

Clancy, John

by Anne Dolan

Clancy, John (1856–1912), catholic bishop of Elphin, was born 23 December 1856 at Ballygraney, Co. Sligo, son of Martin Clancy and Mary Clancy (née O'Connor). Educated at Kilross national school, the Marist Brothers school, Sligo, and the diocesan seminary, Summer Hill College, Athlone, he entered St Patrick's College, Maynooth in 1876. A high honours degree earned him a place in the Dunboyne Establishment, where from 1881 he undertook extensive postgraduate research. On 25 June 1882 he was ordained a priest of the diocese of Elphin. The following year he was appointed to a professorship at the diocesan college, Sligo, a position he held until becoming (1887) professor of English literature at Maynooth. While teaching at Maynooth, his growing reputation as a preacher led to the creation of a separate chair of sacred eloquence at the college. As the hierarchy's chosen lecturer in oratory, his talents were sought for special ecclesiastical occasions such as the sermon for the centenary of Maynooth (1895), the anniversary panegyric of St Francis Xavier (1910), and a speech on 'Ireland and the eucharist' at the eucharistic congress at Cologne.

He was consecrated bishop of Elphin in February 1895. It is estimated that at 39 he was the youngest bishop in Christendom at the time. In Elphin he oversaw the construction of several churches and actively improved the conditions of the clergy and religious throughout the diocese. A popular figure, he was devoted to the poor (establishing a home for the destitute in 1910), and considered education the answer to poverty. He erected and renovated a large number of national schools in Sligo and Roscommon and set up higher-grade schools for the poor of the larger towns of his diocese; he also developed courses at the diocesan college, tailored for the underprivileged through a system of open competition. However, the main thrust of his work lay in the promotion and establishment of technical schools. As a member of the general council of technical instruction, he was responsible for founding the renowned Loughglynn community where girls were trained and employed in the domestic sciences.

A firm advocate of wholesome literature, he denounced immoral plays and convinced the *Catholic Bulletin* of the need to publish a monthly list of approved books. He was a strenuous opponent of 'English socialism' and proselytising street preaching, while Sligo temperance hall remains a monument to his zeal for the temperance movement. A friend of Eugene O'Growney (qv), he was closely associated with the foundation of the Gaelic League and always maintained that, next to pastoral duties, a priest should promote the Irish language. Subsequently he was closely associated with many prominent League members including Patrick Pearse (qv), his fellow bishop John Healy (qv), and Thomas O'Kelly (1879–1924). In 1907 he became a member of the Gaelic League Oireachtas committee.

Although an enthusiastic nationalist, he discouraged agitation and was regarded as responsible for the defeat of the 'no rent' campaign on Lord de Freyne's estate in Co. Roscommon in 1902. Despite his lifelong support for the Irish parliamentary party, he took no active part in politics; he was merely amused by the negative use of his pastorals on home rule by unionist newspapers.

He died 19 October 1912 at his home at St. Mary's cathedral, after a lengthy illness, and was buried in the vault of Sligo cathedral.

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John Healy, *Maynooth college: its centenary history* (1895), 509, 567; *Ir. Times*, *Freeman's Journal*, *Times*, 21 Oct. 1912; *Sligo Champion*, 28 Oct. 1912; *Catholic Bulletin*, ii, no. 11 (Nov. 1912), 799–801; *Ir. Catholic Directory*, 1913, 290, 541–2; *WWW*; John C. McTernan, *Here's to their memory* (1977), 360–64; *N.H.I.*, ix, 385; B. J. Canning, *Bishops of Ireland* (1987), 341–2; P. J. Corish, *Maynooth college 1795–1995* (1995), 197, 219, 445