

# William Monsell: a Roman Catholic Francophile Anglo-Irishman

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William Monsell, first Baron Emly (1812–94), is a major figure in the history of County Limerick. Indeed, he is a significant figure in the history of Ireland, although his prominence has only recently begun to be acknowledged.<sup>1</sup> He was born into a wealthy Protestant landed family, whose principal residence was Tervoe House, near the village of Clarina, about five miles from Limerick city. He was reared in an atmosphere of devotion to the Union with Britain, loyalty to the Church of Ireland, and adherence to the Tory Party. He was educated in England, at the public school of Winchester (1826–30), and at Oriel College Oxford (1831–3). In 1836, he inherited the family estates from his grandfather. Monsell was a serious, conscientious, and just man. In 1850 he converted to Catholicism under the influence of his great friend and mentor, John Henry Newman (1801–90). This process of conversion occurred over a long period in the late 1840s, and coincided with a change in his political allegiance from Tory to Whig.

In the 1840s Monsell had flirted with Federalism and even Repeal; but from the early 1850s onward his religious and political views remained fairly fixed. He became a staunch Unionist, and broke with the Liberals over Home Rule in 1886; however he gave long and valuable service to the Liberal cause for many years, serving as the party's Liberal MP for County Limerick from 1847 to 1874. During this period he became one of Ireland's leading political figures. He served in several British administrations, under four prime ministers, between 1853 and 1873. He was Clerk of the Ordnance (1853–7), President of the Board of Health (1857), Paymaster-General and Vice-President of the Board of Trade (1866), Under-Secretary for the Colonies (1868–71) and Postmaster General (1871–3). He was a close friend of such prominent figures as Newman, Manning, Cullen and Gladstone. In 1874 he was raised to the peerage with the title Baron Emly of Tervoe. He is one of the most fascinating figures in the history of nineteenth-century Ireland; but what sets him aside from the bulk of Irish political figures over the past two centuries was his major engagement with the political, cultural, social and religious life of the Continent of Europe. To

<sup>1</sup> The chief accounts of Monsell's life are Matthew Potter, *The life and times of William Monsell, 1st Baron Emly of Tervoe (1812–94)* (Limerick, 1994); Matthew Potter, 'A Catholic Unionist: the life and times of William Monsell, 1st Baron Emly of Tervoe (1812–94)' (PhD thesis, NUI Galway, 2001); and Dermot Roantree, 'William Monsell M.P. and the Catholic question in Victorian Britain and Ireland' (PhD thesis, University College Dublin, 1990).

understand his life fully it is first necessary to examine the three great strands of his political philosophy: patriotism, Unionism and Liberalism.

Monsell always considered himself Irish. On 1 March 1870, while addressing the House of Commons, he described himself as 'an Irishman'.<sup>2</sup> His public utterances throughout the 1850s, 60s and 70s are filled with references asserting that Ireland was a separate nation from England or Scotland; on 26 July 1867 he told the Commons that the Irish and the English were 'two distinct races'.<sup>3</sup> The best summary of his sense of nationhood is to be found in a remark of his close friend, David Moriarty, bishop of Kerry (1814–77). In 1868 the bishop told Gladstone that 'there does not breathe a purer patriot than Monsell, and what is rare in Irish patriotism, he is heart and soul attached to [the] British connexion'.<sup>4</sup> Linda Colley has described the development of the concept of a dual nationality between the years 1707 and 1837, when a British nation was constructed from the four component countries of the United Kingdom. She describes the half-century between 1776 and 1815 as 'one of the most formative periods in the making of the modern world and – not accidentally – in the forging of British identity'. There emerged 'a new unitary ruling class in place of those separate and specific landed establishments' that had existed in the four countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the Scottish, Welsh and Anglo-Irish nobilities did not become absorbed into the English élite. Instead, according to Colley, they 'became British in a new and intensely profitable fashion, while remaining in their own minds and behaviour, Welsh or Scottish or Irish as well'.<sup>5</sup> Monsell subscribed to this dual nationality. On 2 January 1881, he wrote to Gavan Duffy: 'I think the entire union of hearts between the three kingdoms may be arrived at without the sacrifice of one grain of our national feeling'.<sup>6</sup> Any attempt to deny the authenticity of this claim infuriated him: in 1893 he angrily attacked Gladstone and his supporters for their 'monstrous' accusation, that of 'not loving our country' because 'we are Unionists'. Warming to the theme he continued:

I confess I have a strong feeling on this subject – an intense feeling – I feel bitterly the accusation. I declare before God that from the time I first entered Parliament some fifty years ago my earnest desire was . . . to raise up my fellow countrymen that were then downtrodden and give them every advantage and every privilege that the citizens of the rest of the United Kingdom enjoy.<sup>7</sup>

In short, Monsell was a Unionist because he was an Irish patriot, not despite it.

The third strand in Monsell's ideology was his Liberalism. This term requires

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, Third Series*, 199.1023 (1 March 1870). <sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, 189.222 (26 July 1867). <sup>4</sup> Moriarty to Gladstone, 28 November 1868, in Gladstone Papers, British Library Add. MSS 44416. <sup>5</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation 1707–1837* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp 7, 13. <sup>6</sup> Emly to Duffy, 2 January 1881, Gavan Duffy Papers MS 800S/23, National Library of Ireland. <sup>7</sup> *A Roman Catholic Liberal peer on the Irish Home Rule bill: speech by Lord Emly* (Dublin, 1893).

some explication, as it meant a great deal more than being a member of a particular political party. Liberals believed that constitutions, laws and political proposals should promote individual liberty, based on the exercise of rational will. Government, they held, should be carried on with the consent of the governed, and be responsive to public opinion. The state's function was to create the conditions within which individual liberty could find its fullest expression. It was there to make laws, not to meddle in the economy, or direct people's lives. The state, they believed, is an institution established by rational individuals to deal with the public business of society in order that each person might be free to pursue his own concerns. Liberals believed in freedom of speech, of worship, of association, and of the press.<sup>8</sup>

Monsell worked throughout his career for civil and religious equality, and upheld the classic Liberal freedoms: speech, religion, and the freedom to engage in political activity. He gradually emerged as the unofficial leader of the Catholic Whigs, a subgroup of the Irish Liberal Party which combined Irish patriotism, Unionism and Liberalism in an interesting political experiment that lasted from 1847 to 1874.<sup>9</sup> The Catholic Whigs were moderate reformers, opposed to Toryism on the one hand and separatism on the other. They constituted one of the largest categories of Irish MPs in parliament throughout the 1850s and 60s, but were virtually obliterated in the home rule landslide at the 1874 general election. Monsell's chief policy interests were in education, and in advancing the civil and political rights of Roman Catholics. In this, he resembled his fellow Catholic Whigs.

As well as being a Catholic Liberal, Monsell was an adherent of the Liberal Catholic movement, which had arisen as an offshoot of Ultramontanism in both France and Germany. As Ward notes: 'In the hands of Lamennais, the Ultramontane movement was destined to undergo a violent change of direction, a change which opened the way for the movement of the Liberal Catholics'.<sup>10</sup> Hugues Félicité Robert de Lamennais (1782–1854) was one of the most significant figures in the Catholic revival of the nineteenth century. His aim was to 'baptise the revolution', to reconcile the teaching of political liberalism with the Roman Catholic Church, and thus to bridge one of the great ideological divides of the nineteenth century. The movement that he founded grew and prospered in the France of the July Monarchy (1830–48). During this period it was led by Lamennais' two chief disciples, Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire (1802–61), and Charles Forbes René, Comte de Montalembert. Lacordaire was responsible for re-establishing the Dominican Order (to which he belonged) in France, and he electrified congregations in Notre Dame

<sup>8</sup> For Liberalism see Harry K. Girvetz, *From wealth to welfare: the evolution of Liberalism* (Stanford, 1963) and William A. Orton, *The Liberal tradition: a study of the social and spiritual conditions of freedom* (New Haven, 1945). <sup>9</sup> See David Thomas Horgan, 'The Irish Catholic Whigs in parliament, 1847–74' (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 1975). <sup>10</sup> Wilfrid Ward, *William George Ward and the Catholic revival* (London, 1912), pp 101–2. For the Liberal Catholics see also Joseph Altholz, *The Liberal Catholic movement in England: the Rambler and its contributors 1848–62* (London, 1962), and Hugh A. MacDougall, *The Acton-Newman relations: the dilemma of Christian Liberalism* (New York, 1962).

de Paris with the eloquence of his preaching. Montalembert (1810–70) was a politician, publicist, historian and author. He was a member of the French parliament for most of the period 1837–57, straddling the successive regimes of Louis-Philippe, the Second Republic and the Second Empire. As France's leading Liberal Catholic political figure, he campaigned on two fronts: firstly, he tried to persuade liberals that Catholics could be loyal to the Liberal political regimes that ruled France after 1830; secondly, he sought to wean Catholics away from their attachment to the *ancien régime*. Above all, 'he aimed also to train [the Catholics] to win their rights in and through parliamentary processes'.<sup>11</sup>

The chief aim of the French Liberal Catholics was to obtain what they called 'free education', that is, freedom for secondary education, which was under the strict control of the *Université* (in effect, the Ministry for Education). In 1846, 140 deputies supporting Catholic schools were elected to the French parliament, with Montalembert as their leader. While the 1848 revolution at first seemed to doom their efforts to failure, it eventually provided the occasion of their greatest victory. On 20 December 1848, a leading Liberal Catholic and friend of Montalembert, Frédéric Alfred, Comte de Falloux (1811–86) was appointed Minister for Public Instruction; the hour for the establishment of 'free education' had come. The *Loi Falloux* of March 1850 gave members of religious orders the right to open schools without requiring any further qualification, and introduced councils with strong clerical elements to control the *Université*. The restrictions on the total number of pupils allowed to attend Catholic secondary schools were abolished. However, the *Université* retained the monopoly of conferring degrees.<sup>12</sup>

This stunning victory was in some ways a pyrrhic one for the Liberal Catholics. It led to a sharp split with the Ultramontanes, so that the French Catholics became polarized into two increasingly hostile factions. Montalembert, Falloux and Lacordaire continued to be the most prominent Liberal Catholics. They were joined by Jacques Victor Albert, fourth duc de Broglie (1821–1901) who belonged to one of France's greatest families and had a distinguished political career.<sup>13</sup> Among the French bishops, the leading Liberal Catholic was Félix-Antoine-Philibert Dupanloup (1802–78), bishop of Orléans (1849–78). *Le Correspondant* became their newspaper, with Falloux and others at its head. At the same time, the Ultramontanes acquired formidable leaders especially the fiery journalist Louis Veuillot (1813–83), editor of *L'Univers*. The split between Ultramontanes and Liberal Catholics spread from France to Germany, England, Ireland and indeed over much of the world.

The Liberal Catholic movement, which had much in common with the Tractarian movement, had obvious attractions for Monsell and his fellow Oxford

<sup>11</sup> J.C. Finlay, 'Charles Forbes René de Montalembert' in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 9 (New York, 1967), p. 1075. See also Margaret Oliphant, *Memoir of Count de Montalembert: a recent chapter of French history* (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1872). <sup>12</sup> Alfred Cobban, *A history of modern France, volume two: 1799–1871* (London, 1961), p. 154. <sup>13</sup> He was French ambassador to London, 1871–2; minister for Foreign Affairs, 1873; deputy prime minister and minister for the Interior, 1873–4; and prime minister and minister for Justice, 1877.



converts, the third earl of Dunraven, and the de Vere brothers. It appealed to them as Liberals, and as pragmatists; it provided them with an ideology, and a model of how a Catholic parliamentary body should operate. The chief difference between the Irish Liberal Catholics and the Irish Ultramontanes was that the former elevated their Liberalism to a principle, while the latter, operating in a parliamentary system, saw it as a necessary expedient.<sup>14</sup> Two other aspects of French and German Liberal Catholicism appealed to Monsell and his friends. Firstly, it was strongly Anglophile: both Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger (1799–1890) and Montalembert idealized the English constitution and English culture. England was the nursery of parliamentary democracy, of intellectual freedom, of modern civilization; this strongly appealed to the English-educated Monsell. Secondly, the French Liberal Catholics had shown how a successful Catholic parliamentary agitation could win ‘freedom of education’, and throw off the domination of a non-Catholic state bureaucracy over Catholic schools. The parallels with Ireland, and the lessons to be drawn from this example, were obvious. It must be remembered that throughout his life Monsell’s chief political interest was in the question of education – at primary, secondary and tertiary level.

Monsell soon became Ireland’s leading Liberal Catholic. He favoured the Church’s reconciling itself to parliamentary government, freedom of thought and worship, and religious toleration – all of which were core Liberal beliefs, but which did not find favour with Catholic conservatives who saw Church and state in Catholic countries as having a much more ‘*intégriste*’ relationship. He believed that Christianity could survive and prosper only by embracing the modern world. He also wanted to reconcile religion and science. Besides the de Veres and Dunraven, the other principal Liberal Catholic in Ireland was Bishop Moriarty, who was a lone Liberal voice in the Irish hierarchy.<sup>15</sup> Such individuals were opposed to the Ultramontanism of the archbishop of Dublin, Cardinal Cullen (1803–78), and clashes between the two sides became frequent in the 1860s, especially over the vexed issue of Catholic education.

All of this demonstrates how very much an international figure Monsell was in his outlook. It is worth emphasizing how much Monsell’s consciousness of being a citizen of the world was both strikingly modern, and not at all typical of his time and place. Irish politicians (with some notable exceptions) from the early nineteenth century to the present day, tended not to have a strong European sense of themselves and of their world. Their universe generally and increasingly consisted of Ireland, Britain and the United States – an anglophone world. Also, the class to which Monsell belonged, and specifically the Anglo-Irish élite, tended to become more isolated from Europe as the nineteenth century progressed. The previous age had been that of French cultural supremacy in Europe; it was also the era of the Grand

<sup>14</sup> Roantree, ‘William Monsell M.P.’, pp 5–6, 169–70. For the Anglophilia of the French and German Liberal Catholics, see Matthias Buschkuhl, *Great Britain and the Holy See, 1746–1870* (Dublin 1982), pp 133–45. <sup>15</sup> See Kieran O’Shea, ‘David Moriarty (1814–77)’, in *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*, 5 (1972), 86–102.

Tour and of great interest, on the part of Britain and Ireland, in European fashion in art, architecture, costume and furniture. Then, the nineteenth century became the age of England's 'complacent arrogance' and 'England, not Europe was the loser', writes the prominent historian J.H. Plumb; he continues: 'the maintenance of English ways, the insistence on the superiority of English ideas, led to a withdrawal from European culture as a whole, and England in the nineteenth century developed its art and its literature almost uninfluenced by foreign examples'.<sup>16</sup> Among the Protestant Anglo-Irish this became even more marked: their disproportionately large service in the British armed forces and their belief in British superiority were among the factors that orientated their vision away from Europe, and towards the Empire.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the rising Catholic masses had strong ties with their emigrant kin in North America, Britain and Australasia, but little contact with the mainland of Europe. The Catholic religious orders, with their links to Rome and to the Continent, remained the strongest link with the European mainland.

Monsell's world view, on the other hand, was more reminiscent of Ireland's in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the Irish diaspora spread throughout Europe, and links with Continental Catholicism were strong. His conversion to the Catholic Church had made him a member of a world-wide organization (in contrast to the anglo-centric Church of Ireland) while his wealth and connections enabled him to travel widely on the Continent. The British nobility, despite the insular tendencies already mentioned, 'formed part of a linked French-speaking aristocracy'.<sup>18</sup> 'The polite of every country seems to have but one character', as a mid-eighteenth-century Englishman put it. 'Like artists and intellectuals, but in much greater numbers, they moved about Europe, in search of education, pleasure and employment'.<sup>19</sup> Monsell was not only a Francophile, but a fluent French speaker; his facility gave him the *entrée* into the entire cosmopolitan European and Europeanised élite.

Three great world cities formed the capitals of Monsell's universe. Paris was, in many ways, the centre of Western civilization in the nineteenth century; Monsell, like so many others, succumbed to its charms. He visited it frequently and became a familiar figure at one of the great salons of the time, that of Anne Sophia Swetchine (1782–1857).<sup>20</sup> She was a Russian aristocrat, and a convert to Catholicism, who had arrived in Paris in 1816 and made it her home in 1825. She resided in a mansion on the Rue St Dominique, in the very fashionable Faubourg St Germain; there she

16 J.H. Plumb, *The first four Georges* (London, 1956), p. 35. 17 See Michael McConville, *Ascendancy to oblivion: the story of the Anglo-Irish* (London, 1986), pp 242–52. 18 Philip Magnus, *King Edward VII* (London, 1964), p. 97. 19 Quoted in Jonathan Dewald, *The European nobility, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 3. 20 The salon was a centre of discussion on such topics as art, literature, politics and even religion. Of the three greatest salons in Paris of the first half of the nineteenth century, one was hosted by a Frenchwoman, Madame Recamier, and the other two by Russians, Princess de Lieven and Madame Swetchine. See M.V. Woodgate, *Madame Swetchine (1782–1857)* (Dublin, 1948), p. 95. This remains the best work in English on this enigmatic woman. See also 'Madame Swetchine and her salon' in *The Month*, I (July–December 1864), 163–76.

hosted her salon for some thirty years until her death. It was claimed that '[in] religion, she was a strict Catholic and in philosophy Christian. In politics, she preferred a Liberal monarchy.'<sup>21</sup> It was not surprising, therefore, that while she welcomed all parties, Madame Swetchine's salon became a centre for the Liberal Catholics. Montalembert, Falloux, Lacordaire and Broglie were regular attenders, and Monsell met them all there. Around 1850, he first met Montalembert, and they became very close friends; he also befriended the other three. In addition, Monsell became a very warm friend of a number of prominent French clerics; these included Bishop Dupanloup and Cardinal Louis-Edouard-Désiré Pie, bishop of Poitiers (1815-80) as well as Cardinal Charles-Martial-Allemand Lavigerie (1825-92) who became archbishop of Algiers, and of Carthage, as well as primate of Africa. The intellectual brilliance of Monsell's French friends was notable: Montalembert, Falloux, Broglie and Dupanloup all became members of the French Academy.<sup>22</sup>

Rome was another city that Monsell grew to love; he often stayed there for months at a time. Indeed, his familiarity with Rome was such that he could casually remark in a letter to Newman, concerning a mutual acquaintance, that 'he does not speak French well enough to enjoy Roman society thoroughly'.<sup>23</sup> Also, he befriended the city's most prominent resident – a circumstance referred to by Aubrey de Vere at the time of Monsell's death: 'He was very intimate [with] Pius IX,' de Vere told a correspondent; the pope 'often sent for him, and had long private conversation with him, without any ceremony'.<sup>24</sup> The troubles of the pope and of the church were a matter of high priority for Monsell. He took a keen interest in Catholic affairs throughout the world. In 1860 and 1861 he spoke on a number of occasions in parliament, condemning the massacres of Christians in the Lebanon.<sup>25</sup> In 1863 he denounced Russian oppression of Catholic Poland.<sup>26</sup> Indeed one of his last sallies into public life was a letter to *The Times* concerning the slaughter of Catholics in Uganda in 1893.

The third great city with which Monsell was familiar was London; as a member of parliament, he was obliged to spend half of each year living there. The sittings of parliament commenced in late January or early February, and continued until late July or early August; sometimes there were additional sittings in October, November and December.<sup>27</sup> During his English sojourns, Monsell would meet his many friends there. These included Gladstone, successive dukes of Norfolk (particularly the fifteenth duke) and successive archbishops of Westminster: Nicholas Wiseman (1802-65), and Henry Edward Manning (1808-92).

**21** 'Madame Swetchine and her salon', p. 166. **22** Another giant of the Liberal Catholics, Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger, also befriended Monsell. **23** Letter from Monsell to Newman, 16 March 1861, in *The letters and diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. 19, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain (London, 1969) p. 484. **24** Aubrey de Vere to Robin O'Brien, 26 April 1894, De Vere Papers, Trinity College Dublin, MS. 5053-4, no. 276. **25** *Hansard*, 160.1479-86 (17 August 1860), 1583-6 (20 August 1860); 161.1229-31 (1 March 1861); 162.250-2 (22 March 1861). **26** *Hansard*, 170.1406-10 (24 July 1863). **27** Chris Cook and Brendan Keith, *British historical facts, 1830-1900* (London, 1975), p. 100.

During one of his frequent visits to France, Monsell (whose first wife had died in 1855) was introduced to a young French noblewoman, Marie Louise Ernestine Berthe de Montigny (1835–90). Her father, Philippe August Comte de Montigny-Boulanvilliers (1789–1866), was a noble of the *ancien régime* who had served in the Grand Armée and was decorated with the Legion d'Honneur. After a short courtship they were married on 23 February 1857, in Madame Swetchine's private chapel.<sup>28</sup> Monsell's second marriage was as happy as his first had been. Berthe was a pretty young woman, who quickly learned to speak English. On 5 March 1858 she gave birth to the long-awaited son and heir, Thomas William Gaston, later the second Lord Emly. A little girl, Mary Olivia, quickly followed, in 1859; both were born in France.

Berthe brought renewed joy into her husband's life. She was his equal in piety, and introduced the new devotion to our Lady of Lourdes into her Irish home. The apparitions at Lourdes occurred in 1858, and Berthe erected the first Lourdes grotto built in Ireland at Tervoe;<sup>29</sup> she also strengthened and deepened his attachment to France. When the Comte de Montigny died in 1866, his inheritance was shared between his three daughters (he had no son). In this way, Monsell came into an estate near the town of Montoire, in the Loire Valley, which had been the playground of the French kings and nobles for centuries. The estate featured the Chateau de Drouilly, which remained in the ownership of the Monsell family until the middle of the twentieth century; it was to be Monsell's second home for the rest of his life. Inter-marriage between the Irish and French élites was uncommon at this time;<sup>30</sup> thus he had a fairly unique and intimate relationship with France and came to identify closely with the country. He was there in 1870, when the great crisis of the Franco-Prussian War broke upon the country. In 1880 he described himself, when addressing the House of Lords, as a French landlord.<sup>31</sup> His residence in Montoire also deepened his connections with French Liberal Catholicism. Bishop Dupanloup lived in Orléans, sixty-five miles away, while Falloux's residence in Angers was fifty miles from Montoire. Bishop Pie's diocese of Orléans also lay nearby, while Berthe's cousin was archbishop of the neighbouring diocese of Bourges. Above all, he gained a unique insight into the culture of another land. Montoire is in the département of Loire-et-Cher, and Monsell witnessed at first hand the apex and decline of the Second Empire (which enjoyed strong support there), as well as the battle between clericals and anti-clericals under the Third Republic, and the effects that economic depression in the 1870s and 1880s had on landlord-tenant relations there (they curiously paralleled contemporary developments in Ireland).

Monsell was also intimately involved in the Ultramontane-Liberal Catholic struggle on the mainland of Europe which climaxed in 1863 and 1864. In August 1863 a congress of Belgian Catholics was held at Malines, the seat of the Belgian

<sup>28</sup> Monsell to Dunraven (1857), Dunraven Papers. D3196/F/10/No. 40. <sup>29</sup> Potter, 'A Catholic Unionist', p. 45. <sup>30</sup> Coincidentally, Monsell's friend and neighbour, Eyre Massey, third Baron Clarina (1798–1872) was married to Susan Elizabeth Barton (1810–86) of the Anglo-French wine producing dynasty, whose estates were divided between Ireland and France. <sup>31</sup> *Hansard*, 254.1866 (3 August 1880).

primate.<sup>32</sup> Montalembert delivered two very important speeches there. His first, 'A Free Church in a Free State', urged that the church should not be established, but that it should operate freely and without state support. His second, 'Liberty of Conscience', rejected religious intolerance in principle, and condemned persecution in all its forms. The importance of this exposition of Liberal Catholic political ideology by Montalembert was that it was an articulation of the same position as that held by both Newman and Monsell. The question of religious intolerance in Spain came before parliament, and Monsell asked Newman's advice on the matter. Newman wrote back, and took his stand on practical grounds, stating that 'the question is not so much an ecclesiastical one, or a political or legal or constitutional one in Spain, but a social one'. The tide of public opinion was the determining factor, and 'the Spanish laws are Anti-protestant [*sic*], because the people is such . . . the Spanish government is more liberal than the people, just as our ministries have been more liberal, and our representatives, than the constituency'. He promoted religious toleration on pragmatic grounds 'as, a fact, persecution does not answer. It does [*sic*] against men's feelings; the feelings of the age are as strongly against it as they were once for it. The age is such, that we must go by reason, not by force'. He fully accepted Montalembert's thesis: 'I am not at all sure that it would not be better for the Catholic religion every where [*sic*], if it had no very different status from that which it has in England.'<sup>33</sup> Monsell echoed these sentiments in his speech on Spain to the Commons on 17 July; he stated that the issue was not a religious one, but rather 'simply a political and social one'. He believed that the policy of the Spanish government, like that of Britain, was determined by public opinion. The Catholic Church in Ireland, he said, 'had no privileges, she had liberty. This was the source of her vigour, and of that zeal and energy which made her victorious over all her assailants'. He concluded by stating that privilege 'often palsied' the church, and that its triumph would be brought about in an atmosphere of religious liberty for all. This speech met with a very favourable reaction in parliament.<sup>34</sup>

It was not, however, Westminster's good opinion that was uppermost in Monsell's mind. The leading Ultramontane, William George Ward (1812–82), coupled Montalembert's Malines addresses and Monsell's speech to the Commons in a fiercely critical pamphlet which he published soon after.<sup>35</sup> By January 1864 Monsell was seriously alarmed by denunciations in Rome of Montalembert's Malines speeches. He wrote to Dunraven:

We are engaged here in a conflict far more serious than about Model Schools. On the one side are the Bishop of Orleans with whom I am with constantly [*sic*], and a few more obscure persons including myself – I have spoken in the

<sup>32</sup> Altholz, pp 219–20. Malines is the Belgian ecclesiastical equivalent of Armagh or Canterbury. <sup>33</sup> Letter from Newman to Monsell, 17 June 1863, in *The letters and diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. 20 (London 1970), pp 476–7. <sup>34</sup> *Hansard*, 172.1008–13 (17 July 1863). <sup>35</sup> [William George Ward], *Civil intolerance of religious error: M. De Montalembert at Malines* (London, 1863).

strongest language to the Pope – on the other, a host of persons, among whom are many English, strange to say, denouncing Montalembert, and pressing as I am told, for his condemnation – as yet the blow has been averted, and I trust it will not fall.<sup>36</sup>

Monsell was quite right, for Pope Pius IX, according to Newman, ordered Cardinal Antonelli to send private letters of complaint and censure to Cardinal Sterckx, archbishop of Malines, where Montalembert had delivered his discourses, and to Montalembert himself.<sup>37</sup> While some commentators attributed this successful outcome solely to Dupanloup, it is reasonable to suppose that the pope also took into account the opinions of his friend Monsell.<sup>38</sup> A public condemnation of Montalembert would have been disastrous: both Newman and Monsell would have been tainted in the process.

Nevertheless the pope himself moved decisively to crush Liberal Catholicism throughout the world. He followed up his condemnations of the speeches of Montalembert by sending to the bishops of the world an encyclical, *Quanta Cura*, with an accompanying 'Syllabus of Errors'.<sup>39</sup> The latter was regarded with dismay amongst the Liberal Catholics and caused a storm of protest everywhere when it appeared on 8 December 1864. It was a list of eighty propositions which had already been condemned by the pope in previous documents. Many of these were obvious targets for papal condemnation, such as rationalism, pantheism, indifferentism, socialism and communism. However, as Altholz has written concerning the last condemnation on the list, 'the last proposition condemned in the Syllabus is an almost perfect statement of the Liberal Catholic creed: the Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself to and come to terms, with progress, liberalism and modern civilisation'. The encyclical itself condemned the principle of freedom of conscience and worship, and the principle of 'the sovereignty of the people considered as supreme law independent of all human and divine rights'.<sup>40</sup> It seemed as if the pope was declaring war on the modern world.

Predictably, Monsell was horrified. He recorded his reaction in a letter to Newman on 10 January 1865:

Our Catholic papers and the Dublin review [*sic*] all seem to maintain that 80 new propositions are added to the creed . . . But what are we to do in Parliament when the encyclical is thrown in our faces? – our respect for the Pope must tie our tongues – I am told that several French and Belgian bishops will write to Rome to point out the difficulty in which they who have sworn to the constitution of their respective countries are now placed – Would it be

<sup>36</sup> Monsell to Dunraven, 22 January 1864, Dunraven papers, (DP) MS D3196/F/10/43.

<sup>37</sup> *The letters and diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. 21 (London, 1971), note to p. 41.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41. <sup>39</sup> See Damian McElrath, *The syllabus of Pius IX: some reactions in England* (London, 1964). See also Altholz, and MacDougall. <sup>40</sup> Altholz, p. 231.

possible to get any English or Irish bishops to do something of the same sort? The Bishop of Orleans is in despair.<sup>41</sup>

*Quanta Cura* and the Syllabus constituted a major victory for the Ultramontanes. As Altholz notes, 'Henceforth Liberal Catholicism was capable of little more than a rear guard action'. He adds: 'The Munich brief and the Syllabus had sounded the death knell of Liberal Catholicism. Its agonies were prolonged until 1870, however, as the Liberal Catholics struggled to salvage some fragments of accomplishment from the wreckage of their movement.'<sup>42</sup> Monsell, a practical politician, had to soldier on, realizing that, in the world of largely Protestant politicians in which he had his field of operation, the pope's actions had made his task immeasurably more difficult.

Monsell was also active at the time of the Vatican Council in 1869.<sup>43</sup> The main issue was the proclamation of the doctrine of Papal Infallibility. This was the last occasion on which the Liberal Catholics (who opposed this dogma) rallied in their losing battle against the Ultramontanes. They became known as Inopportunist – that is, they tended to believe in the concept itself, but felt that it was inopportune to have it proclaimed a dogma of the Church at that moment. To them it was a continuation of the retrograde policy of *Quanta Cura* and the Syllabus. Newman, Monsell, Montalembert, Acton and Döllinger were among the most prominent Inopportunist.<sup>44</sup> Dupanloup and Moriarty were among the minority of bishops taking that line, while, predictably, Cullen and Manning were among those who campaigned hardest for a definition.<sup>45</sup> Monsell played two major roles in the drama. Firstly, he tried to persuade Newman to attend the Council as theologian to Dupanloup. The latter was willing to take him, but Newman declined the offer.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, Monsell was given a document which was a French translation of a memorandum written by Döllinger (originally in German) to be circulated to the German-speaking bishops who would attend the Council. Roantree notes that it argued 'in strong and urgent language for the inopportune-ness of a definition of the Pope's personal infallibility'.<sup>47</sup> Monsell translated it into English, and Newman had it printed.<sup>48</sup> It was then distributed to the English-speaking bishops who were due to attend the Council. As Roantree says, 'it is impossible to say what kind of impact it could have had';<sup>49</sup> Papal Infallibility became a dogma in 1870, and Monsell accepted it reluctantly, as he had already accepted the Syllabus. The Vatican Council represented the final defeat of Liberal Catholicism.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Monsell to Newman, 10 January, 1865, in *The letters and diaries of John Henry Newman*, xxi, p. 383. <sup>42</sup> Altholz, pp 233–4, 235. <sup>43</sup> For the Irish bishops at the Council, see Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the home rule movement in Ireland, 1870–1874* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990). <sup>44</sup> See Dermot Roantree, 'William Monsell and Papal Infallibility: the workings of an Inopportunist's mind', in *Archivum Hibernicum*, 43 (1988), 118–34. <sup>45</sup> Larkin, pp 4–7. <sup>46</sup> Roantree, 'William Monsell and Papal Infallibility', pp 123–4. <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125. <sup>48</sup> *Is it opportune to define the infallibility of the pope? Memorandum addressed to the bishops of Germany, respectfully offered in translation to the bishops of the United Kingdom and its colonies and to the bishops of the United States* (London 1869). <sup>49</sup> Roantree, 'William Monsell and the Catholic Question', p. 243.

In the final analysis, Monsell's enduring historical interest may rest not principally on his political impact on the affairs of state or the systems of governance of his time, nor even on his role as a local grandee among the Limerick and Irish gentry. His significance may, rather, reside in the very particular combination of religious and political views and positions which he firmly held, and which represent an ideological strand in Irish political life that was virtually obliterated in the polarized world of Nationalist-Unionist contestation in Ireland from the intrusion of Home Rule to the settlements of 1920-2.

Catholic, Liberal and Unionist, Irishman, Briton, adopted Frenchman and European, friend of Gladstone and Duffy, of Pope Pius IX and Newman, of Acton and Cardinal Paul Cullen, Monsell represents conjunctions of belief and loyalty which were to be eclipsed by the ideological fervour and the traumatic conflicts of the twentieth century. The fact that he was neither an O'Connell nor a Parnell should not mean that what he was, and the political disposition he represented, should be ignored; his political position on the spectrum of Irish politics in the Union era provides historians with a valuable, distinctly European vantage point from which to consider the full complexity of political life in Victorian Ireland, and from which to contemplate those other political possibilities which Monsell and his contemporaries entertained but which, in the event, were never realized.