

Cullen, Paul

by Colin Barr

Cullen, Paul (1803–78), catholic archbishop and cardinal, was born 29 April 1803 at Prospect House, near Ballitore, Co. Kildare, third of the fifteen children of Hugh Cullen and his second wife, Mary Maher of Kilrush. (There was one daughter by an earlier marriage.) Prosperous tenant farmers, the Cullens and Mahers were prominent in counties Kildare, Carlow, and Meath. Paul Cullen himself was named after an uncle executed by crown forces in May 1798. Cullen's father was also involved with the United Irishmen, was arrested, and narrowly avoided court-martial and a probable death sentence. He was released in 1801.

Education Like no fewer than eight other members of his immediate family, Cullen's early education was entrusted to a quaker boarding school in Ballitore, which he entered on 10 May 1813. Cullen seems to have remembered both the school and the quakers fondly, stating publicly and without irony in 1873 that he had 'always been very friendly with the Friends' (*Court of queen's bench, Ireland. Report. . .* (1874), 393). By 1816 he had come under the particular notice of James Doyle (qv), the future bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. Doyle was impressed both with Cullen's character and his academic talent. As bishop, Doyle would do everything he could to advance Cullen, and privately expressed the hope that he would succeed him in Kildare.

On 17 February 1817 Cullen entered Carlow College, where he remained for two years. In 1819 he was sent to the Urban College of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in Rome. This was despite the offer of a place at Maynooth, which his father most likely rejected on the grounds of the oath of loyalty required of all students. Cullen arrived in Rome on 25 November 1820 and in many ways he never left. He fell in love with papal Rome, its liturgical grandeur, and its architecture. If Rome itself was crucial to the development of his character, his time in Propaganda was central to his career. He earned the trust and respect of the officials there, a trust that he never lost; this trust was essential as Propaganda controlled the church (and episcopal appointments) in the UK, the USA, and the British empire.

While a student, Cullen impressed successive cardinal prefects of Propaganda, including Mauro Cappellari, the future Gregory XVI. The basis of Cullen's success was both personal – he was well liked – and academic. By 1821 he had already acquired a good knowledge of Italian, and had begun the study of Greek and Hebrew. (He later studied Syriac.) By 1823 he had begun taking first place in examinations. In 1828 Cullen was chosen to defend 224 theological propositions before an audience that included Pope Leo XII and two future pontiffs. The performance earned him his doctorate and his reputation. Cullen's mastery of the Italian language further enhanced his influence in Propaganda; the day-to-day

language of the Holy See was Italian, and few at Propaganda spoke or read English. He was often commissioned by Propaganda to translate and comment upon English documents sent to them. The opportunities this provided were not wasted.

Rome, 1829–49 Cullen was ordained on 19 April 1829 (Easter Sunday) for the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin. Despite Doyle's desire that he return to Ireland, Cardinal Cappellari persistently prevented Cullen's departure, pleading his involvement in the production of a polyglot Bible and the teaching of scripture and oriental languages in the Urban College. The patronage of Cappellari – who was elected pope in 1830 and reigned till 1846 – was crucial to Cullen's early career.

By the early 1830s Cullen was recognised as a rising star in Rome. A number of American bishops urged him to join the mission in the USA, and he became the unofficial agent of the 'Irish' or 'Roman' faction of the American hierarchy. Cullen's representations were crucial in the Roman decision to increase the number of American dioceses and influential in the selection of bishops for them. In 1834 John England (qv), bishop of Charleston, South Carolina, believing he had Cullen's permission for the step, secured a papal bull appointing Cullen his coadjutor with the title of bishop of Oran. (Oran was a defunct see in what later became Algeria.) England had previously urged Cullen's candidature for the see of New York. Despite these and other offers or suggestions, Cullen consistently declined all appointments that required him to leave Rome. What he could not decline was the offer, in late 1831, of the rectorship of the Irish College in that city. Although the incumbent rector was ill, and the power to replace him lay in Ireland, Cullen's appointment was nevertheless the work of Propaganda, which pushed his name on the Irish bishops. The college had only recently been reestablished, and it had fewer than twenty students at Cullen's appointment. It also had inadequate buildings and a precarious financial position.

Cullen's first task was to secure the future of the college, which he did with great success, increasing enrolment and eventually securing it a new home on the Quirinal hill and a summer retreat at Tivoli. Cullen hoped to make Rome an attractive choice for ambitious young seminarians, and he wanted to ensure that those educated in the Eternal City would return to Ireland with not only a first-class education, but also with the same abiding love of Rome that Cullen himself had. As he confided privately to an American bishop in 1833, his plan was that the students of the Irish College 'will be the means of introducing Roman maxims into Ireland and uniting that church more closely with the Holy See' (letter to Francis P. Kenrick, 9 December 1834, Baltimore diocesan archives). In later years, products of the Cullen-era Irish College were sent out around the English-speaking world as bishops; in 1845, for example, no fewer than six future Australian or New Zealand bishops were students.

As rector of the Irish College, Cullen also assumed the position of agent of the Irish bishops to the Holy See. The appointment secured Cullen a much-needed income, but more importantly it placed him in a uniquely powerful position within the Irish

church. On the one hand, the Irish bishops needed Cullen to represent their interests to Propaganda. On the other, Propaganda trusted him to explain Irish affairs and to recommend policy, recommendations that were usually followed. The situation was a powerful one, but fraught with tension.

In the 1840s the Irish church was successively divided by the issues of primary education, charitable bequests, and the proposal to establish secular higher education in Ireland. In each case the hierarchy bitterly and publicly disagreed, thus throwing the questions on Rome. Both sides sought Cullen's assistance, and he had to walk a fine line between the factions. Temperamentally, Cullen was usually in agreement with the minority of the hierarchy led by Archbishop John MacHale (qv) of Tuam. MacHale and his allies sought to reject any British concessions that fell below full compliance with catholic demands. Cullen, however, was more pragmatic than MacHale. While visiting Ireland in 1840, and at the request of Propaganda, he examined the national schools as they actually operated. Although opposed to the principle of the system, Cullen's report made it clear that in practice it was safe enough, and his advice ensured that Rome did not condemn the schools. Occasionally, however, Cullen's feelings ran ahead of his pragmatism: in early 1845 he retreated from what he himself admitted to be an over-partisan support for those bishops opposed to the support of Archbishops William Crolly (qv) and Daniel Murray (qv) for the charitable bequests act. He was helped along to this conclusion by his worst nightmare: papal displeasure.

From 1845 Cullen lent his fervent support to the campaign to ensure papal condemnation of the secular queen's colleges. In the period 1845–9 he sought to ensure that Rome continued to condemn the colleges in the face of the manoeuvrings of both the British government and its allies in the Irish hierarchy. In that time three separate condemnations were secured, successes that confirmed his power in Rome.

Archbishop of Armagh, 1849–52 When William Crolly, archbishop of Armagh, died in April 1849, there was no obvious successor. The bishops of the province failed to unite behind a candidate and the choice was thrown on Rome. The decision was delayed by the political chaos there: in common with much of Europe, the papal states were convulsed by revolution in 1848–9. Pius IX was forced to flee Rome, and a secular government led by Mazzini ruled in the city till violently expelled by the French. By late November or early December 1849, however, it was decided to send Paul Cullen to Armagh with a brief to unify the tempestuous Irish church; the appointment was formally announced on 19 December. Although Cullen's name was first suggested by Archbishops John MacHale and Michael Slattery (qv) of Cashel, it was an initiative welcomed in Rome; Propaganda wanted its own man on the scene. Paul Cullen was consecrated at Rome by Cardinal Castruccio Castracane on 24 February 1850.

The British government greeted the appointment with horror. As early as 1847 the unofficial British emissary to Rome, Lord Minto, had identified Cullen as the primary obstacle to securing papal toleration of the queen's colleges. He bluntly told Pius IX that Cullen was giving him false information about Irish affairs. When Cullen's elevation was announced, the lord lieutenant, Lord Clarendon (qv), despairingly told Lord John Russell that there was no worse an enemy of England and that Cullen was the 'devil incarnate' (Bodl., Clarendon papers; Clarendon to Russell, 5 January 1850).

Cullen was sent to Armagh not only as one archbishop among four, but also as apostolic delegate with instructions to convene and chair a synodical meeting of the Irish hierarchy. That meeting, held at Thurles, Co. Tipperary, in August 1850, laid the foundations of Cullen's transformation of Irish catholicism, a process that has been described as a 'devotional revolution'. At Thurles Cullen pushed through – often by exceptionally slim majorities – a series of changes in the disciplinary and devotional practices of the Irish church, as well as a further condemnation of the queen's colleges and an endorsement of a catholic university. Although many of the practices mandated at Thurles had long been in place in at least some Irish dioceses, the synod none the less marked the introduction of distinctly Roman devotional forms across the island. Cullen considered the synod's decrees to be his greatest achievement and worked hard to secure their implementation. He did his best to enforce them both in Armagh and in Dublin, and gave powerful patronage to such orders as the Vincentians and their campaign of parish missions. Cullen also proved a firm and consistent advocate of religious orders of women, and the number of sisters and nuns and the range of their activities expanded rapidly during his episcopate.

Archbishop of Dublin, 1852–70s On 3 May 1852 Cullen was translated to the see of Dublin, a move that was pushed by Propaganda in the face of intense British opposition and consequent papal uncertainty. British pressure reached such a level that, in a heated interview with Pius IX, Alessandro Barnabò, the influential secretary of Propaganda, had to threaten resignation in order to save the appointment. Although Armagh was the primatial see, Dublin was the richest and most populous on the island, and Cullen's translation was correctly seen as a promotion.

The 1850s were a period of consolidation for Cullen. His narrow majorities at Thurles made clear that he could not count on the support of the Irish episcopate. On the one hand he faced opposition from a number of bishops who supported the policies of Archbishops Crolly and Murray. On the other, it was becoming increasingly clear that MacHale was unprepared to defer to Cullen or even to work with him. Their alliance of the 1840s began to fail almost immediately after Thurles, and collapsed completely by 1852. In order to avoid the destructive public feuding of the 1840s, Cullen needed to control the hierarchy. To do that, he used his influence at Propaganda to ensure that episcopal vacancies would be filled with acceptable candidates, often displacing the choices of the diocesan clergy and provincial

bishops. By 1860 Cullen had influenced enough appointments to be sure of his dominance over MacHale and his few remaining allies. Until then, he had to be careful not to provoke any substantial minority of the bishops, an imperative that substantially limited his freedom of action.

The 1850s also saw resumed political agitation in Ireland. Cullen gave his support to the Tenant Right League, but was less certain of the affiliated Independent Irish Party, which he feared could lead to the evolution of an Italian-style nationalist movement. By 1853 Cullen was working systematically to deny the party clerical support, a decision that caused much dissension both within and without the church. From this time on, first in the columns of *The Tablet* (founded and edited by Frederick Lucas (qv)), and then more widely, Cullen began to be portrayed as an anti-national 'Castle bishop'.

More than politics, education was central to Cullen's episcopate. Cullen not only saw a sound catholic education as a crucial good in itself, but also as the surest protection against future revolution. His long support for a catholic university bore fruit with the 1851 appointment of John Henry Newman (qv) as the first rector of the Catholic University of Ireland. The appointment was entirely Cullen's idea, unprovoked by any other source, Irish, English, or Roman. The university opened on 3 November 1854. From early 1855 Cullen and Newman came to disagree on issues of finance, discipline, and Newman's erratic residence in Dublin, although Cullen was never quite the confirmed enemy that Newman believed him to be. The university also suffered from its failure to gain a royal charter to award degrees. Few students enrolled, Newman departed in 1858, and the university limped on, a conspicuous failure for the rest of Cullen's life.

At primary level, Cullen's initial hostility to the 'mixed' principle of the national system of education was cemented by his experiences as archbishop. Cullen worked hard to ensure total clerical dominance over those schools where a majority of the pupils were catholic, and regularly and publicly condemned any policy that tended to obstruct that goal. It was his consistent aim to keep catholics and protestants apart in institutional settings, whether in school, university, hospital, prison, the workhouse, or indeed in marriage. This was partially the result of his own distaste for protestantism as such, and partly from his experience of protestant proselytism in Ireland. Cullen was also concerned to secure catholic prisoners and soldiers regular access to clergy and a suitable place of worship; he was not amused to discover, for example, that the room set aside for catholic worship at a Dublin prison was used during the week to flog prisoners. His campaign lasted many years, and served to solidify his conviction that the Irish protestants who controlled many public institutions were implacably hostile to catholicism.

In the 1860s Cullen was confronted by what he believed to be his greatest political challenge: the Fenians. Although he likely overestimated their potency, Cullen saw the Fenians as the successors of Young Ireland and the near relatives of Garibaldi

and Mazzini. Cullen's objections to the Fenians fell under three heads: they could not secure British withdrawal; they could cost countless Irish lives; and their principles, if ever they had the chance to put them into practice, could only lead to an assault on the church similar to that in Italy. As he told his former student Archbishop Spalding of Baltimore in 1865: 'Nothing would be more pleasing to the fanatics of England than to be provoked by Ireland to a trial of brute force. We have not any means of resistance. If the Fenians in America were to succeed in driving our half starved and unarmed people to revolt, the massacres of Cromwell w[oul]d be renewed and all that religion has gained during the present century w[oul]d be lost in six months' (letter to Martin J. Spalding, 2 March 1865, Baltimore diocesan archives).

Cullen threw all his energies into destroying the Fenians. He fought for their formal papal condemnation (finally secured in 1870); he struggled with mixed results to deny them clerical support; he created the National Association in a largely failed attempt to provide a safe alternative political focus for national feeling; and he urged successive British governments to intensify their efforts to suppress the Fenians, efforts that he thought over-timid. On more than one occasion he wrote to Gladstone, urging the prime minister to censor Fenian-supporting publications. Although it is difficult to assess what impact Cullen had on the failure of Fenianism, it is certain that the situation would have been very different if John MacHale had been archbishop of Dublin.

Although distrustful of both the conservatives and the liberals, Cullen preferred the post-Palmerston liberals if given a choice. However, as a pragmatist he was willing to work with whichever party was in power in order to secure his goals, doing so with great success in Gladstone's first administration (1868–74), and with some limited but real successes in Benjamin Disraeli's subsequent government (1874–80). Cullen was profoundly satisfied with the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, and content with the first land act (1870). He only broke with the liberals over the 1873 Irish university bill, as it did not ensure an independent, episcopally controlled, catholic university. He made it clear to catholic MPs that he was opposed, and enough of those usually reliable liberal voters defected; the bill failed by three votes, and Gladstone resigned. It was a Pyrrhic victory, as in the resulting (1874) election many of Cullen's parliamentary allies lost their seats to home rule candidates, removing at a stroke much of his parliamentary influence.

Although he had once been 'anxious' that Daniel O'Connell (qv) secure the repeal of the union, and always held O'Connell as his ideal political leader, Cullen did not welcome the advent of the home rule movement after 1870. He remained deeply suspicious of independent, nationally based political parties, and was not reassured by the presence of protestants such as Isaac Butt (qv) in the leadership. The political success of home rule was such that Cullen could not hope to defeat it as he had the Independent Irish Party in the 1850s; any condemnation would only cost him influence. Instead Cullen tried to steer a middle path: refusing to endorse the party but failing to condemn it either.

His visible lack of enthusiasm for home rule seemed to confirm what nationalists, republicans, and John MacHale of Tuam had been saying since the early 1850s: Cullen was a 'Castle bishop' or a 'west Briton', more concerned to preserve British rule than to encourage Irish freedom. This was a serious distortion: Cullen was proudly Irish, and personally loathed the English. If a free Ireland could be obtained without bloodshed and then entrusted to the rule of men like Daniel O'Connell, Cullen would have been content. He opposed (albeit to differing degrees) the Independent Irish Party, the Fenians, and the home rule movement because he did not believe that they either would or could achieve this aim. Rather, at best they would prevent the church from gaining important concessions from the government of the day, and at worst they could provoke all the instability and bloodshed that Cullen had seen in Italy – scenes that were forever at the front of his memory. And if by some chance the British were expelled, Ireland would be given over to men who, Cullen thought, took Mazzini as their model, with all the consequences for the church and society that that would entail.

Personality and influence outside Ireland Personally, Cullen was a close, somewhat dour man, although not without flashes of slightly heavy humour. His private life was austere: a visiting missionary bishop in the early 1850s recorded in his diary his shock at the simplicity of Cullen's table. He seems never to have read a novel, and the only secular play he records attending was performed by the Deaf and Dumb Institute in Dublin and imagined the defeat of Garibaldi and the Devil's consequent distress. (Cullen enjoyed the play very much.) He did not make friends easily outside his own family, and after his student days probably only Tobias Kirby (qv), his successor as rector of the Irish College, could count as one. Cullen had been notably shy as a boy, and he clearly remained so as an adult. He kept a greater distance from all but a handful of his diocesan clergy than was usual for an Irish bishop.

Despite his reserve, Cullen was an active, engaged, and hardworking bishop. When in Dublin, he constantly travelled his diocese. This was in spite of the fact that from at least the mid 1840s he suffered physical collapses at times of great stress; stress that was often caused by a fear that his actions had displeased Rome. On more than one occasion his friends thought death a real possibility. In the summer of 1858 he experienced a full-scale physical and mental breakdown. Even in normal times his health was poor, and he could be laid low by colds and other ailments, a tendency that only got worse as he aged and was not helped by his attempts to work through sicknesses to the point of collapse.

Cullen's influence extended far beyond Irish shores. From the 1830s he involved himself in American and Canadian church affairs, becoming an important supporter in Rome of Irish-American and Irish-Canadian bishops; as archbishop of Dublin he oversaw the takeover by Irishmen of the hierarchies of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The men sent were usually relatives or former students, or both. Cullen was able to use his influence at Propaganda to ensure Irish episcopal domination

throughout the British empire, and to a lesser extent the US, and thus the dominance of his own Hiberno-Roman form of catholicism. These bishops often supplanted existing groups that had hitherto dominated local hierarchies, such as the French Marists in New Zealand and the English Benedictines in Australia. Only Scotland was able to repel Cullen's Irish. The extent of his influence can be seen by the distribution of his papers: there are substantial collections in the diocesan archives of Dublin, Armagh, Cashel, Cloyne, Elphin, Southwark, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Maitland (New South Wales), Sydney, and the Scottish Catholic Archives. The NLI and the BL both contain important letters to politicians; the vast correspondence held in the Irish College in Rome and the archives of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples testify to Cullen's lifelong attachment to the Eternal City.

Cullen's power at Rome was confirmed when on 22 June 1866 he was created cardinal – Ireland's first – by Pius IX, and given the titular Roman church of San Pietro Montorio. Although many in Ireland and England had expected such a move from the early 1850s, Pius IX was notoriously unwilling to create cardinals and there was no precedent for an Irish one. Cullen's eventual elevation was partially in recognition of his steadfast support of the papal states and the creation of an Irish brigade to defend them in 1860, and partially an acknowledgement of his success in taming the Irish church and moulding it along Roman lines. As a cardinal, Cullen now sat by right on Propaganda, and the Congregations of the Index (for which he had been a consultor in the 1840s), Sacred Rites, and the Discipline of Regulars. His appointment to Propaganda finally formalised his long influence there.

At the first Vatican council (1869–70) Cullen inevitably backed the majority seeking a definition of papal infallibility. He sat on the important congregation De Fide, charged with drawing up and proposing to the council any definitions of faith. Despite his unequivocal ultramontanism, Cullen was never seen as an ultra-infallibilist like Henry Edward Manning of Westminster. Ever the pragmatist, he gave two well-received speeches (in excellent Latin), and offered a compromise formula that maintained infallibility but hedged it about with a number of restrictions. It was this formula that was adopted by the council and defined as dogma.

Last years: the 1870s The 1870s saw the beginning of a slow decline in Cullen's powers. From 1870 he began to delegate more diocesan business to Edward McCabe (qv), who was made auxiliary bishop in 1877. Cullen was himself thrown into a long, draining, and expensive lawsuit mounted by a peculiarly litigious priest of the diocese of Ossory, Robert O'Keeffe (qv), who at one point won at trial a judgement for libel against Cullen. Cullen's health continued to worsen slowly, and he was more and more forced to take days or even weeks off to rest. At the 1875 synod of Maynooth – which consolidated much of what had been begun at Thurles – Cullen was present as chairman, but was nothing like the force within the synod that he would have been in earlier years.

Paul Cullen died in Dublin on 24 October 1878. Despite his obvious weakening over the previous few years, his death was sudden and unexpected. He had continued working till the end, and was not long back from Rome, where he had travelled to attend the conclave that elected Leo XIII.

After an impressive funeral, Cullen was buried on 29 October in the church at Holy Cross College, Clonliffe. Fittingly, he was laid to rest in an Irish building built to a Roman design. Graphic images of Cullen include one in the NLI (c.1866–78) and one in *Illustrated London News* (2 November 1878). There is a statue (c.1880) in the pro-cathedral, Dublin, and another (1881) in Holy Cross church, Clonliffe, Dublin.

Court of queen's bench, Ireland. Report of the action for libel brought by the Rev. Robert O'Keeffe . . . (1874); Patrick Francis Moran (ed.), *The pastoral letters and other writings of Cardinal Cullen, archbishop of Dublin . . .* (3 vols, 1882); M. J. Curran, 'Cardinal Cullen: biographical materials', *Reportorium Novum*, i (1955), 213–27; Peadar MacSuibhne, *Paul Cardinal Cullen and his contemporaries: with their letters from 1820–1902* (5 vols, 1961–74); Emmet Larkin, 'The devotional revolution in Ireland, 1850–75', *American Historical Review*, lxxii (1967), 625–52; John M. Molony, *The Roman mould of the Australian catholic church* (1969); Emmet Larkin, *The making of the Roman Catholic church in Ireland, 1850–1860* (1980); Donal Kerr, *Peel, priests and politics* (1982); Emmet Larkin, *The consolidation of the Roman Catholic church in Ireland, 1860–1870* (1987); Donal Kerr, *A nation of beggars? Priests, people and politics in famine Ireland, 1846–1852* (1994); Colin Barr, *Paul Cullen, John Henry Newman, and the Catholic University of Ireland, 1845–65* (2003)