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A Question of Class? Relations between Bishops and Lay Leaders in Ireland and Newfoundland 1783-1807

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Using Ireland and Newfoundland as examples, this paper tries to demonstrate how class played a significant role in the relations between Catholic bishops and lay leaders in both societies. Sometimes unwillingly perhaps, members of the Catholic hierarchy in both Ireland and Newfoundland tended to be more the followers than the leaders in the political and social evolution of both societies, usually defending the political status quo until circumstances forced them to change course.

To understand properly the period in question, we must first briefly examine the two centuries leading up to it as well as some of the similarities and differences between Ireland and Newfoundland. From the outset it must be said that long before the period being studied, both islands were essentially British colonies, but with very different histories. Ireland, due to her geographical proximity to England, had for centuries posed a major threat to Britain's national security, particularly as a potential staging ground for either a Spanish or French invasion. On the other hand, while Newfoundland's cod-based economy was considered valuable to Britain's North American interests, due to its great distance, it represented no such threat.

Since the sixteenth century, Newfoundland and the rich sea life of the Grand Banks, especially cod, had been the central draw for European exploitation of the island where England and France were the chief rivals. Under the terms of the 1713 peace of Utrecht and the 1763 treaty of Paris, Newfoundland had finally became by 1780 a secure British possession over which London took a minimum level of interest. Fishing being a highly seasonal industry, there were few permanent settlers in Newfoundland before the eighteenth century, since most people returned to Europe after their annual catch. By the mid-eighteenth century, in order to protect their interests, a growing number of fishermen, mainly from the English West Country, began to settle in Newfoundland. By then, there was also a somewhat steady increase in Irish-Catholic seasonal workers, mainly

fishermen from County Waterford who also began to remain there for similar reasons. By the mid-nineteenth century, due mainly to immigration occasioned by the great famine, their numbers became a comparative flood so that Irish Catholics soon came close to being the dominant population on the island.[1]

This gradual increase of Irish seasonal migration and ultimate settlement in Newfoundland also had it roots in economic, political, and social changes in Ireland. In the fishing industry, it started with the migration of shoals across the Atlantic to Newfoundland beginning in 1600, a migration which continued to increase throughout the next two centuries. Added to this was a gradual shift in the Irish-Catholic class leadership from an essentially land-based one in the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries, to its ultimate late eighteenth-century configuration which contained an increasing number of merchants, professionals, and mid-sized farmers. Land, however, and not business continued to hold the imagination of most Irish Catholics. This was largely due to the belief that a person could only become a "true gentleman" if he could lease property, which, due to the penal laws, was the only option open to most Catholics. Excluding a tiny minority of less than five percent who had not suffered forfeiture in the late seventeenth century, Irish Catholics could not legally own land. In fact, this attitude regarding land was so strong that many Irish merchants would sell-out as soon as possible so that they could become "landed gentry" and thus "gentlemen," even if this meant that they were only able to afford a limited thirty-three year lease on no more than a few dozen acres.[2]

In Ireland the seventeenth century also witnessed the final battles between the native ruling class made up of old Irish and recusant English nobility and gentry, who were mainly Catholic, and the settlement and new ruling class who were largely composed of Anglo-Protestant colonialists. The latter group's victory at the Boyne at the end of the century represented the final act in a century-long British imperial confiscation of Ireland. When that century opened, the native ruling class controlled almost two-thirds of the

[1] Craig Brown, ed., *The Illustrated History of Canada* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys Ltd., 1987), 125-7, 195-7.

[2] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 21, 345-8; S.J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 145-8; L.M.Cullen and T.C. Smout, eds. *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History 1600-1900* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1977), 9.

land; by its close they held less than five percent, unless they had avoided automatic forfeiture and were in a politically "correct" position to save their land by changing their denomination and becoming "Anglo-Protestant." Since the power of both groups was grounded upon a landed economy, such a major shift also represented a change in the composition of the actual ruling class. However, the true power base of the new settlement class was significantly different than the one that they replaced, since it was no longer local but essentially mirrored the needs, demands, and politics of their masters in London upon whom they depended for their ultimate survival. As a result, "resentment" among Anglo-Protestants was high in face of this reality, but their "constitutional dependence upon England" was beyond all doubt.[3]

A political pawn in English and European diplomacy would be the best description of Ireland throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[4] The Battle of the Boyne, for example, was far more important to English than to Irish interests. Thus, while the ostensible victors at the Boyne were the Anglo-Protestant settlement class, the actual ones were their parliamentary masters in Whitehall.

There were, however, some very notable exceptions to this reality. For in the late eighteenth century parliamentary reform, especially the Constitution of 1782, did seem finally to herald Irish parliamentary independence from London. Revolutionary events in France would swiftly undo such hopes, however, and force Anglo-Protestants once more into their grudgingly subservient role. Therefore, especially after the '98 Rebellion, most Anglo-Irish Protestants, out of fear of losing English support, and in the face of growing Irish-Catholic influence and their actual political threat now that most of the penal code had been abolished, reverted, though most did so unwillingly, to their former subservient status. It is true that Whitehall paid enormous bribes in order to gain compliance. Still the frightening speed with which most Anglo-Protestants MPs agreed to end the life of Ireland's historic parliament in 1801 and accept a legislative Union demonstrated just how far most members were willing to go to please their London masters.[5]

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[3] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 173-4.

[4] J.C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 104-21.

[5] W.E.H. Lecky, *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1913), 5:489; Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland*, 139-49; Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 138-63.

As for Catholics during this period, the greatest impact of the penal code was upon Catholic landowners who, due to seventeenth-century confiscation, had become few and whose holdings by then were quite small. Yet their social importance, especially as "aristocratic" leaders in Catholic circles, remained considerable, especially in the church. While Catholic landowners were greatly outnumbered by Catholic leaseholders at all levels of income, these few old landed families had considerable influence over Catholic church affairs throughout the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries. Due to such control, as well as the general public indifference of most Catholics outside this tiny landed class towards formal church attendance, the church enjoyed little real social importance during this period. What it did possess was almost totally dependent upon the fact that many, if not most church appointments at all levels, from bishops to parish priests, were very frequently under the patronage of this quite diminutive landed class. In effect, the church throughout most of the country had become "an adjunct to the rich [landed] lay families in Irish Catholic society." A major result of this situation was that the church was largely bereft of effective, independent, and national leadership until the late eighteenth century.[6]

This situation would change with the advent of Archbishop John Thomas Troy of Dublin (1787-1823). In fact, Troy took the first effective stance in asserting a united, effective, and truly independent episcopal leadership. He tried and in great measure succeeded in freeing the church from its formerly disunited and dependent state. One of the first steps in achieving this objective was his decision to take a direct interest in the Catholic Committee's affairs while still bishop of Ossory (1776-1786). When he become archbishop of Dublin (1787-1823), he formally joined the Catholic Committee, the only bishop ever to do so, in order to influence its decisions and thus strengthen and widen the social influence and thus importance of his church.[7]

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[6] T.P. Power, ed., *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), 80; Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillian, 1992), 124; W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 221-2, 226.

[7] Vincent J. McNally, *Reform, Revolution and Reaction: Archbishop John Thomas Troy and the Church in Ireland 1787-1817* (London: University Press of America, 1995), 14-16.

The Catholic Committee had its beginnings in 1760. Most of its members came from the "old landed class," led by such people as Charles O'Conor of Belanagare. A minority of its initial membership, symbolised by another important early figure, Dr. James Curry, a prominent Dublin physician, was drawn from the rising middle class, which by the 1780s would constitute an overwhelming majority. Therefore, while Curry's participation marked only a beginning, and landed-class influence remained significant into the nineteenth century, it did signal the early stage of a gradual embourgeoisement of Irish-Catholic leadership and thus the steady widening of the Catholic social base. For while the diminutive landed class leadership dominated until the late eighteenth century, Curry's presence indicated that, due to its growing importance, the old landed class had to recognise and accommodate rising middle-class interests. By the beginning of the early nineteenth century, the old landed class would gradually be forced to relinquish effective leadership to the middle class. It was a fact that was also reflected in a major shift in the selection of church leaders in the coming years who would be increasingly drawn from the middle class until, by the mid-nineteenth century, it became the dominant source.[8]

As for the Catholic Committee, the initial operating philosophy of this new endeavour also reflected the more cautious character of the old landed class, especially the well-established desire not to give offence to those in power, and thus for years the Catholic Committee's objectives remained quite modest. Beginning in 1760 and continuing over the next thirty years, the Committee's only hope, expressed through humble and loyal petitioning, was to convince the Irish government and parliament to gradually abrogate the penal laws against Catholics, especially those effecting the ownership of land. Ultimately, it was hoped that Catholics could once more become full citizens in colonial Ireland.

The Irish colonial parliament, until forced by their English masters, made no real effort to oblige the Catholics. Beginning in 1774, and, though the first shots of the American Revolution had not yet been fired, the calling of a Continental Congress in that year did give London reason for concern. While aid to the American colonists from France, her traditional enemy, would not become a reality until after the American victory at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777, fear of such a possibility prompted Whitehall to act. In 1774, with traditional foreboding about a possible French collaboration with the Catholic majority in Ireland, London ordered its Dublin parliament to

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[8] Power, *Endurance and Emergence*, 80-3.

begin lessening the rigors of its penal code. Such a policy, however, soon backfired by both frightening and then inspiring the Anglo-Protestant settlement class, who used America as its model to demand a greater measure of independence, and thus protection of its dominant though very fragile social power base in Ireland. Therefore, by 1782, with the American war reaching its climax, Whitehall agreed to abolish its long cherished absolute veto power over Ireland's parliamentary legislation, thus giving the Dublin parliament an effective independence which would last until its demise with the act of Union in 1801.[9]

From its inception in 1760, the sole desire of the Catholic Committee was to prove its loyalty to the Irish constitution. Both its aims and means, however, were opposed by most of their Catholic bishops. This was because most bishops, being, as usual, defenders of the status quo, still entertaining strong, though by now naïve Jacobite hopes of restoration, remained unwilling even to imagine the possibility of swearing allegiance to a heterodox George III. The exception was in Munster where the bishops all supported their metropolitan, James Butler II of Cashel (1774-91). While Archbishop Butler came from noble roots, time and experience had altered his thinking so that he had become a firm "Irish" Gallican as well as an anti-Jacobite. Thus, he recognised that, since the old status quo expectations of a Stuart restoration were politically and hopelessly wrongheaded, there was now a new necessity of shifting loyalty to the present constitution with the ultimate hope of complete Catholic emancipation.[10]

As noted, the only bishop outside of Munster who openly agreed with Butler, and who was also prepared to act upon his convictions, was the new bishop of Ossory, John Thomas Troy (1776-1786). While still in Rome, where he had spent twenty years as a Dominican seminarian and priest, Troy had agreed with the political position of his Dominican colleague and predecessor in Ossory, Thomas Burke (1759-1776). Like most status quo, old order Irish bishops of the period, Burke was a firm Jacobite who believed that swearing allegiance to a "heretical" king to be the "greatest imaginable absurdity." Once in Ossory, however, Troy soon agreed with the Irish Catholic Committee and the bishops of Munster that such views were no longer viable either socially or politically. Troy's public position naturally endeared him to the Committee and his colleagues in Munster, but alienated him from the rest of the bishops, especially in Leinster, and particularly

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[9] Bartlett, *The Rise and Fall*, 81, 103-04.

[10] McNally, *Reform, Revolution and Reaction,* 11.

Archbishop John Carpenter, Troy's predecessor in Dublin (1770-1786). In 1778, the Dublin parliament passed the first in a series of Catholic relief acts. All who wished to benefit from them were required to swear allegiance to George III and to swear as well that they did "not believe that the pope of Rome hath or ought to have any temporal or civil jurisdiction, power superiority or pre-eminence directly or indirectly within" Ireland. At least in spirit if not in fact, most Irish bishops remained Jacobites, either still hoping for a Stuart return or viewing the present political and social situation as an opportunity for "good" Catholics to practice a form of Jansenistic spiritual dualism. Thus, by refusing to compromise in any way, "loyal" Catholics could "meritoriously suffer" for their faith with the ultimate hope of gaining merit in heaven. Yet fearful of totally alienating themselves from their laity, especially the "rich [landed] lay families" whose patronage was still a reality and who now supported such change, most bishops now grudgingly accepted the new order and swore the oath. Troy, however, had no such qualms for, as noted, he was already taking part in the Committee's deliberations while in Ossory, and when he became archbishop of Dublin in 1787, he officially joined it, its first and only episcopal member.[11]

Troy's role on the Committee was very important, for he acted as a bridge between the ultimate rejection by the bulk of Irish bishops of the old Jacobite position and the hierarchy's gradually willingness to cooperate with the aspirations of a new rising generation of Irish lay leadership, especially those who were represented by the middle-class members on the Committee. Of course, Troy's essential reason for doing this was to strengthen the still very weak social position of the church in the eyes of most of the Catholic laity, and thus his ultimate interest was to increase lay support for his church, especially financial.

As the first and only bishop ever to be a member of the Committee, Troy's membership revealed the tensions that had long existed between the hierarchy and most members of the Committee. For their part, and from its inception, the bishops had feared that the Committee would ultimately compromise the church by agreeing to a form of "Irish" Gallicanism. In the extreme, such a policy shift might permit the Protestant British crown to have at least a limited veto over episcopal nominations. This right, however, might be contingent upon the state providing the Catholic clergy with an annual pension similar to the *regium donum* that the government had long provided to the Presbyterian clergy of Ireland. As for the Committee, they

[11] Ibid., 9-15.

believed that their bishops' behaviour, despite protests to the contrary, meant that in reality they were not truly committed to Catholic legislative relief. In a sense, this was true, since any initial relief act would only protect the security of land tenure, vital to their leading laity, but which would have no immediate impact upon or benefit for the church. Troy hoped that by joining the Committee, he might enhance the church's social standing among its members. Also, as a full member, he might help to influence its decisions and so thereby address his colleagues' fears by insuring that the Committee's lay members did not interfere directly in church affairs.[12]

Whatever influence Troy had over the Committee, however, was to be very short lived due mainly to the cataclysm of the French Revolution. Before 1791, the Committee had been greatly influenced and led, if not totally controlled, by the old landed elements. By the time of the Revolution, however, its middle-class participants, who had formed an overwhelming majority of its members for at least twenty years, began to become increasingly vocal, radical, and democratic in their political outlook. In 1790, for example, Troy had been able to convince the Committee not to accept a new oath of loyalty based on an English Catholic one which denied even the possibility of papal infallibility since, by doing so, Troy insisted, they would be interfering in purely ecclesiastical matters. Yet within the next two years, essentially because of the radical events on the Continent as well as in Ireland, such as the United Irishmen movement, the Committee began "to demand" that the Irish government and parliament give them immediate and complete emancipation. In fact, although still small and to remain so, a growing number on the Committee even supported United Irishmen views that Ireland should become a full democracy either under a constitutional monarchy or a republic with an elected president.[13]

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[12] Ibid., 15.

[13] R. Dudley Edwards, "The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee 1773-1792." .*Archivium Hibernicum* 9 (1942) 114; Dublin Diocesan Archives (hereafter DDA), Troy Papers (hereafter TP), Troy to the Respectable Members of the [Irish] Catholic Committee, Dublin 13 February 1790; Durham, Ushaw College Archives (hereafter DUCA), Troy to unidentified clergyman, possibly Joseph Wilkes, a Benedictine priest and a leading member of the English Catholic Committee, 10 March 1790; Bernard Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival in England 1781-1803*. (London: Longmans, Green, 1909) 1:126 et seq., 294, 333-4; Rome, Propaganda Archives (hereafter APF) Lettere della Sacra Congregazione (hereafter Lettere) vol. 258: fol. 622, Antonelli to Troy, Rome, 25 September 1790.

Troy, as the son of a prosperous Dublin merchant, was inclined to be supportive of the growing middle-class leadership among Catholic Committee members, but his political views had very definite limits. While Troy rejected continued loyalty to a Jacobite past, he was certainly no democrat. By 1799, when forced to choose because of the radical events of the 1790s, Troy finally decided to support a form of "Irish" Gallicanism. By doing so, he believed he could protect his church from radical lay democratic agendas, even if that meant that the church had to become increasingly identified with the state. He had witnessed how valuable such support could be, when in 1795 he founded Maynooth College with vital government financial assistance. This had become an absolute necessity for clerical education after all of the Irish colleges in France had been closed due to the Revolution. While Catholic lay financial support was offered, it contained new demands. Reflecting lay involvement in their former colleges in France, as well as the new spirit of radicalism, lay support was now contingent upon the bishops' willingness to share control with the laity as well as accepting lay admissions to the college, both Protestant and Catholic. When the government offered not only to fund Maynooth but also to give the bishops complete control over their new seminary, Troy had been provided with a graphic indication of how valuable state largesse could be, even when it was Protestant. As a result, with the founding and funding of Maynooth as a backdrop, Troy became convinced that even if further state involvement were necessary, he was prepared to oblige, even if it resulted in the end in the creation of a form of Catholic church establishment in Ireland by which the church would accept a state salary for its clergy in exchange for it granting the crown a limited royal veto over episcopal nominations.[14]

As early as 1791, however, such views were already becoming anathema to the increasingly radical objectives of the Committee's middle-class majority. For them such a state-church, if it ever became a reality, would cease to represent Irish Catholics, and especially as expressed in the first stirrings of Irish nationalism, which had largely been prompted by events in France. Therefore, in that year, and still the only bishop on the Committee, Troy felt compelled to side with sixty-six other reactionary Committee

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[14] Patrick Rogers, *The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation 1778-1793* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1934), 213-17; Lecky, *Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 3:10; Francis Plowden, *Historical Review of the State of Ireland*, (Philadelphia: McLaughlin & Graves, 1805-06), 3:1560-61; Edwards, "The Minute Book," 139-40, 144.

members. All were from the old landed leadership class, and thus reflected the Committee's former stance of cautious, status quo loyalty to the Irish constitution. Acting on this loyalty, they signed a petition addressed to those in power in which they declared that they would leave all future Catholic relief "to the wisdom and discretion of the legislature."[15]

There was an immediate and powerful reaction which demonstrated just how out of touch Troy and his fellow signers were with Irish-Catholic public opinion, for their action met with almost universal condemnation throughout Ireland. Along with the lay petitioners, Troy and his fellow bishops were collectively pilloried for "cowardice and neglect" by an overwhelming body of lay critics and even by some of the lower clergy. Instead, the latter supported the democratic opposition on the Catholic Committee, which saw the church as at best in need of total "democratic" reform by which all of its clergy would be elected by its members, or worse, reflecting lay indifference to all formal religion, that the church's survival was essentially irrelevant to the future of a "democratic" Ireland.[16]

Over the next few years, Troy made several almost desperate attempts to regain middle-class leadership support on the Committee but to no avail. In 1792, for example, the Committee insisted that a statement rejecting papal infallibility, and even implying that such a potential doctrine was "sinful" and "immoral," should become part of a new oath to gain further Catholic relief. Therefore, such a lay stance was viewed as an important symbol of their growing scorn towards the old order in both church and state. Fearing that his rejection of the new oath would totally alienate him from the middle-class majority on the Committee, Troy finally agreed to something that he had publicly and easily rejected barely two years before. Again in 1793, the middle-class members of the Committee demanded that Troy remove his title: "Catholic Archbishop of Dublin" from his signature on a relief petition and instead substitute it with "Titular Archbishop." Their insistence was

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[15] "Address to … Westmoreland," 29 December 1791, *Ross's Dublin Public Register of Freeman's Journal* 30, no. 62; DDA, Delany Letter Book (hereafter DLB), Caulfield to Troy, Ross, 18 November 1791.

[16] Dublin Diocesan Archives [hereafter DDA], Troy Letter Book, Troy to Moylan, Dublin, 23 December 1791; Ibid., Delany to Troy, Tullow, 30 December 1791; Ibid., TP, Caulfield to Troy, Ross, 31 December 1791; Ibid., Troy to Francis Plowden, Dublin, 10 January 1801; Ibid., Troy to Francis Plowden, Dublin, 22 March 1804; William James McNeven, *Pieces of Irish History* (New York: Bernard Dornin, 1807), 21.

based upon a concern that left unaltered, Troy's presumption, which was illegal, would provide their enemies in Parliament with a ready weapon with which to attack Catholic expectations. Troy privately expressed both his anger and humiliation over the incident, and ultimately refused to designate himself a "Titular Archbishop." Nevertheless, he finally signed: "John Thomas Troy, D.D., for himself and the Roman Catholic Clergy of Ireland." Afterwards Troy defended such decisions before his superiors in Rome as acts of "prudence."[17]

Humiliated by his predicament and determined to protect the church from any further association with radicalism, ultimately Troy responded by becoming an increasingly staunch defender of the "old order" in Ireland, even to the point of punishing his "democratic" enemies on the Committee. During the concluding years of the eighteenth century, Troy lead the way in defending established British colonial authority in Ireland. Beginning in 1793, he published a pastoral, *Duties of Christian Citizens*, in which he took care to criticise Protestantism as "heresy." His aim seemed clear, namely to embarrass the middle-class Catholic "democrats" on the Committee, since the pastoral was deliberately made public just before the Irish Lords began their debate on the passage of the latest Catholic relief act. Thus, it seems fair to conclude that in publishing *Duties* Troy at least hoped to embarrass if not actually jeopardise or possibly even defeat further Catholic relief. In fact, for years *Duties* would remain a ready weapon for all those who wished to block complete Catholic emancipation.

Troy repeated a similar approach during the '98 Rebellion. Even in the face of government-sponsored terrorism against Irish Catholics, many of whom were totally innocent of any involvement in the uprising, Troy remained either silent or by means of very strongly worded pastorals totally defended the government's right to use whatever means necessary to regain control. He also supported government reprisals against "suspected" rebels, even if this might entail shedding innocent blood. The same reactionary

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[17] Cashel Diocesan Archives (hereafter CDA), Bray Papers (hereafter BP), 19 February 1793; Edmund Curtis and R.B.McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, (London: Methuen, 1943), 200-01; CDA, BP, Teaghan to Bray, Killarney, 4 March 1793; Ibid., Troy to Bray, Dublin, 16 March 1793; DDA, TP, Troy to Catholic Committee, Dublin 13 February 1790; RPA, Acta Sacra Congregationis (hereafter Acta) 164: 475-506v, General Congregation, 16 June 1794; Ibid., Scritture referite nei Congressi-Anglia (hereafter (Anglia) 5: 577, Troy to Antonelli, Dublin, 28, February 1795.

mentality also prompted Troy and most of his colleagues, along with the old Catholic landed leadership elements, to support the 1801 legislative Union. Both he and his fellow supporters insisted that their action was contingent upon gaining complete emancipation. Still, keeping with his determination to support the old order, his negotiations throughout seemed far more designed to please Ireland's English masters in London even if this meant, as noted, making his church "established." This was also done with the hope of gaining an annual pension for the clergy in exchange for a royal veto over episcopal nominations, since Troy also believed that this would financially free the church from being in any way dependant upon its laity, especially the "democrats." Further, there seemed little awareness or interest among Troy or those who supported him in the fact that, by eliminating the Irish parliament, the Union effectively ended for well over a century any hope of the even moderate constitutional aspirations of 1782.

Thus during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Troy and his episcopal colleagues chose to side almost exclusively with the old guard landed Irish Catholic leadership. By then it was the only part of the Irish Catholic party which, partly in the vain hope of emancipation, was willing to support the policies of accommodation and even appeasement demanded by London's reactionary policies. Nevertheless, by this time any real influence they had formerly enjoyed among their fellow Catholics had been greatly weakened. Although the old landed class would continue to influence Catholic affairs well into the next century, it was never as strong as it had been before the 1790s. This period marked a final and effective transfer of control to the now dominant middle-class leadership on the Committee, which was essentially complete by the time of the Union. For while it is true that they would be forced into temporary retreat due to the horrors of the '98 Rebellion, which cast all liberalism under a cloud, nonetheless a new generation of middle-class leaders would reassert themselves during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, they would be lead by Daniel O'Connell, who though a Co. Kerry land owner, as a barrister and budding parliamentarian also represented the rising aspirations of the Catholic middle class.[18]

Troy's role as a bridge, however, was most important as forming a valuable connection between the old landed order's leadership prominence among Catholics to the far firmer assumption of that role by a rising Catholic middle class. Though outwardly cordial, Troy and O'Connell never trusted

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[18] McNally, *Reform, Revolution and Reaction*, 58-162.

each other. This was naturally due to Troy's previous experiences with the Catholic, middle-class "democrats" on the Committee during the last decade of the eighteenth century. It also reflected O'Connell's hostility towards all those "old order" Catholics such as Troy and the old landed gentry who, in O'Connell's eyes, had foolishly supported the "murder" of the newly rising Irish nation in their championing of the Union. In addition, O'Connell wished to use the Catholic church as a central symbol of Irish Catholic nationalism as well as a vehicle of social cohesion among a growing Irish middle class. Troy, as noted, in his drive to protect the church from any potential control by the Catholic "democrats," had doggedly favoured a royal veto over episcopal elections in exchange for a state pension for its clergy. If Troy had been successful, he would in effect have turned Irish Catholicism not only into an established church, but, much worse, prevented it from becoming an engine for promoting Irish emancipation, repeal, and especially nationalism, all roles that O'Connell now envisioned for it.[19]

Nevertheless, Troy's work was essential in helping to link O'Connell with the next generation of Irish bishops in the person of Troy's successor in Dublin, Daniel Murray (1823-1852). Like Troy, Murray also hoped to improve Catholic moral and financial support for their institutional church, which, as seen, had been traditionally very low among all classes of Catholics before O'Connell's rise to power. Murray rejected Troy's reactionary stance, however, just as in the previous century Troy had formerly opposed the earlier Jacobite position of his colleagues. Instead, Murray enthusiastically supported O'Connell's vision using the church as the focal point of both Irish-Catholic nationalism as well as a major unifying force among its rising middle class. Consequently, Irish Catholicism would be used not only as a cohesive force among the Irish-Catholic middle class in achieving emancipation in 1829, but also in the early attempts to repeal the Union, as well as other nineteenth century liberal causes, such as land reform.[20]

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[19] Bartlett, *The Rise and Fall of the Irish Nation*, 252-9; Maurice R. O'Connell, *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell* (Shannon & Dublin: Irish Manuscript Commission 1972-1980), 632, 634-5, 713, 762, and 1023.

[20] S.J. Connolly, "Religion and Society," *Irish Economic and Social History* 10 (1983) 13; Oliver MacDonagh, "The Politicization of the Irish Bishops 1800-1850," *The Historical Journal* 18 (1975), 53; CDA, BP, McCarthy to Bray, 5 November 1808; Ibid., O'Shaughnessey to Bray, Newmarket-on-Furgus, 9 November 1808; Ibid., Power to Bray, 4 November 1808; Ibid., Power to Bray, 15 December 1808; Maurice R. O'Connell, *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell* (Shannon &

There were some definite parallels between the Irish situation and the development of the Catholic church in Newfoundland during this same period. The year 1783 marked the official beginning of the Catholic church in Newfoundland. It was in that year that its royal governor, John Campbell, whose predecessor, Charles Edwards, had been ordered by London in 1779 to institute "free exercise of Religion to all persons," including Catholics, gave permission to a group of Catholic merchants to construct a Catholic chapel in St John's. In line with this, they were now legally able to obtain a resident priest to serve the spiritual needs of the Irish Catholic residents. This reflected a policy towards Catholics that was similar to that then being promoted in Ireland and England and, for similar reasons, given the recent military victory of the Americans over the British with essential French help. London feared that American or even French influence would increase in Newfoundland and perhaps produce the same dreadful consequences as in her, soon to be former, American colonies.[21]

Unlike Ireland, lay Catholic leadership in Newfoundland, given the absence of any Irish Catholic nobility or old landed class, was already limited to Catholic merchant classes, especially those in St John's. Despite this essential difference, however, there were some important similarities between them. In Newfoundland, as in Ireland, in order to protect the Catholic church and its interests from becoming involved with any radical movements, church leadership responded to social, political, and economic situations in ways which often mirrored the policies being followed by their colleagues in Ireland. In Newfoundland, where there was no old Catholic landed class, it was the Catholic merchants of St John's with whom church leadership began to identify. Their Catholic opposition numbers in Newfoundland were not a rising middle class of radical "democrats" as in Ireland, but instead the fishing family class or working poor.

Though the English remained the majority in Newfoundland throughout the period in question, by the middle of the eighteenth century, due to famines and depressions in Ireland, the Irish came to comprise the bulk of the fishing family class. Class division in Newfoundland was greatly

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Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission 1972-1980) documents: 632, 634-5, 713, 762, and 1023. Vincent J. McNally, "Who is Leading? Archbishop John Thomas Troy and the Priests and People in the Archdiocese of Dublin 1787-1823," CCHA *Historical Studies*, 61 (1995): 153-70.

[21] Public Record Office, Kew, England (hereafter PRO), Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 5/205, Instructions to Governor Edwards, May 6, 1779.

heightened in the late eighteenth century with the transition of labour from a fishing servant class to a fishing family class. The former had always been paid a fixed contractual wage and returned home at the end of a season, while the latter became resident, owned their own equipment, and sold their own fish and not their labour.

Linked to the first, the other major transition was the form of payment, which changed from cash wages for the fishing servant class to a "truck" form of payment for the fishing family class, that is a cashless barter of fish in exchange for company stores that were owned by the merchants. A wage-based system had usually been to the advantage of the fishing servants, since they were assured a fixed income no matter the quantity or quality of their catch. The "truck" form of payment, however, placed all of the economic power in the hands of the merchants, since they did not even fix the prices they were prepared to pay for a catch until mid-season when they were assured of its potential size and quality. Then when the fishing family turned over their catch to the merchant to pay off their account, if there were a surplus they were not paid in cash but in "winter supply." If their catch was not large enough to pay off their account, they were then at the mercy of the merchant to "carry them on the books" until the next season and thus they could only hope that the merchant would advance their winter supplies "on credit." Consequently, with no "real" wages but only a barter system that kept them totally under the control of the merchants, fishing families became entirely dependent upon the merchants who were centered in St John's. Though a minority among the merchant capitalists of St John's, a number of Catholic merchants were members of this dominant group. Thus, fishing families were in effect "classic" peasants, tied to "landlord" merchants who controlled their very existence just as totally as traditional peasants had been bound in the landlord-peasant relationship.[22]

The Catholic merchants of St John's who went to Ireland in 1783 were, presumably, looking for a church leader who would be prepared to "fit" into the already well-established class structure in Newfoundland. In James Louis O'Donel they found what they wanted. The Franciscan priest was not only a native of Co. Waterford, where the overwhelming majority of the Newfoundland Irish Catholics of all classes had their roots, but he was also the son of a "well-to-do farmer." Thus, if nothing else, his background would apparently pre-dispose him to defend bourgeois mercantile interests in his

[22] Gerald M. Sider, *Culture and Class in Anthropology and History: A Newfoundland Illustration*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-57.

new home. Rome next obliged and appointed O'Donel the apostolic prefect, and in 1786 the vicar apostolic of the island, both titles being steps below that of an ordinary. When O'Donel arrived on the island on 4 July 1784, he noted with great pleasure his very kind reception by the British governor. His remark was in a sense an early indication of the future direction of his ministry in Newfoundland.[23] From the beginning, O'Donel's attachment to the Catholic as well as Protestant merchant middle classes was uncompromising, and he appeared to accept without reflection or concern the type of "peasant-landlord" economic dependency of the fishing families upon the merchants, whether Catholic or Protestant.

The fishing families, however, did have their supporters among a handful of the lower clergy. Being in a relatively unsettled state as a colony, for years Newfoundland attracted a type of itinerant or vagabond clergy, canonically termed *vagi* or "wanderers." There were at least two such priests on the island when O'Donel arrived, but they left mysteriously soon afterwards, perhaps under pressure from O'Donel. Nevertheless, a Dominican priest, Patrick Lonergan who arrived from France in 1785 and settled in Placentia, was not as amenable to the desires of the new head of the local church. For Lonergan not only remained, he was also soon siding with the fishing families and against the merchants. Though O'Donel repeatedly excommunicated him, during his two years on the island, Lonergan moved from Placentia to Renews, to St Mary's, and finally to Trinity Bay, gaining fishing family support as well as merchant opposition in each location. That is until l787 when apparently under constant pressure from O'Donel, he finally departed for Labrador. O'Donel described Lonergan and his apparent social activism among the fishing families as a "scandal." As for the priest, O'Donel judged Lonergan as "the worst man I ever heard of." When in the autumn of 1787, O'Donel learned that the Dominican had suddenly dropped dead "in a drunken fit" on Fogo Island, O'Donal was overjoyed at the news.[24]

O'Donel's next opponent, and by far his most determined and difficult, was Patrick Power, a fellow Franciscan. Power came to St John's in 1787, armed with a letter of introduction from his superior in Kilkenny and countersigned by Troy who was then bishop of Ossory. Like Lonergan before

[23] Cyril J. Byrne, *Catholicism's Formative Years in Newfoundland: Gentlemen-Bishops and Faction Fighters: The Letters of Bishops O'Donel, Lambert, Scallan and Other Irish Missionaries* (St John's: Jesperson Press, 1984), 33-40.

[24] DDA, Troy's papers [hereafter TP], O'Donel to Troy, November 30, 1786, Ibid., O'Donel to Troy, November 10, 1787.

him, Power soon began to side with the fishing families and against what he considered was their unjust treatment by the merchants. This fact is born out in an early complaint from O'Donel, in which he accused Power of breeding "confusion among the common people," by which he meant the fishing families. Since Power appears to have been a far more convincing speaker, O'Donel viewed Power as "a more dangerous man than Lonergan."[25]

Power's conduct was obviously frowned upon by the British authorities, who opposed the resulting social tensions and possible disorder that his opposition to the merchants was encouraging. The local government was soon accusing Power's superior, O'Donel, since he seemed incapable of stopping Power, of helping to foster such disorder and even implying that, as a possible solution, perhaps all of the Catholic clergy should be expelled from the colony. When O'Donel reassured the governor, Admiral Elliott, that he would do all in his power to have Power removed and sent elsewhere, the government dropped its opposition.[26]

O'Donel's reassurances, however, were far easier to state than to put into practice, for Power had gained considerable support among his fishing families in Ferryland, which formed the center of his ministry. O'Donel tried to counter this by sending to the region another priest, Thomas Ewer, also a Franciscan but from Leinster. Factional fighting between Leinster and Munster men was frequent, and given the competition for scarce resources in Ferryland, Ewer was soon sowing provincial discord as well as deliberately siding with the merchants. While Troy withdrew his support for Power upon O'Donel's request, other Irish bishops, namely, James Lanigan of Ossory and William Egan of Waterford sided with Power. In effect, the two bishops contended that O'Donel himself was really a major part of the problem in his unwillingness to give the slightest support to his fellow Franciscan in the latter's attempt to gain better living conditions for his fishing family parishioners.[27]

From the outset of his arrival, O'Donel had taken the side of the merchants against the fishing families, and his support only grew with his opposition to Power's determination to champion the fishing families. By 1790 O'Donal had gained the backing of the other three priests on the island,

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[25] Ibid., Power to Troy, 29 October 1789; Ibid. O'Donal to Troy, 10 November & 6 December 1787.

[26] Ibid., O'Donal to Troy, 16 November 1788.

[27] Ibid., O'Donal to Troy, 13 June 1790.

Phelan, Burke, and Ewer in opposing Power, for all three were united in calling their fellow priest "an enemy to the Catholic religion...as was Luther of old in Germany." Such unity of action against him seems to have broken Power's resolve, and thus the priest finally left Newfoundland in 1791.[28]

Of course, O'Donel's loyalty to the merchants and government in St John's did have its rewards, just as Troy's support had gained for him and the Irish church the essential and very generous government funding of Maynooth College. At the height of his controversy with Power, for example, O'Donel's annual income, which was largely contributed by the Catholic merchants of St John's, was over £1,500, or five times that Archbishop Troy's of Dublin. Soon after Power's departure, O'Donel was invited to dine with the governor and chief merchants of St John's. At the conclusion of the celebrations, O'Donel was presented with their official thanks for the "unremitting pains" he had taken for eight years, in O'Donel's words: "in keeping the rabble of the place amenable to the laws."[29]

When the radical decade of the 1790s ended with the '98 Rebellion and Union in Ireland, there was a modest uprising in St John's in 1800. Like their namesakes in Ireland there were certainly United Irishmen sympathisers among the fishing families in the colony who also hoped to achieve a similar type of citizen's republic in Newfoundland. Like Troy, O'Donel viewed such notions as expressions of "French deceit," the aim of which was to produce social chaos in opposition to the laws of England, which, O'Donal declared, were "to be preferred to those of any country in Europe."[30] In response to his continued uncompromising support, the British authorities and merchant classes in St John's again rewarded O'Donel's loyalty by recommending that he be granted an annual government pension. This was occasioned by his decision in 1804 to retire after suffering a mild stroke earlier that year. Governor Gower, in writing to London in support of the pension idea, noted that the government and merchants were indeed indebted to O'Donel for his "constant preservation of peace and good order," especially "among the lower classes of society," who were mostly composed of Irish Catholics. In fact, in 1805 O'Donel did receive a generous govern-

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[28] Ibid., O'Donel to Troy, 6 December 1790; Ibid., O'Donel to Troy, 8 December 1791.

[29] Ibid., O'Donal to Troy, 6 December 1790; Ibid., O'Donal to Troy, 8 December 1791; Ibid., O'Donal to Troy, 8 December 1792.

[30] St John's Diocesan Archives, O'Donal Diocesan Statutes, 1801.

ment pension of fifty pounds, which continued after he left the island in 1807.[31]

O'Donel's unwavering loyalty to the government and his pro-merchant position remained strong to the end, and there is no evidence that he ever attempted to draw the slightest attention to the financial plight of the Catholic fishing families. Before he left Newfoundland in 1807, and largely through Troy's influence, O'Donel procured his own successor, Patrick Lambert, a fellow Franciscan, who readily gave assurances that he would continue O'Donel's social and political policies. Not surprisingly, the grateful merchants of St John's gave O'Donel a very splendid parting gift, a silver urn worth the then enormous sum of 150 guineas, "in testimony of his pious, patriotic and meritorious conduct."[32]

Since Ireland had a much longer recorded history than Newfoundland and more developed social and political systems, the middle-class leanings of the Catholic clergy in the two islands during this period had marked dissimilarities. Yet, they were alike in that in both places the Catholic hierarchy preferred to support the often narrow interests of their church even when such attitudes clashed with the majority of their laity, be it the interests of fishing families in Newfoundland or, in Ireland the radical "democrats" or those of the more moderate political reformers, such as O'Connell. As this study shows and church history generally confirms, the church's leaders have usually tended to defend the status quo, with any opposition to it coming only after social conditions have so changed as to make the former position untenable. Although there have been some notable exceptions to the usual policy of defending the status quo, such as a Von Ketteller, Charbonneau or Romero, they are few and far between. In short, as the few exceptions, they prove the more general stance. Clearly, this was the case with Troy when he refused to accept the radical changes in leadership in the Catholic Committee either before the Union or even the far less extreme ones adopted by O'Connell after it.

Change, however, would come with his successor, Daniel Murray (1823-1852). For Murray soon realised that the previous position had become

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[31] PRO, CO, 194/44 Gower to Camden, 25 October 1804; Ibid., O'Donel to Gower, 11 October 1805; Ibid., 195/16, Camden to Gower, 20 March 1805; Ibid., 194/44 Gower to Castlereagh, 28 November 1805.

[32] M.F. Howley, *Ecclesiastical History of Newfoundland* (Boston, 1888) 215-8.

counterproductive, since it denied the church the advantage of becoming the important vehicle that O'Connell envisioned for it in the drive towards emancipation, possible repeal, and certainly as a new central symbol of Irish nationalism and all the consequent growth in popularity that the church would ultimately enjoy as a result.

As for O'Donel, his strong middle-class leanings, evident in his unwavering and uncritical support of the position of the merchants of St John's, both Catholic and Protestant, were well formed before he had arrived. Certainly O'Donel did nothing to disturb the situation, even when it was clearly injurious to the well being of the Irish Catholic fishing families in the colony or the vast majority of his people. One of O'Donel's later successors and a fellow Franciscan, Michael Fleming (1830-1850), when faced, like Murray, with the rising tide of liberalism, would chose to shift gears. In so doing, Fleming would support Catholic interests now represented not only by the Catholic merchants of St John's, but also by the Catholic majority throughout Newfoundland. Thus Fleming decided to break with the British government as well as the Protestant merchant oligarchy that his predecessors, especially O'Donel, had so staunchly defended.

Like Troy, O'Donel had chosen to support the status quo or old order in their shared desire to protect the interests of their church, although, while for very different reasons, this reflected the same underlying rationale that prompted the change in policy by their successors. Certainly Troy in his own far more enlightened leadership earlier in his career, that is before the radicalism of the 1790s, was a valuable bridge to this new era in Ireland. And while this cannot be said for O'Donel, whose views remained constant throughout his time in Newfoundland, his successors, like Troy and Murray, would also alter the course he had set when the defence of the status quo no longer served the interests of their church.[33]

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[33] Sean T. Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay: Merchant-Settler Relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1995), 142, and, above in this issue, John Edward FitzGerald, "Michael Anthony Fleming and Ultramontanism in Irish-Newfoundland Roman Catholicism, 1829-1850."