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The Failed Attempts to Implement a Native Rector at the Irish College in Rome, 1773–98

Christopher Korten

The suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 set off a movement among the English-speaking secular colleges in Rome to appoint a native rector. Over the next three decades attempts to install such persons were unsuccessful. Italian candidates were given the nod over their Irish counterparts. This effort was particularly important for some of the Irish bishops as penal legislation had prohibited a Catholic higher education in Ireland; this fact raised the stakes of institutions in Europe, such as the Irish College in Rome. The focus of this article is on how to understand the dynamics that were at play and to offer a fuller and more accurate explanation than currently exists in the historiography as to why no changes were made. At the centre of this inquiry is the Irish College; yet the Scots and English Colleges will also play important roles since at times their stories intertwine.

For the Irish College, the yearning for one of its own as superior coincided with the appointment of each of the three Cardinal Protectors during this period – Mario Marefoschi named in 1772; Gregorio Salviati, in 1781; and Carlo Livizzani, in 1795. This article is, thus, divided into three sections. On every occasion the spirits of the Irish petitioners were buoyed, prompting renewed attempts for an Irish rector. Whereas Marefoschi had effectively pre-determined the outcome of the request by Archbishop John Carpenter of Dublin in the early 1770s by inserting his own men into college positions, it was the long-standing, deeply-entrenched rector, Luigi Cuccagni (1772–98), who held off the final two attempts, supported by his Cardinal Protectors and ultimately the pontiff himself. These, in all brevity, are the arguments that this article will put forward. Both Cuccagni and the three Cardinal Protectors had their reasons for retaining the status quo, and they dovetailed nicely. Cuccagni desired to retain his post and standing in Rome; the Cardinal Protectors desired to retain their privileges and authority. The issue, from Rome's perspective, was never really about who would be a better administrator, Italian or Irish, although much of the debate was ostensibly fought on these grounds. Nor

was it about the needs of the mission field; rather it was a one-sided, self-serving plan to protect the prerogatives of those in control.

Until now our understanding of the national rector issue has been clouded by a misreading of the evidence. The curia and especially the Cardinal Protectors have been infused with a degree of forthrightness when examining the reasons proffered for not installing an Irishman that in fact never existed. Symptomatic of the problem is a general misunderstanding of the Roman side of the story. In one recent work Pius VI's Secretary of State is misidentified as (Placido) Zurla – a Cardinal from 1823 – instead of Francesco Zelada.[1] The result of this unfamiliarity has been for historians to take the reasons for denying a native-born rector literally, unaware of the scheming taking place in Rome. Instead blame is directed at Irish bishops for their collective failure to understand the times and seize the appropriate opportunities.[2] Historian Francis Gasquet was lulled – as were many contemporaries – into believing Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Antonelli's promises to the English College in 1783 to appoint a national rector.[3] Even if sincere at the time (two years later he would oppose reform[4]), Antonelli was not in a position to force change, as a relative newcomer to the curia; the inveterate Cardinal Protector of the English College, Camerlingo and great-nephew of Clement XII, Andrea Corsini, did not conceal his dislike of the proposed amendments.[5] In the case of the Scots College, it was believed at various times that its Cardinal Protectors, Caraffa (1774–80) and Albani (1780–1803), were committed to change, and that the Scottish hierarchy merely had to wait for a more 'propitious' time.[6] But this was also a period of forlorn hopes for the Scots; Caraffa and Albani, like contemporaries Marefoschi and Corsini, never seriously contemplated relinquishing power. Thus, despite all of the lip service paid to this

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[1] Michael E. Williams, *The Venerable English College Rome: A History* (2nd edn: Herefordshire, 2008), 85. Zelada served from 1789–96.

[2] For the Scottish College see James F. McMillan, 'Development 1707–1820' in Raymond McCluskey (ed.), *The Scots College Rome 1600–2000* (Edinburgh, 2000), 43–66. See also Williams, *The Venerable English College*, 83–5, and Paul MacPherson, 'History of the College from 1706 to 1793', *Innes Review,* 12 (1962), 115–42.

[3] F. A. Gasquet, *A History of the Venerable English College, Rome: An Account of its Origins and Work from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London, 1920), 179.

[4] McMillan, 'Development 1707–1820', 58.

[5] Bernard Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival in England, 1781–1807* (2 vols; London, 1909), i, 63.

[6] McMillan, 'Development 1707–1820', 56 (Albani), and MacPherson, 'History of the College', 135 (Caraffa).

issue, not one native rector would be installed in any of the three colleges between 1772 and 1798, when they were closed by the French.[7]

In the case of the Irish clergy, they argued in good faith in their petitions, unaware that their requests had no real chance for success. Clare Carroll's work on the *Memoriali* by Cuccagni offers a rich panoply of ideas and intertextual comparisons and analysis, much of which is instructive for this discussion. However, her main themes, that of control and obedience, place the onus on the Irish for the curial decisions rendered. The Church under Pius VI was supposedly concerned that the Irish fall into line politically, and adhere fully to the authority of the English crown: 'The Memorial of 1783 needs to be understood in relation to the struggle over obedience to both Church and State in late eighteenth-century Ireland.'[8] It is true that conservative corners of Rome, especially those at the Irish, Scottish and English colleges, still held to the legitimist notions for the Stuart family, addressing them in regal terms. These Jacobite loyalists were, however, gradually reduced in strength by a contrary trend in Rome towards greater cooperation with England, reaching its peak during the Napoleonic wars, faced as they were with a common enemy.[9] For Rome to elicit England's trust and political support, Popes, beginning with Clement XIV (1769–74), felt it incumbent to distance themselves officially from such treacherous notions; they began denouncing all forms of Jacobitism and instead recognising unequivocally the legitimacy of the Hanoverians, and asked the clergy to follow suit.

While the themes of control and obedience are indeed important in determining a national rector, the context is misplaced. The decisions by the Congregation of Propaganda Fide and the Cardinal Protectors were not influenced to any considerable degree by politics in Ireland or England, not even in the mid-1790s. In fact, English parliamentarian John Coxe Hippisley's impassioned pleas to the pontiff and other key prelates in 1795 about the need for native rectors to ensure order back home ultimately fell on deaf ears.[10] And Pius VI, who plays the central role in Carroll's version, actually absented

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[7] F. A. Gasquet suggests that Paul MacPherson was installed as rector at the Scots College just before the French invasion. Gasquet, A History, 180.

[8] Clare Carroll, '"The Spiritual Government of the Entire World": A Memorial for the Irish College, Rome, January 1783' in Dáire Keogh and Albert McDonnell (eds), *The Irish College and its World* (Dublin, 2008), 65.

[9] For more on this topic, consult F. A. Gasquet, *Great Britain and the Holy See, 1782–1806* (Rome, 1919).

[10] Hippisley letter, 15 January 1795, Cashel Diocesan Archives, (Bishop Thomas) Bray letters: microfilm National Library of Ireland, p5999.

himself from the national rector debate and the decision-making process until 1795, when, as will be shown, he in effect stalled any progress on this front.[11] Instead, local, more immediate considerations predominated in Rome – that of maintaining influence and ensuring *obedience* to the traditional power structures of the college system and its Cardinal Protectors. Unfortunately for the Irish, their circumstances would be too often neglected during this period.

There was, however, a small minority in the English-speaking community in Rome who accurately sized up the state of affairs. For example, the Scottish cleric John Thomson observed in 1786: 'Padrons [sic] are so ambitious of power and so jealous of their jurisdiction that they cannot suffer anyone, much less a stranger, to meddle with it.'[12] And the veteran English agent, Monsignor Stonor, a fixture in Rome since 1748, opined that this rector issue represented one extra 'favour' at the Cardinal Protectors' disposal: 'Not only would the jurisdiction of the Cardinal Protector over the college be diminished, but his influence in Rome would suffer, as he would no longer have posts at his disposal – such as the places of superiors, masters and prefects – to hold in prospect to his dependents.'[13] These disparate and discerning voices, though, have been drown out by a chorus of historians advancing quite another version.

1773 Request

Holding discretionary powers over any of the various colleges vacated by the Jesuits in the aftermath of their suppression in 1773 paid dividends, as Monsignor Stonor reveals. Cardinals jockeyed to receive such prestigious appointments left in the wake of the Jesuit dissolution; those closest to Clement XIV and involved in the Jesuit demise were rewarded appropriately. The conflict between the Jesuits and the so-called Jansenists in Italy was partly theological, but was also fuelled by personal enmity on both sides, as there was room enough in Rome for only one of them. The term 'Jansenism' in Italian lands, primarily an eighteenth-century phenomenon, is somewhat problematic, given the differences between it and the authentic Jansenism of northern Europe, especially France, from an earlier period. This 'Italian Jansenism' represented 'almost every shade of progressive opinion' and is thus difficult to define.[14] Theologically, the movement sought to 'reassert and

[11] Carroll, 'A Memorial for the Irish College', 66–7.

[12] McMillan, 'Development 1707–1820', 58.

[13] Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival,* i, 63.

[14] J. M. Roberts, 'The Italian States' in Elliot H. Goodwin (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern*

purify Augustinian doctrines'; morally, it desired reform of 'clerical discipline and lay manners'; liturgically and ecclesiastically, it deplored 'the cult of saints' and vindicated 'the authority of bishops'; politically, the group was anti-Jesuit and anti-curial. Churchmen who championed such positions, and especially those who were opposed to the Jesuits, benefitted from the great changes which took place under Pope Clement XIV, most notably, the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773. One of the beneficiaries was Mario Marefoschi, Cardinal Protector at the Irish College.

Marefoschi, described in 1771 as the 'true favourite of the Pope', was allotted control over the Irish and German-Hungarian Colleges, as well as the theological academy at *La Sapienza*.[15] But the biggest prize was the Roman College. Marefoschi eventually fell out with other cardinals close to Clement XIV over the handling and reappointment of positions within the college.[16] Marefoschi initially desired Peter Tamburini and Giuseppe Zola to take up positions there; instead they had to be reassigned to the Irish and Umbro-Fuccioli Colleges respectively. The intensity of the disagreement this generated indicates the importance that was attached to the accompanying privileges. On 12 November 1773, Marefoschi was conspicuously absent from the *commissione deputata* sent to restart the Roman College.[17] The effects of this shakeup were felt at the Scots College as well, when Marefoschi resigned his protectorship after the fallout and withdrawal from the commission, incurring the displeasure of Clement XIV.[18]

Having been reduced in stature with the loss of control of two colleges, Marefoschi was determined to hold tightly to what authority was still vested in him. These circumstances, however, were unknown to the Irish hierarchy back home, when they first raised the topic of a national rector in early 1773. The Irish bishops had generally reacted with approval to the fall of the Jesuits, unaware of the full implication that accompanied this change. In a letter to Marefoschi, John Carpenter chimed: 'Irish Bishops gladly hear he [Marefoschi]

History Volume 8: The American and French Revolutions, 1763–93 (Cambridge, 1976), 378–96. Although somewhat dated, it still contains one of the best descriptions of Italian Jansenism.

[15] http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/mario-compagnoni-marefoschi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/ [accessed 4 June 2016].

[16] Enrico Carusi, 'Lettere Inedite di Gaetano Marini', *Studi e Testi*, 82 (1938), 47.

[17] Domenico Rocciolo, 'Dalla Soppressione della Compagnia di Gesù al Pontificato di Leone XIII (1773–1903)' in Luigi Mezzadri (ed.), *Il Seminario Romano: Storia di un'istituzione di Cultura e di Pieta* (Turin, 2001), 66; and C. Sica *Cenni storici del Pontificio Seminario Romano* (Rome, 1914), 31–2.

[18] MacPherson, 'History', 132.

has rescued the College where perfidious administration injured it.'[19] Believing this an advantageous moment, he suggested a native superior, underscoring the importance of cultural affinities between rector and student, especially in terms of language. The Archbishop recommended two clerics at that time, a certain Horford and Purcel.[20]

Carpenter's initial overture to Marefoschi – dated 12 January 1773 – was answered two months later. With rector Cuccagni already in place, Marefoschi responded in a very respectful manner. He was pleased to hear that the Archbishop welcomed what he had accomplished for the Irish College. Brushing aside Carpenter's recommendations, Marofoschi wrote that he would gladly appoint an Irish rector were a suitable one to be found. But in lieu of an appropriate candidate, someone had to be appointed.[21]

Carpenter innocently offered a well-reasoned response, putting forth another possibility, Richard O'Reilly, who at the time was vicar-general of Kildare and formerly a student of good repute at the Propaganda.[22] In fact, the young O'Reilly had been the recipient of favourable testimonials by Marefoschi himself.[23] The wily Cardinal's implausible excuse – the one that in hindsight reveals his obfuscation – followed on 23 June 1774; he was barred from granting such a petition for an Irish superior because this was 'expressly forbidden by many decrees of Apostolic Visitors and the Cardinal Imperiali in 1738' on account of the problems that arose from past leadership.[24] This surely must have left Carpenter perplexed (it certainly did Curran, the editor of this correspondence). Not only had six of the last ten rectors been Irish, including all between 1751 and 1769, but Marefoschi had also recently compiled a very lengthy, detailed report about the College and its history and would have been aware of this. Indeed there had been one such apostolic visit in 1738, but the fact that Marefoschi failed to explain himself in light of the clear incongruity between any little known, unheeded recommendation which had been issued and the widespread practise of employing Irish rectors in

[19] Marefoschi to Carpenter, 2 January 1773, Dublin Diocesan Archives, Carpenter Letters 1770–80. In summary form, M. J. Curran, 'Archbishop Carpenter's Epistolae (1770–1780), part I (1770-1775)', *Reportorium Novum*, 1 (1955), 161. The correspondence in the next four footnotes are also referenced in Curran.

[20] Carpenter to Marefoschi, 12 January 1773, D.D.A., Carpenter Letter Book, 1770–1780.

[21] Marefoschi to Carpenter, 9 March 1773, D.D.A., Carpenter Letter Book, 1770–1780.

[22] O'Reilly would later become Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland from 1787 to 1818.

[23] Carpenter to Marefoschi, 19 May 1774, D.D.A., Carpenter Letter Book, 1770–1780.

[24] Marefoschi to Carpenter, 23 June 1774, D.D.A., Carpenter Letter Book, 1770–1780.

the eighteenth century was indicative of how seriously he took Carpenter's request. Cuccagni (and Tamburini) had been hand-picked by Marefoschi and had already travelled to Rome in order to carry out his Italian Jansenist programme of reform. He had no intention of undoing this.

The Career of Cuccagni

The passing of Marefoschi in late 1780 represented another opportunity for the Irish bishopric to renew earlier, thwarted agendas.[25] On top of the list was the installation of an Irishman to head up the College. This would, however, mean the removal of the existing rector, Cuccagni. This turned out to be much more difficult than anyone ever imagined. The extent of his power and influence would be revealed by his ability to rebuff attempts to remove him over the next two decades. He had moved quickly to ingratiate himself with Pius VI and his curia, as well as the Cardinal Protectors of the Irish College. For example on 20 January 1781 Cuccagni uncovered information in the Casanatense library which allowed the Cardinal Protector the right to use a room in St Isidore, an Irish Franciscan convent in Rome, for his own purposes – an extra benefit for the incoming Protector.[26]

Yet, understandably, in the beginning Cuccagni's well-entrenched position within the curia was lost on the Irish. He had inherited the position in 1773, which at that time was essentially a sinecure post, firmly under the thumb of Marefoschi. It was assumed that, with the death of the Cardinal Protector, Cuccagni was dispensable. After all, many of the prominent philo-Jansenist clerics who had come to Rome during Clement XIV's pontificate were nowhere to be found by the early 1780s. But Cuccagni was a man of a different stamp. Instead of his hold over the college loosening, what transpires over the next two decades until its closure in 1798 was just the opposite. Adopting an agenda in line with the ideals of Pius VI, Cuccagni successfully filled the power vacuum left by Marefoschi. His strategy was quite simply to further his own career and insulate himself from any opposition by inching as close to the power centre in Rome as possible. Cuccagni displayed an uncanny ability to redefine himself by adapting his theology and currying favour with the new pontifical regime despite it valuing a different theological outlook.

The election of Pius VI in February 1775 presented Cuccagni with two sets of predicaments in fact. Theologically, Cuccagni was naturally more aligned

[25] Anthony Cogan, *The Diocese of Meath: Ancient and Modern* (3 vols; Dublin, 1862–70), iii, 58.

[26] Pontifical Irish College, Rome, Liber I, f. 267r.

with the so-called Italian Jansenists, such as Giovanni Battista Molinelli or Francisco Vasquez, but it soon became clear that under Pius VI such men and their ideas were to have very little room; individual ex-Jesuits gradually began to participate and contribute in the theological life of Pius' reign. The second dilemma for Cuccagni was more personal. His closest friends and greatest loyalties lay with those so-called Jansenists who were no longer welcomed or esteemed in Rome. If he was to maintain a positive trajectory in his career, he would have to develop new friendships and distance himself from his former ones. In both cases, he successfully made the transition, not only securing his position as rector at the Irish College, but forging a new identity as a fervent 'anti-Jansenist'.

If Cuccagni was faced with two obstacles in 1775, they were offset by two fortuitous circumstances, which aided his awkward metamorphosis in the late 1770s. First, his protector Marefoschi, an outspoken anti-Jesuit, was in the autumn of his life. He would only live to see five years of Pius VI's twenty-five year reign; what is more, his poor health side-lined him for he spent time convalescing in Macerata. As a result, he was effectively stripped of any real authority by the Congregation of Propaganda, who, in the summer of 1778, encouraged Irish prelates to circumvent the aging Cardinal and direct their queries directly to Propaganda.[27] Thus, Cuccagni's loyalty to the man who had single-handedly established his career would never be directly tested. He later reflected back on Marefeoschi's presence in his life: 'I enjoyed for many years the honour of his protection and confidence.'[28]

Cuccagni shrewdly kept a low profile throughout the rest of the 1770s, not wanting to draw undue attention to himself. He limited his publishing output while Marefoschi was alive. His only misstep – evidence of his past associations – was in 1777 when he produced a work, *Vita di S. Pietro*, deemed too Jansenist in its understanding of the Papal Office.[29] At first Cuccagni attempted to defend himself, claiming an adherence to Augustinian ideals, and not to Jansenist ones. However, when he became aware of Pius VI's desire for

[27] Abbe Belluzze Letter 2 June 1778, N.L.I., p5999.

[28] Arturo Carlo Jemolo, 'L'abate Luigi Cuccagni e due polemiche ecclesiastiche nel primo decennio del pontificato di Pio VI' in *Atti della R. Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, 67 (1931–32), 41n.

[29] Nella Ferrini, 'L'Abate Luigi Cuccagni da Città di Castello Polemista Cattolico del Secolo XVIII' in *Bollettino della Regia Deputazione di Storia Patria per l'Umbria*, 40 (Perugia, 1943), 36.

him to retract part of the questionable theology, expressed in a work he had dedicated to the pontiff, he quickly fell into line.[30]

Cuccagni also avoided the Oath of Allegiance controversy, which began brewing in Ireland in the 1770s. At issue was the desire by England for an Irish pledge of loyalty to King George III (1760–1820) and a rejection of the Pretender. While the dispute touched upon temporal issues of the papacy, the oath itself sought to avoid meddling within the spiritual aspects of the Catholic Church: the Pope's spiritual authority and Roman Catholic dogma were not to be tampered with.[31] In 1776, during this period of great uncertainty for him, Cuccagni refused to air his views to an inquiring Bishop Butler in an uncharacteristic show of meekness. He excused himself 'for withholding his opinion on the question of the Oath of Allegiance; the problem is a delicate one; different interpretations are possible.'[32] By contrast, Prefect of Studies Tamburini was more candid: he counselled the Irish to take the oath for the advancement of the religion.[33]

The second fortuitous occurrence was the departure from Rome of most of his former Italian Jansenist colleagues. It was this same exodus that also swept Tamburini, his future arch-nemesis, from his midst at the college. Molinelli, a member of the Scolopi order, was Cuccagni's closest friend with nearly two decades of correspondence to back it up.[34] The two had met in Rome while Molinelli taught at the Nazarene College.[35] Molinelli, along with Vasquez, was a prime target in the swirling theological currents surrounding Pius VI, as Roman theologians produced works to rebut their ideas. Without

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[30] Ibid., 40.

[31] For more on the comparison of enduring Jacobite sympathies among the Irish with the actual political force of a Stuart restoration as found in pamphlet literature of the day, see Vincent Morley, 'Catholic Disaffection and the Oath of Allegiance of 1774' in James Kelly, John McCafferty and Charles Ivar McGrath (eds), *People, Politics and Power: Essays on Irish History 1660-1850 in Honour of James I. McGuire* (Dublin, 2009), 122–43.

[32] Cuccagni to Butler 14 December 1776 (D.D.A. Troy Correspondence 1777-82); a summary in Mark Tierney, 'A Short-Title Calendar of the Papers of Archbishop James Butler II in Archbishop's House. Thurles: part 1, 1764-1786', *Collectanea Hibernia*, 18/19 (1976–7), 113–14.

[33] Garlaschi, *Vita Cristiana e Rigorismo Morale: Studio storico teologico su Pietro Tamburini (1737-1827)* (Brescia, 1984), 14.

[34] See Ferrini, 'L'Abate Luigi Cuccagni', passim and appendix; and Raffaele Belvederi, 'Nuovi Documenti su Giovanni Battista Molinelli: Teologo della Repubblica di Genoa' in *L'Uomo e la storia* (Rome, 1983), 133.

[35] He taught there from 1769 to 1777. E. Codignola, *Illuministi, giansenisti, e giacobini nell'Italia del settecento* (Florence, 1947), 206.

the presence of those men and their now tainted theologies, Cuccagni was able more easily to conceal these friendships from those to whom it mattered. So as Molinelli established himself as Genoa's foremost Jansenist-leaning theologian, publishing on conciliarism and the limits of the Papacy – topics very out of favour in Rome – Cuccagni could maintain links in a private correspondence with his friend without incurring any repercussions.

Indeed it was Cuccagni's grasp of the importance of secrecy that facilitated his theological evolution. By remaining under the radar, he was able to alter his theological positions without any of the ill effects to his character or reputation that is normally associated with such a drastic makeover. He insisted on using initials when corresponding with Molinelli – and that his colleague reciprocate.[36] Cuccagni was determined not to let the 'anti-Jansenists' in Rome – or anyone else for that matter – know the extent of his personal liaisons. Secrecy would become a hallmark of his career: he published either under pseudonyms or invented initials; contributors to the *Giornale Ecclesiastico*, whose production Cuccagni oversaw, were assigned at least one set of (false) initials under which they wrote; in 1789 he used the cook's name at the Irish College as (thin) cover for his vitriol in one tract against a former student.[37]

Hence Cuccagni's theological transformation was succeeding, despite the initial controversy attached to *Vita di S. Pietro*. In late 1779, '"All were convinced that the author was a good Catholic."'[38] With his former protector, Marefoschi, in the last months of life in July 1780, Cuccagni was courting his future patron, Pius VI, in his first audience. The meeting lasted twenty minutes. He described it as *graziosa*. By the end of 1782, he was under the 'benign watch' of the pontiff. Gradually the fruits of this patronage were in evidence: 'The benefits are raining down [upon me] . . . from year to year.'[39]

This preferment became even more secure after Cuccagni had positioned himself in the vanguard of the anti-Jansenist movement in Rome. He did this through the creation in 1785 of the *Giornale Ecclesiastico*, an ultramontane theological journal. It was the Church's most potent theological weapon prior to the French Revolution, and Cuccagni, more than any other individual, was identified with it. His fate mirrored that of his respected journal, to the point that he became a gatekeeper of sorts for theological publishing in Rome; the

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[36] Ferrini, 'L'Abate Luigi Cuccagni', 20.

[37] The title was 'Risposta di Giuseppe Bianchi da Gubbio Cuoco del Collegio Ibernese di Roma' (Pavia, 1791).

[38] Ferrini, 'L'Abate Luigi Cuccagni', 37.

[39] Ibid., 18.

importance of this genre heightened even more after 1786 and the Synod of Pistoia. By the 1790s his theological reputation was such that key curial members, Propaganda and Pius himself, all valued his counsel. Would-be theologians were keen to get their works into Cuccagni's hands for approval, since this almost always ensured publication.[40] He assisted Mauro Cappellari, the future Pope Gregory XVI, in this way, securing for the young monk a papal dedication in 1796.[41] Cuccagni's stature in Rome was such that even passers-by, like one Spanish traveller in late 1797, made reference to 'Cucagni' (along with one other Roman theologian) in his diary, adding that they were 'celebrated for their writings'.[42]

1781 Request

What are the repercussions of these facts in Cuccagni's career for the Irish College and the petitions for a native rector? The most significant is the effect they had on determining the outcome of the two main requests for a native superior between 1780 and 1798. Cuccagni's established position within the curia doomed attempts on the part of the Irish clergy and their representatives to pry him out of office.

A new wave of petitions for a native rector was submitted in the early 1780s. This time the Scottish led the way; their Cardinal Protector, Francesco Carafa, was reassigned in the same year as Marefoschi's death in 1780. Perhaps giving impetus to the petition drive was the rumour that Carafa had been kindly disposed to the idea of a native rector (conveniently only after he had vacated his protectorate).[43] Bishop Hays travelled to Rome in November 1781 in order to appeal directly to the Pope and urged his counterpart in England, Vicar Apostolic James Talbort, to do the same.[44] Talbort in turn produced a request signed by three of his four English confreres for the college to be turned over to an Englishman. In the case of the Irish College, church officials dutifully proffered a candidate, one John Murphy, for rector, unaware what

[40] For example, letters 222–223, and 303–05, National Library of Rome ('B.N.R.'), Manuscripts, S. Gregorio, folder 70.

[41] Cappellari to Frederico Mandelli, 19 September 1795 (Letter 134) and 2 July 1796 (Letter 140), B.N.R., S. Gregorio, folder 55, and Bishop Gardini of Crema to Mandelli, February 18, 1796 (Letter 255), B.N.R., folder 56.

[42] Nicholás de la Cruz y Bahamonde, *Viage de España, Francia é Italie* (4 vols, Madrid, 1807), iv. 307.

[43] McMillan, 'Development 1707–1820', 56.

[44] Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival*, i, 64.

exactly the new Cardinal Protector Salviati, who had replaced Marefoschi, felt about such a change.[45]

Cuccagni's perceived dereliction of duties seems to have drawn the attention of interested observers and contributed to the motives behind the request. By the autumn of 1781, one James Connell, writing from Rome, observed: 'as to the Coll. [Irish College] its situation is deplorable, being in the hands of people who seek only their own advantage and not that of the mission'.[46] This situation would only deteriorate further, along with Salviati's health. The Irish agent Val Bodkin recalled: Cuccagni, under the 'very weak' Cardinal Protector, 'has almost ruined that college.'[47] Even back in Ireland, people were aware of the long-standing problems. Writing in 1795 Reverend John Connolly opined: 'The students of the Irish College at Rome thinking, like many of their predecessors within those fourteen years last past, they had good reason to be dissatisfied with their Rector, Abbe Cugagni [sic].'[48] Connolly's chronology is revealing, as it fixes the origin of the problem from 1781, just following the death of Marefoschi in December 1780. This could very well signify a more flippant attitude by Cuccagni towards his college responsibilities, a reflection of his more secure position within the curia.

In the event the Pope eschewed direct involvement, referring the matter to Propaganda.[49] At its special meeting, held in the early 1780s, which included two of the Cardinal Protectors (Corsini had excluded himself) and seven other Cardinal members, the motions of the three colleges were denied.[50] The congregational vote was 'unanimous', but the final verdict was 'softened' to read 'for the present', an attempt, it seems, to mollify the petitioners.[51]

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[45] Cogan, *The Diocese of Meath*, iii, 57.

[46] Ibid., iii, 57.

[47] Val Bodkin to Bishop Thomas Bray of Cashel, 30 August 1794, N.L.I., p5998.

[48] Cogan, *The Diocese of Meath*, iii, 178-9. While frustrating for the Irish, the College in Rome accounted for only about five percent of the overall seminary intake. French seminaries predominated, followed by Spanish. See the valuable studies on Irish colleges in France by Liam Chambers, including 'Revolutionary and Refractory? The Irish Colleges in Paris and the French Revolution', *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies,* 2.1 (2008), 29–51.

[49] McMillan, 'Development 1707–1820', 56.

[50] Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival,* i, 64; McMillan, 'Development 1707-1820', 56, writes that the Propaganda meeting occurred in 1782, while Cuccagni's Memorial was published in 1783.

[51] MacPherson, 'History', 140; McMillan, 'Development 1707–1820', 56, writes that the decision was left to the discretion of the individual protectors. In any case the result was the same.

Underpinning the decision of the curia were four reports produced, as we would later find out, by Cuccagni.[52] His inclusion was in itself an indication of not only the pre-determined nature of the case but the strong position that the Irish College rector held within the curia. After all, he was tasked with producing the congregational reports effectively about whether or not he and his colleagues should be removed from office. For each of the three colleges there was a report produced.[53] The fourth piece was a general conspectus on the general state of college affairs arguing, unsurprisingly, against the 'innovation' of national rectors. Given the scope of these reports, they were almost certainly written at the behest of the Cardinal Protectors – Salviati, Carafa and especially Corsini, who had recused himself from the final vote so as to give the appearance of fairness to the inquiry.[54] Cuccagni defended their position passionately in his reports: 'These reflections maturely pondered demonstrate how much wisdom . . . the Cardinal Protectors [possess] to any innovations.'[55] He also picked up on a general theme originally articulated by Corsini, contending that Italian rectors were inherently better administrators.

Financial considerations were supposedly at the bottom of this latest decision by Propaganda. In the case of the Irish, as well as the English, it was the high cost of the voyage which precluded them from consideration. (The Scots evidently enjoyed travel discounts.) Cuccagni argued that such expenses would use up a disproportionate amount of the revenue resulting in a smaller intake of students.[56] He cited a visitation and recommendation by Cardinal Neri Corsini years earlier as justification.[57]

Furthermore Italians governed the colleges more economically, given that they were familiar with the language and the culture.[58] On this point Cuccagni devoted much space. Clothes and consumables would be more expensive due

[52] Carroll, 'A Memorial for the Irish College' provides a very helpful account of this subject, though her assumption that issues, such as disobedience to England or clerical relations with the Stuarts (see introduction), were key factors is misplaced. She is also unsure about authorship, when it is certainly Cuccagni. This also provides a different context to the analysis. However, she writes very astutely on the contradictions between Marefoschi's 1771 Memorial and the 1783 Memorial; I take these conclusions one step further to show the obfuscations and insincerity of the reports and the motives of the men who wrote them.

[53] Carroll, 'A Memorial for the Irish College', 70.

[54] Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival*, i, 64.

[55] P.I.C.R., Liber I, f. 243r. See also ibid., 259v.

[56] Ibid., f. 244r.

[57] Ibid. See also Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival*, i, 63.

[58] Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival*, i, 63. See also Carroll, 'A Memorial for the Irish College', 80.

to the 'prejudices' against a non-Italian rector.[59] (Cuccagni's solution to the clothing issue was, according to the students, to deprive them of new threads.[60]) He concluded that rectors needed 'to know the true way of economising.'[61] This could only be accomplished, in his estimation, by those with Italian roots, implying among other things, a native command of Italian and local customs.

But it was not only cost-cutting measures on staple items that supposedly concerned Cuccagni. He also questioned the general financial aptitude of national rectors, singling out Irishmen who had earlier made poor business decisions on behalf of the college. Land or property was foolishly sold by A. Roche in 1664 and M. Giordano in 1670 or purchased by W. Malone.[62]

In addition to their lack of financial acumen, it was argued that Irishmen lacked the proper comportment required to hold this office. It was claimed, not without cause, that native rectors were attracted only to certain dioceses.[63] Rectors from certain regions in Ireland tended to draw students from these same regions, thus denying the institution the designation of a 'national' college.[64] By contrast Italian rectors were allegedly unbiased. Cuccagni drew upon the example of an Irish rector having succeeded an Italian one, resulting in the College's falling into disarray.[65] And borrowing a page from Corsini, Cuccagni charged the Irish as being too lax in morals and discipline, directly contributing to the problems of mismanagement at the college.

Cuccagni held an accompanying set of beliefs which conveniently coincided with this skewed historical interpretation. If not heartfelt, they had been rehearsed to the point of appearing so. Rome was chosen by the Creator as the home of Christendom, and thus, Italians by extension were to perform an exalted role within the Church. Had God not wanted Italians to rule, he would not have placed its home where he did. In this scenario, it followed that Italians must be, in the nature of things, better administrators and governors of the Church.[66] The sharp-eyed English agent Stonor offered a more sober interpretation which seemed to hit at the crux of the matter:

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[59] P.I.C.R., Liber I, f. 244v.

[60] Copy of Students' letter of complaint to Mr Hippisley, 23 December 1794 (Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide ('A.S.P.F.'), Collegi Vari, folder 34, Irlandese (1655–1848), f. 128v.

[61] P.I.C.R., Liber I, f. 244v.

[62] Ibid., f. 245r-v.

[63] Ibid., f. 220v.

[64] Ibid., f. 248v.

[65] Ibid., f. 253v–254r.

[66] Ibid., f. 249v, from Carroll, 'A Memorial for the Irish College', 64.

'Purifying the Church – as those who shut down the Jesuits viewed this period – also included Romanising it . . . preserving power and privilege dovetailed nicely into this ideology.'[67]

But were Italians actually any better at governing than native rectors? Even if the criticisms had some basis of truth to them, such as the tendency towards regional bias, Cuccagni (and Salviati) contributed to the problem: they purposely allocated more positions to the sympathetic Archbishop John Troy of Dublin than to other regions.[68] Moreover, Cuccagni's theme that Italians were inherently better rectors is untenable even at a distance. One only needs to observe the behaviour of the Italian rectors at the Scots and English Colleges after 1772. Rectors in each house fell well short in the key categories of Cuccagni's assessment. That rector Ignazio Ceci was Italian did not help him avoid fraud at the Scots College. In the mid-1770s he was 'cheated by his servants in his employment' and forced to hawk valuable assets of the college in Navona Plaza at a fraction of their value.[69] The English College too had its share of financial improprieties. Rector Marco Magnani was removed for mismanagement in 1787.[70] And when dubious financial acumen was not on display, administrative shortcomings were present. On the Scottish side, in addition to the above-mentioned Ceci, L. Antonini was described as a 'poor administrator'; Marzi was a womanizer; and F. Marchioni, neglected his office.[71]

Cuccagni's seismic shift in historical re-interpretation discredits not only his reports, but also Marefoschi's a decade earlier, which was a justificatory piece compiled in order to remove the Jesuits from the administration of the Irish College. Cuccagni – as with his mentor, Marefoschi – belonged to a milieu that argued not on the merits of a case, but rather *a priori*, selecting materials and 'facts' around which to prove their point. Despite using a similar methodology, drawing upon the findings of select Apostolic Visits, their conclusions are starkly different. In Marefoschi's *Relazione*, the blame is directed at the Jesuit order for the institution's shortcomings, while in Cuccagni's *Memoriali*, it is the Irish who are faulted for the College's woes.[72] In fact, there are no disparaging comments towards the Jesuits in Cuccagni's reports, nor is there – to this author's knowledge – even a mention of the word 'Jesuit'. This report would

[67] Unclear source. 'C.R.S., vol. 19, 131; Kirk, 219–20.'

[68] Bodkin to Bray, 30 August 1794, N.L.I., p5998. Troy became Archbishop in 1786.

[69] McMillan, 'Development 1707–1820', 54–5, and what follows.

[70] Williams, *The Venerable English College*, 81.

[71] McMillan, 'Development 1707–1820', 54–7 and what follows; for a more general description, MacPherson, 'History', 136.

[72] An idea initially observed by Carroll, 'A Memorial for the Irish College', 74ff.

later be seen for what it was, when Irish agent Bodkin promised a rebuttal in 1795, to these reports of Cuccagni, on which 'nothing can be more [unjust] . . . or a greater libel upon a whole nation.'[73]

While Cuccagni's writings fail to reflect accurately the college's past, they do offer insight into his unflattering view of English-speaking clerics at the time. The tone employed in his reports reveals a hostility that borders on xenophobia. From his dismissive comments on the English language found in one report, to the more insidious criticisms pertaining to their management skills, one comes to the disturbing conclusion that Cuccagni disliked and disrespected them.[74] More troublingly, to the Irish were reserved the sharpest criticisms. He fails to mention any positive features of the Irish as a race. He writes in the Irish Memorial, 'the Irish are totally impatient . . . neither are they educated . . . They are extremely jealous of the others and they govern with the spirit of a people under a government half republican. … They scream perpetually among themselves.'[75]

If the Irish were as hopeless as ecclesiastical administrators as Cuccagni endlessly contended, what were to be the effects on the Irish students of a rector who seemingly harboured so much angst? These feelings of antipathy, so visible in his reports, would manifest themselves and become the focus of the controversy in 1794 during the third attempt to install a native rector.

1795 Request

The final episode in the national rector affair occurred in the mid-1790s, and, unlike 1773-4 and 1782–3, Cuccagni was a direct cause of the controversy. At the conclusion of every academic year, students would sojourn outside Rome to the *Villeggiatura* to enjoy the outdoors and relax. The retreat in 1794 witnessed a run-in between Cuccagni and the students which renewed calls for his dismissal. The students spoke of being on the receiving end of an array of curses and offensive name calling by Cuccagni and his unnamed Prefect of Studies;[76] denigrations such as *Birbi* [rogues], *porci* [pigs], *pazzi* [lunatics], and *mendicanti* [beggars] were hurled at them. Other words, they claimed, were too offensive to commit to writing. To make matters worse, this scathing talk had taken place in the presence of other *domestici* at the retreat house.

[73] Bodkin to Bray, 14 February 1795, N.L.I., p5999.

[74] P.I.C.R., Liber I, f. 256.

[75] Ibid., f. 247r.

[76] Student letter to Livizzani (A.S.P.F., Collegi Vari, b. 34, Irlandese (1655-1848), f. 126. busta ('b'). 34, Irlandese (1655–1848), f. 128v), and what follows. For a comparison with Irish students in Paris, see Chambers, 'Revolutionary and Refractory?'

The students forwarded their complaint to the new Cardinal Protector of the Irish College, Livizzani, requesting serious measures be taken.[77] They addressed the Cardinal Protector in a respectful and rational tone: 'In order to convince Your Excellency of the truth of these words, *the Rector himself* told the deacon that not only did we not merit such admonishing, but that also he desired the Prefect to make a public declaration of his guilt.'[78]

Following the incident, Cuccagni contritely asked for forgiveness. One student recalled: 'The rector … at the time of his illness, called us all into his room, and asked us for forgiveness for his past conduct. He told us that we were justly disgusted at his *cattivo* comportment, and he promised that we would not see any more of this from him.'[79] Such remorse on the part of the rector failed to calm the swirling winds of protest. After all, according to the students, this had not been an isolated incident: 'It has been already … many years that he [Cuccagni] has conducted himself in an inconsiderable and harsh manner. The current rector of this College has given the young students good reason for the continual vexations and discontent … Most of the current students are not able to suffer any more of the poor treatment and disgusting manner of the Rector, and are close to abandoning their vocation … thus losing the fruits of their study, witnessing the damage of a College, unuseful to the Kingdom of Ireland, to the just disappointment also of their bishops.'[80]

Perhaps anticipating what was coming, Cuccagni levelled charges of his own against the students in a letter to Livizzani, ahead of their own petition.[81] Thus, the students had not only to register their own complaints, but had to defend themselves against Cuccagni's three main charges: that they wanted to assume control over the college; that they contributed to Cuccagni's illness as a result; and that their conduct constituted 'a series of disobediences'. This well-worn tactic gives more credibility to the first claimant, Cuccagni, as the victim, while at the same time casting the students' grievance as petty and retaliatory in spirit.

Everyone in Rome was apparently aware of Cuccagni's treatment of the students whom he was charged to oversee: 'We do not lament the occasional imprudent moment or punishment of the superiors, but of being rigorously

[77] Cogan, *The Diocese of Meath*, iii, 178-9, on the chronology of the petitions: Livizzani, York, followed by Hippisley.

[78] Student Letter to Livizzani (A.S.P.F., Collegi Vari, b. 34, Irlandese (1655–1848), f. 126).

[79] Ibid.

[80] Copy of Students' Letter of Complaint to Mr Hippisley, 23 December 1794, A.S.P.F., Collegi Vari, b. 34, Irlandese (1655–1848), f. 128v.

[81] Student letter to Livizzani, A.S.P.F., Collegi Vari, b. 34, Irlandese (1655–1848), f. 126.

castigated with various slanderous expressions, and for which has now become famous throughout the whole city', wrote the students.[82]

Opinions about Cuccagni among the Irish were understandably low. Bodkin referred to him as 'a known defamer of the Irish nation.'[83] He later added that 'The Rector Cuccagni's proceedings and government have been a series of tyranny the most base, degrading and insulting.'[84] Cuccagni had alienated most of the Irish, maintaining contact in Rome only with Luke Concannen, Archbishop Troy's agent.[85] But even the pro-Roman Troy had run out of patience, calling the College 'very unsettled and disturbed'. He spoke of the need to remove Cuccagni:[86] 'the uncivil manner of Rector Cuccagni … disgusts the students, provoking them to leave the College and abandon ecclesiastical life.'[87]

The student's petition to Livizzani accomplished little except to deepen the divide between them and the administration. There were even rumours that he threatened to expel them. After an unfruitful overture to Cardinal York, the students turned to the Englishman John Coxe Hippisley for assistance. A member of the British parliament, Hippisley had sojourned to Rome in December 1792, ostensibly to convalesce, all the while promoting English business interests.[88] With a mixture of deep sympathy for Catholic emancipation and a strong desire for career advancement, Hippisley eventually got involved in the national rector issue. His pro-Catholic stance was an indication not only of his desire to win political points back home; it was also an indication of the policy England was adopting at this time. Italian ports were logistically critical for the crown, both economically and militarily. And as Napoleon pressured the Pope to close them to English vessels, the king desired an advocate in Rome to argue the contrary. Any concessions that he could win for his English-speaking constituents in Rome, he reasoned, would work in England's favour.

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[82] Copy of Students' Letter of Complaint to Mr Hippisley, 23 December 1794, A.S.P.F., Collegi Vari, b. 34, Irlandese (1655–1848), f. 128v.

[83] Bodkin to Bray, 30 August 1794, N.L.I., p5998.

[84] Bodkin to Bray, 14 February 1795, N.L.I., p5999.

[85] Bodkin to Bray, 30 August 1794, N.L.I., p5998. Concannen, a Dominican, would later technically become New York's first bishop, though he died en route in 1810.

[86] Troy to Bray, 12 January 1796, N.L.I., p5999.

[87] Troy Letter, 6 April 1795, A.S.P.F., Collegi Vari, b. 34, Irlandese (1655–1848), f. 130.

[88] Susan Mitchell Sommers, 'Sir John Coxe Hippisley: That "*Busy* Man" in the Cause of Catholic Emancipation', *Parliamentary History,* 27 (2008), 84 and 87.

Hippisley's perceived influence in favour of the English and Scottish houses, brought the Irish hierarchy into his corner, as they too hoped for concessions.[89] Having caucused since January 1795, Irish bishops were in agreement that Cuccagni must be replaced. The recent deaths of Irish Cardinal Protector Salviati, in August 1794, and Corsini in January 1795 added to the sentiment favouring change. English agent Robert Smelt observed: 'We have a fair prospect, at present, of recovering the College again into our own hands; since Corsini died, I have been pursuing this business with every possible diligence and attention.'[90]

Adding to the optimism were the very high opinions held of Hippisley. Agent Smelt spoke very favourably of his countryman:

> this gentleman is considered here, <u>almost</u> as a publick [sic] minister [and] of course has great influence with the Government; he has been indefatigable in his exertions to serve us, whether we succeed, or not, we shall have great obbligations [sic] to him. He has stated the case in a very able manner.'[91]

What is more, he had none of the 'annoying arrogance' that might be supposed of an English parliamentarian. Rather he was 'honest', 'candid', unassuming, and possessed 'great abilities and dexterity'.[92] His standing in Rome was buoyed by the political maelstrom which was gradually engulfing the Papal States. Pius VI looked for any sympathy he could muster in order to counteract French bellicosity. In 1793, following the assassination of French diplomat Nicolas Jean Hugon de Bassville in Rome and the subsequent French hostility, he even attempted to call on England for military assistance.[93]

As to his arguments for national superiors in all three houses, Hippisley spoke with much verve and conviction. He repeatedly stressed the importance of order and civic responsibility on the part of the new college seminary

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[89] Bodkin to Bray, 14 February 1795, N.L.I., p5999; referenced in Claude Meagher, 'Calendar of Bray Papers', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archeological Society* (1968), 109.

[90] Smelt Letter, 4 April 1795, B.A.A., A810. Corsini died on 10 January 1795. Cardinal Romualdo Braschi took over on 2 March.

[91] Smelt Letter, 4 April 1795, B.A.A., A810.

[92] Bodkin to Bray, 14 February 1795, N.L.I., p5999. This opinion was not always shared by Hippisley's colleagues in Parliament, who not infrequently found him annoying, long-winded, and opportunistic. See Sommers, 'Sir John Coxe Hippisley', 84–7.

[93] Smelt Letter, 7 May 1793, B.A.A., A808.

graduate.[94] 'The proposed regulations for the reform of the national colleges', he wrote, 'materially interest the good order of the United Kingdom.'[95] A successful seminary experience could inculcate 'love for the constitution of his country' and inspire 'the same sentiments as those whom [he] is charged to instruct', he elsewhere observed.[96] He extended the theme of order to the spiritual realm, suggesting that unqualified rectors could leave the students feeling embittered against their superior, instead of inspiring cardinal virtues.[97] He also underscored the gradual rapprochement between their two states, after nearly three centuries of bickering. In England there were fewer restrictions and greater protection for Catholics.[98] Concessions in this present case, so his argument ran, would strengthen further the 'links of esteem and of confidence and of attachment' between them.[99]

Hippisley also spoke of the disillusionment of parents and the 'disadvantageous' results of their sons' overseas education, due to the 'severity' of the superior.[100] Consequently, parliament had been forced to step in and initiate measures for the funding of local seminaries in order to facilitate religious education at home. He dwelt on the importance of cultural homogeneity among students and rector. Being 'under the eyes of [native] citizens' would provide the necessary elements deemed critical for a successful mission: 'There is no doubt that our government and our people consider it with more confidence the missionary pupils, while in a foreign country, to be under the eyes of a [native] citizen … [who] inspires them with a new confidence.'[101] In particular, it was the exercise of the young seminarian's 'natural language', which was critical for fruitful service to the laity at home.[102] Up to now the needs of English parishioners were unknown to the freshly-ordained clerics – they were simply out of touch.[103]

At the core of Hippisley's argument was a promise made by Prefect of Propaganda Antonelli in 1783, mentioned at the outset of this piece, to supply the colleges with national superiors at the next available opportunity: "'since

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[94] Hippisley Letter, 15 January 1795, N.L.I., p5999.
[95] Bodkin to Bray, 14 February 1795, N.L.I., p5999.
[96] Hippisley Letter, 15 January 1795, N.L.I., p5999.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.

this is so much desired by you, in future, care shall be taken that when next the Office shall become vacant, one of your priests, whose piety, doctrine and capability of administration is assured, shall be appointed head of the College.'"[104] Armed with a copy of this document – and seemingly unaware of the Prefect's subsequent and steady opposition to reform – Hippisley appealed to the curia and to Antonelli himself to follow through with his decade-old promise: 'These inconveniences can easily be foreseen in adopting officially, and in a manner to ensure the next possible execution of these sage measures which your Excellency announced … in the Act on 12 April 1783.'[105]

In his reports, Hippisley was partial to the Irish.[106] While promoting national rectors for all three colleges, he mentions specifically the Irish on several occasions.[107] This is because the Irish were fairing poorest in his judgement. Reform was underway in the other two institutions, but not as yet at the Hibernian.[108] Such were the dire circumstances that 'the unfortunate affairs of the Irish College easily capture the attention of parliament.'[109] Attempting to underscore the importance of his mission, he claimed that this affair interested 'the more than two million Catholics of Ireland.'[110]

Hippisley placed the blame for this infelicitous situation squarely on Cuccagni: 'The conduct of the rector has constantly embittered the spirit of those who have proceeded at the College.'[111] In defending the students, he felt that Cuccagni and others did not possess the requisite qualities to govern young people of a foreign nation: character, points of view, and the language being so different. Backing up student claims, he wrote, 'I believe to be well assured [by] Monsignor that their remonstrance against the current Rector are founded … These young people are not the first to complain … Several of the Colleagues [students] it seemed to me were determined to escape the severity which they were no longer able to withstand.'[112] At the same time Hippisley acknowledged, albeit in an understated manner, Cuccagni's importance to the Church: 'It would please me if the young men would do justice to the other good qualities of their Rector. It is sufficient to note that he has been able to

[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Hippisley Letter, 15 January 1795, N.L.I., p5999.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Hippisley to Bodkin, 11 March 1795, N.L.I., p5999.
[109] Hippisley Letter, 15 January 1795, N.L.I., p5999.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

merit some confidence on the part of the Cardinal Protector … I know that he writes well, and that his journal is very useful.'[113]

Livizzani fired back in a letter to Hippisley on 21 February 1795, defending not only himself, but also Cuccagni, by suggesting that the persons stirring the unrest were not the administrators of the College, but rather the students themselves: 'the young men now are fomenting their alleged dissatisfaction by … abusing in this your kindness, and they render themselves more than ever unruly and disobedient to the rules of the college.'[114] He continued: 'With having taken to favour these bad boys [*Giovanastri*], underscored by their remonstrance to that boldness they advance not only reasserting the accusations against the rector, which are in large part a heap of lies, as I could demonstrate in detail, if I had time to debate everything ... they try to control the administration of the college and to propose new methods and a new system of governance and discipline.'[115] He then asked under what premise these young men were intending to run the College? Bitterly he penned, '[if] this undisciplined residue of youth wants to imitate their compatriots who have already emigrated and abandoned the college, I will certainly not be afflicted by it.'[116]

In many ways Cuccagni and Livizzani were cut from the same cloth. The friendship between them was marked by a shared propensity for a loose tongue: 'The Cardinal Protector is known as the "Bashaw"', wrote Irish agent Bodkin, 'His language is coarse and vulgar.'[117] Bodkin was a classmate of Livizzani's secretary and spoke of the Cardinal's character: 'he is a very hard man and self-interested, as also haughty'.[118] Livizzani's inaugural at the start of his protectorate was foreboding in many ways; he breached protocol and took possession of the College without bothering to read the Papal Brief investing him with such powers; nor did he invite the national superiors for the occasion.[119] Even more revealing was Livizzani's reference to the Irish hierarchy as Vicars Apostolic, instead of bishops, a clear indictment, according to Hippisley, of the cavalier nature in which he approached his duties as Protector not only of the Irish College but of Ireland as well.[120]

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[113] Ibid.

[114] Hippisley Letter, 21 February 1795, N.L.I., p5999.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Hippisley to Bodkin, 11 March 1795, N.L.I., p5999.

[118] Bodkin to Bray, 30 August 1794, N.L.I., p5998.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Hippisley to the Pope, 11 March 1795, Bray Letters, N.L.I., p5999.

Hippisley acknowledged receipt of Livizzani's letter and offered a very conciliatory response; but in truth his reply had incensed Hippisley. He called it 'coarse', 'vulgar' and 'ignorant'. [121] He also resolved to counter the Cardinal's plan to recruit fresh pupils and asked Bishop Thomas Bray of Cashel, who had initially been receptive to the Protector's request,[122] not to act upon it. The Englishman endeavoured to starve the College into submission.[123]

Meanwhile, desire for Cuccagni's removal was transformed into optimism, as many placed much stock in the relationship Hippisley had formed with Pius VI. Bodkin, in early 1795, believed changes would be made: 'the Holy Father will approve of a just reform of the Colleges.'[124] A certain Reverend John Connolly observed independently: 'This gentleman [Hippisley], who has greatly insinuated himself into the Pope's favour, by warmly exerting himself to bring about a correspondence between the Courts of Rome and England, has so zealously undertaken the cause of the Irish students, that he is likely to succeed in his efforts to have the Italian rectors removed from the English, Irish, and Scotch colleges here, and national ones put in their place.'[125] All of this hubbub was because Hippisley himself spoke confidently about the matter. 'The memorial for reform in the name of the British apostolic vicars was presented yesterday', he remarked in March 1795: 'From what His Holiness has said in confidence to me, as well as from the conversation with the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, I am persuaded that the reform will take place.'[126]

But this optimism was illusory as the man responsible for generating it, Pius VI, was ultimately to dash these hopes. The Pope, while appearing amenable to Hippisley, was in fact determined to forestall any action. Hippisley's impassioned pleas to the pontiff on the three occasions that they met produced no results, as Pius remained silent, failing to advocate the Englishman's initiatives, despite giving the impression that he would. In a letter from Archbishop Troy in January 1796, Livizzani claimed that he had not been communicated any such information by the Pope: 'The Cardinal in his Words *non conosco la materia di cui se tratta* [is not aware of the material that I referring to], must allude to the supposed determination of the pope respecting the

[121] Hippisley to Bodkin, 11 March 1795, N.L.I., p5999.
[122] Bray to Egan, 25 April 1795, N.L.I., p5999.
[123] Hippisley to Bodkin, 11 March 1795, N.L.I., p5999.
[124] Meagher, 'Bray Papers', 109; Ward, The Dawn of the Catholic Revival, ii, 178; see also Troy to Bray, 12 December 1795, N.L.I., p 5999.
[125] Cogan, *The Diocese of Meath*, iii, 178–9.
[126] Hippisley to Bodkin, 11 March 1795, N.L.I., p5999.

grant of national superiors, which as now appears never existed, of which he [Livizzani] remains ignorant, and … it likewise appears, that the pope had not officially communicated Mr Hippisley's application to the S. Congregation, or to any Cardinal member thereof.'[127]

Once Hippisley left town in March 1795 Pius delegated responsibility to Propaganda now under the direction of the aged Cardinal Gerdil. In May 1795 Gerdil averred that 'he had made up his mind on the matter that althow [sic] it did not depend entirely on him, nevertheless his influence was considerable that I might inform the Bps [Bishops] in England it would be settled to their satisfaction.'[128] However, Gerdil continued the pattern of foot-dragging initiated by the Pope. Despite his promise in May, by November 1795 there was still no recovery of the English College.[129] Neither was there any more mention of the Irish College by this point. However, Gerdil informed English agent Smelt that 'it will certainly take place and that soon';[130] by November 1796, the Pope sanctioned Gerdil to 'conclude the business himself, without waiting for a general Congregation.'[131] In November 1797 – another year later – the Pope authorised the recommendation of a 'proper person'.[132] But for reasons unknown, the person could not be both the agent and the rector, effectively eliminating Smelt, the most obvious candidate at the time and currently residing in Rome.[133] What is more, this papal request for a potential candidate never found its way to England, either being lost in the post or never being sent. Thus, no suitable candidate was forthcoming. By Christmas 1797, the penny had dropped for Smelt: 'There has been some underhand dealings in this affair, I don't despair of finding out the authors: some self-interested persons here, do all in their power to prevent the house returning into our own possession; it is now three years since I have been in continual pursuit

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[127] Troy to Bray, 12 January 1796, N.L.I., p5999. In 1811 Hippisley would reflect upon this interlude, and conclude that his failure was the result of the scheming of the Cardinal Protectors and a rather weak, though well-intentioned Pope, who was unable to exert his influence. Gasquet, *A History,* 206. Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival*, ii, 178, argues that Hippisley's petition, more than anything else, accounted for eventual nomination of an English rector. If Hippisley did play a role, it was indirectly and much later, a result of his close relationship with future Secretary of State Ercole Consalvi.

[128] Smelt Letter, 16 May 1793, B.A.A., A811.

[129] Smelt Letter, 14 November 1795, B.A.A., A814.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Smelt Letter, 5 November 1796, B.A.A., A820.

[132] Smelt Letter, 25 November 1796, B.A.A., A825.

[133] On being a prime candidate, Smelt Letter, 14 November 1795, B.A.A., A814.

of this object.'[134] Gerdil was then supposedly authorised to act (once again) autonomously, without even a congregational meeting, this at the beginning of 1798; but any action was prorogued by the invasion of the French.[135]

Conclusion

Why, despite all the petitions and well-reasoned arguments, was Cuccagni never removed from the Irish College, even though the problems were obvious? What all English-speaking parties misjudged was Cuccagni's influence and support in Rome. The Scots and English Colleges went through at least three different rectors. All of them were ousted with much less effort than was exerted against Cuccagni. His biographer commented on his position within the church as being *forte*.[136] In fact, in 1795, at the height of the third national rector debate at the Irish College, the pontiff, while meeting with Hippisley and discussing Cuccagni's dismissal, actually conferred on the rector a pension of 17,50 *scudi* annually.[137] Quite simply, Cuccagni was a critical cog in the theological wheel: one of a handful of theologians – many of the rest, not coincidentally, contributors to the *Giornale Ecclesiastico* – upon whom the Pope relied on to wage his theological battles. His first calling was to publish theological ripostes to the so-called Italian Jansenists, and this greatly outweighed the issues at the Irish College, which were essentially viewed as distractions.

Cuccagni had come out the winner. He alone among non-cardinals of any theological importance managed to survive the transition from Clement XIV to Pius VI, relying upon qualities admittedly more Machiavellian than Franciscan. Cuccagni's ability to remake himself – and thus shield himself from external threats – was key to the failure of the Irish to exact reform.[138] Even after the French arrived, his wherewithal and survival instincts were on display. In March 1798, a month after the French takeover and eight months prior to his death, he began to champion the ideas and ideologues behind French republicanism and democracy in his journal.[139] Throughout this period, most English-speaking petitioners made the mistake of assuming that they would receive a fair hearing. Hippisley naively asked in one letter,

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[134] Smelt Letter, 23 December 1797, B.A.A., A818, and what follows.

[135] Smelt Letter, 10 February 1798, B.A.A., A825.

[136] Ferrini, 'L'Abate Luigi Cuccagni', 16.

[137] Ibid., 18.

[138] The somewhat positive take of Cuccagni's transformation after 1775 presented in this article is unique. Others have, justifiably, formed a critical view of his modus operandi. See, for example, ***Jemolo, 'L'abate Luigi Cuccagni***', passim.

[139] Ferrini, 'L'Abate Luigi Cuccagni', 85ff.

'what is the … [problem that] this great reform excites so many fears?'[140] He had failed to realize that the movement which removed the Jesuits in 1773 also coveted filling the power vacuum left in its wake.

The victims, or losers, were the students at the Irish College during Cuccagni's years as rector, especially from 1785, when their College became his personal publishing house for his journal.[141] His interest in training up young men for ministry in Ireland was, by comparison, negligible, as his actions so poignantly reveal. Ultimately for the College it was only at the death of Cuccagni in late 1798 that change was possible. The French Revolution would then delay reform for another generation.

On an administrative level, the period from 1773 to 1798 at the Irish College acts as a bridge between the earlier association with the Jesuits (1635–1772) and the post-1826 period, following the College's suppression, which had Irishmen at the helm; the years of Cuccagni's rectorate were unique in that an Italian secular held the position. The College would finally get the native rector that it had been longing for, in the person of Michael Blake in 1826, a former student at the College. It would soon become clear that this marriage was also far from perfect, as Blake encountered stiff opposition and even demands to be removed from office just two years into his tenure.[142] But there was another irony; after all the long, arduous lobbying for an Irish rector, deemed so critical for the student body, the presence of non-Irish students would become an enduring feature of the Irish College in its modern phase.[143]

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[140] Hippisley to the Pope, 11 March 1795, Bray letters, N.L.I., p5999.

[141] Jemolo, 'L'abate Luigi Cuccagni', 29

[142] A. Quinn to Rev Mr Doyle, 12 April 1828, D.D.A.

[143] Luigi Gentili was one of the first, in 1830, Denis Gwynn, 'Father Gentili', The Irish Ecclesiastical Record, 70 (1948), 769–84.