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in Paris and the French Revolution

Author: Liam Chambers

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Revolutionary and Refractory?

The Irish Colleges in Paris and the French Revolution

Liam Chambers

In the summer of 1787 James St John, an Irish Protestant traveller, stopped off at the Irish Colleges in Paris. While he noticed the poor physical condition of the older college in the city, the Collège des Lombards, he commented that the ordained priests who formed the student body were ‘in a far more respectable light than they were in Paris half a century ago’.¹ He was impressed by the new Collège des Irlandais, which had opened just over a decade earlier: ‘The house occupied by the Irish scholars, called the Irish Seminary or Community, and which was built by Abbé O’Kelly, is neat and convenient, and perhaps more so than any of the colleges in Paris’ and he praised the academic abilities and achievements of the younger unordained students who resided there.² St John also offered criticism, writing of the Collège des Lombards: ‘it is in a very wretched a ruinous state, and the streets and houses about it are old and tattered.’³ He disapproved of dictation of notes, corporal punishment, the ‘very spare diet’, the rigid daily timetable, the practice of retreats and the promotion of the Irish language. Moreover, he regretted that Irish Catholics were forced to go to France to be educated and he suggested that they should be educated in Ireland, ideally alongside Irish Protestants, to alleviate ‘the folly and absurdity of hating one another on account of religion’.⁴ St John’s extended commentary on the Irish Colleges, published on the eve of the French Revolution, was a sign of changing attitudes among liberal Irish Protestants to the higher education of their Catholic neighbours. He was clearly well informed and while his criticisms reflected something of his own cultural conditioning, he also drew on standard Enlightenment critiques of higher education. In this sense his comments reflected both the importance and the vulnerability of the Irish Colleges in Paris in the 1780s.⁵

¹ James St John, *Letters from France to a Gentleman in the South of Ireland: Containing Various Subjects Interesting to both Nations* (2 vols, Dublin, 1788), II, 63.

² *Ibid.*, 63.

³ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵ While the Irish Colleges in Paris traced their origins to a community of Irish students who entered the Collège de Montaigu in 1578, the two colleges were established

In 1789 the two Irish Colleges in Paris accommodated around 180 students, more than one third of the total number of students at continental Irish Colleges.⁶ The recently constructed building was a fitting testimony to the financial and ecclesiastical success of the Irish migrant community in Paris. Yet the French Revolution would have a profound impact on the educational structures of Irish Catholicism and this has ensured the attention of historians, notably Mary O'Riordan and Liam Swords. The basic narrative thread is therefore well established. Initially, the revolution posed little threat to the colleges, though there were signs even during the moderate early phase that problems were likely to emerge. The fissures opened by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the gradual assault on university and religious structures, especially from 1791, impacted much more strongly on the colleges, whose administrators fought an impressive battle for survival until 1793 when both colleges were confiscated and closed and the recently constructed Collège des Irlandais was transformed into a prison. Yet this was not the end of the story. The prisoners were released in 1794 and both colleges were restored to Irish ownership in 1795, though over the next three decades a long and complex struggle ensued for their control and the revenues that pertained to them.⁷

much later. The Irish acquired the Collège des Lombards in 1676–7 and constructed the Collège des Irlandais between 1769 and 1776. For an overview history see Patrick Boyle, *The Irish College in Paris from 1578 to 1901* (London, 1901).

⁶ John Healy, *Maynooth College: Its Centenary History* (Dublin, 1895), 696–7.

⁷ The key work on the subject is Liam Swords, *The Green Cockade: The Irish in the French Revolution 1789–1815* (Glendale, CA, 1989). Some important additions and amendments are contained in Liam Swords, 'Irish Priests and Students in Revolutionary France' in Liam Swords (ed.), *Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter: The Clergy and 1798* (Dublin, 1997), 20–44. See also Robert Amadou, 'Saint-Ephrem des Syriens du Collège des Lombards à nos jours', *Mémoires de la Fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et l'Ile de France*, 37 (1986), 6–152; Patrick Boyle, 'The Irish College in Paris during the French Revolution', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 4th series, 15 (1904), 48–73; idem, 'The Abbé John Baptist Walsh D.D., Administrator of the Irish Foundations in France from 1787–1815', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 4th series, 18 (1905), 431–54; idem, 'The Abbé Charles Kearney, D.D. (1762–1824). His Life and Sufferings during the French Revolution', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 4th series, 23 (1908), 454–66; Haim Burstin, *Une révolution à l'oeuvre: le faubourg Saint-Marcel (1789–1794)* (Seyssel, 2005); G. Daumet, 'Notices sur les établissements religieux anglais, écossais et irlandais fondés à Paris avant la révolution', *Mémoires de la société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France*, 37 (1910), 1–184; idem, 'Notices sur les établissements religieux anglais, écossais et irlandais fondés à Paris avant la révolution', *Mémoires de la société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France*, 39 (1912), 1–224; Joseph Kelly, 'Calendar of Materials referring to the Irish College, Paris, 1792–1830, and Preserved in the Library of St Patrick's College, Maynooth', unpublished typescript, 1950, Russell Library, National University of Ireland – Maynooth; Mary O'Riordan, *The Irish*

Building on the work of earlier historians, the present article offers a re-assessment of the impact of the revolution on the Irish Colleges. First, it emphasises that despite appearances to the contrary, the colleges were in difficulty before the outbreak of the revolution. Even James St John was not entirely oblivious to their financial problems, as his comments on the older Collège des Lombards, noted above, suggest. Second, it examines the adaptability of the Irish College authorities as they negotiated the problems thrown up by the revolution in the early 1790s. Binarist approaches have tended to assume that historical actors were either ‘for’ or ‘against’ the revolution.⁸ In fact, as the history of the Irish Colleges clearly demonstrates, the reality was far more convoluted as allegiances shifted in the course the 1790s. Only the increasingly radical nature of events in France from 1792 threatened the existence of the colleges. Indeed, it was the mid-1790s rapprochement of the Irish bishops and the British government, a by-product of the revolution, which ensured that the Irish Colleges faced an uphill struggle for survival after they emerged from the Terror. Finally, this article argues that the impact of the revolution must be assessed within a long-term perspective, running from the 1750s to the late 1820s. This viewpoint underlines the argument that the revolution was undoubtedly damaging, but by no means fatal. While some historians have viewed the French Revolution as the great cataclysm which swept the entire continental college system away, this article suggests that the situation was less apocalyptic and more varied.

I.

From the 1750s, political, cultural and social changes across Europe affected the whole network (or more realistically the networks) of Irish Colleges. The suppression of the Jesuits, first in Portugal, then in Spain and France, closed the Irish Colleges which the order administered in Lisbon, Seville, Santiago de Compostella and Poitiers. The Irish College at Alcalá de Henares was shut down in 1785 and the Irish Franciscan College in Prague closed, a victim of

Colleges in Paris and the French Revolution (Ph.D. thesis, University College Galway, 1973); Liam Swords (ed.), ‘History of the Irish College, Paris, 1578–1800. Calendar of the Papers of the Irish College, Paris’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 35 (1980), 3–233.

⁸ For some discussion of this point see David Garrioch, ‘The Local Experience of Revolution: The Gobelins/Finistère Section in Paris’, *French History and Civilization: Papers from the George Rudé Seminar*, 1 (2005), 20–9.

Joseph II's reforms, the following year.⁹ The Irish Colleges in Paris were particularly significant and influential during the second half of the eighteenth century, though they were not immune from changes taking place in France and Ireland. By the 1760s the endemic disputes which had dogged the Collège des Lombards in the early eighteenth century, especially in the 1730s and 1740s, had largely abated.¹⁰ The financial situation was improving throughout the 1760s and 1770s. A telling sign of a new financial era was the foundation established by the Paris-based Irish doctor, Bartholomew Murry, in 1761, which provided for sixteen bursaries of 500 *livres* each.¹¹ In general, the number of new foundations rose steadily in the eighteenth century, reaching an apogee in the 1760s, before declining very slowly in the 1770s and 1780s.¹²

The suppression of the Jesuits in France indirectly created a major crisis for the Irish Colleges in Paris.¹³ In 1762, the Jesuits were expelled from the Collège Louis-le-Grand, one of the largest of the colleges attached to the University of Paris. While ten of these were teaching colleges, the other thirty or so, including the Collège des Lombards, were essentially student hostels and by this stage some were very poorly managed. During 1762–3 it was decided to suppress the non-teaching colleges altogether and to gather all the bursaries and bursary students attached to them in the vacant Collège Louis-le-Grand.¹⁴ This threatened the autonomy, and indeed the very existence, of the Irish

⁹ Francis Finegan, 'The Irish College of Poitiers, 1674–1762', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 5th series, 104 (1965), 18–35; Patricia O Connell, *The Irish College at Santiago de Compostella, 1605–1769* (Dublin, 2007); Patricia O Connell, *The Irish College at Lisbon, 1590–1834* (Dublin, 2001); Patricia O Connell, *The Irish College at Alcalá de Henares 1649–1785* (Dublin, 1997); Jan Perez, 'Irish Franciscans in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Prague' in Thomas O'Connor and Mary Ann Lyons (eds), *Irish Migrants in Europe after Kinsale, 1602–1820* (Dublin, 2003), 104–17; Oscar Recio Morales, *Irlanda en Alcalá: La comunidad irlandesa en la Universidad de Alcalá y su proyección europea, 1579–1785* (Alcalá de Henares, 2004); J.J. Silke, 'The Irish College, Seville', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 24 (1961), 103–47.

¹⁰ Liam Chambers, 'Rivalry and Reform in the Irish College, Paris, 1676–1775' in Thomas O'Connor and Mary Ann Lyons (eds), *Irish Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Dublin, 2006), 103–29.

¹¹ Swords, 'Calendar', 103–4.

¹² See Patrick MacSweeney, *État actuel des revenus des fondations faites en France pour l'éducation des Catholiques Irlandais* (Paris, 1829); Patrick Boyle, *The Irish Catholic Foundations in France* (Dublin, 1909).

¹³ It should be noted, however, that the college also benefited following the transfer of bursaries from the Irish Jesuit College at Poitiers to Paris. See Swords, 'Calendar', 144–5.

¹⁴ André Tuilier, *Histoire de l'Université de Paris et de la Sorbonne* (2 vols, Paris, 1994), II, 161–74.

Collège des Lombards and the administrators argued forcefully against amalgamation. Much of their case rested on their 'distinctness' from the other colleges and student bodies within the university:

Leur nombre, leur langage, leurs mœurs, leur façon de vivre et de se nourrir, le genre d'étude, qui est leur particulier, la nécessité de conserver des supérieurs tirés de leur nation, le peu de ressource, enfin, que l'on trouveroit dans la location de leurs bâtimens pour améliorer leur condition sont des raisons dont chacune, en particulier, semble former un obstacle invincible à leur reunion avec les boursiers des autres colleges.¹⁵

In addition, the administrators drew heavily on the 'extremely severe' penal laws in Ireland to make their case.¹⁶ Their argument was successful and while the reform went ahead, the Collège des Lombards was exempted. But, as Michael Rapport has noted in relation to the Scots College in Paris, which made a similar case, the exemption created an institutional anomaly.¹⁷

In the short term, financial pressures on the colleges proved much more testing. The new Collège des Irlandais, which opened in 1775 or 1776, experienced at first hand the growing efforts of the French government to tap into the wealth of the first estate. In the early 1780s it fought an enormous demand for 150,000 *livres* (exactly half the value of the new building) as payment of *droit d'amortissement* (a form of construction tax). The college successfully resisted, but the case was ominous.¹⁸ Indeed, while the construction of the new college in the early 1770s and the growing number of foundations seemed to

¹⁵ 'Mémoire pour le Collège des Lombards', 24 novembre 1762, Archives nationales (France), Collège des Irlandais: Historique, lettres patentes, pièces diverses, 1623–xviii siècle, H³ 2561^B.

¹⁶ 'Addition au Mémoire du Collège des Lombards', undated, with attachment: 'Extrait di Recueil des Loix d'Irlande', Archives nationales (France), Collège des Irlandais: Historique, lettres patentes, pièces diverses, 1623–xviii siècle, H³ 2561^B. Similar arguments were made in relation to Irish bursaries already attached to suppressed Jesuit colleges. For example: L. Kelly, 'Observations relatives aux Bourses de Molony fondées au Collège Louis-le-Grand', 15 juillet 1768, Archives nationales (France), Collège Louis-le-Grand, M 149, pièce 218.

¹⁷ Michael Rapport, 'A Community Apart? The Closure of the Scots College in Paris during the French Revolution, 1789–1794', *The Innes Review*, 53 (2002), 81–4.

¹⁸ *Mémoire pour le collège et le séminaire des clercs et écoliers Irlandois; contre l'administration général des domaines de sa majesté* (Paris, 1783). For the context see Charles Kearney to Patrick Plunkett, bishop of Meath, 29 May 1780 in Anthony Cogan, *The Diocese of Meath: Ancient and Modern* (3 vols, Dublin, 1867–74), III, 90–4.

herald a new era of financial security, increasing costs and the growing financial crisis of the 1780s created serious difficulties for the colleges.¹⁹ While more bursaries were available to students by the 1780s, competition for them was frequently intense, leading to a growing number of disputes.²⁰ Charles Kearney, the administrator of the new college from 1785, later complained that the value of the bursaries was insufficient to cover the costs of the students and that fee-paying students frequently failed to pay their fees, forcing him to compensate from the revenue of the house.²¹ Meanwhile, the situation at the older Collège des Lombards was even worse. In 1783 Peter Flood, then the Leinster administrator, described the 'wretched and distressed state of our poor Lombardians', occasioned by the effects of inflation and the 'sensible decay of piety and religion, in every order and description of the people', which reduced the priests' ability to earn money through mass stipends.²² In 1787 Antoine-Eléonore-Léon Le Clerc de Juigné, the archbishop of Paris, spearheaded an attempt to alleviate the financial problems by reducing the number of administrators from four to one. The new administrator, John Baptist Walsh, was the former administrator of the Irish College in Nantes, and he had connections to the powerful Franco-Irish Walsh-Serrant family.²³ Walsh quickly convened a meeting in the college of 'plusieurs personnes distinguées de leur nation'. It was revealed that the college was 30,000 *livres* in debt, with an annual income of 3,800 *livres* and an annual outgoing of 9,600 *livres*. As a result of the meeting Walsh penned a *Mémoire* to solicit extra funding for the college. Addressed to a French audience, it reveals the range of rhetorical strategies available to the Irish College authorities during the late *ancien régime*. In this case, Walsh stressed the attachment and value of the Collège des Lombards to France: supplying chaplains to Irish and other regiments in the *French* army, priests to the *French* church, and service to the *French* state.²⁴

¹⁹ Charles Kearney to the Bureau d'Administration, 10 Brumaire an 10, Russell Library, National University of Ireland–Maynooth, Irish College Paris Papers, MS. 60.

²⁰ A number of cases during the 1780s are documented in: 'Pièces relatives à la Commission extraordinaire du Conseil établie en 1736 afin de juger toutes les contestations relative au Collège des Lombards (1736–1790)', Archives nationales (France), Collège des Lombards, V° 331, Dossier 5.

²¹ Kearney to Plunkett, 9 June 1788 in Cogan, *Meath*, III, 124–7.

²² Peter Flood to Patrick Plunkett, 8 June 1783 in Cogan, *Meath*, III, 88–90. On 'secularisation' in Paris see David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris* (Berkeley, 2002), 184–202. For an alternative analysis see Nigel Aston on 'enlightened piety' in *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780–1804* (Basingstoke, 2000), 55.

²³ Amadou, 'Saint-Ephrem des Syriens du Collège des Lombards à nos jours', 39, 54.

²⁴ *Mémoire* ([Paris], 1787), Archives nationales (France), Papiers séquestrés, Collège des

Service to the French army, church and state provided a pretext to seek financial assistance, but what about the relationship between the Irish Colleges and the Irish church, particularly as the Irish population rose in the second half of the eighteenth century? The financial difficulties faced by both Parisian colleges helps to explain why they failed to respond sufficiently to the need for an increased number of priests for the Irish mission. Despite the dramatic increase in the provision of bursaries in the eighteenth century and the construction of a brand new college, the administrators could only manage a modest increase in the number of students, from 165 in the early 1760s to 180 in the 1780s.²⁵ As the Irish population increased and the priest to people ratio steadily worsened, it must have become clear to the Irish bishops that the system of foreign education was not coping and that domestic clerical formation was an obvious alternative.²⁶ Indeed, some bursary foundations for Irish students created in the 1780s made specific provision for the possibility of domestic education.²⁷

Meanwhile, the Irish Colleges were developing much closer associations with Ireland than had previously existed. In 1772, Laurence Kelly, the main mover behind the construction of the new college, penned a revealing 'Appeal ... to the Catholics of Ireland', the first such document of its kind, in which he noted that 'Nothing can be obtained from strangers already tired of repeated importunities.'²⁸ The connections reached beyond the Irish Catholic community. When the Dublin Society established a Committee of Antiquarians in the same year, they contacted Kelly to seek the assistance of the Irish Colleges on the continent in the acquisition of Irish manuscripts. This resulted in 'a General Assembly of all the Irish Gentlemen in Paris' at the Collège des Lombards in February 1773 and the appointment of a Select Committee, chaired by Richard

Lombards et Collège des Irlandais, T 1636. In reality, this was an underestimate as Walsh also had access to other funds. See his statement of finances dated 20 February 1790 in Swords, 'Calendar', 179–80.

²⁵ 'Mémoire pour le Collège des Lombards', 24 novembre 1762, Archives nationales (France), Collège des Irlandais: Historique, lettres patentes, pièces diverses, 1623–xviii siècle, H³ 2561^B; Healy, *Maynooth College*, 696–7.

²⁶ For recent discussion of this issue see Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1750–1850* (Dublin, 2006), 9–60. It is possible that the decline in ordinations in France encouraged greater leakage of Irish priests. See Aston, *Religion and Revolution*, 25.

²⁷ Swords, 'Calendar', 165, 167.

²⁸ 'Appeal from the Irish Community of the Irish College to the Catholics of Ireland', 1772, Dublin Diocesan Archives, Papers of Archbishop Daniel Murray: Irish College Paris, Part 1 (1718–1812), DDA/AB3/34/16/37.

Arthur Dillon, archbishop of Narbonne, which in turn contacted other Irish institutions in Europe.²⁹ Nothing substantial came of these contacts, but they suggest that the Parisian colleges were becoming more integrated into élite Irish society. It seems that they became stop-off points for Irish Protestant visitors to Paris, including Edmund Burke in 1773 and James St John in 1787.³⁰ John Baptist Walsh had an eye on the employment opportunities occasioned by grand tourists when he commented in 1773 that ‘The Young Noblemen & Gentlemen of England and Ireland flock here [Paris] for education, and if properly directed cannot fail of acquiring not only the language but the other accomplishments that constitute the real Gent. and sweeten the remainder of his days.’³¹ The point is that the closer associations with Ireland developed during the later eighteenth century prefigured the shift from foreign to domestic third-level Catholic education; the French Revolution was the catalyst not the cause.

II.

Michael Rapport has argued that the difficulties experienced by the Scots College in Paris in the later eighteenth century prepared it for the more serious challenges of the French Revolution. In particular, he has shown how the Scots re-cycled arguments first used when they were faced, like the Irish, with amalgamation and effective closure in the early 1760s.³² The Irish Colleges also drew on decades of experience and while they relied on similar rhetorical strategies to the Scots, they were uniquely positioned to develop other survival tactics. This was evident from an early date. When the Collège des Irlandais presented plate and silver vessels from their chapel to the revolutionary authorities in 1789, Tromphime Gérard Lally, marquis de Lally-Tollendal, marked the donation with a patriotic speech before the National

²⁹ Minute Book of the Select Committee of Antiquarians, Royal Irish Academy, MS. 24/E/7, ff. 4–6v, 12v–13; Laurence Kelly, Paris, to the Prior of the Irish Dominicans, Rome, 5 April 1773, Archives of San Clemente (Rome), Codex II, Volume 2, ff. 335–336v.

³⁰ For Burke’s visit see Paul Langford (ed.), *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (9 vols, Oxford, 1991), IX, 571–2.

³¹ John [Baptist] Walsh to Vere Hunt [jun.], 30 August 1773, Limerick City and County Archive, De Vere Papers, P22/1/8. My thanks to Ursula Callaghan for bringing this letter to my attention.

³² Rapport, ‘A Community Apart’, 81.

Assembly in which he drew on the history of Irish migration to France and pledged the loyalty of the Irish in France to the new régime.³³ This approach was more clearly articulated during the first important revolutionary test for the colleges: the nationalisation of ecclesiastical property. John Baptist Walsh appealed to the Ecclesiastical Committee of the National Assembly to exempt the Irish Colleges, on the basis of Irish 'distinctness', consciously echoing the case made by his predecessors in the 1760s.³⁴ But Walsh went further. He amalgamated this 'distinctness' argument with that contained in his recent *Mémoire* (1787) highlighting the service and attachment of the Irish Colleges to France. Putting the two together he appealed to a shared pro-revolutionary Franco-Irish anti-Britishness. Walsh argued that the Irish population could be divided into the two-thirds majority who were excluded from military and civil offices and the one third who were composed of 'étrangers usurpateurs'.³⁵ A clear comparison could be made between the revolutionary French and the Irish Catholics: 'Ces deux tiers sentiront les droits et la dignité de l'homme et ils secourront le joug d'un pareil esclavage'.³⁶ Ireland therefore presented an opportunity to weaken Britain: 'N'en doutons pas, si cette isle devenoit indépendante de l'Angleterre, la France n'auroit plus rien à redoubter de sa rivale qui sera humiliée sans coup férir'.³⁷ This provided the basis for conserving the colleges which suggests that Walsh had been paying close attention to the language and concerns of the early revolution:

Le gouvernement anglois déteste la Révolution que régénère la France et il fera tous ses efforts pour empêcher les étudiants irlandais et venir puiser dans nos écoles les principes qui feront tôt ou tard éclore le germe de la liberté si naturelle aux hommes.

La France est donc intéressée par humanité et par une saine politique à conserver les maisons étrangères, sans parler du lustre et de la gloire de devenir le centre et l'Athènes des sciences.³⁸

³³ M.J. Mavidal et E. Laurent (eds), *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, première série (1787–1799), vol. 9 (Paris, 1877), 385–6.

³⁴ His first two *mémoires* are reprinted in Daumet, 'Notices' (1912), 201–4. The original documents are in: Archives nationales (France), Comité ecclésiastique, D XIX 30, liasse 472.

³⁵ Daumet, 'Notices' (1912), 201.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

In his second petition, Walsh emphasised the service of the Irish Colleges to France and stressed that, unlike the Scots College in Paris, the Irish Colleges had no need of the intervention of the British ambassador.³⁹ On 14 September 1790 the Ecclesiastical Committee exempted the Irish Colleges, which encouraged Walsh to pen a third petition requesting confirmation in a decree of the National Assembly. Here he distanced the Irish Colleges even further from the Scots and English Colleges, underlined their military value and re-emphasised their revolutionary credentials:

Le supérieur a l'honneur d'observer que cette maison n'a rien de commun soit avec les religieux étrangers quelconques, soit avec MM. les Ecossois ou Anglois de Paris. Ceux-ci sollicitent la permission de vendre pour quitter la France. Au contraire, les Irlandois demandent à s'y attacher de plus en plus.

Le Comité est donc supplié de prendre en considération *le nombre, l'utilité et le civisme des prêtres irlandais étudiants en France* et de poser la base de leur tranquillité en faisant décréter promptement la conservation de leur maison principale dans le Collège des Lombards.⁴⁰

In October the National Assembly confirmed the decision of the Ecclesiastical Committee and exempted foreign institutions from nationalisation.⁴¹ It is significant that while the Scots College looked to Britain for support and even protection, the Irish Colleges chose a different, consciously anti-British, strategy. Walsh's arguments are a reminder that pro-revolutionary and anti-British arguments by Irish figures were circulating in Paris long before the arrival in the city of much better known United Irish ambassadors. This does not mean that Walsh was a convinced revolutionary, rather it suggests that he viewed the events of 1789 and 1790 in a pragmatic fashion and realised that they offered plenty of room for manoeuvre.

Despite the exemption from the Ecclesiastical Committee the precarious position of an educational institution which was at once foreign and religious was thrown into sharp relief by an event which occurred on the Champ de Mars in 1790. On 6 December, the feast of St Nicolas – a patron saint of

³⁹ Ibid., 204–5; Rapport, 'A Community Apart?', 85–8. Rapport notes that the British ambassador did in fact attempt to assist the Irish Colleges.

⁴⁰ Daumet, 'Notices' (1912), 205. My italics.

⁴¹ *Loi relative aux établissemens d'études, d'enseignemens, ou simplement religieux, faits en France par des étrangers, & pour eux mêmes. Donnée à Paris, le 7 novembre 1790* (Paris, 1790). The king sanctioned the law on 7 November 1790.

students and therefore a holiday – a group of Irish students left the Collège des Irlandais at two o'clock and walked to the Champ de Mars. This had been the site for the great *Fête de la Fédération* on 14 July 1790 and the Altar of the Fatherland, erected for the occasion, was still in place. Some of the Irish students climbed onto the altar to have a closer look during which escapade part of the altar paraphernalia was damaged, possibly the support for an urn. As a result, the sentinel on duty demanded that the Irish students descend. One of them, not understanding French, refused and when he was physically threatened by the soldier he defended himself. As some of the other students tried to intervene to explain the situation, it only became more serious and the Irish students suddenly found themselves confronted by an angry mob. Most of them fled, but six were cornered and later imprisoned.⁴²

During the evening and into the following day the incident grew out of all proportion as wild rumours circulated in parts of Paris. According to one pamphlet sixty 'calotins' had assassinated the sentinel.⁴³ Another explained how the forty brigands, mainly dressed as *abbés*, had disarmed and attacked the sentinel and defaced the altar. Both pamphleteers blamed the attack on counter-revolutionary aristocrats and clergy. The second underlined the fact that the attackers were foreigners – noting that of the seven arrested (in fact, only six had been arrested) one spoke English, a second German and a third Italian. Neither pamphleteer realised that the 'brigands' were Irish.⁴⁴ If the incident itself suggests the susceptibility of Irish students in Paris to attack, then the defence of the Irish students against the exaggerations circulating about them underlines the essential moderation of the revolution at this point and the means of defence throws up important issues. One pamphlet, signed by a member of the 'Club de Cordeliers' is particularly revealing. It argued that

⁴² This account draws on pro-Irish pamphlets published after the incident. See *Adresse au peuple de la capitale, sur l'événement du Champ de Mars, le lundi 6 décembre 1790* (Paris, 1790); *Justification des écoliers irlandais, sur l'événement qui s'est passé au Champ de Mars, le lundi six du mois* ([Paris], [1790]); *Récit véritable de ce qui s'est passé au Champ de Mars* ([Paris], [1790]). For anti-Irish accounts see *Grand poème épi-civique* ([Paris], [1790]); *Détail de l'horrible assassinat commis hier au soir au Champ de la Fédération, sur la personne d'une sentinelle, Et insulte faite à l'Autel de la Patrie, par une troupe d'Aristocrates et d'Abbés* ([Paris], [1790]); *Fureur du Père Duchêne contre les soixante calotins qui ont saccagé et profané l'autel de la patrie, et assassiné la sentinelle du Champ-de-Mars, et désarmé le corps de garde* ([Paris], [1790]). It also draws on papers relating to interrogations, witness statements and the trial: Archives nationales (France), Police générale, Comité de sûreté générale (1746–1820), F⁷ 4624 (plaq. 4), ff. 182–212. See also Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 31–6, which draws on the same source material.

⁴³ *Fureur du Père Duchêne*, 1–2.

⁴⁴ *Détail de l'horrible assassinat*, 3–8.

the Irish were, in fact, good patriots: 'Français par reconnaissance, Français par attachement, Français par intérêt, comme propriétaires, comment pourroient-ils, ces Irlandois, chercher à être odieux à la nation Française.'⁴⁵ This was despite the fact that some of the students were unable to speak French, the root cause of the scuffle at the altar. A similar pamphlet drew on the heritage of Franco-Irish connections: 'Ce sont des Irlandois qui se sont remarquer dans tous le pays par leur attachement pour la France; *qui, de tout temps, ont chéri la France comme une seconde patrie*'.⁴⁶ After two weeks in prison, the students were tried for disfiguring the altar of the fatherland and attacking the sentinel and were acquitted. The judgement was applauded by those present and an order was made that the evidence in favour of the Irish should be printed. (It is notable that the students were referred to as 'English' not Irish in the judgement.)⁴⁷

One could read the Champ de Mars incident in different ways. It can be taken as indicative of increasing xenophobia or anticlericalism (the more lurid pamphlets deliberately conflated the students with ordained priests). It also suggests that the Irish Colleges would be singled out sooner or later as bastions of counter-revolution. But perhaps the most significant point about the incident is the means of defence available to the Irish; their defence cast them as good French patriots and saw no contradiction in highlighting simultaneously their Irish and French identities. In this the rhetoric they used reflected the arguments developed by college administrators in 1789–90.

By December 1790 the impact of the most important religious reform of the revolution, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, was becoming clearer. The king reluctantly sanctioned a compulsory oath to the constitution on 26 December 1790. During 1791 the constitution and the oath divided French Catholicism into a state-sponsored constitutional church and an increasingly underground refractory church.⁴⁸ As Nigel Aston puts it: 'oath-taking became, in effect, a referendum on whether one's loyalties were to Catholicism or to the Revolution.'⁴⁹ As a result the refractory clergy were increasing likely to be considered seditious as 1791 progressed and the hard-line opposition of Pius VI to the Civil Constitution and the revolution further ruptured French Catholicism.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ *Adresse au peuple de la capitale*, 3.

⁴⁶ *Justification des écoliers irlandais*, 4. My italics.

⁴⁷ Judgement, 20 December 1790, Archives nationales (France), Police générale, Comité de sûreté générale (1746–1820), F⁷ 4624 (plaq. 4), f. 206.

⁴⁸ See Aston, *Religion and Revolution*, 140–243.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Burstin, *Une révolution à l'oeuvre*, 211–45.

The administrators and students of the Irish Colleges were affected by the oath. Irish priests at the Collège des Lombards had traditionally earned small amounts of financial support by saying masses at the parishes around the college, which was made increasingly difficult and eventually impossible.⁵¹ For Irish clergy embedded in French ecclesiastical and academic structures the situation was even more difficult, because they were forced to take a position on the oath.⁵² However, the Irish College administrators and students were not obliged to take a position on the constitution and could reasonably claim immunity from the sanctions levied on the nascent refractory church.

In Paris, a clandestine refractory church evolved slowly during 1791. The Irish Colleges were situated in the Faubourg Saint Marcel, one of the more violently pro-revolutionary Parisian regions. In the ten parish churches of the *faubourg*, six *curés* took the oath, often at well-attended ceremonies. At the same time a major reorganisation of parish structures was undertaken, which saw the old ten parishes reduced to just four, entailing the closure of churches from April 1791. Haim Burstin has argued that one of the consequences was that some of the faithful sought out alternatives to the four constitutional parish churches. The Faubourg Saint Marcel was packed with alternative locations for worship, chapels generally associated with educational institutions, which were still unaffected by religious reforms, including the Irish, English and Scots Colleges, as well as the houses of English male and female religious orders.⁵³ On 19 March 1791 communal authorities surprised a refractory ordination ceremony in progress at the Collège des Anglais, on rue des Postes, just around the corner from the Irish College on rue du Cheval Vert.⁵⁴ The Eudistes, on the same street, developed an important refractory network and priests from the house preached at the Collège des Irlandais.⁵⁵

While Walsh and others employed a pro-revolutionary rhetoric after 1789, the Irish Colleges also emerged during 1791 as important centres for

⁵¹ John Reilly, C. Reilly and P. McMahon (Meath students, Collège des Lombards) to Patrick Plunkett, 18 April 1791 in Cogan, *Meath*, III, 191.

⁵² Thomas O'Connor, 'Surviving the Civil Constitution of the Clergy: Luke Joseph Hooke's Revolutionary Experiences', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 11 (1996), 129–45; Philippe Loupès, 'The Irish Clergy of the Diocese of Bordeaux during the Revolution' in Hugh Gough and David Dickson (eds), *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1990), 28–39.

⁵³ Burstin, *Une révolution à l'oeuvre*, 211–23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

the refractory clergy. Maintaining a good working relationship with the revolutionary authorities was important, but for Walsh and Kearney there were other audiences to think about: French Catholics opposed to the constitution, Catholic authorities in Rome, Irish and British officials, and, above all, the Irish bishops.⁵⁶ Under Walsh's leadership both Irish Colleges opened their doors to refractory clergy and to their congregations. Between October 1791 and March 1792 at least six secret retreats took place at the Collège des Lombards. They appear to have been organised by an élite and rather mysterious clerical organisation called the *Aa*, founded 'to deepen commitment and religious devotion among the clergy'.⁵⁷ Established in the early seventeenth century, though never on a proper 'legal' basis, Nigel Aston has argued that the Association 'came into its own in the 1790s by helping to facilitate a clandestine priestly ministry'.⁵⁸ This is important because it closely links Walsh, Kearney and the Irish Colleges with the networks of refractory clergy in Paris and beyond. The retreats were very serious affairs. At the fourth secret retreat, held at the end of January 1792, the participants drew up an address to Pius VI and held an elaborate ceremony, during which they promised conformity to his papal briefs, which had rejected the Civil Constitution. In addition to the retreats, up to seven secret ordination ceremonies took place during this period (including the ordination of Irish candidates). Moreover, the college was reportedly overflowing with anti-constitutional worshipers, with reports of masses said all morning in the chapel and at makeshift altars in the library and the refectory.⁵⁹ The Irish College connection was well known to the Abbé de Salamon, the papal representative in Paris, who forwarded glowing reports on the situation to Rome.⁶⁰ This level of activity could not have gone unnoticed and it is no accident that the retreats coincided with the eruption of serious violence outside the college. In other words, the colleges were targeted not

⁵⁶ Walsh protested strongly in a letter to John Thomas Troy, the archbishop of Dublin, on 14 July 1791 about reports circulating in Ireland that he had taken the oath to the Civil Constitution. See Cogan, *Meath*, III, 194–5.

⁵⁷ John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth Century France, Volume 2, The Religion of the People and the Politics of Religion* (Oxford, 1998), 182. The significance of the name is unclear, although it may have been an abbreviation of *Associatio Amicorum*. On the connection with the Irish College, though it should be noted that the author is overtly partisan, see Antoine Lesta, *Le Père Coudrin: fondateur de Picpus* (Paris, 1952), 70–97. My thanks to Fr Declan Hurley for bringing the latter to my attention.

⁵⁸ Aston, *Religion and Revolution*, 234.

⁵⁹ Lestra, *Le Père Coudrin*, 70–97; Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 48–50.

⁶⁰ *Correspondance secrète de L'abbé de Salamon, chargé des affaires du Saint-Siège pendant la Révolution avec le Cardinal de Zelada (1791–1792)* (Paris, 1898), 319.

primarily because of xenophobia or simple anticlericalism, but because they had clearly identified themselves with the refractory clergy and, in the eyes of the attackers, with the forces of counter-revolution.

Engagement with the refractory network in the Faubourg Saint Marcel was particularly problematic. There was strong local support for the constitutional church, which David Garrioch has suggested was linked to the Jansenist tradition in parishes like St Medard.⁶¹ During 1791 the Irish Colleges slowly came under pressure from groups within the local population. In April the college chapels were, largely as a result of confusion about their status, sealed briefly by the Parisian authorities.⁶² Much more seriously, on 25 September a group of women attending mass at the Collège des Lombards was attacked. Further attacks followed, outside the Collège des Irlandais, on 9–11 October and again on 16 October. An account of the attacks on 9 October, the feast of Saint Denis, identified the college as a centre for refractory clergy from the rest of Paris. The same pamphlet described how a group of women attending mass at the college, ‘presque toutes gouvernantes des anciens curés refractaires’, were beaten in the middle of the street in a scene beginning at two o’clock and lasting four hours.⁶³ The attacks of September and October posed a major threat to the colleges and mirrored other, clearly co-ordinated, attacks which occurred elsewhere in the neighbourhood.⁶⁴ Walsh, however, was confident in his position and he responded forcefully in public to the events. In a letter to the Parisian municipal authorities, published in the *Mercure de France*, he rejected claims that the colleges were refractory and counter-revolutionary centres and argued that they should be afforded protection, citing the freedom of worship enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. In this case, Walsh also invoked the status of staff and students as British subjects.⁶⁵ The strength of Walsh’s argument is illustrated

⁶¹ Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*, 195–6. The Collège des Lombards had distanced itself from local popular Jansenism in the 1730s. See John Bourk to Cardinal Imperiali, 5 October 1733, Archives of San Clemente (Rome), Codex II, Volume 2, ff. 418–419v.

⁶² Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 37–8.

⁶³ *Détail exact de la grande Révolution arrivée au séminaire irlandais rue du Cheval vert, à l'Estrapade, fauxbourg S. Marceau, où 27 bigotes contre-révolutionnaires ont été fouettées, par la sainte colère du peuple, ainsi, que le supérieur du séminaire avec la liste des noms et qualités de tous les culs fouettés* ([Paris], [1791]). On the disturbances see also Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 40–8; Burstin, *Une révolution à l'oeuvre*, 232–8.

⁶⁴ Burstin, *Une révolution à l'oeuvre*, 225–6, 231.

⁶⁵ *Mercure de France*, 15 octobre 1791. The full text is printed in Amadou, ‘Saint-Ephrem des Syriens du Collège des Lombards à nos jours’, 48–9.

by the reaction of the departmental and municipal authorities, who acted to protect the Irish Colleges by confirming their right to freedom of worship in decrees dated 12, 14 and 19 October, in the process extending the possibility of toleration to other churches and groups.⁶⁶ While further sporadic attacks occurred in December 1791 and February 1792, the incidents did not threaten to escalate into full-scale public disturbances.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, Walsh and Kearney had already signalled their growing concerns about the viability of Irish clerical formation in Paris to the Irish bishops.⁶⁸ Yet it is important to note that it was only towards the end of the academic year in May 1791 that the leading Irish archbishop, John Thomas Troy of Dublin, considered calling home sixth-year students at the Collège des Lombards.⁶⁹ Some students had already left, for there were only sixty-two students and staff there in April, and the numbers continued to decrease during the academic year 1791–2.⁷⁰ Students were also leaving the Collège des Irlandais, though *boursiers* who continued to receive payments seem to have been reluctant to abandon their *bourses* and students continued to arrive in 1792–3.⁷¹ As the revolution radicalised in the late summer and early autumn of 1792, so the position of the Irish Colleges became increasingly difficult. The collapse of the monarchy in August and the creation of a republic coincided with a crackdown on refractory clergy, further legislation against religious practice and, most starkly of all, the September massacres, which resulted in the murder of around 230 priests out of a total of 1,300 victims killed in just three days.⁷² Massacres occurred close to the two Irish Colleges and included victims from university colleges, seminaries, religious communities and parishes with strong connections to them.⁷³ While the colleges were untouched, the revolutionary shift of August and September had a profound impact. On 2 September 1792, the day

⁶⁶ Burstin, *Une révolution à l'oeuvre*, 232–38. Amadou, 'Saint-Ephrem des Syriens du Collège des Lombards à nos jours', 48–9. Walsh and Kearney responded to the decrees with a letter of thanks on 17 October. See Daumet, 'Notices' (1912), 117.

⁶⁷ Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 49.

⁶⁸ See, for example, John Baptist Walsh to Patrick Plunkett, 18 April 1791 in Cogan, *Meath*, III, 190.

⁶⁹ Mark Tierney, 'A Short Title Catalogue of the Papers of Archbishop James Butler II in Archbishop's House, Thurles: part 2, 1787–91', *Collectanea Hibernica*, 20 (1978), 102.

⁷⁰ Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 38.

⁷¹ O'Riordan, 'The Irish Colleges in Paris', 166; Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 58, 86; Amadou, 'Saint-Ephrem des Syriens du Collège des Lombards à nos jours', 55; Liam Chambers, 'Irish *fondations* and *boursiers* in Early Modern Paris, 1682–1793', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 35 (2008), 17–19.

⁷² Aston, *Religion and Revolution*, 183.

⁷³ Burstin, *Une révolution à l'oeuvre*, 427.

on which the September massacres broke out, Charles Kearney, the superior of the Collège des Irlandais, wrote a thoroughly pessimistic letter to Patrick Plunkett, the bishop of Meath, noting in passing a report that 'this day all the prisoners have been murdered.' In the end, he suggested to Plunkett that 'two or three houses might be established in Ireland for such as are intended for the church. Funds could be sent over yearly from France, whither it will be for many years improper to send persons for ecclesiastical education.'⁷⁴ Kearney's letter highlights the continuing importance to the Irish church of more than a century of investment in French education for Irish Catholics. Though he realised that the bishops could no longer send students to France, Kearney also realised that the investments could not simply be abandoned.

The ascendancy of the Paris commune following the events of August 1792 encouraged a group of radical students at the Collège des Irlandais, with links to the increasingly important radical Irish, Scots and English groups in Paris, to attempt a take-over of the college. The commune was keen to support them and oversaw the election on 29 October 1792 of William Duckett, a former student, to replace Charles Kearney as administrator. Even at this stage, however, Walsh and Kearney could muster sufficient official protection. The Girondin minister of foreign affairs, Pierre Lebrun-Tondu, was instrumental in overturning the student election and restoring the *status quo* within a few weeks.⁷⁵ Such a significant level of protection related largely to the foreign status of the colleges, but Walsh and the less radical students who remained at the Collège des Irlandais also continued to express their revolutionary sympathies. Following petitions from Walsh and a number of Irish *boursiers*, on 14 February 1793 the National Convention authorised payment to the Irish, English and Scots Colleges of revenues for the first six months of the year.⁷⁶ The beginning of the war with Great Britain two weeks earlier marked an important moment in the relationship between the Irish Colleges and the revolutionary authorities. Arrested later in the year, Walsh expressed his revolutionary credentials and tried to argue that Ireland was not at war with France: 'Quand même le gouvernement d'Irlande entrerait dans la coalition par la suite, il serait

⁷⁴ Charles Kearney to Patrick Plunkett, 2 September 1792 in Cogan, *Meath*, III, 196–7.

⁷⁵ This incident is well covered by a number of authorities. See Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 55–69 and, for clarity on a number of points, Swords, 'Irish Priests and Students in Revolutionary France', 22–3; O'Riordan, 'The Irish Colleges in Paris', 274–83; Amadou, 'Saint-Ephrem des Syriens du Collège des Lombards à nos jours', 54–5. For a slightly different analysis see Burstin, *Une révolution à l'oeuvre*, 503–4.

⁷⁶ Documents relating to the Loi du 14 février 1793, Archives nationales (France), Établissements d'instruction publique, F¹⁷ 2500.

injuste d'imputer cette coalition aux catholiques, parce qu'ils n'ont aucune part au gouvernement, ni voix au parlement.⁷⁷ Following Kearney's denunciation in the National Convention and his detention, on 6 September, the remaining students at the Collège des Irlandais petitioned the Convention to be allowed to continue their studies and protested their loyalty to France in a mixture of arguments used during the *ancien régime* and the revolution:

Si L'Irlande ne s'est pas ouvertement prononcée pour la revolution françoise, c'est qu'elle est subjuguée par une force supérieur ...

Nous avons appris avec une profonde douleur que les Malveillours de notre pais ont voulu jeter des soupçons sur nos sentimens à l'égard de la République.

Nous protéstons ici solennellement contre ces infames colomnies, et nous déclarons en face de cette auguste assemblée que nous ne cédon's en sentimens républicains à aucun citoyen quelconque.⁷⁸

Despite the patriotic protestations of administrators and students, the war left Walsh and Kearney much more susceptible to denunciation by radical Irish students and others.⁷⁹ Both men had already been arrested and released during 1792 and 1793. On 9 October 1793, the National Convention finally decreed the arrest of all British (including Irish) subjects in France and the confiscation of their property. Kearney was already in detention and Walsh was arrested on 15 October. By the end of the month both colleges had been closed and the Collège des Irlandais had been transformed into a prison.⁸⁰ They had been the last remnants of the *ancien régime* structures of the University of Paris, which had finally been swept away, a month earlier, on 15 September 1793. Gone too were the religious establishments and *ancien régime* legal structures within which the Irish Colleges functioned: the 'extraordinary commission' (established in 1736 to resolve disputes which arose in the college), the Abbaye de Ste Geneviève and the Abbaye de St Victor. Meanwhile the structures of the Archdiocese of Paris were in turmoil and the archbishop, who had jurisdiction

⁷⁷ Cited in Amadou, 'Saint-Ephrem des Syriens du Collège des Lombards à nos jours', 56.

⁷⁸ Pétition des Etudiants Irlandois au Citoyen Président de la Convention, 7 octobre [1793], Archives nationales (France), Assemblées nationales, C 271, dossier 666, pièce 29.

⁷⁹ Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 86.

⁸⁰ Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France: The Treatment of Foreigners, 1789–1799* (Oxford, 2000), 200; Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 82–95.

over the colleges, had long joined the émigrés. In this context, it is remarkable that the Irish Colleges remained open for as long as they did.⁸¹

III.

Even more remarkably, the Irish Colleges emerged from the Terror. During the winter of 1794–5 the prisoners at the Collège des Irlandais were released, though the Colleges faced an uphill administrative struggle to benefit from the overturning of the confiscation of foreign property, decreed on 29 December 1794.⁸² Walsh petitioned the authorities for assistance, drawing as he had done early in the Revolution on a shared Franco-Irish anti-Britishness. On 4 April 1795 the remaining Irish staff and students were granted access to funding allocated to refugees.⁸³ Crucially, some of the Irish students who remained in France joined the army, which provided clear proof of service to the republic.⁸⁴ In September Walsh and Kearney were ‘reinstated ... in possession of the Irish properties and revenues’.⁸⁵ However, the financial situation was extremely precarious and while payments on public investments re-commenced in 1796, they were irregular for the rest of the decade. Moreover both colleges were in very poor condition and the only option in the immediate term was to rent them out.⁸⁶ Only in the early nineteenth century were moves to re-structure and re-open the Irish Colleges successful. In 1801, the Irish Colleges were placed under the control of a government appointed *bureau*. Over the following two years what remained of the Irish, Scots and English Colleges in France were united into a single institution based in the Collège des Irlandais, which opened in 1805. There followed a lengthy and complex struggle for control involving various Irish, Irish migrant and French interest groups.⁸⁷

From the mid-1790s the survival of the Irish Colleges in Paris was not sufficient to guarantee their future. That survival was, to a large extent, predicated

⁸¹ Rapport makes this point in relation to the Scots College. Rapport, ‘A Community Apart?’, 100.

⁸² Swords *The Green Cockade*, 101; Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship*, 285–91.

⁸³ Loi de 15 germinal an 3, Archives nationales (France), Établissements d’instruction publique, F¹⁷ 6237c; Liste des réfugiés ... mandats payés, An II – An V, Archives nationales (France), Hospices et secours, F¹⁵ 16.

⁸⁴ [Réfugiés] Irlandais, Réfugiés de l’Ouest, États et correspondance, An II – An V, Archives nationales (France), Hospices et secours, F¹⁵ 3508A.

⁸⁵ Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 104.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 104–5, 139–40; Riordan, ‘Irish Colleges in Paris’, 193.

⁸⁷ Swords, *The Green Cockade*, 139–234. Swords takes the story to 1815.

from the start on the willingness of Walsh and others to accommodate themselves to the currents of revolutionary change, while exploiting the gap, which Michael Rapport has argued existed, between the increasingly difficult legal position of foreigners and the reality on the ground.⁸⁸ Just as the Irish Colleges emerged from the Terror in the winter of 1794–5, the Irish bishops were negotiating with the British government with a view to the establishment of a new domestic institution for the education of Irish Catholics, the Royal College of St Patrick, which opened at Maynooth in 1795. As a result, the Irish Colleges' accommodation to the French Revolution, however pragmatic or piecemeal, became not just unsavoury, but dangerous. The position of the bishops was all the more important because while the colleges survived, the old legal, religious and university structures within which they functioned did not (at least in the immediate term). The Irish bishops had had no direct or formal role in the administration of the colleges during the *ancien régime*, but a vacuum now existed in relation to authority over the new college and the two main contenders to fill it were the Irish bishops and the French state.⁸⁹ The bishops had provided Walsh and Kearney with an approbation in 1791, though they ignored Walsh's suggestions that an episcopal representative should be sent to Paris.⁹⁰ From 1795 they were unwilling to risk the ire of the British government. Troy summed up their position in 1802:

Were they [the Irish Colleges in France] restored to us in their former situation, which they will not be, we could not send students to them from hence without endangering their principles, & offending Government, which we are soliciting for funds to support two hundred additional students at Maynooth, as the like number at present there is totally inadequate to our wants. We daily witness an alarming decrease of clergy. The Almighty in his mercy may in his own good time, restore its ancient government to France, and thereby render our Colleges useful. It is, therefore, advisable to preserve our rights & titles to them,

⁸⁸ Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship*, 334–6.

⁸⁹ New educational institutions also eyed-up the Irish Colleges, initially the Prytanée français and, later, the Imperial University.

⁹⁰ Deed of Archbishop Troy of Dublin appointing Walsh and Kearney superiors of the Irish Colleges in Paris, 24 February 1791, Russell Library, National University of Ireland – Maynooth, Irish College Paris Papers, MS. 71, registered in Paris on 7 March 1791 (see Archives nationales (France), Établissements d'instruction publique, Fondations irlandaises, Titres divers, 1719–1917, F¹⁷ 14764); Walsh to Troy, 18 April 1791 in Cogan, *Meath*, III, 190.

which in the worst event, may enable us, perhaps, to dispose of them for a valuable consideration.⁹¹

Troy had other motives for his pessimism about re-establishing the Irish College network in France. He was well aware that the closure of the Irish Colleges marked a very definite watershed in the history of Irish Catholicism, one which ultimately had positive repercussions for the episcopacy. While Patrick Corish has pointed to the continuity between the Irish Colleges in France and Maynooth College, this should not be overstated.⁹² The Maynooth system was, in fact, profoundly different to the Irish College system. The weak influence of the bishops over the continental colleges stood in stark contrast to their much more direct involvement in Maynooth. One could even argue that the eclipse of the Irish Colleges abroad allowed the Irish bishops to exercise control over the system of clerical formation for the first time in the history of the Irish church.

Other voices within the Irish Catholic church were more positive concerning the role of a re-established Irish College network in France. Thomas Hussey, the first President of Maynooth College and a controversial bishop of Waterford, reflected on the benefits of the Irish Colleges in a letter written to John Baptist Walsh in September 1801:

The insular position of that country [Ireland], the little intercourse between it and the continent might endanger the Catholic faith as taught in that remote corner to dwindle into sectarian forms if not principles too, whereby it must cease to be a portion of the Catholic or Universal religion. Thus different colleges on the continent and the aid if practicable of the regular Orders sent as heretofore as Missionaries to Ireland would be the security against the national faith dwindling into a Sect.⁹³

⁹¹ John Thomas Troy to Alexander Cameron, 22 November 1802, Scottish Catholic Archives, Blairs Letters, BL/4/197/12. Troy expressed similar opinions as early as 1793. See Vincent J. McNally, 'John Thomas Troy, archbishop of Dublin, and the Establishment of St Patrick's College, Maynooth, 1791–5', *Catholic Historical Review*, 67 (1981), 571.

⁹² Patrick Corish, 'Les séminaires Irlandais du continent, la révolution française et les origines du collège de Maynooth', *Études irlandaises*, 23 (1998), 121–35.

⁹³ Thomas Hussey to John Baptist Walsh, 6 September 1801 in Patrick Boyle, 'Documents Relative to the Appointment of an archbishop to the See of Cashel in 1791, and a Coadjutor to the bishop of Waterford', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 7 (1918–21), 18.

The tension between the opinions represented by Troy and Hussey reflected longstanding uncertainties and concerns relating to the role and function of the Irish Colleges.

This reminds us of the importance of considering a long-term perspective. The French Revolution did not decimate the Irish Colleges in Paris. They were resilient institutions whose administrators exploited the revolutionary ambiguities concerning foreigners to survive, if only just. In retrospect the revolution was a catalyst for change, rather than the cause of change. The Irish Colleges were part of a network of Irish migrant communities in Paris, France and continental Europe, which were already experiencing signs of decline (not necessarily terminal) in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁹⁴ The revolution provided an opportunity for the Irish bishops to develop a system of domestic education which had become increasingly appealing during the second half of the eighteenth century. However, Troy and the other Irish bishops also recognised that the extensive finances invested in Paris could not simply be abandoned. The acute shortage of priests in Ireland and the lack of suitable university level outlets for lay Catholics also caused concern. When the Restoration Troy had prayed for finally arrived in 1814, the Irish bishops dispatched a Dublin priest, Paul Long, to administer the Collège des Irlandais. His tenure lasted five years and appeared to end in failure, but the increasingly conservative nature of French politics during the 1820s, and especially after 1824, ensured that the Irish bishops were able to recreate the Irish College as something it had never been during the *ancien régime*, an Irish seminary under the control of the increasingly powerful Irish episcopacy.⁹⁵ The colleges could survive the French Revolution, even in the hyper-revolutionary Faubourg Saint-Marcel, but the political and ecclesiastical ramifications of events in France for Ireland ensured that they were fundamentally altered from *ancien régime* French colleges to a nineteenth-century Irish seminary.⁹⁶

MIC, *Limerick*

⁹⁴ See Louis Cullen, 'Apotheosis and Crisis: The Irish Diaspora in the Age of Choiseul' in Thomas O'Connor and Mary Ann Lyons (eds), *Irish Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Dublin, 2006), 6–31.

⁹⁵ On the history of Long's mission and the Collège des Irlandais in the 1820s, see: Dublin Diocesan Archives, Papers of Archbishop Daniel Murray: Irish College Paris, Part 2 (1814–1853), DDA/AB3/34/17.

⁹⁶ I would like to thank the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences for funding the research on which this article is based. My thanks also to Michael Brown, Sylvie Kleinman and Thomas O'Connor for constructive comments and assistance.