts published. L.E. Froom has estimated that over one thousand considerable works grounded in the pre-millennial advent and prophecies emerged during the first four decades of the nineteenth-century.⁵⁴ Equipped with their new knowledge, these scholars resolutely set out to fix a date for the second coming.

Roadmaps to the millennium had been carefully designed before in both Britain and North America, so there was no shortage of models to imitate. The Cambridge academic and Puritan Joseph Mede (1586-1638) had rekindled interest in Biblical prophecy on both sides of the Atlantic as far back as 1627, when he published *Clavis Apocalyptica* (The key to the Revelation) – first in Latin and later in English, translated by order of Parliament in 1643. James Ussher, who served as the archbishop of Armagh from 1625 until his death in 1656, had twice attempted to have Mede appointed provost of Trinity College, Dublin.⁵⁵ Although Ussher's requests were ultimately refused, they illustrate the excitement about millennial chronology on both sides of the Irish Sea, especially within the walls of Trinity. Furthermore, in the century after Mede, his chronology was accepted both by Isaac Newton and his episcopal namesake Thomas, whose *Dissertations on the prophecies* (1754-58), a book

⁵³ Edward King, *Remarks on the signs of the times* (London, 1798), p. 86. King grew obsessed with the second coming after 1792, having plenty of time to devote to it since a massive fortune was bequeathed to him from his uncle which freed him from the duties of his law practice. *Remarks* involved him with a dispute with Richard Gough within the pages of the *Gentlemen's Magazine*. Besides interpreting Biblical prophecy, King attempted to prove that John the Baptist was an angel from heaven.

⁵⁴ L.E. Froom, *The prophetic faith of our fathers* (4 vols, Washington, 1946), iii, p. 266.

studied by Nangle during the divinity course at Trinity, brought respectability to “year-day” theory. Predictably, these writers had their critics, and the historian S.R. Maitland (1792-1866) epitomized best the suspicion that sceptics had of “year-day” theory in *An enquiry into the grounds which the prophetic period of Daniel and St. John has been supposed to consist of 1,260 years* (1826).

The most influential studies after 1800 came from the pens of various historicist exegetes; and its bibliography included works such as George Stanley Faber’s *Dissertations on the prophecies* (1806), Manuel Lacunza’s *The coming of the messiah in glory and majesty* (1812), William Cunninghame’s *A dissertation of the apocalypse* (1813), and James Hatley Frere’s *Combined view of the prophecies of Daniel, Esdras, and St. John* (1815).⁵⁶ Furthermore, in the periodicals of the time, inspired writers, frequently identifying themselves by such cabbalistic pseudonyms as Talib, Senex, or Crito, wrote for an audience craving prophetic writing in journals such as London’s *Morning Watch*, the *Jewish Expositor*, the *Record*, the *Investigator*, the *Watchman*, and Dublin’s *Christian Herald* and *Christian Examiner*.⁵⁷ Only a handful of these periodicals lasted more than a few years, yet their sudden appearance on the scene illustrates the vitality of the interest in Biblical prophecy and testifies to the urgency of getting the word out before it was too late.

⁵⁵ Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan millennium: literature and theology, 1550-1682* (Dublin, 2000), p. 90.

⁵⁶ George Stanley Faber (1773-1854) was Anglican; Manuel Lacunza, a.k.a. Ben Ezra (1731-1801), alias Juan Ben-Ezra, was a Chilean Jesuit; James William Cunninghame (1780-1861) was a Scots Presbyterian; James Hatley Frere (1779-1866) was an Anglican. According to Sandeen, Anglicans supplied the greatest number of contributors to prophetic study. E. Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Ernest Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, p. 8.

Apocalyptic literature and intellectual trail-blazers were not the only evidence of pre-millennial excitement, for a plethora of prophetic societies and discussion groups sprang up to give shape and practical expression to pre-millennialism. The most noteworthy and far-reaching of these societies, the London Society for Promoting Christianity was founded in 1809, mainly to proselytise London Jews. However, when Lewis Way, an intriguing and eccentric parvenu, relieved the London Society of its substantial debt in 1815, and transformed this agency into a worldwide mission set upon the restoration of the Jews to Palestine – an essential precursor to the second coming – the London Society attracted international attention. From 1816-1831, the pages of its monthly journal, the *Jewish Expositor*, doggedly informed readers of the society's progress and urged them to prepare for Christ's unexpected arrival. Another group, the Society for the Investigation of Prophecy, formed in London in 1826 looked for the precise intersections between prophecy and secular history. Further proof that interest in prophecy was slow to subside, the Prophecy Investigation Society, founded in 1842, boasted in the 1860s of fifty members who met twice a year for intense three-day conferences.⁵⁸

This pre-millennial frenzy, coming from Anglican pens, greatly affected Nangle. He devoured the publications of the day and attended as many prophetic discussion groups as possible. His acceptance and personal exposition of Revelations raises two questions. Firstly, was this particular scriptural book cardinal to his religious tenets or merely a passing interest? Secondly, if Revelations was an integral part of Nangle's religion, and I believe it was, then how did its interpretation affect his world view and

⁵⁸ Ernest Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, p. 25.

especially of his fellow man – how did he put it into practice? Did it influence his missionary work on Achill?

The answers can be unearthed in Nangle's writings on the subject. Even a cursory glance at his life work reveal that, like most vigorous evangelicals of the day, he was obsessed with Christ's second coming. Titles like: *The coming and kingdom of Christ; A short and simple explanation of the book of Revelation; The church of Rome: the foretold apostasy; and Glimpses and songs of the coming kingdom* corroborate this fascination. Scripture, which provided evidence for all of Nangle's religious beliefs, also supported the Second Advent:

Thus the Holy Scriptures make wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. To illustrate this truth fully, we should carry your thoughts forward to the time of Christ's second and glorious appearing, when the period of his people's mourning shall be ended, when the soul being perfected in holiness, shall be reunited to a glorified body, and the whole redeemed family shall be gathered together in one, in Christ's everlasting kingdom of light and love...⁵⁹

Nangle drew considerable inspiration from many Irish examples. Besides the texts mentioned above, Trinity College graduates, and other men with strong Irish links, composed updated and home-grown representations of the apocalypse.⁶⁰ The definitive chronology of James Ussher (1581-1656), the *Chronologica sacra* was published after 1658; William Hales (1747-1831) who composed *A new analysis of chronology* (1809-1812); Peter Roberts (1760-1819) who contributed the *Manuel of prophecy* in 1818; George Croly (1780-1860) who published a commentary on Revelations in 1827; Edward Newenham Hoare (1802-1877), the rector of St. Lawrence, Limerick, who edited the short-lived Irish prophetic journal, the *Christian Herald* (1830-1835); and William Digby (1783-1866) and Joseph D'Arcy Sirr (1794-1868),

⁵⁹ Edward Nangle, *Scriptural education. A sermon preached in behalf of the Castlebar schools, on Sunday. March 17, 1839* (Achill, 1839), p. 11.

Archbishop Trench's biographer, teamed up to write *The first resurrection considered* in 1833. Digby, the archdeacon of Elphin, periodically contributed lengthy letters on the pre-millennial advent of Christ to the *Achill Missionary Herald*. Most of these expositions were written during what Ernest Sandeen terms the "first phase of British millenarianism", or roughly from 1792 until 1845. The "second phase", which experienced the resurgence of millenarianism in England and Ireland during the late 1840s, coincided with the decline of the historicists and the rise of John Nelson Darby's dispensationalism, which was derived from a futurist interpretation of Scriptural prophecy. While the latter period is the subject of this chapter, Nangle's case suggests that it was inspired and shaped by the former.

More importantly for Irish evangelicalism, in 1831 the centre of pre-millennial discussion in the United Kingdom shifted to Ireland with the conferences held at the county Wicklow home of Lady Theodosia Powerscourt, which during the early 1830s became in effect the centre of evangelical life in Ireland.⁶¹ These annual meetings debated the validity of "year-day" theory and the imminent return of Christ along the same lines as the Albury group, its better-known English predecessor.⁶² Robert Daly, future bishop of Cashel and then rector of Powerscourt, presided over the group, yet it was the charismatic John Nelson Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren, who dominated the proceedings. Most of the pre-millennialists in attendance,

⁶⁰ D.N. Hempton, "Evangelicalism and eschatology" in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xxxi (1980), p. 185.

⁶¹ Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession: radical evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815-35* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 162.

⁶² In 1826, Henry Drummond, banker, Tory MP and follower of Edward Irving, invited a distinguished group of ministers and laymen to Albury Park, Surrey, to discuss Biblical prophecy. This was repeated until 1830. For a more in depth discussion of the Albury Park meetings, see Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, pp. 18-22; and D.N. Hempton, "Evangelicalism and eschatology", pp. 185-186.

like Joseph Henderson Singer, Thomas Kelly, and Peter Roe, were of the historicist persuasion and fiercely contested Darby's futurist views.⁶³ Those present, however, agreed upon the following: the tribulation of the church at some period; the support received by God's people under trial; and the personal appearance of Jesus Christ at the second coming. However, there was much difference of opinion concerning the period of the 1,260 days and whether the earth would suffer destruction similar to that which took place at the deluge. Moreover, in Daly's words, 'There has been no uniformity of opinion respecting the beast in 13th Revelations, and about the little horn into whose hand the saints are delivered'.⁶⁴ Since the conference adjourned with such dissension, Daly asked the participants to refrain from discussing the proceedings, 'because what might be assumed one day might change at another and confuse unintelligent congregations of the truth of the Bible'.⁶⁵ To Daly's dismay, this fear was realised, for during these meetings a power struggle emerged and both Daly and Darby vied for Lady Powerscourt's favour. In the end, the Darbyites won her over and she left the Church of Ireland, thus creating a fissure that upset Irish evangelicalism and sent shockwaves throughout Britain.

But who was John Nelson Darby and how was he able to cause such a fracas? Unfortunately, his career is little understood and a modern biography is needed.⁶⁶ After completing his course at the well-known Westminster school in London, he matriculated at Trinity College, Dublin at the age of 15 on 3 July 1815. After finishing the undergraduate course with a Gold medal, Darby

⁶³ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-1870* (Dublin, 1978), p. 65.

⁶⁴ *Christian Examiner*, 1831, p. 961.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 962.

opted to train in law, but left his professional studies as quickly as he started them.⁶⁷ His own unique contributions to nineteenth-century Protestant eschatology, which included the distinctive theological concept of the secret rapture, effectively provided the instrument that cut biblical scholarship into the competing historicist and futurist camps. Darbyites espoused futurism, while others, like Nangle, embraced historicism, saying, 'men of the most enlarged intelligence have traced out a resemblance between the prophecies of the Book of Revelation and the succession of events which have occurred since the first coming of Christ'.⁶⁸ Not only did Nangle regard futurism as unsound and illogical, but he also objected to what he perceived as its trappings of Catholicism.⁶⁹ Although Darby did not possess any affinity for Roman Catholic tenets, both shared the assumption that the whole Book of Revelations, with the exception of the first three chapters, remained to be fulfilled and that the predicted events of the last days, whenever they arrived, would be literally squeezed into a brief space of three and a half years. Darby and Nangle also differed on the church's position in history, for the former held an ecclesiology that reversed almost every position held by the Church of Ireland, advocating a purely spiritual church that existed outside of history.⁷⁰ Darby never intended the church to become the great world network that boasted of an elaborate episcopacy; that kind of success he considered a sign of apostasy and he satisfied himself with a handful of followers.⁷¹ While

⁶⁶ The most noteworthy and cited biography of John Nelson Darby is W.G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby* (London, 1901).

⁶⁷ A treatment of J.N. Darby and his life's work is given in E. Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, especially chapter 3.

⁶⁸ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle, the apostle of Achill*, p. 246.

⁶⁹ Edward Nangle, *Recollection of separatists: a plea for the Reformed Church of England, based on the statements of Scripture and the testimony of facts* (Dublin, 1861), p.11

⁷⁰ Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, p. 67.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Nangle might have frequently bumped heads with the High Church elements within the Church of Ireland, especially the Tractarians after 1833, he respected its institutions and defended the visible Protestant church against the looming threats of Catholicism.⁷² When preaching in Bath in 1835, he beseeched his fellow ministers to uphold the Thirty-nine articles or be accused of 'clerical dissimulation'.⁷³ However, despite their differences, the two men shared something in common: both Darby and Nangle had attended Trinity College, Dublin during the early nineteenth-century and both had had Joseph Henderson Singer as their tutor.

More investigation into the intellectual life of Trinity College, Dublin during the first half of the nineteenth-century is needed to gauge fully the connection between the growth of pre-millennial thought and anti-Catholicism in Ireland. Ernest Sandeen noted that graduates of Trinity, for unclear reasons, were among the most able defenders of futurism, while D.N. Hempton has seen the same university producing a considerable number of historicist writers.⁷⁴ Since all undergraduates at this time were fixed into one prescribed course, it is unlikely that it was the material covered and the books read that steered students into a particular camp. However, the Fellows of the College, many of whom were also tutors, had profound influence over the undergraduates. Since the majority of the Fellows were in clerical orders, their influence over future generations of Irish clergymen paved the way for the growth of

⁷² Edward Nangle, *The church of Rome: the foretold apostacy*, p. 6.

⁷³ Edward Nangle, *Protestantism in Ireland*, p. 13.

⁷⁴ Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, p. 38fn; D.N. Hempton, "Evangelicalism and eschatology", p. 185.

evangelicalism within the established church.⁷⁵ As the evangelical party within the Church of Ireland began to take shape at the end of the eighteenth-century, its most charismatic and vociferous leaders, men like Joseph Stopford and Peter Roe, emerged from College Green.⁷⁶ The upheavals of the 1790s shocked these men, and some Trinity Fellows, like William Hales, experienced the horrors of the 1798 rebellion at first hand. As a result, the prevailing pre-millennialism already in the air blended well with a fierce anti-Catholicism, which saw the Roman Church as the beast from Revelations 13. This pairing of pre-millennialism with anti-Catholicism was more than casual, and although millenarians across the board were stoutly anti-Catholic, they were even more so in Ireland. Since the nearest zone of Papal influence to Britain was Ireland (Roman Catholic episcopacy), Trinity pre-millennialists needed only to look in their own back garden for the first signs of the great battle between Christ and Antichrist.⁷⁷ Every agitation by English and Irish Catholics was seen to correspond with the battles described in Revelations and, thus, after Ireland's turbulent entry into the nineteenth-century, it appeared with increasing certainty that the second coming was drawing near.⁷⁸ Trinity academics during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, therefore, were able to inculcate their brand of pre-millennialism in their students. While it is difficult to account for the prevalence of both historicism and futurism in the prophetic writings of Trinity academics and graduates, the

⁷⁵ Joseph Liechty, "Irish evangelicalism, Trinity College, Dublin, and the mission of the Church of Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century" (Ph.D. thesis., N.U.I. (Maynooth), 1987), p. 166.

⁷⁶ Irene Whelan, "Evangelical religion and the polarization of Protestant-Catholic relations in Ireland, 1780-1840" (PhD. Thesis., University of Wisconsin-Madison 1994), p. 151.

⁷⁷ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-1870* (Dublin 1978), p. 65.

⁷⁸ Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, p. 17.

relationship between pre-millennialism and anti-Catholicism within the university is better understood.

If we are to understand Nangle's thinking, then we must take seriously his intense preoccupation with the cryptic images of Biblical prophecy, which he probably acquired at Trinity and developed during his years on Achill. Attesting to this ardour, his biographer admitted, 'Few will perhaps agree with him in what he says on this remarkable subject, but all will admire the ingenuity of his arguments and the plausibility of his reasoning'.⁷⁹ Today, with even less emphasis placed on interpretations of Revelations among the general public, the dangers of misinterpreting what Nangle wrote on Biblical prophecy are as great as expositors faced in the nineteenth-century. In order to gauge the significance of prophecy's role to the mission of Irish evangelicals like Nangle, the careful and arduous reading of their tracts, sermons and pamphlets dealing with the obscurities of Biblical prophecy is required. Nangle must be placed within the broader context of nineteenth-century pre-millennialism; doing this forces us to see him as an integral element rather than an aberration of the times.

The immediate post-Famine years gave Nangle the hope and inspiration to continue with his missionary work on Achill. Despite the incessant conflicts with the island population, the colony had made considerable gains. Since the colony had attracted its greatest number of converts during the Famine, Nangle and his staff were optimistic that they could expand their enterprise throughout Connaught. With the support of Bishop Plunkett and the financial backing of ultra-Protestants in both Ireland

⁷⁹ Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle*, p. 252.

and England, it seemed the perfect time to branch out. MacHale's third visit to the island in 1850 inspired Nangle once again to take up the pen to defend Protestant principles against the 'Catholic enemy'. When Plunket transferred Nangle to Skreen in 1852, he spent no more than three months of the year at the Achill missionary settlement. Although removed from the day-to-day activities of the colony, he continued to edit the *Achill Missionary Herald*. No longer occupied with running the settlement, Nangle used his spare time to delve deeper into the intellectual realm of Biblical prophecy and to warn readers of the second coming.

Anti-Catholicism was obviously a stimulus to Nangle's pre-millennialism, if not its sole explanation. 'His whole soul was consumed in the controversy with Rome'⁸⁰, and what he saw as the deceitfulness of the priests convinced him that Rome stood for the Babylon described in Revelations 18.⁸¹ For him, letting Catholics into the political process in 1829 had been 'toleration run mad'. He became disillusioned with British politics and his polemics darkened noticeably.⁸² Because Irish Catholics continued to make political demands after 1829, his anti-Catholicism intensified.⁸³ Some evangelicals and conservative MPs had supported Catholic Emancipation, but soon after regretted their decision and grew more fiercely anti-Catholic as well. James Martineau, a minister at Eustace Street Presbyterian Meeting House in Dublin, was shocked by the anti-Catholic feeling found among many of the leading people in Irish society, who, in all other respects were kind,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 229.

⁸¹ Edward Nangle, *The gospel-lever applied to the overturning of Romanism in six discourses*, p. 20.

⁸² Edward Nangle, *The endowment of Maynooth neither morally right or politically expedient. A letter addressed to James Anthony Lawson, L.L.D., Q.C., in reply to his address to the electors of the University of Dublin, and his speech at the election* (London, 1857), p. 9.

courteous and fair minded.⁸⁴ While discussing the political concessions given to Irish Catholics, Nangle told the Protestant Association at a meeting in Exeter Hall on 28 December 1838 that the government had been too soft in dealing with Catholic requests and that control of the country was ‘virtually in the hands of the Irish priests – they must be conciliated at all costs’.⁸⁵ Later, when speaking on behalf of the Protestant Asylum in Galway in 1843, he accused the government of deliberately plunging Ireland into a state of national sin, ‘not knowing how to steer the vessel of the constitution through the troubled waters of democratic and revolutionary commotion’.⁸⁶ Because Nangle endorsed historicism, he believed that the signs of the times, especially the concessions given by parliament to Irish Catholics, were indicators that the second coming of Christ was imminent.

The signs of the times did much to push Nangle further along the pre-millennial path. He believed that certain signs would enable man to know when the change from the old to the new was about to take place, and since he believed that these signs would be social and political, he examined contemporary developments closely. Furthermore, Nangle identified the Church of Rome as the apostasy predicted by St. Paul, who told Timothy that ‘in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron’.⁸⁷ Because parliament continued to

⁸³ David Hempton, “Evangelicalism and eschatology”, p. 184.

⁸⁴ Ralph Waller, “James Martineau and the Catholic spirit amid the tensions of Dublin, 1828-1832”, in W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds.), *The churches, Ireland and the Irish* (London, 1989), p. 225.

⁸⁵ Edward Nangle, *The Achill Mission, and the present state of Protestantism in Ireland* (London, 1839), p. 18.

⁸⁶ Edward Nangle, *Britain’s sin and judgement: a sermon preached in the church of St. Nicholas, Galway, on Sunday, August 6th, 1843* (Achill, 1843), p. 4.

⁸⁷ 1 Timothy 4: 1,2.

pass legislation beneficial to Irish Catholics, he considered Britain the 'most wicked nation on earth'.⁸⁸ Despite all of her religious societies, which had impressively spread the word of God throughout the four corners of the world, Britain, represented by her parliament, merely paid lip-service to loyalty to Christ. Since 1829, parliament had increased the Maynooth Grant; reduced the number of archdioceses in the Irish Church; established a system of national education without the Bible; allowed Catholic priests to work in the army and the prisons; and emancipated Irish Catholics. In a pamphlet, *The glimpses and songs of the coming kingdom* (1864), Nangle castigated parliament, charging its members with colluding with the Pope against the British nation: 'How many of our members of Parliament know that the endowment of Maynooth is wrong in principle, who, from a variety of considerations affecting their personal ease or interest, refuse to vote against it!'⁸⁹ This parade of legislation, which weakened the Protestant world in Ireland, baffled Nangle and convinced him of Christ's imminent return. Nangle was convinced that just before the second coming 'semi-infidel Protestants and those who pass for serious Christians will all submit to the beast'.⁹⁰ As the government continued to pass more pro-Catholic laws, granting relief to Catholic disabilities, therefore, Nangle's pre-millennial expectations intensified.

The changing political climate was not the only sign that the second coming was quickly approaching. Hard times in Ireland revived millennial dreams and reminded Nangle of his Catholic nightmares. Since he expected God to unleash His wrath upon sinful nations prior to the second advent, he

⁸⁸ Edward Nangle, *Glimpses and songs of the coming kingdom*, p. 45.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

agreed that the Irish Famine was sent 'as a visitation – a chastisement for our national sins and crimes...which of late has engrossed the minds of all ranks and classes of men'.⁹¹ Nangle had anticipated such a catastrophe and in 1843 had warned Members of Parliament: 'If those guilty of offending God do not repent their sin, He will be visited on the day of judgement'.⁹² Consequently, the endowment of Maynooth had provoked God to punish Britain:

this act of treason against Christ was followed by a fearful Famine of six years' continuance, which spread distress among all classes and cost England eight millions of money. To those who think it politically expedient to persevere in a course which God has marked with such evident tokens of His displeasure, I say, in the words of the prophet – "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it."⁹³

While moderate lay evangelicals, like Sir Charles Trevelyan, Secretary to the Treasury at the time of the Famine, regarded the Famine as divine retribution against the 'indolent and unself-reliant' Irish, Nangle saw it, not only as the object of, but as the means of God's retribution for Britain's national sins.⁹⁴ Ireland suffered the potato blight not only because of Irish Catholic idolatry, but in consequence of the sins of parliament, whose liberal ministers had run amuck and had made the established religion compatible with the Romish apostasy: 'The endowment of Maynooth is a *practical denial* that such a difference of faith does exist between the Reformed Church and that of Rome. It is a *practical assertion* that Popery and Protestantism are but different phases of Christianity'.⁹⁵ In other words, it had nullified the relevance of the established religion. Since the Catholic Church had

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

⁹¹ Charles Vansittart, *A sermon on the Famine: the expediency of a public fast, and the duty of personal abstinence in the present time of dearth* (London, 1847), p. 9, as quoted by Boyd Hilton in *The age of atonement*, p. 113.

⁹² Edward Nangle, *Britain's sin and judgement*, p. 6.

⁹³ Edward Nangle, *The endowment of Maynooth neither morally right or politically expedient*, p. 36.

⁹⁴ Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement*, p. 113.

⁹⁵ Edward Nangle, *The endowment of Maynooth neither morally right or politically expedient*, p. 7.

historically shown a fierce intolerance towards Protestantism – for instance the inquisition – Nangle reasoned that the British legislature should now give no quarter to Catholics and in *The endowment of Maynooth neither morally right or politically expedient* (1857) asserted ‘unhesitatingly that a wise and prudent Legislature, anxious to confer the largest amount of toleration on the subjects of the realm, must impose salutary restraints on a system which strives with untiring energy and perseverance to substitute for rational liberty the grinding despotism of the Priest’.⁹⁶

Nangle never set a fixed date for the second coming. However, he was committed to some kind of schedule of expectations: ‘That these glorious events will take place, the writer is sure as there is a God in heaven, but when, or in what order, he prefers not to say, but he hopes and believes that the time is not distant’.⁹⁷ He considered prediction mania dangerous – perhaps even forbidden by Scripture. ‘There is no way of knowing for sure how long one must wait for the second coming and each generation has to be aware that He may come again at any time’.⁹⁸ He was careful to distance himself from controversial ‘superstitions’, like spiritualism, which believed that the living could communicate with the dead through the use of mediums.⁹⁹ Yet by adopting “year-day” theory to explain the 1,260 days of Daniel and Revelations and by further attaching the scenes of Revelations with contemporary events, he mortgaged his credibility to the uncertain future. As an example, Nangle identified the pouring of the second vial in Revelations 16

⁹⁶ Edward Nangle, *Endowment of Maynooth.*, p. 10.

⁹⁷ *AMH* 28 Jan. 1841.

⁹⁸ Edward Nangle, *A short and simple explanation of the book of revelation of Jesus Christ*, p.

viii.

⁹⁹ Edward Nangle, *Spiritualism fairly tried and its phenomena traced to their true cause* (Achill, 1861).

as the period of anarchy and terror that began in France on 2 September 1792.¹⁰⁰

Correlating past historical events with Biblical prophecy was one thing; using the Bible to predict the future was another. Nangle was well aware of the pitfalls of interpreting Scriptural prophecies: 'There always have been, and there necessarily must be, difficulties in the interpretation of unfulfilled prophecies, as parts of a system imperfectly understood'.¹⁰¹ Following the disaster of William Miller's notorious miscalculations regarding the end of the world in New England, the historicist position began to slip and to lose the almost undisputed ground that it had held earlier in the century.¹⁰² Consequently, Nangle refused to give in to the pressure to set a date for the second coming, choosing instead to warn others to ready themselves, for Christ will 'burst suddenly on a slumbering world'.¹⁰³ In the *Achill Missionary Herald*, he constantly reminded his readers of the imminence of Christ's return, publishing hymns like *The Convert's Hymn*, whose verses contained the following warnings:

Full soon (oh! heed the warning)
The proud for ever scorning,
 The Lord of wrath,
 On his fiery path,
Shall rush with the wings of morning¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Edward Nangle, *A short and simple explanation of the book of revelation*, *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹⁰¹ *AMH* 27 Aug. 1849.

¹⁰² William Miller (1782-1849) was a self-educated farmer from Vermont, who formulated his own views on prophecy while worshipping with the Baptists. From 1838 he preached of Christ's sudden return to churches in the New England and New York area. Miller used a crude mathematical system to calculate the second coming to occur sometime between March 1843 and March 1844. He settled on 22 October 1844 as the exact date for Christ's return. The week before the predicted second coming, his followers abandoned their crops and animals, resigned from their work and waited with each other in exuberant expectation. After a day and night vigil, the expected signs did not appear. Consequently Miller and the historicist position fell into worldwide disrepute.

¹⁰³ Edward Nangle, *A short and simple explanation of the book of revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 125.

¹⁰⁴ *AMH* 22 Apr. 1852.

Although he refused to predict the time, yet he knew whom the antichrist would be – the Pope, supported by a powerful secular government, perhaps Britain.¹⁰⁵

Although Nangle failed to predict an exact date for Christ's return, he never referred to any source for his ideas other than the Bible; indeed, he claimed that the Bible was a history authored by God. While he toured Famine-stricken Ireland, he told crowds in Dublin, Ballinasloe, Portarlinton and Cork that the marks of Rome's apostasy from the true Christian faith were now more apparent than ever. In a popular, yet unoriginal pamphlet, *The church of Rome: the foretold apostasy* (1850), Nangle told the reader that Scripture supported these accusations:

We learn from the Babylon Whore that the apostasy will appear in ecclesiastical form, that it should be embodied in the visible church. Hence it is manifest that the apostasy should occupy the position of a visible church, sunk in idolatry, and seeking to secure acceptance for her delusions by a gorgeous ceremonial, calculated to captivate and fascinate the senses. This church will also take a parental control over her worshippers and is to be centred in a city situated and built upon seven hills.¹⁰⁶

In Scripture, Nangle unearthed both ecclesiastical and geographical evidence that Catholicism, centred upon Rome's fabled seven hills and caught up in "gorgeous" ceremony, was without a doubt the foretold apostasy. He beseeched his Catholic listeners to examine candidly the tenets of their church and to compare them with the marks of the apostasy outlined in Scripture. Since the priests controlled the reading and exposition of Scripture, Nangle decided to bring the Word of God to the Catholics of Achill, making it his personal mission to ensure that the inhabitants knew of the impending Second Advent. He adduced from Scripture twenty reasons why the Catholic Church was the predicted apostasy and highlighted two – clerical celibacy and the

¹⁰⁵ AMH 29 Oct. 1845.

¹⁰⁶ Edward Nangle, *The church of Rome: the foretold apostasy*, p. 15.

abstention from meats – as irrefutable confirmation. In his first letter to Timothy, St. Paul had predicted that the apostate church would ‘forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth’.¹⁰⁷ Since the Catholic Church forbade its clergy to marry and required its communicants to abstain from meat on Fridays and certain Holy Days, Nangle was able to make a persuasive argument that St. Paul had Roman Catholicism in mind when making his prediction.

Nangle divided Rome’s historical authority into two parts: secular and ecclesiastical. Daniel’s ten-horned animal and the ten-horned, seven-headed beast that arose from the sea in Revelations 13, were identified as the same thing – the secular power of Rome. Initially, Nangle had extended these images to papal Rome; however, world events and new developments in pre-millennialism, like the drop-off in historicism, helped to change his mind. Since millenarianism after 1845 witnessed the climax and decline of the historicist school within Britain, Nangle proceeded with added caution.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, standing in the tradition of learned interpretation as he did, the historicist pillars from earlier in the century still commanded his attention. Accepting the chronology published in 1828 by G.S. Faber, who frequently corresponded with Nangle through the pages of the *Achill Missionary Herald*, which argued that the secular arm of ancient Rome still possessed its ‘legal unity’, and that Rome would endure until the final days, Nangle summarised the historical progression of Rome’s secular power:

The secular head of the Roman Empire should exist under seven different forms of government, and, although nominally Christian under its latter heads, it should, during the

¹⁰⁷ 1 Timothy 4: 2.

¹⁰⁸ Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, p. 81.

whole term of 1260 years, be Satan's tool for persecuting the Church. This empire shall be divided into ten kingdoms. At the time that St. John wrote, five of the forms of government under which the secular Roman power should exist had fallen, and the sixth form existed.¹⁰⁹

To bolster his ideas and to appear impartial, Nangle cited the analysis of Catholic historians, like the sixteenth-century Florentine Niccolo Machiavelli. Machiavelli claimed that ancient Rome, which existed under seven governmental forms, had been divided into ten barbarian kingdoms: the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Sueves and Alans, Vandals, Franks, Burgundians, Hernli and Thringi, Saxons and Angles, Huns and Lombards.¹¹⁰ With little difficulty, Nangle's exegesis of Daniel identified the ten-horned animal with these ten successive kingdoms. Going one step further, the 'little horn', which rose up and 'plucked' away three of the other ten, was seen as an analogue to the papacy, which, as recorded by Machiavelli, had destroyed the Hernli, Ostrogoths and Lombards. Deciphering this complex web of prophecy, Nangle denounced the Pope as the Man of Sin, described in the second epistle to the Thessalonians and understood the seven heads of the beast from Revelations 13 to delineate the seven forms of Roman secular government represented by Machiavelli.

Accordingly, a chronology accompanied Nangle's forecasts. Faber wrote and Nangle concurred that the sixth secular head of Rome continued from the time of John's ethereal vision until 1806, when Francis II of Germany formally resigned the Imperial Dignity of the Holy Roman Empire, becoming Francis I of Austria.¹¹¹ Next, in more dramatic fashion, Napoleon's rise to power represented the seventh head – a notion reinforced in Nangle's mind when

¹⁰⁹ Edward Nangle, *A short and simple explanation of the book of the revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 61.

¹¹⁰ Edward Nangle, *The church of Rome: the foretold apostasy*, p. 24.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Pope Pius VII crowned Napoleon emperor in Paris on 2 December 1804.

Drawing from Faber, Nangle described the seventh head:

The seventh head, when it appeared, should continue for a short time, until it received a deadly wound with the sword; but this deadly wound should be healed, and the revived seventh head should become the wonder of the world and the greatest military power of the age.¹¹²

When Napoleon's brief eleven-year reign ended after his defeat at Waterloo, so too ended the seventh secular head of Rome. However, this 'death blow' did not signify the end, for Revelations 13 foreshadowed that Satan would heal the wound, and an eighth head – the seventh revived – would rise up and take its place. Consequently, when Napoleon III was crowned emperor in Paris on 2 December 1852, Nangle stood firm, convinced that Revelation 13 had been fulfilled. Furthermore, a crude mathematical system, which equated a Greek translation of the name Napoleon into the Arabic numeral 666, the sign of the beast, afforded Nangle all the proof that he needed to assure himself that the battle between the forces of Christ and antichrist would commence at the culmination of the Bonaparte dynasty.¹¹³

This meant that the second beast in Revelations 13, which 'rose from the earth', represented Rome's ecclesiastical power. And a third agent, the Babylon Whore – also identified by Nangle as the papacy – rode atop the secular authority and helped the ecclesiastical beast to perform and spread false miracles. This wicked triumvirate, which Nangle termed the antichrist, worked against the true Christian church and would only be defeated at the time Christ returned to earth in the dramatic glory described in Matthew 24:27 ('For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so

¹¹² Ibid., p. 61.

¹¹³ Edward Nangle, *A short and simple explanation of the book of revelation of Jesus Christ*,

will be the coming of the Son of Man'). However, antichrist would inflict much pain and suffering on earth before the final days; and Nangle saw in the events of his day signs that the second coming was quickly approaching. Antichrist, therefore, was to be a person, a French-inspired revolutionary infidel power, in cahoots with papal Rome.¹¹⁴

Nangle agreed with Faber and settled on the year 607 AD, when the Byzantine usurper Phocas conferred the title of Universal Bishop on Pope Boniface, as the most likely beginning of the modern papacy. If this lasted for 1,260 years, then the date for the second coming would be in 1867. However, Nangle was certain that the Jewish people, or some remnant of the literal descendants of Abraham, must be restored to Jerusalem before Christ would return to earth.¹¹⁵ Since this event could happen at any time, therefore, urgency and awareness were constantly stressed: 'The Lord has also warned us that his second coming will take the world, and the professing Church too, by surprise.'¹¹⁶ Furthermore, Nangle understood Matthew 24:14, 'And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come', to mean that the job of God's ministers was to warn everyone of the second coming.¹¹⁷ Since the 'minions of antichrist' would do everything in their power to prevent the spread of the Gospel, the removal of the Bible from the National Schools coupled with the Maynooth endowment convinced Nangle that the priests and the government were the real enemy of the people. While he refused to fix an

¹¹⁴ S.W. Gilley, "George Stanley Faber: no popery and prophecy" in P.J. Harland and C.T.R. Hayward (eds.), *New heaven and new earth: prophecy and the millennium* (Leiden, Boston and Koln, 1999), p. 298.

¹¹⁵ Edward Nangle, *Glimpses and songs of the coming kingdom*, p. 238.

¹¹⁶ Edward Nangle, *The coming and kingdom of Christ*, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ *AMH* 25 Jan. 1844.

exact date for Christ's return, he declared that it would happen before 2016.¹¹⁸ He kept a vigilant watch, for he was 'persuaded that days of trial and persecution are fast approaching'.¹¹⁹ His uncertainty kept him in a state of expectancy, and he castigated his fellow ministers in Christ who paid little attention to the coming of the millennial kingdom.

The main tenets of Nangle's eschatology should now be clear. Unlike many of the pre-millennialists of the time, Nangle had patience and respect for other students of prophecy. Faber, Frere, Cunninghame and others deeply influenced his pre-millennial outlook.¹²⁰ His preoccupation with prophecy, with the second advent, with the restoration of the Jews to Palestine – an important harbinger of the second coming, and with the overturning of the present order was shared by almost all pre-millennialists during the nineteenth-century.¹²¹

Nangle also shared a philosophy of history that divided the past into distinct eras, in each of which the mode of God's operation was unique. These eras were commonly called dispensations. Most students of nineteenth-century millenarianism identify dispensationalism with J.N. Darby and the theology of the Plymouth Brethren.¹²² However, closer investigation reveals that dispensationalism was not exclusive to Darby; many of his opponents and other pre-millennialists shared it as well. In nineteenth-century religious literature, one finds the word and associated philosophy of history in continual

¹¹⁸ *AMH* 25 Jan. 1844

¹¹⁹ *AMH* 20 July, 1845.

¹²⁰ Edward Nangle, *Glimpses and songs of the coming kingdom*, pp. 8-15.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹²² Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism*, p. 68.

use by historicists and futurists alike.¹²³ Nangle used the term frequently and found the concept useful in making his own analysis about the past:

The student of the Bible who takes a comprehensive view of its contents cannot fail to observe that it is a history retrospective and prospective of God's purpose to restore this fallen world to the position from which it fell by man's transgression, and this purpose gradually developed and carried out in a series of dispensations, all of them having certain features in common, and each one more perfect than that which preceded it. Geological discovery seems to prove that the physical world has passed through a series of changes, or successive organizations, characterized by progressive improvement...First we had the Adamic dispensation...Next came the Noachian...This was succeeded by the Jewish dispensation...this dispensation, likewise, was consummated in fearful judgement on the privileged nation for their rejection of Christ, and was succeeded by the Christian dispensation...The Book of Revelation takes up the history of the Church at this point, and its prophetic announcements plainly teach that this dispensation, like all that preceded it, will end in fearful judgement upon apostate Christendom. This tempest of judgement will be succeeded by the calm and sunshine of the millennial kingdom.¹²⁴

Urgency, therefore, was central to Nangle's eschatology. Since he believed that the world had entered into the final dispensation, the time to save the Irish from the errors of Romanism was quickly running out. Like many contemporary Irish evangelicals, he felt he was living in the 'last days' and that there could be no retreat from the spiritual warfare with the forces of antichrist.¹²⁵ Before the second coming, the Son of Man 'with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand' would come down upon a cloud and reap the harvest of man. In other words, Christ would save the righteous from eternal death. Nangle referred to the present time as the 'seed time', or the time when 'the fruits of what is planted will be harvested'.¹²⁶ During this time, the exhaustive final push to convert those lying outside of God's fold was to be accomplished. Throughout all of the adversity in his life, Nangle felt sure that he was preparing the way for the second coming of the Lord: 'The anticipation of the harvest of glory sustains the soul in the labour of this seed-time; but the fruit of toil is realized in the actual ingathering, when the

¹²³ Ibid., p. 69.

¹²⁴ Edward Nangle, *A short and simple explanation of the book of revelation*, p. 118.

¹²⁵ Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession*, p. 23.

righteous will 'rejoice in the Lord and give thanks as the remembrance of his holiness'.¹²⁷ In his mind, discord reinforced his righteousness; the more friction he caused, the more he felt vindicated in his mission. Since Nangle took biblical prophecy so seriously, it affected his world and evangelical outlook.

Nangle's career is interesting to follow for it spanned all three stages of the Irish Protestant 'second reformation' during the nineteenth century. The first, from 1822-1829 was concerned with the pamphlet warfare between Protestants and Catholics. The second was the colony stage and lasted from 1834-1852. The third, which saw the rise of futurism and the decline of historicism, lasted from the middle 1850 up until disestablishment. Nangle was a busy part of all of this.

¹²⁶ Edward Nangle, *Glimpses and songs of the coming kingdom*, p. 136.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Conclusion

By the time the Vincentians left Achill in late 1854, the Achill Mission had already begun a steady decline into obscurity. After Nangle's departure in 1852, the missionary settlement lost its driving force on the island. The 'Second Reformation' ideology that had been developing from the early years 1820s had also begun to run out of steam. From the 1850s, the fortunes of the Achill Mission went into a protracted period of decline, just as the proselytising efforts of organisations like the Irish Church Missions began to lose the momentum it had gained in the aftermath of the Famine. While the protestant settlement continued into the late nineteenth-century, the death of Dr Neason Adams in 1859 marked the real end of the missionary period on the island.¹

The career of Edward Nangle spanned many years and saw many changes with the established church. Soon after he left Achill to serve as the Rector of Skreen, he became an almost forgotten figure, only remembered perhaps by a few Protestant zealots like his biographer, the Rev. Henry Seddall. His evangelical journal, *The Achill Missionary Herald and Western Witness* continued for many years after his departure, yet something seemed to be missing. Without any real sectarian competition, the Roman Catholic priests on the island went about their business, keeping quiet and out of the national spotlight.

From the youthful days of Trinity College, when the evangelical revival invigorated many intelligent and enthusiastic men and women with the spirit of 'vital religion'; to the years of sectarian tensions in Cavan; to the

years spent in controversy on Achill, Edward Nangle always remained, 'doubtless at times headstrong'. After 1850, the ever-changing religious tides in Ireland had shifted from the exuberances of the evangelical revival to the "Cullenisation" of Ireland, when Cardinal Paul Cullen consolidated the Ultramontane mission in the country of his birth. The optimism brought about by the Act of Union, which gave zealous evangelicals hope of a nationwide conversion to the Protestant faith, ended with another Act of Parliament, the disestablishment of the Irish Church in 1869.

Edward Nangle's struggle with the Catholic Church lasted for his entire life. Up until his final days, he fought spiritual battles with the forces of antichrist. Although he passed away before the second coming of Christ on earth he departed this world in 1883 knowing in his heart that he had put forth his best efforts to win those in error to the truth of Scripture.

In trying to understand Nangle, one tries to understand the Protestant mind in Ireland during the middle years of the nineteenth-century; or at least one significant aspect of it. Although Nangle's personal ambition carried him far, he would not have been able to build or sustain the Achill Mission if not for the support of the vast evangelical network that had been established during the first quarter of the nineteenth-century in England and Ireland. The assorted religious clubs and societies that sprang up in Dublin, and then spread out into the countryside, provided models and valuable contacts for Nangle. From W.B. Stoney to Robert Daly to Joseph Henderson Singer, Nangle and his associates put together an elaborate array of support, both administrative and spiritual, for the Achill missionary project. In conclusion, it is my hope

¹ Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission, 1834-52" in Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (eds.), *'A various county': essays in Mayo history 1500-1900* (Westport, 1987), p. 133.

that this modest study of Edward Nangle, as representative of Protestant thought, action and mission during the nineteenth-century, does a little more than tell the reader what men like Nangle did, but also offers a fair representation of why he did it.

Appendix A

Trinity College, Dublin Undergraduate Course of 1793

<u>Junior Freshman</u>	<u>Senior Freshman</u>
<p>Hilary Murray's Logic, parts 1,2 Virgils' <i>Aeneid</i>, Books 7-9; Homer's <i>Iliad</i> books 13-18</p> <p>Easter Murray's Logic, part 3 Horace, <i>Odes</i> and <i>Epodes</i>; <i>Iliad</i> Books 11-24</p> <p>Trinity Euclid 1,3 Virgil, <i>Georgics</i>; Greek Minor Poets</p> <p>Michaelmas Euclid, Book 3 elections from Herodotus; 4 books of Livy</p>	<p>Hilary Euclid, Books 5,6 Livy, Book 6; Plutarch, Solon and Lyncurgus.</p> <p>Easter Locke's <i>Essay on human understanding</i>, Books 1,2 Livy Book 10 Xenophan, <i>Cyropaedia</i></p> <p>Trinity Locke, book 3 Caesar Civil War Plato, <i>civita and Apologia</i> with Alcibriacles</p> <p>Michaelmas Locke, Book 4 Horace, satires and Epistles Xenophon, <i>Memoralbrilia</i></p>
<u>Junior Sophister</u>	<u>Senior Sophister</u>
<p>Hilary Astronomy Juvenal and Persius Stock's Lucian</p> <p>Easter Gravity and Mechanics Cicero's Oration; Demostenes; Philippies vol. 1.</p> <p>Trinity Hydrostatics and Pneumatics Cicero's Orations; Demothenes, Philippies vol. 2.</p> <p>Michaelmas Optics Selections from Quintilian; Aeschines Contra C and esiphontem and Demosthenes De Corona</p>	<p>Hilary Burlamanqui's Natural Law; Tacitus, History and <i>De Moribus Germanorum</i>; Selections from Thucydides</p> <p>Easter Conybeare, <i>Defense of Revealed religion</i> Terence Sophocles</p> <p>Trinity Locke on Government Plautus, Euripides</p> <p>Michaelmas Cicero's <i>de Officiis</i>; Tacitus, Annals; Longinum</p>

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Dublin Evening Post
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