

The Catholic Church in Newfoundland: The Pre-Emancipation Years

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The foundation of the Catholic Church in Newfoundland dates back, officially, to the year 1784 when the Rev. James O Donel was sent out as Prefect Apostolic. He was the first fully accredited priest in the Island and to him was given the responsibility of organizing the Church there, directly under the oversight of Rome.

Father O Donel was not the first priest to visit Newfoundland. The Portuguese, the English and the French had all brought priests with them on their voyages of exploration. When George Calvert, Lord Baltimore, established his English colony at Ferryland in the 1620's, religious freedom was permitted¹ but this ceased with the failure of the colony. Likewise, when the French established themselves at Placentia, after the middle of the seventeenth century, they were permitted to enjoy the free exercise of their religion "according to the usage of the Church of Rome and as far as the laws of Great Britain allowed."² The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 dealt a death blow to French power and prestige in the New World and thus the efforts of the French to establish the Catholic Church on a firm basis failed. It was left to the emigrants from Ireland and the priests who followed them into exile to make the real foundation of the Catholic Church in Newfoundland.

The Early Irish Catholics

The Irish began to come to Newfoundland in the seventeenth century, on board English ships bound for the fishing grounds. Those ships called in at Irish ports, mainly Waterford and Cork, to pick up supplies and provisions

¹ C.O. 195/1, "A Grant of the Province of Avalon to Sir George Calvert and his Heires," April 2, 1623 (In PANL, Provincial Archives of Newfoundland. All C.O., Colonial Office, and GN, Government of Newfoundland, Documents, Governors' Papers, B.I.S. and S. P.G. Papers are in PANL).

² *Thomas Graves Papers*, 1761-1764, Ms 9365, Copy of the 14th Article of the Treaty of Utrecht.

for the fishing season and there they were joined by Irishmen, some to take part in the fisheries, others to work as servants.³

At that time colonization of the Island was forbidden and not until the nineteenth century was full freedom to settle in Newfoundland granted. As early as 1633 an order of the Star Chamber, largely the result of pressure from the powerful English merchants, established the rule of the fishing admirals whereby the captain of the first ship to enter a harbour became the virtual governor of that harbour for the fishing season. These regulations were reconfirmed by Charles II in 1660 and an injunction was added that “all owners of ships trading to Newfoundland are forbidden to carry any persons not of ship’s company or such as are to plant or settle there, and that speedy punishment may be inflicted on offenders.”⁴ By an order of the King, issued in 1670, masters of ships were “to bring back or cause to be brought back into England all such seamen, fishermen or other persons they shall carry out (mortality and the danger of the sea excepted).”⁵ Further confirmation of those regulations came from William III in 1698, in “An Act to Encourage the Trade of Newfoundland.”⁶ Here provision was made for a vice-admiral, the master of the second ship to enter a harbour, and a rear-admiral, the master of the third ship. The fishing admirals were, in the main, rough, ignorant, illiterate skippers who tyrannized a floating population and dispensed justice with barbarity and unscrupulousness and often neglected their duty.⁷ The jurisdiction of fishing admirals lasted till 1793 when it was abolished by the establishment of regular courts of judicature. The Act of 1698 had some positive aspects: it made no mention of penalties and it gave title to all persons who had built houses, stages, or other improvements, since 1685, that did not belong to fishing ships, to “peaceably and quietly enjoy the same to his or her own use without any disturbance of or from any person or persons whatsoever.”⁸

Regulations governing the fisheries and trade of Newfoundland were meant to apply to all those who came to Newfoundland, English and Irish alike, but from the beginning Irish Catholics became special objects of persecution. In 1720 the Lord Commissioners for Trade and Plantations instructed the commanders-in-chief of the Newfoundland convoy not “to encourage Irish Papists who are disaffected to our present happy establish-

³ C. O. 194/ 1, Dec. 4, 1692, p. 32.

⁴ C.O. 195/1, Jan. 24, 1633, p. 29; Jan. 26, 1660, p. 36.

⁵ C.O. 195/2, March 10, 1670, p. 59.

⁶ John Reeves, *History of the Government of Newfoundland*, (London: J. Sewell, 1793), Appendix (Copy of full text of the Act, pp. i-xv).

⁷ C. O. 194/34, Dec. 9, 1779, p. 91.

⁸ Reeves, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

ment” and to find out “what number of such may now be among the French.”⁹

To the first governor, Captain Henry Osborne, appointed in 1729, was given the instruction “to permit a liberty of conscience to all persons (except Papists) so they be contented with a quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the same not giving offence or scandal to the Government.”¹⁰ This instruction was repeated *verbatim* to subsequent governors, all naval men, who followed one another in rapid succession.¹¹ Governors seemed to signalize their tenure of office by issuing bigoted enactments and proclamations against the Irish Catholics. Some governors were less callous than others. In 1732 Governor Falkinham wrote back to England that while he found in general the inhabitants of Newfoundland frequented the Church of England “there are great numbers of Irish servants, Roman Catholics, who are not allowed or permitted to exercise their religion.”¹²

A report consisting of answers to a series of questions was sent home by the governors annually. In 1738 Governor Vanbrugh, in answering the several articles contained in His Majesty’s instructions, reported that the most serious material complaint of the traders and inhabitants was against the great numbers of Irish Catholics annually imported, and since a much greater number of these remained during the winter than Protestants the latter feared the ill consequences that could attend them in case of war. He reported further that “drunkenness is a common vice especially among the Irish servants of which there are great numbers and occasion many disorders and thefts committed.”¹³

The following year Captain Medley reported in similar vein.¹⁴ Governor Byng also deplored the great number of Papists in the Island “especially at Ferryland, almost all.” “The English inhabitants,” he said, “employ themselves and servants in sawing boards, building boats, providing timber and other necessities for the new fishing season, but the Irish for the most part, except cutting fuel, spend the greatest part of their time in excess and debauchery.”¹⁵ Governor Rodney, in 1749, complained of the great number of Irish Papists who remained in the Island during the winter and he

⁹ C.O. 195/7, March 9, 1720, p. 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, May 14, 1729, p. 199.

¹¹ C.O. 194/24, To Byng, Feb. 22, 1742, p. 152; C.O. 195/8, To Drake, April 6, 1760, p. 226.

¹² *Ibid.*, July 20, 1732, p. 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1738, pp. 85-93

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, March 30, 1740, p. 110. He repeated the complaint for the year 1740, see *ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1740, p. 124.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 22, 1742, pp. 153-158.

described them as “most notoriously disaffected to the Government, all of them refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance when tender’d to them” adding that “the majority of inhabitants to the southward of St. John’s are Papists, but to the northward very few.” Governor Drake’s report in 1750 was no different.¹⁶

By mid-eighteenth century the Irish population had grown considerably. Attempts to keep their number in check were of little avail. Even in 1717 it was reported that “masters of ships are very negligent in bringing their men home, whereby they have charge of their passages and those men are enticed and carried to New England.”¹⁷ Later, the Justice of the Peace at Ferryland was ordered by the Governor “to keep a watchful eye over the Irish Papists and that you disarm them agreeable to the Act of Parliament and to send as many out of the country as you possibly can and this late season will permit.”¹⁸

In the early 1750’s the Irish were caught in a cross-fire between the planters and the Government and the West Country merchants. The planters appealed to the Government for some form of civil authority to protect them against the cruelties of the fishing admirals. The merchants, from Poole, Dartmouth, Teignemouth and Exeter, all trading in Newfoundland, strongly opposed any form of civil government and sent memorials to that effect to the Lord Commissioners for Trade and Plantations. From Poole came the following observation:

As to the number of Papists and other disaffected persons increasing in Newfoundland your memorialists beg leave to observe that they are in general His Majesty’s natural born subjects that go from Ireland, that they think their increase to be no more than in proportion to the increase of Protestants and that their behaviour has given no cause to apprehend any danger to the well-affected to His Majesty’s government residing here.¹⁹

Merchants from Dartmouth, Teignemouth and Exeter all concurred in this observation. They had one thing in common – they were all opposed to the appointment of a resident governor and they maintained that existing laws pertaining to the fishing admirals were adequate for the encouragement of trade.

Governor Bonfoyle, in 1754, spoke of the many thefts and disorders committed by the Irish who remained in the country during the winter.

¹⁶ C. O. 194/12, Oct. 2, 1749, p. 119; Dec. 24, 1750, p. 186.

¹⁷ C.O. 195/6, May 9, 1717, p. 355.

¹⁸ C.O. 194/24, Oct. 2, 1743, p. 184

¹⁹ C.O. 194/13, Nov. 8, 1752, p. 34.

Having nothing on which to subsist they stole from the traders and inhabitants.²⁰ In the fall, when Bonfoyle returned to England, as was the wont of all governors, the principal magistrate of St. John's, Michael Gill, kept him informed of the activities of the Irish, "enemies of our religion and liberty."²¹

The administration of the next governor, Richard Dorrill, 1755-1756, was especially characterized by intolerant bigotry and persecution of the Catholics. A probable reason for the severity of his actions was given some years later:

War with France having broken out at this time, Government suspected that the Irish Catholics could not with safety be trusted and that they would be inclined to join the enemy in case the Island should be invaded which was probably the cause of the severity exercised towards them by the Government.²²

In 1755 Dorrill wrote to George Garland, Justice of the Peace at Harbour Grace, that

Whereas I am informed that a Roman priest is at this time at Harbour Grace and that he publicly reads Mass which is contrary to law and against the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King. You are therefore required and directed on the receipt of this to cause the said priest to be taken into custody and sent round to this place (St. John's); in this you are not to fail as will answer the contrary at your perille.

Garland was quick to answer, not, it may be assumed, in defence of the priest, but in self-defence, that the priest had said Mass in a place other than Harbour Grace "for if he had read it in the Harbour I would have secured him; after he was informed that I had intelligence of him he immediately left the place. I was yesterday informed he was gone to Harbour Main."²³

The matter, however, was not allowed to drop, for in September of the same year Dorrill's surrogate, Thomas Burnett, ordered the Justice of the Peace at Harbour Grace to burn down a storehouse where Mass had been said. The owner was not present at the time but he had failed to lock the door of his storehouse to keep out the men and maid servants. He was required to pay a fine of ten pounds, the money to be used to defray the expense incurred by the Governor in sending his deputy to the northern circuit of the Island.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Jan. 6, 1754, p. 120.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 22, 1754, p. 186.

²² P 1/5, *Duckworth Papers*, M3717, Nov. 20, 1811, p. 2296.

²³ GN 2/1/2, Aug. 15, 1755, p. 202.

The fishrooms of two other storeowners were demolished at Harbour Main because they permitted a priest to read Mass there. They were fined and ordered to sell all their possessions and leave the country along with their servants. The servants were also fined, the money to be used to pay their masters for their losses. The house of another man was burned down because Mass was said in his house and he and his wife had been married by a priest. He and his servants were fined subject to the same condition imposed on previous offenders. Similar incidents took place at Carbonear and Musketa Cove.

The hoisting of the Irish colours did not go unpunished. Burnett, the notorious surrogate of the notorious Governor Dorrill, ordered the Justices of the Peace at Harbour Grace to issue a fine to captains of three ships who had raised the Irish flag in defiance of the “English and Jersey men” of the Harbour. The captains were accused of planning to stir up sedition and mutiny among Catholics.

Dorrill repeated the threats of his predecessors to punish masters of ships who failed to bring back with them the Irish whom they brought out with them for the fishing season

a great part of which have but small wages so that after paying their passages to this place and the charges of clothing, etc., during the fishing season their whole wages are spent and they have not wherewith either to pay their passages home or to purchase provisions for the winter by which means they not only become chargeable to this place but many robberys and felonys are committed by them to the great loss and terror of His Majesty's subjects on the Island.²⁴

With a view to curbing drunkenness and the crimes and disorders associated with it Dorrill directed the Justices of the Peace in St. John's to see to it that no Catholic be allowed to sell spirituous liquors.²⁵ Governor Thomas Graves, described by Prowse²⁶ as being entirely free from the bigotry of the age, nevertheless enjoined the Justice of the Peace to continue in due force the tax levied on Catholic traders by his predecessor, Governor Webb, and to make return of what money had been collected on that account.²⁷ Graves was also requested by the King's instructions to find out the number of Catholics in Newfoundland “and what proportion they have to

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1755, pp. 236-263.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1755, p. 279.

²⁶ D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoods, 1896), p. 314.

²⁷ GN 2/1/3, Oct. 29, 1762, p. 150.

Protestants,” as well as to find out “whether the French do not encourage the Irish Papists who are disaffected to our present happy establishment and what number of such may now be among the French.”²⁸

Governor Hugh Palliser, who came to Newfoundland in 1764, distinguished himself by his barbarous treatment of Irish Catholics. Though he had a special predilection for persecuting the Irish, no one escaped his brutality. Prowse says, “No ruler since the days of Charles II hated the country he was set over more bitterly than Sir Hugh Palliser.”²⁹

In reporting on the men doing garrison duty in St. John’s, Palliser described the auxiliary people as totally unfit for the service, “being all Irish Roman Catholics and not proper to be trusted even so far as to be learnt their duty.” He ordered the destruction of the “butts” of the Irish Catholics in St. John’s. He accused the Catholics of having “priests secreted among them to the great disturbance of the peace and good government of the country in the winter season,”³⁰ He complained to the King that his regulations were not being carried out, that

the masters of ships which carried out passengers from this kingdom and from Ireland either not having the power to oblige them to return or perhaps not finding it their interest to bring them back when the fishing season was over the practice of their remaining there began and has continued and gradually increased to the extent at which it has at the present arrived... The greatest part of them are Roman Catholics; that they are under no control of any regular civil government, except what arises from the ineffectual establishment of justices of the peace who oftener use their own private interest rather than the public welfare.³¹

For the purpose of “better preserving the peace, preventing robberies, tumultuous assemblies, and other disorders of the wicked and idle people remaining in the country during the winter” he proclaimed:

That no Papist servant man or woman shall remain at any place where they did not fish during the summer preceding.

That not more than two Papist men shall dwell in any house during the winter, except such as have Protestant masters.

That no Papist shall keep a Publick House or vend liquor by retail.

²⁸ *Thomas Graves Papers*, No. 62, May 3, 1764.

²⁹ Prowse, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

³⁰ C.O. 194/16, Sept. 1, 1764, p. 6.

³¹ C.O. 195/9, April 29, 1765, pp. 409-411.

That no person keep dyeters during the winter.

That all idle, disorderly, useless men and women be punished according to law and sent out of the county.³²

A great many poor women found their way to Newfoundland. Palliser ordered ships' masters not to land "any women without first giving security for their good behaviour so as not to become chargeable to the inhabitants."³³

He restricted the number of public houses to eight or ten "and no more shall be licenced for the entertainment of strangers, etc., and none to be kept by Roman Catholics or that are reputed so."³⁴

The harsh regulations of Palliser were applied by subsequent governors³⁵ and his influence continued to be felt long after his term as governor was over and no place was it more noticeable than in Palliser's Act which in 1775 decreed that

the person so hiring or employing seamen or fishermen shall be at liberty to reserve, retain or deduct and he is hereby authorized, required and directed to reserve, retain and deduct out of the wages of every person so hired or employed a sum of money not exceeding forty shillings for each man, which money such hirer or employer shall pay or cause to be paid to the master or other ship who shall undertake to carry such seamen or fishermen to the country.³⁶

By 1779 a break was on the way for the Irish Catholics. With the coming of Governor Richard Edwards there was a slackening of persecution. His arrival coincided with an instruction from King George which read: "It being our intention that all persons inhabiting our Islands (Newfoundland and Madelaine) should have full liberty of conscience and the free exercise of all such modes of religious worship as are not prohibited by law."³⁷ For the first time there was omitted from the King's instructions the phrase "except Papists."

³² GN 2/1/3, Oct. 31, 1764, pp. 272-273 (Dyeters, men who remained in the Island during the winter, living upon their summer wages without engaging as winter servants.)

³³ *Ibid.*, July 2, 1764, p. 232.

³⁴ GN 2/1/4, Aug. 31, 1767, p. 84.

³⁵ GN 2/1/5, July 13, 1772, p. 102; GN 2/1/6, Oct. 16, 1775, p. 10 1.

³⁶ C.O. 194/37, Act of Parliament, 15 Geo., Cap. 31, 1775, p. 227.

³⁷ C. O. 195/ 10, May 6, 1779, p. 389.

This concession prepared the way for Catholics to practise their religion openly. There was, however, a total lack of priests among the Irish population. Dearth of clergymen was of concern to members of the Established Church as well. Colonel J. Gorham, in charge of the garrison at Placentia made a request to the Lord Bishop of London to this effect:

There is between five or six hundred transient people employed in the fishery (as are a number of the inhabitants) mostly of the Roman Catholic persuasion who I am informed would nevertheless attend was there a clergyman established among them and willingly join with the other inhabitants in paying their proportion for the support of a clergyman.³⁸

The time seemed ripe for Catholics to act but it would be naive to assume that achieving religious freedom in practice was to be an easy task. Impediments abounded. At the time Newfoundland was not much more than a fishing station and a nursery for the British navy. The penal laws in force in Ireland were applied with harshness in the Colony. There were no churches, no roads, no postal communications, no opportunities for social or cultural development, no fair system of justice. Ownership of land was forbidden although there was tacit approval for use of land. The civil government was in a primitive state – the governor, like the migrant fishermen, came to Newfoundland in the spring and went home in the autumn.

The severity with which the Irish had been treated had left its mark on them in a variety of ways. Large numbers of them were “disaffected,” disloyal, disorderly, enured to drunkenness, debauchery, vices and felonies of all kinds, but as one writer says, they “were hunted down like wild beasts... What else could one expect them to be?”³⁹ In spite of adverse conditions and repressive regulations there were many others who, either by evading the restrictions or putting up with them, had established themselves in respectable businesses and trades; even a few teachers were found among them.⁴⁰

Such were the political, social and religious conditions in Newfoundland when in January of 1784 a group of Catholics represented to James Talbot, Bishop of Birtha and Vicar Apostolic in the London District⁴¹ that the

³⁸ *Fulham Mss*, Newfoundland, No. 47, British Manuscripts, Nov. 12, 1771, in PANL.

³⁹ Prowse, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

⁴⁰ GN 2/39/a, Census, 1794-1795, 1796-1797.

⁴¹ After the treaty of Utrecht in 1713, jurisdiction over Newfoundland passed to the Vicar Apostolic of London and remained there until the appointment of Father O Donel in 1784. See M.F. Howley, *Ecclesiastical History of Newfoundland*, Belleville, Ont.: Mika Publishers, 1979 (originally published in

Government of Newfoundland had granted permission to build a chapel in St. John's.⁴² A request for a priest followed.⁴³ Thus it was that the first official priest came to Newfoundland.

Bishop James O Donel, 1784-1806

The Rev. James O Donel, a member of the Franciscan Order, as were the four Bishops who followed him, was that priest. He was appointed Prefect Apostolic by Rome on May 30, 1784 and arrived in St. John's on July 4, 1784.

Shortly after his arrival liberty of conscience and liberty of religion were proclaimed in Newfoundland. In October of 1784 Governor Campbell directed the respective magistrates of the Island

to allow all persons inhabiting this Island to have full liberty of conscience and the full exercise of all such modes of religious worship as are not prohibited by law, provided they be contented with a quiet and peaceful enjoyment of the same, not giving offence or scandal to Government.⁴⁴

At the time of this indulgence the Catholics were still subjected to the numerous restrictions imposed by the "prohibited by law" clause of the proclamation and it was to take years of struggle before they could enjoy a measure of real freedom.

There were marriage restrictions. Instructions from the Court of St. James required that a "Table of Marriages as established by the canons of the Church of England be hung in every orthodox church or chapel and duly observed."⁴⁵ Another instruction stated "It is... our will and pleasure to reserve to you (governor) and to all others by whom the same may hitherto have been exercised or to whom it may lawfully belong, the granting of

1888).

⁴² Hans Rollman, "Memorable Dates for Roman Catholicism in Newfoundland, 1783/1784" from the Archives of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, Rome. Notes in Archdiocesan Archives. Names of Catholic laymen: James Keating, Patrick Gaul, John Commins, Lewis Maddock.

⁴³ Cyril Byrne, ed., *Gentlemen Bishops and Faction Fighters*, (St. John's: Jespersion Press, 1984), p. 38.

⁴⁴ GN 2/ 1 /11, Oct. 28, 1784, p. 138.

⁴⁵ C.O. 194/23, June 1, 1786, p. 352.

licenses for marriage.”⁴⁶ Further, every Catholic was obliged previous to marriage to have the banns published in the Protestant parish church.⁴⁷

There were restrictions on the holding of public offices – Catholics were excluded from public offices. An Act made in the 25th year of the reign of King Charles II entitled “An Act Preventing Dangers Which Happen from Popish Recusants” was spelled out to each governor who came to the Island as well as regulations regarding the oaths Catholics had to take.⁴⁸ The Justices of the Peace were ordered by the governor to take care that all Popish recusants and other persons dissenting from the Church of England “do take such oath or oaths as are usually taken in Great Britain by persons executing such offices and trusts.”⁴⁹

There were restrictions on burying the dead. The Catholics had no distinct burying ground of their own. They were obliged to bury their dead in the burying ground of the Established Church and a clergyman of that Church was to perform the ceremony according to the rites and ceremonies of the Protestant Church. Fees were paid for the burying ground as well as for the services of the clergyman.⁵⁰ Giving their dead a proper burial always seemed to be an important and an emotional issue with the Irish. Back in 1755 Burnett, surrogate in Harbour Grace to Governor Dorrill, complained that it was sometimes a difficult matter for the Protestant clergy to bury the Catholic dead and “lawmen have been obliged to make use of all force they could assemble to prevent their insolence while they were burying the dead.”⁵¹

Some clergy of the Established Church and the governors, generally, showed hostility towards the Catholic clergy and the expression of their fears became a recurring theme in their reports home to England. The year in which Father O Donel came to St. John’s, the Rev. Walter Price, a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, spoke of the arrival in St. John’s of three “Romish” priests from Ireland much to his disadvantage. One of these priests was Father O Donel, a second was to be missioned to Harbour Grace, while the third was a school teacher. He expressed fears that the Catholic presence in Newfoundland would lead to a reduction in members of the Church of England. He accused the priests of proselytizing and of disturbing and subverting the Established Church. He also mentioned that there were sundry “Popish” schools in St. John’s and

⁴⁶ GN 2/ I/ 11, Aug. 5, 1787, p. 281.

⁴⁷ C.O. 194/21, Feb. 22, 1793, p. 420.

⁴⁸ C.O. 195/15, April 26, 1782, p. 124.

⁴⁹ GN 2/1/12, Sept. 15, 1792, p. 153.

⁵⁰ Duckworth Papers, M3717, Oct. 26, 1811, p. 1565.

⁵¹ GN 2/1/2, Sept. 15, 1755, p. 252.

tracts and catechisms of that Church were very plentifully distributed among the people. He did, however, concede that Father O Donel appeared to be a “well disposed intelligent person.”⁵²

About the same time the Rev. James Balfour, SPG missionary at Harbour Grace, observed that “Since the late toleration for the Roman Catholics Popery is likely to be the only prevailing principle round this Island... while priests carry all before them with great pomp and parade.”⁵³

Dissenting clergymen had begun their missionary work in Newfoundland by 1784. They found themselves experiencing some of the same hostility which the Catholic clergy met. On one occasion, the Rev. Price circulated a rumour that a Congregational minister, Rev. John Jones, had preached against the Catholics, an accusation which was later disclaimed. The same Rev. Jones had an entry in his diary to the effect that “this year, 1784, the Romish priest came to the Harbour, got full tolerance to marry and exercise his religion in all respects, obtained leave to build a chapel and laid the foundation thereof.”⁵⁴

It is understandable why the governors would be so closely linked with the Established Church – they were required to take a whole series of Oaths, the Declaration against Transubstantiation, the Declaration against Popery, the Oath of Supremacy, the Oath of Allegiance and the Oath of Abjuration.⁵⁵

The year following Father O Donel’s arrival Lt. Governor Elford in a letter to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Sydney, described the effects of the coming of a Catholic priest thus:

Last summer an Irish Roman Catholic priest arrived here and they began building a chaple (*sic*) (with which the English merchants are much dissatisfied as they think it will in the end turn out very prejudicial) the consequence of which is, as soon as the fishery was over, away they came here in great numbers from the out harbours, never thought of going home, spent the money they got in the summer and was reduced to the greatest distress, for upon a list of them being taken it appears, there are about five Roman Catholics to one Protestant, the lower class of people being mainly Irish.⁵⁶

⁵² SPG, A Mss 167, No. 69, Oct. 25, 1784.

⁵³ *Fulham Papers*, Nov. 22, 1784.

⁵⁴ Extract from the Journal of Rev. John Jones sent to Archbishop Skinner, St. John’s, Newfoundland, April 17, 1975, by Rev. J.S.S. Armour, St. David’s Presbyterian Church, St. John’s, in Archdiocesan Archives.

⁵⁵ *Duckworth Papers*, M3716, pp. 942-946.

⁵⁶ C.O. 194/36, May 14, 1785, p. 14.

Finding a place to live and ground on which to build a chapel was of immediate concern to Father O Donel. Consequently, in the fall of 1784, with the support of a group of Catholic laymen, he procured a piece of land with a house and garden attached and a space of ground on which to build a chapel.⁵⁷ The structure when built became known as the “Old Chapel.”

Father O Donel gradually extended his ministrations beyond St. John’s, to Ferryland, Harbour Grace and Placentia. Just a year after his arrival he had the embarrassing experience of having to deal with the behaviour of a troublesome priest at Placentia. Governor Campbell became involved in the incident as well, for he wrote to the Justice of the Peace at Placentia to have the priest sent away;

A Mr. William Saunders having represented to me that there is a Roman priest at Placentia named Londergan of a very violent and turbulent spirit who has given great interruption to Mr. Burk, a regular and sober man of the Catholic persuasion and that unless the former is sent out of the country the peace of the place is in imminent danger of being disturbed. I desire you will cause the said Londergan to be put on board the first vessel that may sail from Placentia for England or Ireland.⁵⁸

A few years later Father O Donel had a similar situation with a troublesome priest in Ferryland and again the Governor intervened. A riot broke out in that place in 1788 and a Father Patt Power was accused of stirring up a spirit of rebellion among the Catholics. A committee to deal with the riots was set up, consisting entirely of Protestant inhabitants. Both Father O Donel and Father Power were reprimanded. An account of the reprimand was sent to Captain Pellew, surrogate at Ferryland, by Lt. Governor Elford:

I have admonished Father O Donel as you have Father Power and as they must plainly perceive that their diabolical proceedings will not be suffered

⁵⁷ GN 2/1/10, Oct. 18, 1784, pp. 106-109. Copy of lease signed on behalf of John Rogers, Captain of His Majesty’s late Newfoundland Regiment and by James O Donel, Andrew Moloney, Garrett Quigley, William Burke, Edward Cannon, Luke Maddock. Lease for 99 years, renewable for another term of 99 years. Lease renewed by Bishop Mullock in 1863. Copy of lease also in Archdiocesan Archives.

⁵⁸ GN 2/1/10, Oct. 14, 1785, p. 197. T.P. Londergan was a Dominican priest who had come from France to Placentia where his demeanour got him into trouble with the authorities, Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 62, and he died at Fogo, Oct. 25, 1787, *ibid.*, p. 360.

to pass unnoticed or with impunity. I am inclined to believe or at least to hope that both of them for the future will take care to remain quiet.⁵⁹

To meet the needs of a growing population Father O Donel requested from Governor Milbanke permission to build some chapels. His secretary conveyed the refusal saying the Governor

so far from feeling disposed to allow of an increase of places of religious worship to the Roman Catholics of this Island he very seriously intends next year to lay those already established under particular restrictions. Mr. O Donel must be sensible that it is not the interest of Great Britain to encourage people to winter in Newfoundland and he cannot be ignorant that many of the lower order of those who now stay would, if it were not for the convenience with which they obtain absolution here, go home for it at least once in two or three years, and the Governor has been misinformed if Mr. O Donel instead of advising their return to Ireland does not encourage them to winter in Newfoundland.⁶⁰

By 1794 Rome felt it was time to consider episcopal supervision for the mission in Newfoundland. Besides, a group of priests and laymen, representatives of the Catholic population from St. John's, Harbour Grace, Ferryland and Placentia sent an urgent appeal to Pope Pius VI asking that Father O Donel be made a Bishop. The request was granted and in a Bull dated January 5, 1796, Father O Donel was appointed Bishop with the title Bishop of Thyatira *in partibus*, and Vicar Apostolic.⁶¹ He was consecrated at Quebec on September 21, 1796 by Bishop Francis Hubert with co-consecrators Rev. Frs. Francis Gravé and Rev. Philip John Desjardins.⁶²

On the occasion of his visit to Quebec for his episcopal consecration good wishes came to him in a memorial from the Chief Justices, Magistrates, Protestant merchants and principal inhabitants of St. John's.⁶³

In the years that followed his consecration Bishop O Donel, besides continuing to organize and expand his growing church, set about fostering friendly relations with the civil authorities. When in 1797 Governor Waldegrave issued a proclamation establishing a fund for the relief of the

⁵⁹ GN 2/1/11, Oct. 24, 1788, pp. 439-440. Father P. Power was a "thorn in Father O Donel's side." He was a Franciscan who was "irregularly operating," Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 4 & p. 62.

⁶⁰ GN 2/1/12, Nov. 2, 1790, p. 102.

⁶¹ "Excerptus en buuis dabs die januarii, 1796", in Archdiocesan Archives.

⁶² Quebec Document copied February, 1854, re consecration of Bishop O Donel, in Quebec in 1796, in Archdiocesan Archives.

⁶³ *Pole Papers*, July 19, 1796.

poor he sent a copy to Bishop O Donel requesting his approval, a request which was immediately granted.⁶⁴ O Donel's name was listed among the committee members who administered the fund.⁶⁵

About the same time the Bishop appealed to the Governor for a grant of land, stating that he had no other ground except that which provided for his house, garden and chapel and that two previous governors, Campbell and King, had offered him some land which he was compelled to decline. Waldegrave replied immediately, ordered the land to be surveyed⁶⁶ and eventually granted the Bishop's request "strictly forbidding his being interrupted in the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the same during His Majesty's Pleasure."⁶⁷

Waldegrave, of whom Prowse says "The fire-eating old sailor was most sincerely religious and in private life the kindest and most benevolent of men,"⁶⁸ was, like the governors before him, and in spite of his personal regard for Bishop O Donel, suspicious of the Irish Catholics. On refusing permission to his Chief Justice to leave Newfoundland in 1798 he wrote to the Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Portland, by way of excuse for his refusal that

nearly nine-tenths of the inhabitants of this Island are either natives of Ireland or immediate descendants from them and that the whole of these are of the Roman Catholic persuasion. As the Royal Newfoundland Regiment has been raised in the Island, it is needless for me to endeavour to point out the small proportion the native English bear to the Irish in this body of men... how little dependance cou'd be placed on the military in case of any civil commotion in the town of St. John's.⁶⁹

The civil commotion happened when, in 1799, a mutiny of the military stationed in St. John's occurred. Bishop O Donel, by private and public admonition, brought all his influence to bear on his people and restored peace and order. Later he has to receive a reward for his services.

At the time of the revolt Edward Duke of Kent, Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's forces, finding that forces were not up to strength in Newfoundland asked for more men: "either the English, Scotch or German, but on no account Irish should be sent out to complete the 66th Regiment... men

⁶⁴ 64GN 2/1/13, Oct. 13, 1797, pp. 313-314.

⁶⁵ 65GN 2/1/14, Oct. 5, 1798, p. 335.

⁶⁶ 66GN 2/1/13, Sept. 25, 1797, pp. 261-262.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Oct. 13, 1797, p. 345.

⁶⁸ Prowse, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

⁶⁹ GN 2/1/14, June 19, 1798, p. 250

on whom dependence can be placed ... not one of Irishmen.” The Royal Artillery was to be strengthened by gunners sent from England “after driving the Irish out of it.”⁷⁰

Bishop O Donel feared greatly the presence among his people of the French whose revolutionary principles and rebellious and irreligious views were in wide circulation. These fears prompted him to publish his *Diocesis statutas* in 1801. They were designed for the guidance of his priests and adapted, as well, to the state of the Church in Newfoundland at that time. The missionaries were exhorted to visit each other as frequently as possible; all were to come to St. John's at least once a year, and the priests of Harbour Grace and Ferryland twice a year. Public prayers were to be offered every Sunday and holyday for King George III and the Royal Family. Priests were to use every means to turn aside their flocks from the vortex of modern anarchy; they were to inculcate a willing obedience to the laws of England and to the commands of the governors and magistrates of the Island. They were to oppose with all means in their power all those who favoured the French and to use every endeavour to withdraw their people from the plausible cajolery of French deceit.⁷¹

The actions of Bishop O Donel in this time of crisis impressed Governor Gambier who ruled the Island in the early years of the nineteenth century. It may not be amiss to say that the British Government bore no great love for the Irish Catholics and their Bishop, yet it felt it was safer to preserve the people in Catholicity as a safeguard against anarchy and to use Howley's words, “it was better to have the Newfoundlanders loyal Catholics than Gallican rebels and Dr. O Donel's influence was cheaper and more serviceable than an armed force.”⁷²

In course of time a cordial relationship developed between Gambier and Bishop O Donel. When the Governor appealed for assistance to build a steeple for the episcopal church in St. John's as well as to provide a clock and bells, the Bishop responded graciously and generously. When in 1802 Gambier drew up a plan for the establishment of charity schools in St. John's whose purpose it was to teach religion and morality, he consulted the Bishop as well as a clergyman of the Established Church, Rev. J. Harris. The plan required that every master of a family from the governor to those of the lowest circumstances make a voluntary contribution to the support of two or more schools, one Protestant, the other Roman Catholic, the funds to be divided among the two persuasions.⁷³

⁷⁰ *Pole Papers*, May 24, 1800

⁷¹ James O Donel, *Diocesis statutas*, Aug. 2, 1801, in Archdiocesan Archives.

⁷² Howley, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

⁷³ GN 2/1/16, Oct. 13, 1802, p. 350; Oct. 9, 1802, pp. 338-341.

Gambier left Newfoundland before he could put his plan into operation and it was left to his successor, Governor Gower, to get the schools firmly established. The schools, one for girls and one for boys, were set up along nondenominational lines, and not along the confessional lines envisaged by Gambier. It was Gower's hope that his arrangement would have the effect of reducing schools of the lower classes kept by Catholics. Gower also provided for instruction in an appropriate form of domestic economy as well as in religion and morality. He directed that "some regulation be adopted for assembling the children at school every Sunday and requiring the master and mistress to send such of them to the Established Church as belong there, and the assistant to see the Roman Catholic children to the Chapel."⁷⁴ For years numbers of Catholic children attended these schools.

The early years of the nineteenth century brought only a modicum of prosperity to the poor of Newfoundland and they had but little money to contribute to the support of their priests; hence it was that the Bishop requested a pension from the Governor. The magistrates, merchants and other principal inhabitants, many of them Protestants, sent a petition to Gower on the Bishop's behalf, attesting that for the twenty years he had lived among them

he has strenuously and successfully laboured to improve the morals and regulate the conduct of the planters, servants and lower classes of the inhabitants of this and the neighbouring districts, whereby he has effectively prevented the quarrels and animosities which before were frequent and rendered our persons and properties unsafe, particularly in the Spring of 1799, when next to General Skerret, he was the person who saved the valuable island from becoming a scene of anarchy and confusion by making the most unwearied exertions and using the extensive influence he had acquired over the lower classes by which means they were prevented from joining mutineers of the Newfoundland Regiment, at a time when General Skerret had not sufficient forces to oppose such dangerous combination ... We earnestly request that you will use your benevolent influence with His Majesty's Ministers, to reward this very respectable gentleman, with some little independence during the short remainder of a long life spent in the service of the King, country and neighbour.⁷⁵

Gower acknowledged the petition immediately and wrote the Colonial Secretary, Earl Camden, enclosing a supporting letter from General Skerret, asking for a pension of fifty pounds. Camden authorized the Governor to grant the sum of fifty pounds to Bishop O Donel as long as "he remains in

⁷⁴ 74GN 2/1/18, Sept. 26, 1804, pp. 19-20; June 24, 1805, pp. 214-216.

⁷⁵ GN 2/1/17, Aug. 10, 1804, pp. 337-339.

Newfoundland “⁷⁶In informing the Bishop, Gower spoke of the “harmonious relations he had established between the Roman Catholics and the Established Church” and he hoped “the habits of industry, sobriety and good order” he had established among the Catholics would continue. The Bishop’s response was gracious; he assured the Governor that he would not desist from pursuing the same line of conduct he had followed for the past twenty-one years “without any farther expectation of fee or reward than what I hope to receive from the Deity for discharging my duty to him, my country and my neighbour.”⁷⁷

Within a short time, finding his health declining, and planning to retire to Ireland, Bishop O Donel appealed to the Governor for an additional pension. As on the previous occasion, Gower wrote to the Colonial Secretary commending the high qualities of the Bishop and expressing the hope that, if the pension were granted,

it would encourage in his successor the same spirit of allegiance to His Majesty and assiduous attention to improve the morals of the labouring classes and render them faithful subjects and good members of the community, which in Newfoundland, is a consideration of the greatest importance, as the far greater proportion of that class are Roman Catholics from Ireland and their numbers are yearly increasing... At present they are remarkable for industry, sobriety and good order and there is no doubt of their attachment to His Majesty’s Government which I understand may be attributed in great measure to the beneficial influence of their Bishop’s admonitions and example.⁷⁸

A pension of fifty pounds was granted.⁷⁹

In 1806 there was established in St. John’s the Benevolent Irish Society, a nondenominational body, founded on the principles of benevolence and philanthropy and made up of Irishmen or descendants of Irishmen. The original officers, with one exception,⁸⁰ were all Protestants. At the founding meeting the committee formed to draft a code of rules and regulations for the governance of the Society and the extension of the charity, consulted Bishop O Donel. At the general meeting held on February 17, 1806, the Bishop took

⁷⁶ 76GN 2/1/18, March 12, 1805, p. 197.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, June 15, 1805, pp. 206-207; June 17, 1805, p. 210.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Nov. 28, 1805, pp. 397-399.

⁷⁹ GN 2/1/19, March 31, 1806, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Henry Shea was the first secretary of the Society; later he became vice-president, a post he held till his resignation in 1823. Minutes of B.I.S. Meeting, March 17, 1823.

the chair, something he, and the Bishops who followed him, did at all meetings where elections were held. Later he was made an honorary member of the Committee of Charity. The Governor became the honorary President of the Society.⁸¹

Bishop O Donel returned to Ireland in 1807 and died there in April, 1811, in his seventy-fourth year, having spent twenty-three years as Prefect Apostolic and Bishop in Newfoundland.⁸²

Bishop Patrick Lambert, 1806-1817

Bishop Patrick Lambert succeeded Bishop O Donel. Father Lambert had already spent some time in Newfoundland, having come to St. John's as an assistant to Bishop O Donel in 1805.⁸³ In April 1806, at the age of fifty-five he was consecrated at Wexford with the title Bishop of Chitra *in partibus* and shortly after came to Newfoundland.

The Colony to which Bishop Lambert returned was a more stable place than that to which his predecessor came in 1784. Other problems were substantially the same. Resentment of Catholic priests on the part of governors and clergy of the Established Church persisted. Governor Holloway, successor to Governor Gower, received from the Court of St. James the customary set of directions relative to the restrictions imposed on Catholics with the observation that

It is greatly to be lamented that there are not more than three clergymen of the Established Church and one dissenting minister of the Protestant faith upon this Island to counteract the zeal and energy of the Catholic priests whose religion predominates here.⁸⁴

A few years later Holloway, in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke of the increasing number of Catholics

whose priests labour with indefatigable industry and are too successful in making converts to their religion... Unless clergymen can be found it must be expected that the Catholic religion will gain a greater ascendance by the

⁸¹ *Centenary of the B.I.S. of St. John's*, N.F., 1806-1906, pp. 10-23.

⁸² Letter of Rev. B. Egan, Ireland, Feb. 8, 1977, in Archdiocesan Archives.

⁸³ GN 2/1/25, n.d., 1813, p. 117.

⁸⁴ *Duckworth Papers*, 1768-1809, June 6, 1807, p. 163.

exertions of priests who are so well rewarded not only in a pecuniary way but also in their triumph over our Established Church.⁸⁵

It became a source of irritation to the governors to have to allow grants of land to the Catholics to provide places of worship. In 1809 Holloway allowed a chapel to be built at Carbonear “in such a spot as may not interrupt the fishery or be within 200 yards of the shore.”⁸⁶

At the beginning of 1810 there were four Catholic priests in St. John’s, one each in Ferryland, Harbour Grace and Placentia. There were seven places of worship. Salaries of both Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy were made up by public subscription. Episcopal ministers received, in addition, funds from the SPG and fifty pounds from the Government. The Methodist minister occasionally received some small contribution from the Methodist Society in England, so the official report says, and

Roman Catholic ministers are exceedingly well provided for by contributions by being paid for marriages, christenings, absolutions, masses, etc., and very frequent legacies are often bequeathed to them.⁸⁷

The provision of schools for Catholic children posed a problem. In 1810 there were in addition to the Schools of Charity in St. John’s and the Free School in Harbour Grace, both nondenominational and offering instruction to children of the poor, a number of private schools. For Catholics there were three such schools in St. John’s, and one in Bonavista. At the same time there was in St. John’s an academy under the supervision of Paul Phillips to which a number of Catholic boys of the “higher classes” went. Phillips had received permission from the Governor to keep “a school for the instruction of Protestant youth” and he was directed to take the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy and to subscribe the Declaration before the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.⁸⁸ These arrangements were obnoxious to the feelings of the Catholics and as soon as their engagement finished they withdrew their support from the school and Phillips was forced to close his academy and, as he wrote to the Secretary of the SPG, “In a society where two third are

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 4, 1810, pp. 291-292.

⁸⁶ GN 2/1/20, Sept. 20, 1809, p. 216.

⁸⁷ C.O. 194/49, pp. 120-121. (priests: St. John’s – J. Lambert, J. Martin, J. Sinnott, J. Power; Harbour Grace – T. Ewer; Ferryland – A. Fitzpatrick; Placentia – A. Cleary. Teachers: St. John’s – W. MacLeod, M. Dierney, Mrs. Cleary; Bonavista - E. Macawley.)

⁸⁸ GN 2/1/21, Aug. 1, 1810, p. 39.

Catholic such action cannot but materially injure the teacher who adheres to the Established Church.”⁸⁹

The ministers of the Established Church continued to resent the growth of Catholic influence. The Rev. D. Rowland, in a letter to the SPG, complained of the great advantage of “Romish priests” over the clergy of the Established Church “in point of number.” He spoke of “Popish superstitions and idolatry” and the increased proselytizing of the priests.⁹⁰

A growing church needed buildings and Bishop Lambert did not lag behind his predecessor in seeking out land on which to build. He arranged for a lease of property situated at the back of the Chapel for a term of sixty-three years from October 20, 1811, carrying a rent of ten pounds a year.⁹¹ He enlarged the “Old Chapel” by the addition of transepts, the old building being too small for the population. Later, he built the “Old Palace,” an episcopal residence.⁹² He had also received from Governor Duckworth permission to build chapels at Harbour Main⁹³ and Burin.⁹⁴

The question of burying practices resurfaced. The arrangements made in Bishop O Donel’s time proved unsatisfactory. Complaints had been made, on occasion, to the Governor that the Protestant clergyman had been kept waiting for the corpse to arrive at his burying ground with the result that a body was interred without the services of a minister. The Governor reprimanded Bishop Lambert, who duly apologized, promising as far as he was able to make every effort to prevent a recurrence of such a happening in future. Exasperated with the whole situation, the Catholic people of St. John’s sent a petition to the Governor to complaining that, while they were willing to pay the fees required for the ground and for the minister’s services, they asked to be exempted from the necessity of his officiating as a Protestant clergyman over the last remains of those who lived and died in the principles and faith of the Catholic religion. They stated they were asking for nothing more than what they had enjoyed in Ireland even before the repeal of the penal laws.⁹⁵ Permission was given by the Prince Regent and Duckworth advised Father T. Ewer, Vicar-General, that

until a burying ground is set apart distinctly for the Roman Catholics they must of course continue to be interred in that of the Protestant Church and

⁸⁹ SPG, Box/A/17, Sept. 4, 1810.

⁹⁰ *Duckworth Papers*, M3717, Sept. 5, 1810, p. 1297.

⁹¹ GN 2/1/21, *Aug. 1, 1810*, p. 39.

⁹² SPG, Box/A/17, Sept. 4, 1810.

⁹³ *Duckworth Papers*, M3717, Sept. 5, 1810, p. 1297.

⁹⁴ *Duckworth Papers*, M3718, Oct. 12, 1811, pp. 3213-3214.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, M3717, Oct. 2, 1810, p. 1562; Oct. 26, 1810, pp. 1565-1566

the Roman Catholic ministers will officiate on those occasions but when their own burial ground is allotted those only who have been old inhabitants and who may have a strong desire to lie near their families in the Protestant burying ground will be suffered to be buried there.⁹⁶

In expressing thanks to the Governor, Father Ewer assured him that the Catholics “duly appreciate this boon which serves to inform the world, that under your mild and beneficial administration they feel in this Island the glow of that increasing and enlightening liberality which marks the present era.” Two days later Ewer informed Duckworth that in compliance with his direction he had advised the Catholics of St. John's “of the necessity of continuing the usual fees to the Protestant incumbent on the occasion of funerals, either in or out of the present churchyard, to which they agree.”⁹⁷ This unfair practice was to continue till the time of Bishop Fleming.

The story of the burying ground did not end there. The plot of land was found and granted but it was claimed by the Nova Scotia regiment; it was the property of the troops granted to them by a former government. In time the difficulty was resolved.⁹⁸

Bishop Lambert maintained the same close relationship with the B.I.S. as Bishop O Donel had done. He attended the meetings regularly and generally extended his patronage and influence to its work. In 1814 the Society established itself at Harbour Grace, the initiative coming from Father Ewer along with some prominent Irishmen.⁹⁹

Following the precedent set by Bishop O Donel, Lambert requested a pension from the Governor on the grounds that he was called upon to discharge duties of religion to His Majesty's subjects in the hospital, garrison and prison, citing also as a precedent that in Ireland His Majesty's Government allowed a salary to Catholic clergy who attended hospitals, gaols and garrisons. Furthermore, the declining state of his health warranted consideration. Keats, the successor to Duckworth, made a request to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Bathurst, suggesting to him that the Bishop had every claim to his Lordship's consideration because of the faithful discharge of his duties and that

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, M5899, Aug. 29, 1811, p. 379. In 1810 there were 200 funerals of which 133 were Roman Catholics. Parson's fees were 5 pounds, sexton's fees, 5 pounds, clerk's fees, 2/6 pounds, total of 12/6 pounds, *ibid.*, M3717, p. 1831.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, M3717, Sept. 4, 1811, pp. 1834-1835; Sept. 6, 1811, p. 1852.

⁹⁸ GN 2/1/24, July 20, 1813, p. 346.

⁹⁹ *Centenary of B.I.S.*, pp. 25-27.

When the particular descriptions of Catholics in Newfoundland and their great preponderance in numbers are considered the necessity that would be felt for their active services in the event of an enemy appearance I confess I am disposed to think also pleads in support of the merits of the Petitioner... A still more considerable pension than that bestowed on his predecessor which I believe was considered small.¹⁰⁰

Bathurst granted the pension of seventy-five pounds as long as the Bishop remained in Newfoundland. The Government expense book carried the following reference to the pension:

By allowance to the right Rev. Patrick Lambert, Bishop of Chytra, as head of the Catholic Church in this Island, during the same period, allowing an abatement in the property tax, he having made affidavit that the whole of his income, derived from every source whatever in Great Britain does not exceed seventy-five pounds per annum.¹⁰¹

Keats, no less than the governors who preceded him, feared the increase of the Catholic population. He expressed his fears in a letter to Bathurst as he informed him that members of the Established Church

are every day becoming a prey to the proselytizing of the Catholic priests... In a population of perhaps 60,000 there are three ministers of the Established Church and a few dissenting ministers. To the northward of St. John's inhabitants are generally Protestant, to the southward Catholics whose members much exceed that of Protestants. The Catholic Bishop or Vicar Apostolic has numerous priests at his direction, successful in making proselytes. For marriage and baptism another cause of increase of Catholics and that evil grows with the population. (*sic*)¹⁰²

A year later Keats complained to the Archbishop of Canterbury of the indifference of Newfoundland to the Established Church and suggested that this indifference profited both dissenters and Catholics.¹⁰³ He was fair enough to come to the defense of the Irish engaged in the fishery when they were under attack and he wrote he could "discover no trace of premeditated disobedience" among them.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ GN 2/1/25, n.d., 1813, p. 117; Dec. 18, 1813, pp. 171-172.

¹⁰¹ C.O. 194/68, Oct. 20, 1814, p. 14.

¹⁰² GN 2/1/25, Dec. 18, 1813, p. 173.

¹⁰³ 103 GN 2/1/26, Dec. 29, 1814, p. 102.

¹⁰⁴ GN 2/1/27, Nov. 10, 1815, p. 35.

Bishop O Donel was embarrassed before the Government by the behaviour of a recalcitrant priest, Father Patt Power. Bishop Lambert had a similar experience with a Father John Power, whom he silenced in 1812. A commentary on the problem was sent to Bathurst by Keats:

John Power went to Newfoundland from Ireland without any recommendation or introduction to his Bishop. This person is now under the censure of the Church and suspended by his Bishop from all ecclesiastical functions to which he submits with an ill grace... I have asked to have him secretly removed if it could be effected by an arrangement through the Government of Ireland. Measures could be taken by His Majesty's Government to prevent any priests being suffered to go from Ireland in future to Newfoundland whose characters may not be known and whose introductions to the head of the Catholic mission are irregular.¹⁰⁵

The Bishop became embroiled in a riot which took place among the Irish factions in St. John's in 1815. Economic conditions and dissatisfaction with the merchants over wages were partially responsible for the troubles but in essence "the contest was between persons coming from different parts of Ireland." Government intervened and came to the assistance of Bishop Lambert who was once again in confrontation with Father John Power. The case was espoused by the Justice of the Peace in St. John's, Caesar Colclough – like the Bishop a Wexford man – who sent a full description of the events to the Colonial Secretary in England:

Our Roman Catholic Bishop, a very loyal, honest and well-intentioned man, has some time since suspended and silenced one of his priests... This man is very popular and it has occasioned a great schism among the people and he seems to me to have more supporters than the Bishop: he is either a County Tipperary or Waterford man. The Bishop is a County Wexford man as are also his two chaplains, and I believe a large proportion of his clergy. This seems to have given umbrage to all the persons coming from that part of Ireland of which Power is one and every demonstration of respect and attention is paid to Mr. Power the 'suspended priest' and some very respectable people speak favourably of him. I am convinced that though Dr. Lambert is an irritable man of no abilities he is an honest one and would not intentionally do wrong.¹⁰⁶

The riots were put down and punishment meted out to the offenders with Bishop Lambert left somewhat debilitated after the fray. He was a man of

¹⁰⁵ GN 2/1/27, Nov. 10, 1815, p. 35.

¹⁰⁶ GN 2/1/26, March 21, 1815, p. 197; March 22, 1815, pp. 212-215.

delicate health at all times and now the work of the mission was taking its great toll on a man who was well advanced in years when he came to Newfoundland. He returned to Ireland and from Wexford wrote to Keats to request a pension such as Bishop O Donel had received. The Governor answered to say that he would anticipate difficulties in granting the pension “since the warrant by which it was issued authorized payment expressly to continuance in office.”¹⁰⁷ The following year, Governor Pickmore informed the Bishop he was not entitled to a pension “except when residing in Newfoundland as head of the Romish Church.”¹⁰⁸ Bishop Lambert died in Wexford in 1817.

Bishop Thomas Scallan, 1817-1830

The Rev. Thomas Scallan, like his predecessor, had spent some time in Newfoundland before his appointment as Bishop, having first come out in 1812. He was appointed Bishop of Drago *in partibus* in 1815; in January 1816 he was nominated coadjutor to Bishop Lambert and on May 1 of the same year was consecrated in the parish church of Wexford by Dr. Troy, Archbishop of Dublin.¹⁰⁹

Bishop Scallan returned to Newfoundland in the summer of 1816 to the same sorts of problems that plagued his predecessors. There was the struggle to get ample space to bury the dead and to get a place of worship for the living. Governor Pickmore gave him permission to extend the burial ground in St. John’s, under His Majesty’s instruction and under the usual conditions, that no building (except for fishing purposes) be built on ground capable of being employed in the fisheries. Within the five years following, permission, under the usual conditions, was given to build a chapel at Bonavista,¹¹⁰ a chapel and clergy residence as well as to own a burial ground at Carbonear¹¹¹ and a chapel at Torbay.¹¹²

Hard economic times fell on Newfoundland between 1815-1820. Three ravaging fires swept St. John’s and these combined with changes in trade relations, restricting the financial contributions the Bishop could receive from his Catholic people. He therefore appealed to Governor Hamilton for a pension. The latter sent the request to the Colonial Secretary, immediately,

¹⁰⁷ GN 2/1/27, March 5, 1816, pp. 95-96; March 19, 1816, p. 97.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Feb. 25, 1817, p. 386. Pickmore was the first resident Governor in Newfoundland. He came to the Island in 1816 and died there in 1818.

¹⁰⁹ Account of Bishop’s consecration in Archdiocesan Archives

¹¹⁰ GN 2/1/28, Oct. 1, 1817, p. 46; Dec. 17, 1817, p. 165.

¹¹¹ GN 2/1/32, Nov. 10, 1821, p. 229.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, Nov. 19, 1822, p. 349.

pointing out that Bishop Scallan's "conduct has been in all respects exemplary and calculated to keep up in his flock the best dispositions to loyalty and good order."¹¹³ No answer came from the Colonial Secretary so in 1823 Hamilton renewed his request and confirmed the sentiments he had expressed in his letter of November 1819.¹¹⁴ There is no record that an answer was ever received or that the pension was granted.

By 1820 Irish laymen had begun to play an active role in the life of the community and the Church. One such person was Patrick Morris. A committee of the inhabitants of St. John's, under the chairmanship of Morris, prepared a report for the Crown on the State of Newfoundland,¹¹⁵ anticipating a bill to revise the laws of Newfoundland which was read in the House in July, 1823.¹¹⁶

In October, 1823 the Catholic clergy and laity of St. John's presented a memorial to Governor Hamilton objecting to some of the clauses in the provisions of the new marriage act. From the passing of the act, marriage would be performed by some person in Holy Orders of the United Church of England and Ireland, provided always that when inconvenient to parties intending to marry it would be lawful for a Roman Catholic priest to officiate at the marriage. This would impose an unnecessary penal law and it would prevent priests in St. John's and other districts where it would be convenient to get an episcopal clergyman, from officiating at a marriage of Catholics. The memorialists asked for a change.¹¹⁷

The following month Morris presided over a meeting of the merchants and other inhabitants of St. John's to prepare a petition to present to the Crown objecting to many of the clauses in the bill before Parliament.¹¹⁸

This was followed up in February 1824 by a petition to George IV from the Bishop, clergy and laity of Newfoundland, objecting to two specific clauses in the proposed revision. One clause had to do with the conditions under which a marriage would be performed; the petitioners felt the priest would be entirely deprived of the privilege he always enjoyed in

¹¹³ GN 2/1/31, Nov. 19, 1819, pp. 66-67.

¹¹⁴ GN 2/1/34, Nov. 28, 1823, pp. 20-21.

¹¹⁵ C.O. 194/65, Dec. 6, 1822, pp. 211-212.

¹¹⁶ C.O. 194/68, July 10, 1823, p. 106.

¹¹⁷ C.O. 194/67, Oct. 27, 1823, pp. 88-94. Signers of the petition – Clergy: James Scallan, Nicholas Devereux, S.S.F. Burgess, James Sinnott; a long list of laymen, among them Patrick Morris, Lawrence O'Brien, and others who figured prominently in later events.

¹¹⁸ C.O. 194/68, Nov. 7, 1823, p. 344.

Newfoundland and in Ireland. The second objection was to the imposition of a tax for registering marriages.¹¹⁹

The petitions all bore fruit, for in March of 1824 J. Stephen wrote from Lincoln's Inn to Under-Secretary Horton to say that he had sent to the Secretary's office, i.e., the office of Bathurst, "a draft of a Bill for the Administration of Justice in Newfoundland in which are incorporated such of the amendments suggested in the Colony, as I learn to have met Lord Bathurst's approval." A fuller explanation came later:

The Catholics have been accustomed from the earliest times to solemnize marriages and this, I conceive, they were entitled by law to do. The Church of England acknowledges the validity of Roman Catholic ordination and the Common Law of England considered any marriage contract as valid which was celebrated by a person who had himself received valid orders. ... Such a rule as this would give the greatest umbrage to the Roman Catholic portion of the Society, without producing any corresponding advantage to the Church of England.... A petition very numerously signed has been addressed by Lord Bathurst on the subject, and this regulation has been introduced in compliance with the prayers of that petition.¹²⁰

The Bill was passed on June 17, 1824.¹²¹

Governor Cochrane was not so successful in having Catholic members appointed to his Council. He was himself aware of the disabilities under which His Majesty's Roman Catholics residing in Newfoundland laboured.¹²²

As a member of his Council Cochrane chose Lt. Colonel Burke, a Catholic, commander of the military forces and had administered to him the Oaths of Allegiance and of Office. He reported to Bathurst that because Burke was a Catholic he could not take the Oath of Supremacy or make and subscribe the Declaration (against Transubstantiation) and therefore he assumed the Oath and the Declaration could be dispensed with as had been done in similar cases in Lower Canada.¹²³ The chief justices and assistant judges doubted the legality of Burke's vote as a member of the Council

¹¹⁹ C.O. 194/67, Feb. 27, 1824, pp. 258-263. Signers of petition – Clergy: T. Ewer, N. Devereux, D. Mackin, M. Fleming; a large number of laymen.

¹²⁰ C.O. 194/68, March 5, 1824, p. 110; March 12, 1824, p. 128.

¹²¹ C.O. 194/69, June 17, 1824, pp. 16-17. The Bill was entitled "An Act for the Better Administration of Justice in Newfoundland, and for Making Further Provisions for the Solemnization of Marriage in the Said Colony and for Other Purposes."

¹²² C.O. 195/17, March 30, 1830, pp. 390-391.

¹²³ C.O. 194/72, Oct. 8, 1825, p. 137.

without a dispensing instruction. Cochrane requested from Bathurst approval for his action:

The great majority being of Roman Catholics it would be highly gratifying to them to have a person of their persuasion as a member of the Board and the removal of Lt. Colonel Burke from it might be a great disappointment to them. I beg leave also to add that I consider him peculiarly qualified for the situation and that I expect to derive much assistance from his advice and opinions.¹²⁴

Burke being the officer commanding the military forces, he would be the logical person to take over the administration of the Government on the death or in the absence of the Governor. Cochrane asked for an instruction in this matter. To both requests he received a refusal and he was advised that Burke and all other Catholics must be excluded from the Council.¹²⁵

Cochrane also nominated Bishop Scallan for the Council saying

I have included the Catholic Bishop of Newfoundland in the Council as a precedent is to be found for such an appointment in that of the Catholic Bishop of Lower Canada... I consider Dr. Scallan is entitled to this distinction from the rank he holds in the Catholic Church and the influence he thereby professes among persons of that persuasion in the Colony... as well as from his private character, which is marked by great liberality of principles and moderation.¹²⁶

A refusal came with a brief note: "Exception which is made in favour of Roman Catholics in Lower Canada is not applicable to those residing in the Colony under your Government" and Dr. Scallan's name was not submitted for His Majesty's confirmation.¹²⁷

Like Bishops O Donel and Lambert, Bishop Scallan was a good friend of the B.I.S. By 1823 Patrick Morris had become the first Catholic President of the Society.¹²⁸ Due to his efforts permission was obtained from the Governor for a piece of land on which to build an Orphan Asylum in St.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1825, pp. 153-154; Dec. 29, 1825, p. 253.

¹²⁵ C.O. 194/73, Jan. 6, 1826, p. 143 .

¹²⁶ C.O. 194/72, Dec. 29, 1825, p. 253.

¹²⁷ C.O. 195/17, April 10, 1826, pp. 231-232.

¹²⁸ Minutes of Meeting of B.I.S. Feb. 17, 1823.

John's¹²⁹ and for establishing the Orphan Asylum School,¹³⁰ an institution which became in time an all-Catholic school.

The last confrontation with the Government came in Bishop Scallan's last year, when he was too ill to take an active interest in events. The Emancipation Act, "An Act for the Relief of His Majesty's Roman Catholic Subjects," was passed in 1829. It was the opinion of the legal authorities in Newfoundland that the Act did not apply in Newfoundland. The Governor transmitted the conclusions of the Attorney General and the Judges of the Supreme Court to England for His Majesty's pleasure.¹³¹ The Catholics of St. John's immediately called a meeting to express their surprise and indignation at the decision and requested to be informed "whether the Act alluded to does or does not apply to His Majesty's subjects in this Island." They were informed that the Act "does no more apply to His Majesty's colonial possessions than those penal statutes it is intended to repeal, and that the relief it affords to His Majesty's Catholic subjects in Great Britain and Ireland must, in the colonies, emanate from His Royal Will."¹³² Shortly after, the Secretary informed the Catholics that immediate steps were being taken for extending to His Majesty's subjects in Newfoundland, by a royal instruction, the provisions of the Act.¹³³

A strange logic is to be observed here. The Emancipation Act did not extend to the colonies, the penal laws not having been enacted for these countries. If the penal laws did not extend to Newfoundland, then neither did the disabilities which were created by these laws. It was left to Bishop Fleming to resolve the matter.

In 1828, finding he could no longer discharge his duties, Bishop Scallan asked for and received a coadjutor, Father Michael Anthony Fleming, for a number of years a missionary in Newfoundland. On October 28, 1829 he was consecrated by Bishop Scallan in the "Old Chapel," the first episcopal consecration in Newfoundland. Bishop Scallan survived only a short time after that and died on May 29, 1830 and was interred in the yard of the "Old Chapel." His remains were later transferred to the cathedral and buried in the choir behind the high altar.¹³⁴

Conclusion

¹²⁹ C.O. 194/66, Oct. 12, 1823, pp. 182-183.

¹³⁰ Minutes of B.I.S., May 27, 1827.

¹³¹ GN 2/1/37, Dec. 10, 1829, pp. 307-308.

¹³² *Ibid.*, Dec. 22, 1829, pp. 310-311.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, June 30, 1830, p. 374.

¹³⁴ Notes in Archdiocesan Archives.

The death of Bishop Scallan brought to an end the pre-emancipation era of the Catholic Church in Newfoundland. It was a period that witnessed countless advances, albeit modest ones: some relaxation of penal restrictions, a greater tolerance, an increase in numbers, wealth and social standing of the Catholic population, the beginnings of formal education for both rich and poor, the establishment of organizations devoted to the betterment of conditions of the poor and other benefits.

These improvements were due, in large measure, to the exertions of the early Bishops O Donel, Lambert and Scallan, who guided the infant Church through difficult days. They were men of vision but, withal, realistic for they knew that only by slow stages could progress be made. They had a dream of emancipation but the fulfilment of the dream was not to be theirs – this was left to Bishop Scallan's immediate successor, Bishop Fleming. They were men of such calibre as could submit to the servility and venality heaped upon them by a system which was abhorrent to them but which they endured for the sake of their people, so many of whom supported them and worked with and for them. A small number of devoted priests also shared their burdens with them.

Those who came after them may have accomplished greater things, materially, but it was Bishops O Donel, Lambert and Scallan who paved the way for those greater things to come. It was their sacrifices as well as the sacrifices of their priests and grateful people which made it possible for them to put down the deep and strong roots of the Catholic Church in Newfoundland.