
A Letter from a Novice at St Isidore's College, Rome, in the Early Nineteenth Century and Its Annotations

Author(s): John M. Cunningham

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Introduction

In a letter of 27 April 1912 to Fr Michael O'Kane, prior provincial of the Irish Dominicans, Fr Ambrose Coleman, O.P., referred to a suggestion which he himself had made in 1910 that a provincial archive be created in which 'all documents of historical interest to the province might be deposited and arranged.'¹ In the same letter, he mentioned that he had himself already deposited in the archive 'many thousands of letters ... collected from various convents.'² In a separate note of 1911 he remarked that he had sorted 'the great bulk of the letters, according to decades, from 1760 to 1910, into old cardboard boxes'³ and that he regarded the letters as a primary source for 'the internal history of the Irish Dom[inican] Province.'⁴ After many years, the letters were transferred to large robust box files by Fr Hugh Fenning, O.P., subsequent to his appointment in 1973 as the provincial archivist.

The collection is comprised of letters of assignation of friars to foundations, the appointment of superiors, the promotion of friars as Preachers General and Masters of Sacred Theology, letters of commendation, wills, internal correspondence between the Dominican friars, and correspondence to and from individuals who were not Dominicans. Even such a cursory description suggests the significance of the letters for the history of the Irish Dominicans et al. at home and abroad.

The Letter

Discovered among the letters of the nineteenth century was one addressed by William O'Sullivan (1796–1819), a Franciscan novice at St Isidore's College, Rome, to Fr Bartholomew T. Russell, O.P. (1799–1890),⁵ 'one of the most important Dominicans in his century.'⁶ The letter is written on

1 Ambrose Coleman, O.P., Letter to Fr Provincial and 'Diffinitorium,' 27 April 1912, in the provincial archive of the Irish Dominicans.

2 Ibid.

3 Ambrose Coleman, O.P., 'The Tallaght Archives,' 19 May 1911, in the provincial archive of the Irish Dominicans.

4 Ibid.

5 William O'Sullivan, O.F.M., Letter to Bartholomew T. Russell, O.P., 17 November 1818, in the provincial archive of the Irish Dominicans.

6 Hugh Fenning, *St Saviour's Church, Dublin: centenary 1861–1961* (Dublin, 1961), 7. For the

a single sheet of paper 25 cm in length and 38.8 cm in width, folded in half to create a book fold of four pages, each of which is 25 cm in length and 19.4 cm in width. The folds for its dispatch are evident and it bears a franking mark, 'ROMA.' The letter is written 'small & close'⁷ and its writer, in requesting 'all the news in the world,'⁸ advises its recipient to do the same in his reply.

Both natives of Cork, O'Sullivan and Russell were clearly dear friends. Indeed, in the tender terms of a past age, O'Sullivan refers to himself as the friend who 'unbosomed'⁹ his thoughts to Russell and to whom Russell revealed 'the secret recesses'¹⁰ of his soul and there is a hint of regret at their separation by divine providence, one a friar minor, in Rome, and the other a friar preacher, in Lisbon.

With little time to spare for anything but his studies, O'Sullivan took the occasion of a 'feria' on 17 November 1818 to satisfy 'the tender entreaty'¹¹ from Russell for a letter. It is hard not to imagine that the date of the holiday from class was associated with the anniversary of the death of Fr Luke Wadding, the founder of St Isidore's College, in 1657, on 18 November. O'Sullivan had received 'the kind letter'¹² sent by Russell from a Franciscan confrère, Fr Michael Bernardine Lonergan, and it was the first letter O'Sullivan had received since his departure from Ireland a year earlier. In fact, O'Sullivan makes much of the fact that since leaving home the previous year he had not received 'a scroll'¹³ from 'a friend in the world'¹⁴ except Russell. O'Sullivan refers to 'difficulties'¹⁵ arising from his status as a novice which had thwarted his desire to write to Russell and he trusts that his previous diligence as a correspondent has not been forgotten. O'Sullivan had even inquired of the Dominican confrères of Russell in Rome to learn of any person travelling to Lisbon who might act as courier as he thought 'the postage was exorbitant.'¹⁶

In the autumn of 1817, O'Sullivan had set off from the port of Lisbon, most certainly on a commercial sailing vessel. Initially, the vessel made good progress with a favourable wind and, passing Gibraltar, entered the Mediterranean Sea. Calms and adverse winds then hampered its progress. After almost four weeks at sea, O'Sullivan declared that he was never

best printed account of Bartholomew T. Russell, see Louis C. Coffey, 'The silver-tongued preacher: Fr Bart. Russell' in *The Watchman* (Autumn, 1939), 42-47.

7 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

fresher in his life than when setting foot on *terra firma* at Genoa, in north-western Italy.¹⁷ After five days in Genoa, he took a barque for Livorno, avoiding 'the coast road with its perilous mountains and dangerous river crossings.'¹⁸ The vessel arrived at Livorno a day and a half later. As it was not possible to get another for Civitavecchia, he took a coach and travelled overland for seven days to reach Rome and St Isidore's College where he would don 'the poor & despicable habit of Francis'¹⁹ on 7 December 1817 and begin upon his experience of 'the delicious delights'²⁰ which religious life bestows.

Less than a decade earlier, in 1809, Napoleon had declared the annexation of the Papal States to the Empire Français and Pius VII had been arrested at the Palazzo del Quirinale and removed from Rome. A year later religious houses were sequestered and, in 1813, a general disposal of property witnessed the auction of St Isidore's College by the Amministrazione del Debito Pubblico. However, the collapse of the Napoleonic regime in Rome and the return of Pius VII saw the entire property of St Isidore's back in the possession of the friars the following year.²¹ It fell to the guardian, Fr James McCormick to restore its fortunes and it was he by whom O'Sullivan was 'kindly'²² received upon his arrival at St Isidore's.

Together with James Bernardine Finegan of Dublin, O'Sullivan was received as a novice on the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception 1817, and he was given the name Peter. He proceeded to cry 'tremendously'²³ the whole day, leaving even the Italian brethren at a loss. Some months earlier, two novices had been received at St Isidore's on 25 July, George Murphy of Garryhack, Co. Wexford, and Patrick Anthony McCabe of Dublin. Two others who had made their novitiate in Wexford, Thomas Bonaventure Richmond and Francis Rogers, and two natives of Monaghan professed in Athlone and ordained in Dublin, Francis McCabe and John Benedict O'Leary, had also arrived at St Isidore's.²⁴ O'Sullivan casts a welcome light on the faith and fortitude of those who made their way to St Isidore's when he refers to a young man from Limerick who after a voyage of four months arrived in Rome. He had boarded a vessel bound for Naples but had to abandon ship and behold 'before his eyes ... the vessel

17 Lloyd's shipping news records the arrival of the *Flora* at Genoa from Lisbon on 28 October 1817. See *Lloyd's List*, 17 October 1817. It is possible that O'Sullivan had been a passenger aboard the *Flora*.

18 Pietro Piana, Charles Watkins, and Ross Balzaretti, 'Travel, modernity and rural landscapes in nineteenth-century Liguria' in *Rural History*, xxix, 2 (2018), 170.

19 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

20 Ibid.

21 See Patrick Conlan, *St Isidore's College, Rome* (Rome, 1982), 154.

22 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

23 Ibid.

24 See Conlan, *St Isidore's College, Rome*, 154–155.

dashed to pieces.²⁵ The young man in question may well have been Daniel Louis Hourigan who was received as a novice on 30 January 1818, one of at least five men who arrived at St Isidore's College that year. O'Sullivan also refers to three novices clothed in the habit 'a few days ago'²⁶ who brought the number of Irishmen at St Isidore's up to twenty in addition to a few Italians. One of those received on 12 November 1818 was Nugent Anthony Dardis, 'a good young gentleman from Drogheda,'²⁷ a relation of a Neapolitan prince, and a man of fortune, who abandoned 'the glitter and glories of the world for the infamy and ignominy of the Cross.'²⁸ To the mind of O'Sullivan, Dardis stood in stark contrast to so many religious whose moral standing in Italy was so low that only one order was allowed to wear its habit '100 miles from Rome.'²⁹

Referring to the solemn profession of George Murphy, O'Sullivan declares himself to rejoice in the success of his unfortunate countrymen. In contrast and in cryptic terms, he refers to a Sancho, 'the living transcript of his master,'³⁰ who appears to have fared less well notwithstanding his efforts at emulation. A blessing is invoked upon Patrick Rea whom O'Sullivan refers to as a friend but also as the lumber that encumbers religion.

For part of the novitiate, these young men started the day 'by rising at 3 o'clock in the morning'³¹ for prayer. In addition to their studies, they also performed domestic chores such as 'sweeping the house'³² and 'humble'³³ duties in the refectory. Throughout his novitiate, O'Sullivan had access to the library and towards its end was, as it were, auditing lectures in philosophy. His spare time was given over to reading Greek, Latin, and Spanish. Since his arrival he had neither read an English book nor ventured beyond the confines of St Isidore's except to buy spectacles. Snuff was permitted as, according to O'Sullivan, Pius VII had dispatched six pounds of it to every religious in the city while 'picking & killing fleas'³⁴ was a necessity as the novices were flayed alive worse than St Bartholomew.

At the beginning of his novitiate at St Isidore's, O'Sullivan found 'disgust'³⁵ in many things so much so that he concerted 'plans and schemes

25 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell. According to the shipping news in *Lloyd's List* of 30 December 1817, the *Unanimity* from Newfoundland was stranded on the rocks on entering Naples on 19 December 1817. It is not impossible that it was the vessel to which O'Sullivan refers.

26 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

of flight'³⁶ to another order. However, the little he learned from the brethren at St Isidore's regarding the condition of the Irish Dominicans at S. Prassede extinguished any ambition of a change from the former to the latter as far as O'Sullivan was concerned. Moreover, he had no money at his disposal and was unlikely to be received elsewhere in such straitened circumstances. However, John Thomas Hynes, O.P., Apostolic Administrator and Vicar Apostolic of British Guiana 1843–1846 and 1846–1857,³⁷ received as a novice at St Isidore's on 11 February 1819, did transfer to the Irish Dominicans and received the Dominican habit on 3 October 1819 at S. Maria della Pace, acquired by the Irish Dominicans on 4 May 1818³⁸ and to which they had transferred from S. Prassede. Whatever prompted Hynes to make such a move, O'Sullivan's discontent was not prompted by any austerity required of novices but from the manner in which he was treated. After a year at St Isidore's, he assures Russell that he would prove himself 'a most destructive & pernicious being to some comfortable gentlemen of Ireland'³⁹ were he to make public his observations 'on men & men's manners.'⁴⁰ Later in the letter, however, O'Sullivan declares himself 'heartily'⁴¹ disposed to pronounce his solemn profession for 'it is a holy life'⁴² and he would not abandon 'the poor & despicable habit of Francis.'⁴³ Indeed, he refers to his brighter moments, 'the thrills of religious desire,'⁴⁴ and 'the delicious delights'⁴⁵ which religious life bestows. As to 'the vexations'⁴⁶ O'Sullivan met, they may simply have appeared at times worse than they were due to his sense of isolation, 'neglected as it were by ... friends at home.'⁴⁷ Indeed, he himself declares the vexations encountered to be of 'a private nature.'⁴⁸

O'Sullivan suggests that part of the problem was the want of a guardian. Fr James McCormick⁴⁹ had died on 30 January 1818. His brother, Michael McCormick, 'a man of very extraordinary peculiarities of disposition'⁵⁰ but

36 Ibid.

37 See Dermot Walsh, 'The correspondence of Dr Hynes' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xxviii (1966), 118.

38 See Leonard E. Boyle, *San Clemente Miscellany*, i, *The community of SS. Sisto e Clemente in Rome, 1677–1977* (Romæ, 1977), 97.

39 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 'His surname is frequently written McCormick, rather than McCormack.' Benignus Millet, 'The community of St Isidore's College' in *Collectanea Hibernica*, xxxi–xxxii (1931–32), 197, n. 4.

50 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

highly regarded 'for learning and abilities,'⁵¹ was dispatched from Naples to hold the reins at St Isidore's until the arrival of Henry Hughes in whom O'Sullivan expected 'to hail the rising Sun of Peace who will dissipate the clouds of melancholy ... and give serenity and brightness.'⁵² No small task for any superior! His expectation that Hughes would make 'such as are of age push for orders'⁵³ was fulfilled to judge from his own progress after his solemn profession on 8 December 1818. On 27 March 1819 he received the minor orders of porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte. A fortnight later he was ordained a subdeacon and on 29 May he was ordained a deacon.

However, Italy was 'as infamous for its lethal fevers as it was famous for its beauty'⁵⁴ and Rome was 'a destination rendered dangerous by endemic malarial fevers.'⁵⁵ O'Sullivan died on 8 August 1819 of a fever that endured for more than a fortnight. It was not the first illness to have afflicted O'Sullivan at St Isidore's. In his letter he informs Russell that he had enjoyed 'a very good state of health'⁵⁶ in Rome until he was laid low earlier in the year with a tertian fever or ague, 'with shaking fits,'⁵⁷ a reference perhaps to malaria and the paroxysms that would have recurred every forty-eight hours or every third day reckoning the day of the paroxysm as the first day. Indeed, O'Sullivan endured the tertian fever 'in recoverings and relapses'⁵⁸ for more than two months. His death a year later is a sad confirmation that in modern Rome adult immigrants were more vulnerable to malaria than those born and bred in the city.⁵⁹

Whatever about the 'mal'aria' of Rome, O'Sullivan describes to Russell the very salubrious air at St Isidore's. He notes that 'its site,'⁶⁰ between the Pincian and Quirinal Hills and 'a little segregated from the city,'⁶¹ almost adjoins the pope's palace and its gardens. O'Sullivan is most probably referring to the Villa Ludovisi, erected in the seventeenth century by Ludovico Cardinal Ludovisi (1595–1632). The fact that he was a nephew of Gregory XV (1621–1623) must have afforded the villa and its once extensive gardens an association of a papal character in the mind of O'Sullivan and even of his confrères. After more than two hundred years, O'Sullivan's description of 'a great garden ... that produces all sorts of vegetables

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Frank Snowden, *The conquest of malaria: Italy, 1900–1962* (New Haven, 2008), 7.

55 Benjamin Reilly, 'Cardinal numbers: changing patterns of malaria and mortality in Rome, 494–1850' in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xlix, 3 (Winter, 2019), 397.

56 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 See Robert Sallares, *Malaria and Rome: a history of malaria in ancient Italy* (Oxford, 2002), 223.

60 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

61 Ibid.

throughout the seasons'⁶² and 'a number of trees that bear abundance of fruit ... such as oranges, figs, plums of various species, pears, peaches and more'⁶³ is capable of exciting more than just 'the envy of the Roman friars.'⁶⁴ He informs Russell that 'a virtuoso'⁶⁵ was content 'to carry a lump of a stone and a plum stone'⁶⁶ from St Isidore's to England as part of the grounds was thought to have belonged to the *horti Sallustiani*, the gardens developed in the first century B.C. by Gaius Sallustius Crispus, the Roman politician and historian. Nonetheless, O'Sullivan counsels Russell against travelling to Rome 'for curiosity's sake'⁶⁷ or to satisfy 'a desire of seeing the classic land of Italy.'⁶⁸

In addition to its location and its gardens, O'Sullivan describes the interior of St Isidore's College, 'a very neat clean place with comfortable rooms,'⁶⁹ and the church, 'a lovely structure all marble.'⁷⁰ However, it is difficult to square his reference to the church as 'adorned with mosaic work' with accounts of its art and architecture. Even 'the high altar of Parian marble inlaid with other rare marbles'⁷¹ seems remote from O'Sullivan's reference to mosaic. The description of a painting of the Virgin with the child Jesus whose heel crushes the serpent's head is also intriguing as it is not an accurate description of the *Immaculate Conception* by Carlo Maratta (1625–1713) at St Isidore's in which the divine Infant wields a silver lance topped with a golden cross to transfix the head of the serpent while the right foot of the Virgin is planted on its coiled body. Reference to the *Espousal of St Joseph* is to an oil painting above the altar in St Joseph's Chapel, a work which earned the young Maratta fame in Rome. As to the painting of St Francis noted by O'Sullivan, and excluding a painting on a pilaster at the entrance to the Chapel of St Patrick and St Francis executed by Silvio Galimberti in the 1940s,⁷² in question is an eighteenth-century fresco in the same chapel depicting St Francis receiving the stigmata rather than the figure of St Francis on a pilaster at the entrance to the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception.

O'Sullivan also remarks upon 'a beautiful cloister.'⁷³ In question is 'the

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Humbert Quinn, *Saint Isidore's Church and College of the Irish Franciscans, Rome* (Vatican City, 1949), 24.

72 Aedan Daly, *S. Isidoro, Le chiese di Roma illustrate*, no. 119, ed. Carolo Pietrangeli (Rome, 1971), 58.

73 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

spacious Waddingian cloister⁷⁴ designed by Orazio Torriani (1602–1657) where the walls are decorated with ‘the different illustrious saints’⁷⁵ of the Franciscan Order and a portrait of Clement XI (1700–1721), all the work of Fra Giovanni Antonio Sguary da Padua, a member of the Province of S. Francesco a Ripa. Invited by Fr Bonaventure Burke in 1701 to decorate the cloister, he adopted ‘a new technique’⁷⁶ of his own invention.⁷⁷ In addition to the series of Franciscan saints and blessed, he also depicted the life of St Francis in the lunettes of the cloister.⁷⁸ One of the lunettes, representing St Francis and St Dominic embracing caught the attention of O’Sullivan and prompted him to declare his affection for Russell to be ‘as much ... as St Francis had for St Dominic.’⁷⁹

Reference to ‘a philosophy school’⁸⁰ established ‘lately’⁸¹ at St Isidore’s College almost certainly indicates the resumption of the normal teaching of philosophy when life had adequately returned to normal in Rome after the collapse of the Napoleonic regime and St Isidore’s could once again receive men for the novitiate and for studies. As to the curriculum, O’Sullivan refers to reading ‘Lugdunensis,’ possibly the *Institutiones philosophicæ* of Joseph Valla, published under the auspices of Antoine de Malvin de Montazet (1713–1788), Archbishop of Lyons (Lugdunensis) 1758–1788. It may well have been that O’Sullivan attended these lectures at St Isidore’s in the aula maxima and over its entrance he notes an inscription in large characters and in Irish characters,⁸² ‘Initium sapientiae est timor Domini,’⁸³ supplying the copulative himself.

O’Sullivan also refers to ‘the venerable figures’⁸⁴ painted on the walls of the aula maxima. Constructed in the time of Wadding, the aula was decorated in 1672 with frescoes by Fra Emanuele da Como at the invitation of Fr Patrick Tyrrell, the guardian. On one side of the aula the frescoes depict John Duns Scotus and four Irish Franciscan scholars, Luke Wadding

74 Quinn, *Saint Isidore’s Church and College*, 30.

75 W. O’Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

76 Quinn, *Saint Isidore’s Church*, 30.

77 See Daly, *S. Isidoro*, 77–78.

78 See *ibid.*, 77.

79 W. O’Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

80 *Ibid.*

81 *Ibid.*

82 Cf. Emma Nic Cárthaigh, ‘Mór a-tá ar theagasg flatha: *Speculum Principis* le Tadhg mac Dáire Mheic Bruaideadha’ in Seán Ó Coileáin, Liam P. Ó Murchú and Pádraigín Riggs (eds), *Séimhfhéar suaírc: aistí in ómós don Ollamh Brendán Ó Conchúir* (An Daingean, 2013), 139–180 cited in Mícheál MacCraith, ‘National identity and universal theology: aspects of the history and art of St Isidore’s’ in Susanne Kubersky-Piredda (ed), *Il Collegio di Sant’Isidoro: laboratorio artistico e crocevia d’idee nella Roma del seicento* (Rome, 2019), 29.

83 Psalm 110:10.

84 W. O’Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

(1588–1657),⁸⁵ Anthony Hickey (1586–1641),⁸⁶ John Colgan (1592–1658),⁸⁷ and John Punch (1603–1660/1662 or 1672/73).⁸⁸ On the other side, the frescoes represent St Bonaventure and Irish Franciscan scholars raised to the episcopate, Maurice O’Fihely (1460–1513),⁸⁹ Hugh MacCaughwell (c. 1571–1626),⁹⁰ Florence Conry (c.1560–1629),⁹¹ and Thomas Fleming (1593–1655).⁹² A further fresco depicts Wadding, Punch, and Hickey, the three men who got the first edition of Scotus into print, and Bonaventure Baron (1610–1696), seated together at a table in the library at St Isidore’s.⁹³

O’Sullivan writes that the frescoes of the aula maxima depict ‘the luminaries’⁹⁴ of the Franciscan Order in Ireland in former times. His description would have been more accurate had it simply referred to them as Irish Franciscans since almost all of them spent the entire of their Franciscan lives on the continent. He also omits any reference to the credentials of ‘the venerable figures’⁹⁵ in relation to the Scotist tradition. Wadding’s edition of the complete writings of Duns Scotus, with scholia, commentaries, and marginal notes, initiated ‘a new epoch in the history of Scotism ... that was not superseded till the 1950s’⁹⁶ and of the twelve volumes published in 1639 Hickey’s contribution filled no less than three

- 85 See ‘Wadding, Luke,’ in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish biography from the earliest times to the year 2000*, 9 vols. (Cambridge, 2009), ix, *Staines-Z*, 680–685. See also ‘Father Luke Wadding, O.F.M.,’ in Conlan, *St Isidore’s College, Rome*, 31–59.
- 86 See ‘Hickey, Antony,’ in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish biography from the earliest times to the year 2000*, 9 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 2009), iv, *G-J*, 669–670. See also Conlan, *St Isidore’s College, Rome*, 69–71.
- 87 See ‘Colgan, John,’ in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish biography from the earliest times to the year 2000*, 9 vols. (Cambridge, 2009), ii, *Burdy-Czira*, 658–660. See also Conlan, *St Isidore’s College, Rome*, 77–79.
- 88 See ‘Punch (Pontius, Ponce), John,’ in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish biography from the earliest times to the year 2000*, 9 vols. (Cambridge, 2009), viii, *Patterson-Stagg*, 317–318. See also Conlan, *St Isidore’s College, Rome*, 79–80.
- 89 See ‘O’Fihely, Maurice (Mauritius de Portu, Mauritius de Hibernia, Flos Mundi)’ in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish biography from the earliest times to the year 2000*, 9 vols. (Cambridge, 2009), vii, *Oates-Patten*, 463–364. See also Conlan, *St Isidore’s College, Rome*, 65–67.
- 90 See ‘MacCathmhaoil (Mac Aingil), Aodh (MacCaghwell, Hugh; Cavellus, Hugh)’ in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish biography from the earliest times to the year 2000*, 9 vols. (Cambridge, 2009), v, *Kane-McGuinness*, 828–830. See also Conlan, *St Isidore’s College, Rome*, 67–68.
- 91 See ‘Conry, Florence (Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire),’ in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish biography from the earliest times to the year 2000*, 9 vols. (Cambridge, 2009), ii, 784–786. See also Conlan, *St Isidore’s College, Rome*, 68–69.
- 92 See ‘Fleming, Thomas,’ in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish biography from the earliest times to the year 2000*, 9 vols. (Cambridge, 2009), iii, *D-F*, 1017–1018. See also Conlan, *St Isidore’s College, Rome*, 75–77.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 80–82.
- 94 W. O’Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.
- 95 *Ibid.*
- 96 See ‘MacCathmhaoil (Mac Aingil), Aodh’ in *Dictionary of Irish biography*, v, 829. See also Timothy J. Corcoran, ‘An Irish tercentenary: St Isidore’s, Rome’ in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, xv, 57 (March, 1926), 124.

of them.⁹⁷ Even Colgan's *Tractatus de Joannis Scoti Doctoris Subtilis theologorumque principis vita, patria, elogiis encomiasticis* with its interest in the nationality of Scotus reveals a Scotist pedigree. Punch was 'a leading exponent of the teaching of the Franciscan philosopher and theologian'⁹⁸ and, next to Wadding, the greatest of the Scotists at the college⁹⁹ while Baron, responsible for a defence of Scotism in three volumes, was 'the last of the great Scotists at St Isidore's.'¹⁰⁰ O'Fihely was 'the first Irish Franciscan who dedicated his life to the study of Scotus'¹⁰¹ and was responsible for editions of the works of Scotus as well as commentaries while McCaughwell was recognized by his contemporaries as 'an outstanding Scotistic scholar'¹⁰² and was responsible for 'an Irish Franciscan tradition of dedication to Scotist doctrines.'¹⁰³ Conry was a Scotist theologian and Fleming too had been trained in Scotist thought. The Irish Franciscan scholars depicted in the aula maxima were very much 'the luminaries'¹⁰⁴ of Scotism in which the Immaculate Conception had a prominent place just as da Como's *Immaculate Conception* has in the same aula.

While he extols the luminaries of the past, O'Sullivan laments the very presence of a Sardinian lector at St Isidore's 'when formerly St Isidore's gave lectors to all Italy.'¹⁰⁵ Indeed, 'the universities and seminaries of Europe were liberally sprinkled with Scotist lecturers from the Irish Franciscan house in Rome.'¹⁰⁶

O'Sullivan also writes of 'a grand library'¹⁰⁷ enriched with 'the best works.'¹⁰⁸ Among its holdings, he notes the publications of those who lived at St Isidore's. In particular, he refers to the '18 large folio tomes of the annals of the order,'¹⁰⁹ a history of the Franciscan Order from its foundation to 1540, 'the work of 'the illustrious Wadding,'¹¹⁰ who was designated to put into chronological order the historical material sent to Rome subsequent to a circular issued in 1619 by Benignus of Genoa, Minister General. O'Sullivan also informs Russell of Wadding's role as the theologian chosen by King

97 See 'Hickey, Antony,' in *Dictionary of Irish biography*, iv, 669.

98 See 'Punch (Pontius, Ponce), John,' in *Dictionary of Irish biography*, viii, 317.

99 See 'MacCathmhaoil (Mac Aingil), Aodh' in *Dictionary of Irish biography*, v, 829.

100 Conlan, *St Isidore's College, Rome*, 82.

101 See *ibid.*, 65.

102 'MacCathmhaoil (Mac Aingil), Aodh' in *Dictionary of Irish biography*, v, 829.

103 Conlan, *St Isidore's College, Rome*, 66.

104 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

105 *Ibid.*

106 Conlan, *St Isidore's College, Rome*, 90. See Benignus Millett, 'Irish Scotists at St Isidore's College, Rome, in the seventeenth century' in *De doctrina Duns Scoti: Acta congressus Scotistici internationalis, Oxonii et Edimburgi 11-17 Sept. 1966 celebrati*, iv, *Scotismus decursu saeculorum* (4 vols, Rome, 1968), 399-419.

107 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

108 *Ibid.*

109 Cf 'Wadding, Luke' in *Dictionary of Irish biography*, ix, 682 where eight and not eighteen volumes are mentioned.

110 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

Philip III of Spain to accompany Antonio de Trejo, Bishop of Cartagena, who had been commissioned by the king to go to Rome and petition Paul V to define as a dogma of faith 'that point of religious disputation that so long divided the disciples of Scotus & St Thomas,'¹¹¹ the Immaculate Conception.

With reference to Sir James Ware, O'Sullivan remarks upon an account of 'all the occupations in which that great man [Wadding] was conversant.'¹¹² However, in a preface to an English translation of a revised, improved, and enlarged edition of Ware's *De scriptoribus Hiberniæ*, Walter Harris notes his possession of corrections and additions by Ware and his own addition of a chapter to the original work, a chapter on writers of the seventeenth century and it is, in fact, in this chapter that the account of the occupations of Wadding is found.¹¹³ The editor of Ware's *De scriptoribus Hiberniæ* provides an extensive catalogue of Wadding's literary accomplishments. Noting the exertions of Wadding, coupled with the munificence of Ludovico Cardinal Ludovisi, in securing the foundation of the Irish College in Rome in 1627 for the secular clergy, he also records the foundation by Wadding of St Isidore's College and his responsibility for the inauguration of a novitiate at S. Maria del Piano in Capranica. He remarks upon the role of Wadding as a supporter of the Irish Rebellion of 1641 and observes that 'nothing of any Consequence was stirred in relation to the Disposition of Bishopricks or Benefices to the Ecclesiastics of the Romish Persuasion, nor anything else transacted concerning that Country wherein he [Wadding] did not bear a great Share.'¹¹⁴ The editor's words narrate further undertakings of Wadding and render it easy to appreciate payment of 'the filial rites of tenderness'¹¹⁵ at the tomb of the illustrious friar.

O'Sullivan advises Russell of dissatisfaction in Rome with 'an ecclesiastical government.'¹¹⁶ It was not only 'the great Romans,'¹¹⁷ who were dissatisfied. There was 'une masse d'individus irréductiblement hostiles au "gouvernement des prêtres"'¹¹⁸ notwithstanding the provision for administrative, legal, and financial reforms in the Papal States¹¹⁹ set out

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 See James Ware, *The history of the writers of Ireland*, part i, *Of such writers who were born in that kingdom* (Dublin, 1746) in Walter Harris, trans., *The whole works of Sir James Ware concerning Ireland*, revised and improved with many material additions, ii, *The history and antiquities of Ireland and The history of the writers of Ireland in two books* (2 vols, Dublin, 1764), i, 130–139

114 Ibid., 137.

115 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 See Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, 'La restauration (1800–1848)' in Ludovicus J. Rogier, Roger Aubert, and Michael D. Knowles (eds), *Nouvelle histoire de l'Église*, iv, Ludovicus J. Rogier, Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, and Joseph Hajjar, *Siècle des lumières, révolutions, restaurations* (5 vols, Paris, 1966), 304.

119 See Roger Aubert, 'The Catholic Church after the Congress of Vienna' in Hubert Jedin and John Dolan (eds), *History of the Church*, vii, Roger Aubert, Johannes Beckmann, Patrick J.

in *Quando per ammirabile disposizione*, the *motu proprio* issued by Pius VII on 6 July 1816. Although it provided for the most efficient government the Papal States had ever enjoyed under pontifical rule, many of its provisions remained a dead letter. In addition, those eager for the unification of Italy were more interested in the elimination of the Republic of St Peter than any of the improvements it desired to introduce within its territories. As to O'Sullivan's sense of looming misfortune to be ushered in with the death of Pius VII, he himself was dead within a year.

In concluding his letter, O'Sullivan notes that Cork is in 'a poor state,'¹²⁰ demands 'all the news,'¹²¹ and sends his compliments to various Dominicans at Corpo Santo, Michael Joseph Malony, George Dominic Corcoran, and John Albert Ryan, the 'good natured'¹²² rector of Corpo Santo from 1817 until 1822 except for a brief period in 1821. He asks to be remembered to 'my dear brother shipmates especially the Doctor'¹²³ et al. who merit reference as 'the two unfortunate wretches'¹²⁴ who were with him in Lisbon.

Regarding the Dominican brethren at S. Maria della Pace, he advises Russell of the ordination to the subdiaconate of William Joseph McDonald and the promotion to minor orders of Patrick Raymond Griffith, Vicar Apostolic of the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa 1847–1862, both of whom had actually been at Corpo Santo in Lisbon before going to Rome. He describes the Dominican brethren at S. Maria della Pace as 'a very genteel set of lads'¹²⁵ who 'for some futile motive'¹²⁶ had declined to visit St Isidore's for some months, to the indignation of the friars minor. The transfer of the Irish Dominicans from S. Prassede to S. Maria della Pace in the course of 1818 may well have contributed to their failure to favour the friars minor with their company. Finally, O'Sullivan, a native of Cork and apparently well acquainted with Russell and his family, declares himself 'angry'¹²⁷ to have been given no news of the latter's father, mother, brothers, or sisters. He prays God to bestow upon Russell 'the grace of living up in all points exactly to your vocation'¹²⁸ and, declaring his affection for him to be 'as much ... as St Francis had for St Dominick,'¹²⁹ he concludes his letter.

Corish and Rudolf Lill, *The Church between revolution and restoration*, trans. Peter Becker (10 vols, New York, 1981), 101.

120 O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell. See Petition from Cork complaining of the increase of poverty, House of Commons, 27 February 1818, in *The parliamentary debates from the year 1803 to the present time published under the superintendence of T C. Hansard*, xxxvii (London, 1818), cc 671–672.

121 W. O'Sullivan, Letter to B.T. Russell.

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

The Annotations

An annotation in the hand of Russell regarding the death of O'Sullivan on 8 August 1819 notes that in his last sickness, O'Sullivan often spoke of him. No less poignant is a further annotation that records Russell as 'indebted'¹³⁰ to O'Sullivan, 'one of the most pious and learned young men of his age,'¹³¹ for 'the *first* thought of a vocation for the Dominican Order.'¹³²

Born on 25 March 1799 within earshot of Shandon bells, Bartholomew Russell received the habit at Corpo Santo, Lisbon, on 8 September 1817 as a son of the Dominick Street Friary, Cork. As prior provincial from 1852 to 1856 and from 1864 to 1868, he was involved in the purchase of property at Tallaght in 1855 for a novitiate and house of studies and secured £4,000 from his brother, Fr Patrick Russell, O.P., at Corpo Santo, Lisbon, for that purpose. Further, he organized the erection of 'the two finest churches of the Order in Ireland,'¹³³ Dublin and Cork, and restored the Order in Waterford. He introduced regular observance in line with the reforms of Fr Alexandre-Vincent Jandel, O.P., Master General 1850–1872, revived the custom of receiving lay brothers, and began the involvement of Irish Dominicans in parish missions. Historiographer of the province of Ireland, he was also a correspondent of John Thomas Hynes, O.P., Apostolic Administrator and Vicar Apostolic of British Guiana 1843–1846 and 1846–1857 respectively,¹³⁴ and of John P. Leahy, O.P., Bishop of Dromore 1860–1890, as well as of the Venerable Mary Aikenhead (1787–1858), foundress of the Religious Sisters of Charity.

He has also been declared responsible for 'the first reappearance of the Dominican habit in a Cork pulpit since James II's time when he preached on St Dominic on August 10, 1851.'¹³⁵

Conclusion

The contribution of Fr Ambrose Coleman to the provincial archive of the Irish Dominicans more than a century ago must be acknowledged. His deposit of letters collected from various foundations ensured the preservation of a primary source for the history of the Irish Dominicans although it was with the destruction of their original order.

Due to the arrangement of the letters in chronological order, O'Sullivan's letter to Russell currently sits between the appointment of Bartholomew Kielty, O.P., P.G., as prior of the Convent of St Mary, Roscommon, on 10 November 1818 and an appeal of 21 November 1818 addressed to the

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Fenning, *St Saviour's Church, Dublin*, 7.

134 See Walsh, 'The correspondence of Dr Hynes, 118–48.

135 Daphne D.C. Pochin Mould, *The Irish Dominicans: The Friars Preachers in the history of Catholic Ireland* (Dublin, 1957), 209.

cardinals of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide by Maurizio Benedetto Olivieri, O.P., assistant to Pio Giuseppe Gaddi, O.P., Vicar General, regarding the congregation's decree of 22 November 1817 exempting Dublin and Limerick from the jurisdiction of the prior provincial. Nonetheless, the historical worth of O'Sullivan's letter is patent.

A first glance suggests a letter of interest to the Irish Franciscan friars of St Isidore's, a letter presumably dispatched without having been submitted to the novice master for his placet. However, perusal of the letter reveals details to arouse the attention of maritime and urban historians and maybe even of the epidemiologist. To the ecclesiastical historian it offers a contemporary perspective on the political situation in Rome subsequent to the end of the Napoleonic regime and the restoration of the Papal States while to those engaged in matters philosophical and theological it also offers much of interest. The annotations elicited by the death of O'Sullivan afford the item a particular interest for Irish Dominicans and reveal him as the one who first prompted Russell to consider the life of the friar preacher. And, of course, there is the simple human story of faith, fortitude, and friendship.

The extent of O'Sullivan's affection for Russell cannot exceed the depth of my gratitude to Fr Míchéal MacCraith, Fr Hugh McKenna, and Bro. Stephen O'Kane, all veterans of St Isidore's, for their patient and prolonged assistance in clarifying details regarding the fabric and friars of St Isidore's. I am also indebted to my own confrère, Fr Conor McDonough. To Dr Joe Varley of the Maritime Institute of Ireland I owe a particular debt of gratitude for introducing me to a world of maritime vessels and voyages and enlightening me as to the significance of a donkey's breakfast on board a ship.

Document

Al Molto Reverendo Padre Bartolemeu Russell
 Colegio/Igreja di Corpo Santo
 Lisboa
 Portugal

My dear Bartholomew,

I shall forever with gratitude remember the favour you have done me this day by the kind letter I have received from Father Lonergan.¹³⁶ You are the first since my departure from my unhappy country that has awakened the genial sympathies of home and retouched the magic string of dear but absent friendship that once more reverberates through my heart. I fancy, as I peruse your lines with a delight verging to ecstasy, your overflowing soul at the idea of your religious profession, your words ideas burning on your lips, as wontedly, and contending for expression, the raptures of your heart uttering to me the joy you participate. In a word, all that delicious antepast of future heaven that God bestows on the elect of his kingdom.

It is too little to say, in the cold words of the world, I congratulate you, my dear beloved but absent friend. Rather, let us sing together in the glowing word of holy David, 'How delightful are thy tabernacles, O God. How happy those that dwell in thy house. Yes.'¹³⁷ 'I have chosen to be a menial in the house of my God rather than abide in the tabernacles of sinners.'¹³⁸ O that I were with you at the same moments and found worthy to perform the same act, but it is now too late.

Upbraid me not, Bartholomew, with not having written to you before now. You have known my attention before now in this point when I was not interrupted by impediments, but in my present state as a novice, in which I am to continue for three weeks more from this day, difficulties presented themselves which I could not well solve until you untied the knot yourself. I asked your brethren here, McDonald¹³⁹ and Griffith,¹⁴⁰ several times when they visited us, if they at any time hear of any persons going to Lisbon. They answered in the negative. I waited all of the time myself to try if I could hear of any person, but in vain. I thought the postage was

136 Michael Bernardine Lonergan. O'Sullivan gives the name as Lunergan. Where necessary, the names of individuals have been adjusted to reflect the forms under which the names are commonly used while the names as given by O'Sullivan are included in the footnotes. In addition, paragraphs have been introduced and the use of capitals and punctuation silently corrected to favour the legibility of the text. Spelling has been modernised and corrected as necessary while dates have been standardised. Uncertainties of reading are enclosed within square brackets.

137 Psalm 84: 1 & 4.

138 Psalm 84: 10.

139 William Joseph McDonald.

140 Patrick Raymond Griffith.

exorbitant and was something loath [and] tender about writing, so that in future I hope you will practice towards me the doctrine you preach at the conclusion of your letter and let no consideration deter you from writing frequently.

The next morning after I parted you, we hoisted anchor and set sail with good wind which cleared us out of Gibraltar. We were then detained by calms and contrary winds for the remainder of the passage so that twenty-seven days elapsed from the time we left Lisbon till we arrived in the harbour of Genoa. I had very pleasant companions that enlivened the tedium of the voyage, but the rascal of a captain found a very simple and witless part of his cargo in me and consequently treated me very indifferently. I got no sickness and was never fresher in my life than when I landed. I remained in that city five days. It is a charming superb one and pretty large. I then got a barque¹⁴¹ for Leghorn¹⁴² and got there in a day and half. I could get none for Civitavecchia so, next day, I took a coach or 'vetturino'¹⁴³ and in seven days was in Rome! I met with no storms, thank God, in my voyages like another young man from Limerick that went to Gibraltar, thence took a vessel for Naples and before he could arrive there, was obliged to make into Amalfi in a small boat, and before his eyes saw the vessel dashed to splinters. At length, he came to us after a voyage of four months.

I was all along impressed with the idea that I could keep here no box and therefore very cunningly gave away my bed and trunk in Leghorn without having the recollection of desiring the brother Christians to whom I was so charitable, to pray for me, although since I have often occasion of bantering myself for my folly. I was received kindly by the poor guardian McCormick¹⁴⁴ who is now no more, a circumstance that I bitterly lament. I found things in a better state than I expected but indeed not in the best. I had only ten guineas spared and so gave him the best part. I wanted the rest for necessaries. And on 7 December, I was invested in the habit of St Francis. I know not from what cause, I was crying tremendously all that day and could not refrain whenever I thought of my reception, so that the Italians took notice of me and wanted to know if I were sorry. But though I wept bitterly that day I had often cause of repeating it since. God grant, my dear Bartholomew, you will never go through in the course of your life what I have underwent since I came here. The causes of this cannot be made known to you until the second coming of the Son of God.

In the beginning of my noviciate, I found disgust in many things in this order and was concerting plans and schemes of flight to another, but

141 O'Sullivan writes 'barck,' a sailing vessel of small size.

142 Livorno.

143 O'Sullivan writes 'voitorino,' possibly a conflation of the Italian, 'vetturino,' and the French, 'voiturin,' a carriage for hire.

144 James McCormick.

alas, what could I do? I had no money and who would receive me in these times without it? I wrote for it home, but be astonished at it, Bartholomew, I never received a scroll from a friend in the world but from you since I left home which is the development of the first part of this letter. I remained for a little longer and still it was the same with me. I would make your heart burn with indignation were I to reveal to you what I have suffered from some of my countrymen, and were I to go out now to the world and make known what I do know and commit it to writing as a memorial or journal of my observations on men and men's manners, it is very probable I would prove a most destructive and pernicious being to some comfortable gentlemen of Ireland and make them more cautious about the manner in which they treat persons who are only novices and who are at will to leave their order. I shall say no more about this, it is a delicate point, but refer it all to omniscient heaven. But pray for me that God may grant me patience in these trials. 'Qui autem perseveraverit usque in finem hic salvus erit.'¹⁴⁵

Such, my dear Bartholomew, is my state of happiness or life, call it what you will. I gave a whisper to one of your brethren one day when they came to visit us, regarding my discontent. He pitied me but we could say no more at the time. Yet from the little I gleaned respecting their condition from the brethren of this house, I had no great ambition of making any change. Thus circumstanced, as I tell you, I struggled out so long, neglected as it were by my friends at home to whom if they continue so, I fear I will never return. And assaulted by internal molestation, I have no consolation but that of my conscience and what I desire from my books. Perhaps the cause of this disquiet arises in a considerable degree for want of a guardian in this house since McCormick died, and in Mr Hughes¹⁴⁶ who is on his journey hither I expect to hail the rising Sun of Peace who will dissipate the clouds of melancholy that long have brooded over us and give serenity and brightness to our horizon.¹⁴⁷ Such, my dear beloved Bartholomew, is the state to which heaven has failed the friend who so often unbosomed to you thoughts that remained cloistered in my heart for the Deity alone and to whom you so often communicated the secret recesses of your soul. However, thanks to him who is eternal, I participate of the delicious delights which a religious life bestows. I feel at times, when peace returns to my bosom, the thrills of religious desire and would not exchange the poor and despicable habit of Francis for the diadem that gilds the brow of sovereigns and of kings.

I enjoyed a very good state of health until about last August when I was attacked by a tertian fever or ague for it was with shaking fits I was

¹⁴⁵ Matthew 24:13.

¹⁴⁶ Henry Hughes.

¹⁴⁷ See Malachi 4:2.

affected. It lasted nearly ten weeks in recoverings and relapses but I am now perfectly rid of it, thank God.

Our college (as this convent is dignified with the title), situated in a spot that excites the envy of the Roman friars, is a little segregated from the city. The pope's palace and his gardens are almost adjoining it. The lodge commands a prospect of the most part of the city and we enjoy very salubrious air, its site being on an eminence, and at the rear are fields that engage the view, and remind one of the scenes of departed days. We have a neat garden of about an acre that produces all sorts of vegetables throughout the seasons besides a number of trees that bear abundance of fruit such as oranges, figs, plums of various species, pears, peaches, and more whose names I can't tell. Besides, we have vines under whose shades in summer we retire from the heat and walk for recreation. I could inspire you with romantic long adored thoughts respecting our pleasant situation for studies, were not the frenzy of former days now past and the fire of enthusiastic fancy extinguished amid the ruins of scholastic barbarity. In a word, you could not dream of a prettier place for a student. The convent is a very clean neat place with comfortable rooms that look out into the garden and our church indeed is a lovely structure, all marble and adorned with mosaic work and embellished with beautiful paintings, especially three, viz. one of the Virgin with the child Jesus whose heel crushes the serpent's head, second, of her espousal with St Joseph, third, of St Francis, all regarded as masterpieces in the art.

We have a grand library, about four times as large as yours, enriched with the best works to which all the time of my noviciate by some casualty I have had access. Among other works we have in it all those of the writers of the college and eighteen large folio tomes of the annals of the order, the work of the illustrious Wadding¹⁴⁸ who was the founder of this house. It seems to me, computing the time one has for study here and all the occupations in which that great man was conversant according to the account Sir James Ware gives,¹⁴⁹ a monstrous task for him to execute in twenty-five years. He was the man that was delegated by the king of Spain, in preference to all the friars of his own nation, to come to Rome and defend by his writings that point of religious disputation that so long divided the disciples of Scotus and St Thomas. This was the time when St Isidore's was established. The stone that inurns his ashes is in the centre of our church and when devotion to the memory of the illustrious dead kindles in us, we kneel and pay the filial rites of tenderness to our great forefather. Our community consists of twenty Irishmen besides a few Italians. To the shame

¹⁴⁸ Luke Wadding.

¹⁴⁹ See James Ware, *The history of the writers of Ireland*, part i, *Of such writers who were born in that kingdom* (Dublin, 1746) in Walter Harris, trans., *The whole works of Sir James Ware concerning Ireland*, revised and improved with many material additions, ii, *The history and antiquities of Ireland and The history of the writers of Ireland in two books* (2 vols, Dublin, 1764), i.

of our order in Ireland be it spoken that we have now one Sardinian lector, when formerly St Isidore's gave lectors to all Italy. Our present superior¹⁵⁰ is the brother of our deceased guardian, a doctor and censor of theology and dignified with other literary titles that have made his name run very high in Rome and Naples for learning and abilities but a man of very extraordinary peculiarities of disposition and now far advanced in years.

And were you to see our schools and the venerable figures that are painted on the walls and that in former times were the luminaries of the order in Ireland, you would be impressed with something awful and sublime in contemplating them. They are spacious halls and over the entrance is painted in large characters 'Initium sapientiae est timor Domini,'¹⁵¹ and the same in Irish characters under it. How grand I thought it. A philosophy school having been established lately, another and myself were permitted, as we were so far advanced in our noviciate, to join them, and so we are also reading Lugdunensis.

Will I tell you how I spent my noviciate? For part of it, last winter, by rising at 3 o'clock in the morning to say the office, and little office, in serving Masses, ringing bells, sweeping the house together with George Murphy and three more, and doing humble duties in the refectory. When I had time to spare, in reading Greek, Latin, and Spanish, and picking and killing fleas for, in truth, we are flayed alive here worse than poor St Bartholomew. Tell me in your next how you spent your noviciate. My profession comes on 8 December, that is, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. I beg your pardon, my dear Barth., don't be offended at the words. God forbid that the strifes of religionists should ever interfere in anything that may concern you and me, strifes that I devoutly abhor, prejudices that are a shame to religion and which, as for myself, I have endeavoured as much as I could and will for ever, I trust, endeavour to eradicate. On this day, I say, I am to plight my solemn vows, God willing, before the altar of high heaven! I am heartily disposed to do so. I have nothing to say to the order for it is a holy life. All the scruples I have is about the manner in which friars in Ireland observe it and are compelled to do so. The vexations that I have met with are in some degree of a private nature and so are not to be ascribed to the order. I hope it will be to me as joyful a day as yours though you have got three months the start of me in everything. I am obliged here to wear spectacles at the office, my sight being so short, and I take snuff though I may blame the pope¹⁵² for that, he having sent six pounds of it to me and every religious in Rome. I never stirred out but once, to buy spectacles, since I assumed the habit. George Murphy was professed on 26 July and displeased with you in not

150 Michael McCormick.

151 Psalm 111:10.

152 Pius VII, 1800–1823.

having made mention of him in your letter. I rejoice in the success of my poor unfortunate countrymen, and deplore the fate of poor honest Sancho or rather the living transcript of his master. God bless my friend Rea¹⁵³ or rather my dear brother, it is with such lumber religion is too much encumbered. We have got three novices here that were invested a few days ago. I wish all that enter religion were like them, but among them one is a young gentleman from Drogheda whose fortune and property entitled him, as I can hear, to a better habit, in the world than that of St Francis. He is relation to a prince in Naples, and Brother Nugent Dardis,¹⁵⁴ having exchanged the glitter and glories of the world for the infamy and ignominy of the Cross, is as humble and as pious a creature as ever I knew. He hinted to me that he was converted on reading Thomas à Kempis. Happy for religion it is that such as he is are chosen sometimes to be its votaries. Were all the religious of the world of his dispositions, they would not be held in such contempt in this country as they are and as effects prove. In a word, the character is so low in Italy that but one order is allowed to wear the habit 100 miles from Rome, that is, in Naples, and from what I daily hear about conspiracies against that living martyr of Catholic faith, Pius VII, and sentences of death pronounced against the delinquents, the greater part of whom are dukes, marquises, etc., I forebode the total subversion of religious orders in some years after the pope's death. The great Romans are discontented, as far as I can hear, with an ecclesiastical government, and the people are presaging eventful scenes after his exit from trials and persecution.

You seemed to me when I was in Lisbon to burn with a desire of seeing the classic land of Italy. If you were in Rome and came to visit us you would be in Sallust's garden or at least part of them, as we are informed. A virtuoso from England was content to carry a lump of a stone and a plum stone to England with him that he got from us. But about travelling here for sake of curiosity, take care and have two large pockets stuffed with dollars and half the third for your own sake. Unless you have private motives such as I was often endeavouring to prompt you with before you left home, never come here for curiosity's sake. You will understand me when I tell you, 'Study for the love of God and be something.' Lose not an instant of your precious time but convert all to the glory of God and your own salvation.

Since I entered this place, I never read an English book so I hope you will pardon this uncouth incoherent scroll. Besides that, my time is so managed that I have very little to spare for anything else but my studies. But as this is a feria in school, I took occasion of writing in consequence of your tender entreaty. But it is now very late. I must conclude by sending

153 Patrick Rea.

154 O'Sullivan gives the name as Dardus.

my compliments to Malony¹⁵⁵ and my most cordial respects to that kind creature your brother Corcoran¹⁵⁶ but above all to your good-natured rector whose civility and kindness I shall forever remember. Remember me to my dear brother shipmates especially the doctor and let me know what became of him. Let me know also what became of the two unfortunate wretches that were with me in Lisbon.

I am angry with you for not having mentioned to me how your father, mother, sisters, and brothers are. McDonald is made subdeacon. Griffith has got minor orders. Your brothers here are a very genteel set of lads. They were accustomed to visit us here very often and we spent very pleasant moments with them, but for some futile motive, as I think, declined these four months back at which the Franciscans are somewhat indignant, though in my opinion it is not their fault.

I am much afraid that after my noviciate Mr Hughes, when he comes, will make such as are of age push for orders. I am twenty-two since August last. I know the consequence of ordaining boys of green and unripe brains. Were I at home and knew as much as I do know, I would take my kind uncle's advice.

When you write, write small and close and send me all the news in the world.

I hear Cork is in a poor state.

Offer up a Communion for me. I shall do so for you, and remember me at the holy Sacrifice.

I feel religion or the religious state, sometimes what it is described, an earthly paradise. Go on, my dear Bartholomew, consider the grandeur of your vocation, an 'act according to the hope that is within you.'¹⁵⁷ The ray that enlightens our pilgrim path does not emanate from the splendour of corruptible matter but from that bright Essence that dwelleth above sun and stars. The evangelic precepts are our guides through this world, let us take care not to stray from them. They and outraged religion one day shall vindicate their cause before a tribunal that is in heaven and many an unhappy religious will bemoan the day of his profession.

I forget to tell you that we have a beautiful cloister where we can walk in winter. The walls are painted with all the different illustrious saints of this order but one in particular attracted my attention, that is over the entrance of it, that is St Francis and St Dominic most cordially embracing each other. When I look on these in so pious an act of affection, I recall to mind the scandals and divisions of their children about points of theology that should be referred and left to God. I am positive these great patriarchs would severely reprobate their conduct. Farewell, my dear Bartholomew,

155 Michael Joseph Malony.

156 George Dominic Corcoran.

157 1Peter 3:15.

God has willed it, we are separated into different orders. If I had anything better to wish you I would it but know nothing better than that God may grant you the grace of living up in all points exactly to your vocation which is enough for mortal man.

Subscribing myself with as much affection as St Francis had for St Dominic.

Your absent but ever affectionate friend.

W. [J.] O'Sullivan

Rome, 17 November 1818

To the writer, William Sullivan, I am indebted for the *first* thought of a vocation for the Dominican order.

He is buried in the cemetery of St Isidore's. A slab bears his name. He was one of the most pious and *learned* young men of his age I ever met.

He died on 8 August 1819 after lying seventeen days. He often spoke of me in his last sickness.