

The Catholic Workers' College Dublin- a personal history

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Introduction

The Catholic Workers' College (CWC) was established in Dublin by the Irish Province of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1951. Its foundation marks one of a number of initiatives of the Irish Catholic Church in the period from the end of the Second World War into the 1960s to involve itself more directly with social issues and social action but it is also a significant educational innovation worthy of more attention than it has previously attracted¹. For the most part, the aim of this new missionary work was the promulgation of Church and papal teachings on the rights and duties of workers in the social teaching of the Catholic Church. For the Jesuits in particular, this was a novel engagement with a group in society that did not previously feature in the 'apostolic works' of the Order. Though probably not recognised at the time, it can be claimed that this new venture was to have significant consequences for the course of Irish industrial relations and for educational thinking in further and community education in Ireland.

This paper describes some of the circumstances, early decisions and life of the college based on the oral testimony of one of the authors who was part of the teaching team from the very beginning of the project. Liam (Bill) McKenna was in his ninety-second year when he related his story, vividly and passionately, in a number of unstructured interviews with the first named author over a period of three months from September to November 2012 at his residence in St. Francis Xavier's Gardiner Street, Dublin². His story of the establishment and early history of the college is unique and provides a number of interesting insights into the structure, curriculum, finances and personalities of this unusual institution. This witness-story will hopefully add to the understanding of what this unusual college set out to achieve and how it went about this, from the perspective of one who was there. However, before engaging with this very personal history, it is worth saying something about the contextual matrix of social, religious and intellectual forces at play at the time.

Three significant contextual elements are worth brief attention. The first is the development of Catholic social teaching in the early part of the twentieth century; secondly, the experience of the

¹ Of note here: Morrissey, T. (1998) From Catholic Workers' College to National College of Ireland. *Studies*, 87, (347), 291-296 and also unpublished papers by Brendan McPartlin, S.J., and Peter Murray, NUI Maynooth.

² Liam (Bill) McKenna sadly died in March 2013, during the later preparation of this paper.

Second World War and its aftermath in Europe on the Church and particularly on clerics and; thirdly, the internal politics in the Catholic Church and within the Jesuits in Ireland.

Catholic Social Teaching

With regard to Catholic social teaching, most Catholic theologians, and indeed those of other Christian denominations, claim that the Christian Church has had, from its very founding, an identifiable social teaching. However, at the end of the nineteenth century there emerged a more focussed engagement with social policy, and in particular social justice, as the Church assumed certain positions on the social problems caused by industrialisation, capitalism and socialism. This particular emphasis resulted from an emerging realisation in the Church hierarchy that economic and social relations in modern societies had become more important than family, civic and international relations³. The response of the Church to this new state of affairs began with the landmark encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII in 1891, which draws from the same sources as earlier Church social teaching of the Gospels, natural law and reason rather than economic or social analysis. It argues that human growth demands sound economic and social conditions, that these conditions are matters of moral judgment and decision making, and that the Church has a particular and legitimate public role in the custodianship of moral law. It was this fundamental argument together with the encyclicals that followed *Rerum Novarum*, such as *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931); *Mater et Magistra* (1961), *Pacem in Terris* (1963) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965) that provided the Jesuit Fathers in Ireland with the theological basis for this new work.

The situation in the Church after WWII

While the insistence by the Church on the moral dimension of economic and social relations forms the theological or philosophical basis for Church intervention into public social life, it is also worth reviewing the church-political context of the post-World War II years in which the Church sought to influence the construction of a new social order in Europe, following a time in which it engaged in widespread collusion with Fascist regimes. In addition to the relief-aid organised by the Church in the immediate aftermath of the War, its efforts on behalf of displaced persons and its continued calls for support for immigration, the results of its social teaching can also be seen in the foundation of a number of Christian social democratic parties in the new European democracies. There is considerable evidence that many of the founding principles of Christian democratic parties

³ J.-Y Calvez and J. Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice: The social teachings of the Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII*, trans. J. R. Kirwan, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), p. 5.

such as distributivism and subsidiarity have their origins in the teachings of *Rerum Novarum* and that many of the founding figures of European unity such as Robert Schumann, Adenauer and de Gasperi were influenced by this thinking. More visibly perhaps, the Church began to show an interest in workers' organisations and trades unions and a number of Catholic Workers' organisations in France, Belgium and Italy in particular become very active very quickly in the immediate post-War period.

The situation in Ireland in those same years, however, is quite different. The Irish Free State remained neutral during the War and did not suffer the horrific trauma that was visited on Europe. Apart from certain food shortages and a regime of food rationing that many or most people could negotiate through the closeness of most citizens to the land and rural farming, Ireland did not suffer during the War. Significantly for the post-war years, the Irish Church, in contrast to the Church in other European countries, did not have to deal with the consequences of collusion and collaboration with a murderous fascism that, for many, irreparably damaged the reputation and standing of the institution. As a result, the Irish Catholic Church occupied a comfortable, insulated if somewhat removed, space in which it could occupy itself with the details of a purist form of Catholicism based on an almost universal acceptance of the pre-eminent place of the Church in Irish life. The decision in the Irish Church to engage in some way with "workers" and their situation was therefore based more on the consideration of extending the Church's influence to the totality of social and political life

The Jesuits in Ireland and the "social apostolates": 1940s-50s

The final contextual piece of the picture concerns the position, activities and missionary interests of the Jesuits in Ireland prior to the founding of CWC and the relations of the Jesuits to the episcopal hierarchy. It is obviously not possible to do more than sketch some of the particular features of these elements but three aspects of the picture seem relevant. The first is that the Irish Jesuits did not possess a strong tradition of social engagement with the working classes in Ireland. There were some individuals such as Fr. Tom Finlay who worked with rural cooperatives; Fr. Joseph Canavan who worked with the unemployed of Dublin and Fr. Thomas Counihan who was involved with trades unions and youth work. However, prior to 1946 there was no structured institutional policy on these "social apostolates".

A second element of the picture was the impetus to take a more corporate position on social matters provided by a decree of the 29th General Congregation of the Jesuits which took place in

1946. This declared that each Province of the Society of Jesus should establish a “social centre” to promote the study of social problems and the promulgation of the Church’s social teaching. In the Irish Province, a three man committee comprising Frs. E. J. Coyne, J. Canavan and T. Counihan was set up to advise the then Provincial Fr. Tom Byrne. On their recommendation a “social centre” was to be established to which a “Workers’ College” was to be attached. This decision was made in 1948 but it took a further three years until the establishment of the College in Ranelagh.

This was due to the third aspect of the background sketch which was the establishment of extra-mural courses in Catholic social teaching and Catholic Apologetics set up by the President of University College Cork (UCC), Prof. Alfred O’Rahilly⁴. O’Rahilly was a controversial figure in Catholic circles but his extra-mural courses in Cork were very successful and soon grew to similar courses being given in many towns in Munster and the south of the country. O’Rahilly was interested in extending the reach of his courses beyond the province of Munster, but, needing to acknowledge the principle of regional autonomy, he began by encouraging the President of University College Dublin (UCD) to also institute similar courses. The President of UCD, Prof. Michael Tierney, under some pressure to introduce something of the kind of courses being offered by O’Rahilly, but also cognisant of the opposition among his own staff to the introduction of a religious element to the activities of the university, approached the Jesuit Provincial Fr. Tom Byrne and asked whether he had anyone that could take on this job. This led to Fr. Eddie Coyne establishing an extra-mural programme in UCD in November 1948 that, in part, satisfied the intentions of the Jesuits in this regard, at least for a time. The establishing of these courses in UCD goes most of the way to explaining the delay between the decision of 1948 and the final establishment of CWC in 1951.

With this background sketch, we can now turn to the personal story that forms the centre of this short study. Fr. Liam McKenna was born in 1920 in Listowel, Co. Kerry [as indeed was Alfred O’Rahilly above]. His family were merchants in the town and he was educated in the local national school before going on the Clongowes Wood College, the Jesuit boarding school in Co. Kildare. On leaving school, he joined the Jesuits in 1938. While still studying for the priesthood he began teaching in the newly founded Catholic Workers’ College but his interest in social matters and the possibilities for Church and religious groups to engage with the working classes date to before his involvement in the College.

Bill begins his story with the background to his interest in the field of social justice, providing insight into some of the prevailing characteristics of Irish society but also a privileged and rare view

⁴ K. O’Flaherty, ‘Prof. Alfred O’Rahilly: an appreciation’, *University Review*, 1:4, (1955), 13-20.

of the internal structures of Jesuit life. From an early stage in his Jesuit formation, he showed an interest in the 'social scene' in Ireland and he requested permission to study economics in 1941. This was refused even though he could claim that sometime earlier Fr. Eddie Kent had been given such permission.

The early reference to Fr. Eddie Kent is significant as he is one of the most important figures in the founding of the College. Although it was Fr. Eddie Coyne who was appointed to UCD to undertake the extra-mural courses alluded to above, he delegated much of the work to the younger Fr. Eddie Kent. In time, as emerges from Bill's story, Eddie Kent grew dissatisfied with the UCD courses and began giving supplementary lectures in a house in Ranelagh in Dublin thus marking the de facto beginnings of CWC. When the College was opened, Fr. Eddie Coyne was appointed its Director with Eddie Kent as his assistant. The tense relationship between the two men in those early years was to be a significant feature of the early College's life.

If Coyne was the College's first Director, it can be claimed that Kent was its first and defining intellectual leader. In some contrast to the more conservative Coyne, Kent had, as indicated, studied economics, had travelled and had come under some powerful influences as a result of his travels and reading. As Limond points out:

This young priest, Edmond Kent [1915-1999], was to be one of the founders of the CWC and it is in his person that at least four of the elements that informed or influenced the creation of the CWC converged. These were the traditions of the CSG/ECWC⁵, Plater and O'Hea, who had influenced the Laymen's League⁶; the Laymen's League, which had initiated the first labor college in the US; the subsequent labor colleges, such as Xavier, which were, in part, inspired by the Laymen's League and the tradition associated with Day, Maurin and the CWM⁷ which, while in some respects at variance with aspects of Catholic orthodoxy and somewhat anti-clerical in its outlook had, in some measure, also been instrumental in inspiring the creation of the various colleges⁸.

Bill McKenna did not get to do his degree in economics at the time but completed a first class honors degree in Classics instead. With some irony he remarks that while his superiors were not

⁵ The Catholic Social Guild (CSG) was founded by Fr. Charles Plater [1875-1951] and Henry Parkinson [1852-1924] in 1909. The abbreviation ECWC is used here to refer to the Catholic Workers' College in Oxford (English Catholic Workers' College, ECWC, to distinguish] which was founded by Fr. Leo O'Hea S.J. in 1922 just one year after the death of Charles Plater. The Catholic Workers' College [ECWC] was re-named Plater College in 1965 and closed among scandal and some acrimony in 2005. The change of name is an indication of the influence of Charles Plater on the founder Leo O'Hea

⁶ J. M. McShane, "'To Form an Elite Body of Laymen..." Terence J. Shealy, S.J., and the Laymen's League, 1911-1922', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 78:4 (1992), 557-580.

⁷ The Catholic Worker Movement (CWM) is an organisation of Catholic communities founded in 1933 in the USA by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin which works in the field of and campaigns for social justice.

⁸ D. Limond, 'The Catholic Workers' College' (Unpublished monograph, Trinity College Dublin, 2011).

convinced that studying economics would be any use, he found little use for his classics later except for reading scripture. Nevertheless, Bill continued to read economics in his spare time and his opportunity to get involved in social studies and in the College came when he was in the final stage of his preparation for priesthood, studying theology. During this time, his superior in Milltown Park in Dublin invited him to get involved in lecturing, though warned him that his theology professors were not to know about it, and he was not to be caught doing it.

Bill did not get caught and following ordination, his final year of theological study and then his final year of spirituality, he was appointed to the College where he taught for over 20 years.

Jesuit thinking and preparation for establishment-the McKenna story

On the background to the foundation of College, McKenna provides a personal 'micro-historical' account of its influences that mirror some of the description of the wider context above. During the war, the Jesuits continued to attract and educate a large number of men but could not send them on the missions due to travel restrictions. This meant that some occupation was needed for them and a review of activities revealed that, in Bill's words 'the Church...was in and out of every marriage bed, and the kids were in the schools' and something else had to be found.' A view to the work of the English Jesuits showed that they had started a Workers' College in Oxford [see Limond note above], but Bill remarks that this was not regarded as a model to be followed as the impression was that they 'brought workers into the College...gave them tutorials and sent them back out into the world with a phony Oxford accent'.

The view then moved to the work of Jesuits in Germany and France. In Germany, there were a number of outstanding Jesuit scholars who had worked on the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and who had a special influence on certain elements of the trade union movement because of their clear distance from communism, despite their deep knowledge of both it and the socialist movement. Bill notes that their work, however, 'sounded too Germanic, too *wissenschaftlich*, and we did not see us getting away with that.' Some activities in France, on the other hand, seemed more attractive as a model. Here, *Action Populaire*⁹ and a Catholics Union were popular among French Catholics and were marked by a more practical engagement with workers than was the case in Germany.

⁹ *L'Action Populaire* is an institute of the French Jesuits. It was founded in 1903 by Fr. Henri-Joseph Leroy S.J. and continues today under the name 'Centre de Recherche et d'Action Sociales' which it assumed in 1961. It is devoted to research and social action in the context of the Jesuit mission of "faith that knows justice"

However, the outstanding influence on the shape of the future college came from the United States. Fr. Eddie Kent spent the final year of his Jesuit formation in New York and there he encountered a Jesuit who was working full-time on the docks in New York and who ran a college for workers and trade union officials. This was Fr. John Corridan S. J. [1911-1984], the son of Irish immigrants to the US and the prototype for the popular ideal, at least in the Anglophone world, of the 'worker priest', though the term has a different meaning and different connotations elsewhere. Fr. Corrigan, shot to prominence, in the US and worldwide, following a series of articles about him and his efforts in the *New York Sun*, that began in November 1948. In 1954 a version of his story appeared on screen in the now famous film *On the Waterfront*, directed by Elia Kazan, scripted by Budd Schulberg, and starring Marlon Brando and Karl Malden.¹⁰

The Province consultation on the use of men in the post war period was just one of the considerations that led to the founding. According to Bill, the other 'leg' was the activity of Alfred O'Rahilly¹¹. in UCC who had begun extra-mural courses to teach the Catholic encyclicals on social questions that were held in towns all over Munster by graduates and staff. O'Rahilly challenged the President of UCD, Professor Michael Tierney, to institute a similar programme, noting that if Tierney did not do so, he would extend his activities from Munster to Leinster. Tierney, knowing that he did not have staff in UCD willing to teach Catholic encyclicals in extra-mural courses but wishing to keep O'Rahilly at a distance, approached the Jesuit Provincial who asked Fr. Eddie Coyne to take on the task. Coyne then devised a course based on the encyclicals but quickly enlisted the services of Fr. Eddie Kent, who, according to Bill, did most of the work. This solution was not without a problem in UCD as some staff there suspected that this initiative could be used as a way of getting Jesuits onto the staff of UCD without going through normal appointment procedures.

So with some difficulties with university staff, the Jesuits Coyne and Kent began the extramural courses in UCD on the encyclicals. The courses lasted two years on two and then three evenings a week with two lectures each evening. This proved too onerous for many

¹⁰Based in the Xavier 'labor' school, Corridan proved himself a brilliant propagandist and, directly or indirectly, exploited opportunities afforded to him first by the press and cinema, in his twin campaigns against unjust employment practices in the New York docks and the infiltration of dockers' unions by gangsters. The latter, so Corridan claimed, were effectively working in cahoots with dockside employers, and contrived to keep dock workers in a state verging on serfdom so that only those who would pay bribes and accept the conditions given without complaint were allowed to work. *On the Waterfront* did not, as Corridan apparently hoped it would, sway New York and New Jersey dock workers, known as longshoremen, when they came to vote on whether or not to replace their corrupt, mobster-dominated union with membership of one backed by the American Federation of Labor [AFL].

¹¹ Prof. Alfred O'Rahilly, one of the most influential figures in the history of the College, was President of UCC between 1943 and 1954. He was a former Jesuit scholastic, mathematical physicist, university administrator and in later life was ordained priest following the death of his wife. His views on Catholicism were controversial but influential among conservative groups.

participants and very quickly numbers began to drop off. The university refused to give the students extensions in order to complete the courses and this brought about the physical establishment of the College. Kent started giving extra classes and inviting students to meet socially at a small house that had been recently acquired by the Jesuits close to the location of their college of theology in Milltown. Bill's story of the acquisition reveals that the Rector of Milltown had recently received an insurance payout as a consequence of a fire and Fr. Coyne approached him to use this money to buy a property to house the College. The agreement was that it was to cost no more than £4,000, but Bill recounts that Eddie Kent came to his room just before the auction and asked him to pray as never before. In the end, the Rector of Milltown paid £4,500 for the house and the College had found a home.

The activities undertaken by Kent and McKenna at the house quickly led to disagreement with Coyne and difficulties with the people at UCD. The disagreement between Kent and Coyne became so serious that they had a "falling out" and the Jesuit provincial had to intervene. He could find no compromise between them and he made the decision in early 1952 to close the infant college. The story of how it, nevertheless, took in a cohort of new students in the September of 1952 is one of delicious Jesuitical manoeuvring¹². However, we should return to the educational and pedagogical aspects of the early college.

The attempts to teach the encyclicals in the manner designed for the extra-mural courses were not a success. The students in UCD were not finishing their courses and were dropping out. Bill cites two reasons for this. First, the students found that when they stood up at union meetings to speak and display their knowledge, they were often met with the reaction 'Oh Jesus, more bloody encyclicals [sic], or more f...ing encyclicals'. Secondly, they found writing assignments particularly challenging, with some of the students displaying literacy difficulties.

Two interesting themes arise in this report. The first is not that the young trade unionists were not able to write, and in many cases were not particularly good readers. This situation might have been met by the Jesuits, as it has been done in many a "critical pedagogical" setting around the world, by a programme of literacy and numeracy. The remarkable point is the way in which the Jesuits responded. They did not embark on the literacy schemes immediately; they concentrated rather on taking the students where they were and working with the ability they all had to talk and debate. So they taught them to

¹² Briefly, following the Provincial's decision, Kent and McKenna went to the Rector of Milltown, Fr. O'Grady asking advice. He made it clear that under obedience they had to follow the Provincial's orders, but asked whether the Provincial had stipulated a date for closure. He had not. Only months later, O'Grady himself became Provincial and reversed the decision of his predecessor!

speak formally and how to speak in public and construct a verbal argument. They did this against a background of complete respect for the position and the learning styles of their students but also a large dose of real understanding of the positions of the students. As adult learners they were encouraged to develop ways of learning that were not about filling gaps left by their childhood education but about learning from their new position. Bill remembers some of his exhortations: “now... you are picking up where you are... not where you were. You don’t have to fill the gap. . Be yourself and learn from there.”

The second early realisation of the educational positions of the students was the discovery that the mixed-sex or co-ed classes, as planned, were not working. Following the admission of women to the College, it took only some short months to comprehend that the men were not attending as well as the women. Of course the Jesuits were aware that some of the men who were being subsidised to attend courses were socializing during the evenings rather than attending lectures, but there was more to the story. McKenna relates that a discussion with some of the women as well as the men resulted in the discovery that some of the men were not attending because the women had better literacy skills and were embarrassing the men in the sessions! This then led to the Jesuits deciding that they would run separate classes for each; a move that was commented in external circles in terms of the Church separating the sexes on moral religious grounds, but whose origins, according to McKenna, lay in purely educational and pedagogical considerations.

Relationship of the early College to Trade Unions and Employers

The College’s relationship with the trades unions was a tense one to begin with ‘they were as suspicious as hell’, and Bill remembers being greeted with the question: “Oh where the f... were you when we needed you in 1913?” referring particularly to the divisive and damaging effect of the preaching of a well-known Jesuit of the time¹³. The unions were quite obviously suspicious of Jesuit infiltration of their ranks and already had their own college, The People’s College, founded by the Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC) in 1948 under the

¹³ Refers to Fr. Robert Kane S.J. who gave an infamous series of Lenten lectures on the theme of socialism, in Gardiner St. church in Dublin in 1910. The lectures were published a short time later in June of the same year by the Catholic Truth Society. Their publication moved James Connolly, the trade unionist, and one of the leaders of the Easter Rising in 1916, to pen a response which he published, also in 1910, under the title ‘Labour, Nationality and Religion’.

leadership of Ruadhri Roberts¹⁴. Persistence, and the argument that the Jesuits had considerable expertise in the field of education and teaching that trade unionists did not possess, led to a compromise that allowed both to undertake their own educational projects. In short, the College was to confine itself to the education of shop stewards and the unions got the education of their branch secretaries. In the course of the development of the College these boundaries disappeared to such an extent that by the 1970s, the then College of Industrial Relations numbered seven alumni among the top nine secretaries general of the biggest trades unions in Ireland.

The experience with Guinness and the College's shift to industrial relations

One brief vignette tells the story of an early move by the College into the field of industrial relations that, though it failed, was a precursor of the College's future and its considerable influence in Irish industrial relations and beyond. Bill tells of a new CEO of Guinness from London who learned that some of his men were attending the College. On inquiring into the matter he found that the men's supervisors had no idea what was going on in these courses. He therefore undertook not only to find out but to ensure that his supervisors also were allowed to attend and he himself went up to the College to enrol them. As Bill relates: 'So with that we had very sheep-faced managers. I used have to stand at the door and make them very welcome and so on. But when they got to know us they'd come up and say – "God, that's very important, we did not know what we were walking ourselves into.'" The extension of the programmes to supervisors and managers quickly yielded not only a cohort of very able men, but also led to the establishment of a dedicated institute, the Institute of Supervisors which was short-lived in its own right, due, according to Bill, to mismanagement, and was ultimately absorbed into the Irish Management Institute.

The College, later trades unions officials and the Irish social partnership model

It has already been alluded to that the College established itself quickly with the trades unions and then later and more generally in the field of industrial relations. Some of the well-known names in trade union and industrial relations circles who were alumni of the College include Paddy Cardiff, who was later General Secretary of the Workers Union of Ireland from 1977-1982; Jimmy Dunne,

¹⁴ For a history of the first forty years of the People's College, see R. Roberts and R. Dardis Clarke, *The Story of the People's College* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1986).

General Secretary of the Marine, Port and General Workers Union, 1957-1969, later President of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions and Senator; Michael Gannon; Christy Kirwan, former Vice President of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union [1981-1990] and later Senator, and Bill Attley, General Secretary of the Workers' Union of Ireland [1982-1990], General Secretary of the SIPTU union [Social, Industrial and Professional Trade Union] [1990-1997]. Although the titles and positions are significant, the real impact of these men, and indirectly perhaps of the College, lies in their influence on the construction of the "social partnership model" of government and industrial relations that became a feature of Irish economic life for a number of decades and which is associated with a long period of peace in industrial relations and even economic growth.

The early successes and a later shift of Jesuit interest

We have indicated some of the achievements and educational experiences of the early College but, in conclusion, it is worth outlining briefly some of the key features of Jesuit involvement in the later life of the College though without treating of its transformation, in 1998, into what is now the National College of Ireland which would demand its own story. By 1966, the course programmes had expanded and altered in nature so that the College had changed its identity and therefore changed its name. It became the College of Industrial Relations and then in 1983, the National College of Industrial Relations. However, under Jesuit patronage and despite its successes, it suffered from severe lack of support in two areas: finance and manpower. The financial aspect is relatively easily explained by Bill; this was a private college run by the Jesuits with Jesuit funding: 'Now,... the financial thing:.. It was always disastrous.' Not only was it disastrous in its own right, but even externally. 'We told more lies than you could believe in the presentation to Rome.' The funding came from donations and legacies and the College simply did not feature as a priority either for those considering a legacy to the Society nor, it would seem, to those with the purse strings within the Jesuits. 'And we appealed for money from a fund for operations. They said: "sorry we have given it all to Gonzaga¹⁵". At one point, as Bill recalls, the College was redeemed by the brother of a Jesuit in Rome who spent his holidays in the College: 'he had a brother who had a shoe shop down in Limerick. He was just telling him the problems you know. And he [the brother] said: "I got about £35,000 in the bank which I don't need. I can lend it to you for three years." He said,... "maybe longer" but he said, "flat three years no rate of interest, but when I whistle you must give it back no matter what it costs you, even if you have to sell the place up." So we were delighted. We gave it to the bank manager who smiled for the first time in ten years!'

¹⁵ Gonzaga College is a voluntary second-level school for boys run by the Jesuits in Dublin.

The more difficult feature of the lack of Jesuit support lies in the area of the deployment of Jesuits and what might be termed the ideological battle-lines that were drawn at the beginning of the 1970s. These lines are described by Bill as the tense relationship between what he calls “consumption justice” and “production justice”

‘Consumption justice’, according to Bill, can be understood as the attempt to counteract the inequalities that arise in the distribution of goods in a society at the point at which the goods are used or consumed, rather than produced. In this perspective, a theory of justice with regard to consumption should provide principles and standards against which such distribution can be judged. The second of Rawls’ original principles in his theory of distributive justice¹⁶ that ‘inequalities are arbitrary unless it is reasonable to expect that they will work out for everyone’s advantage for all’ is one that is invoked by adherents of ‘consumption justice’ to argue that certain inequalities are just, if they are aimed at redressing injustices in goods or wealth distribution. Working within this framework can often mean engaging with community and advocacy groups in order to empower them to seek equality, even by means of ‘positive discrimination’, and it is this type of work that attracted the efforts of a number of younger Jesuits in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the most conspicuous signs of the engagement with consumption justice on the part of the Jesuits was their involvement in the parish and area of Ballymun in North Dublin. The establishment of a Jesuit community a social housing tower block in 1980 was a significant event for the Jesuits and acted as a magnet for some of the most talented young Jesuits of that era. The first cohort was comprised of Kevin O’Rourke, who became chaplain in the parish of Ballymun, Michael Sweetman, who was already known throughout Dublin for his work with the poor of Summerhill, and John Callanan. These were followed shortly by John Sweeney and Frank Sammon who had set up the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice [which remains active from its base in Sherrard St in Dublin, around the corner from St. Francis Xavier’s church, the headquarters of the Jesuits in Ireland in former times] and Peter McVerry, whose work with homeless young people has made him a national figure in Ireland. This early group was joined by successive generations of Jesuit priests and scholastics who lived in the area for longer or shorter periods and this initiative became for many the focus of the Irish Jesuit province’s promotion of faith and justice, or a ‘faith that does justice’.

This concentration of talent and resources in the engagement with social justice understood in this way meant an intellectual and material shift away from an involvement with justice at the point of production of goods and wealth in factories and business. This more traditional view that justice issues should be tackled in the materiality of the world of work rather than in the more

¹⁶ J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

postmodernist world of discourse, 'voice' and 'empowerment', would seem to go some way to explain the differences in approach between the CIR, and earlier the CWC, and the Ballymun project.

This shift away from some of the original central concerns of the College, however, can be seen not only as a function of a changing understanding of the Jesuit commitment to social justice and faith. It reflects also a more general socio-cultural rejection of 'Marxist-style' concerns about modes of production and an increasing concern in western societies about identity, recognition and other non-material forms of capital. Whatever the reasons, the changes that the original Catholic Workers' College underwent in the forty years until it had been transformed into the National College of Ireland were nature-altering and enduring. The story told here is a personal one of contexts, contingencies, wit and struggle in the early years of the Catholic Workers' College by one who was there. It makes no claim to be comprehensive [as evident, for instance, in the lack of discussion of the relationship between the College and the Archbishop of Dublin at the time, Dr. John-Charles McQuaid] and it does not treat the significant contributions made by a number of other Jesuits to the College, particularly, Frs. Tim Hamilton, and later, John Brady and Bill Toner, but does claim to throw a singular light on a most interesting experiment in further and adult education in Ireland.

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