

# ARTICLES ON BLESSED EDMUND RICE

By John E. Carroll



## RÉAMHRÁ

Is é atá sna leathanaigh seo a leanas ná smaointe an Bhráthar Seán E. Ó Cearbhaill i dtaobh Éamonn Bheannaithe Rís, bunaitheoir na mBráithre Críostaí. Scríobh Seán mar altanna iad nó thug sé mar léachtaí iad ar ócáidí éagsúla. Bhí siad i gcló cheana in The Christian Brothers' Educational Record (eagarthóirí éagsúla), nó in Wellsprings (eag. An Br. Seán de Barra, nach maireann), nó in Nuachtlitir ón Edmund Rice League of Prayer (eag. An Br. Aodán ó Caoinleáin, nach maireann) agus ó fhoinsí eile.



**Br. John E. Carroll**

Is é an tUasal Mícheál Ó Cearúill M.A. a bhailigh iad agus is é an Bráthair Mícheál F. Ó Catháin CFC a chuir in eagar iad. Táthar ag cur athchló orthu ar maithe le háisiúlacht, in ómós don Bhr. Sheán E. Ó Cearbhaill agus don sár-obair a rinne sé ar son chúis an Bhunaitheora, agus ag súil go n-aidhnfidh sé breis deabhóide d'Éamonn Beannaithe Rís.

## FOREWORD

The following are talks and articles by Br. John E. Carroll about Blessed Edmund Rice, the founder of the Christian Brothers. They have been collected by Mr Mícheál Ó Cearúill MA, a friend of Br. John E. and

edited by Brother Mícheál Ó Catháin. They have previously appeared in the Christian Brothers' Educational Record (various editors) or Wellsprings (ed. Br John Barry, RIP) or the newsletter of The Edmund Rice League of Prayer (ed. Br Aidan Quinlan RIP). They are reprinted here for convenience, in honour of Br John E. Carroll and to increase devotion to Johnny's hero, Blessed Edmund Rice.



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**Section 1.**

**ARTICLES FROM  
THE  
EDUCATIONAL RECORD\***

\*Published periodically by the Christian Brothers, Rome.



## 1. *An Appreciation of Edmund Rice*<sup>1</sup>

Edmund Rice was brought up in a district where the children had been well instructed in Christian doctrine and fully prepared for the reception of the sacraments.<sup>2</sup> He came from a family of high religious and social standing and of considerable material prosperity.<sup>3</sup> Moreover he had received a much better education than the great majority of Catholic boys of his time.<sup>4</sup> At the age of sixteen he arrived in Waterford, where he entered on a career with his uncle, a provision merchant, who later left him the business, in which he was very successful. He was on familiar terms with many of the better class families of the city and took a full part in the life of a highly cultured society.<sup>5</sup>

### **HIS NATURAL GIFTS**

In the prime of life “he possessed in an eminent degree those qualities which constitute greatness. He was endowed with a powerful intellect. His knowledge of human nature was deep and comprehensive. To the most consummate prudence were united unbending courage, indomitable energy, and untiring perseverance.”<sup>6</sup> He married happily but the shadow of the cross, which was to be with him for the remainder of his life, fell heavily on him, and his young wife died in 1789.<sup>7</sup>

### **SPIRITUAL LIFE**

While continuing his commercial affairs with an ever increasing success, the Faith he had received from his parents in early life took deeper root. His spiritual life developed, expressing itself in prayer, spiritual reading, and works of charity. “He attended Mass daily, summer and winter, at 6 a.m. and went to frequent if not daily communion, in the Cathedral.”<sup>8</sup> He also frequented the neighbouring Church of St. Patrick, where the ministering clergy were the Jesuit Fathers. One of these, Father St. Leger SJ, was his personal friend, at whose house he was a frequent visitor.<sup>9</sup> “He also said the Office of the Church daily – it may have been the Office of Our Lady, and he was very devout to the Mother of God.”<sup>10</sup>

His soul was nourished by the reading of the Bible, in which he noted many of the texts that referred in a particular way to his business transactions.<sup>11</sup> He was also very familiar with the *Spiritual Combat*, the *vide-mecum* of St. Francis de Sales.<sup>12</sup> Another book with which he was familiar was *The Feasts, Fasts, and other Observances of the Catholic Church*.<sup>13</sup>

### **THE CRY OF THE POOR**

Gradually the idea of adopting a contemplative life formed in his mind, but numerous difficulties presented themselves and he received no encouragement from his brother, Father John Rice OSA.<sup>14</sup> But his interest in the poor continued and he began to focus his attention on the boys of the city. Some of these, poor and hungry, “he would bring into his own private house and give them bread and clothes.”<sup>15</sup> “He felt himself strongly inclined to the instruction of the poor in consequence of the number of boys he daily met wandering about the streets and the suburban roads of the city in idleness and in its usual attendant vices.”<sup>16</sup>

### **SEARCH FOR GOD’S WILL**

Was God calling him to this special work? He went to visit Doctor Lanigan, the bishop of his native diocese, who “assured him that, in his opinion, the idea proceeded from God,”<sup>17</sup> and



advised him to dispose of his property and “to apply the money thereby obtained in building and endowing a house and school for the glorious object he had in view.”<sup>18</sup> Having received

this guidance, Edmund Rice wrote to Pope Pius VI and explained the project he wished to undertake. He was “encouraged by him to proceed with it.”<sup>19</sup>

### **A START IS MADE**

His mind was made up. “Everything was adverse; everywhere was difficulty; but in Edmund Rice there was that happy combination of those noble qualities which eminently fitted him for gigantic action, and made him less consider the magnitude of obstacle than the means of overcoming them.”<sup>20</sup> It was at this critical stage in his vocation that he showed the unbounded trust in Providence that became such a feature of his spirituality in later years. He sold his business and with a worldly imprudence, reproved by his brother, Father Rice,<sup>21</sup> and with no group of disciples to assist him opened his first school in a stable in New Street.<sup>22</sup>

“New Street in his time was a residential quarter and it is but natural to expect that the inhabitants objected to his boys.”<sup>23</sup> “One prominent Protestant, who resided in then No. 1 New street, a Mr. Compton, a friend and admirer of Mr. Rice, told him he was wasting his time on such a hopeless task, that he could see no chance of success for him. Edmund Rice replied that indeed of himself he could not hope to effect great changes in the boys, but he felt confident with the blessing of God on himself and his helpers to be able to uplift these poor boys and raise them to the status of men.”<sup>24</sup>

### **APOSTOLIC LIFE**

Hopeless indeed must have appeared the task as he looked on his first pupils. His paid teachers deserted him. Then Providence sent him two young men, his first real disciples. It was not merely to instruct the poor, however, that Mr. Rice had adopted the new life of a teacher. “He knew that the primary end for which he and his associates had come together was their personal sanctification, and hence his first care was to provide a suitable residence in which they could, outside school hours, practise the exercises of the religious life.”<sup>25</sup>

He purchased a site in Barrack Street, opened his first monastery “in a plain and unpretending house with scant accommodation,”<sup>26</sup> and the nucleus of the Congregation was formed. The people of Waterford soon saw the improvement in the manners and morals of the boys and “his name became a household word.”<sup>27</sup> He appeared to them as “one raised up by God to fulfil a special mission, and that mission was that he came to his people and the Church at a time when they were in need of such a man,”<sup>28</sup> and “his fame soon spread outside the limits of the city.”<sup>29</sup>

### **THE SPIRIT OF FAITH**

His spirit of faith, tested to the point of being heroic in the very first days of his apostolate, grew ever brighter with continual trials that faced him, especially when he saw his Congregation defined by Parliament as “existing outside the law,” when each of his brothers could be “transported for life.”<sup>30</sup> Yet in this extreme crisis his call to his Brothers was: “Be intent on prayer and whatever may happen will turn to our

good. Cast all your cares into the arms of divine Providence and in union with your thousands of pupils, join in fervent prayer to our divine Lord and to Mary Help of Christians, to save our Congregation from this impending calamity.”<sup>31</sup>

Later, because of the character of the National Board of Education, a character that was the very antithesis of the religious atmosphere that should permeate the school, the general chapter of 1836 decide that the schools of the Congregation should be withdrawn from the pernicious influence of the system This meant that henceforth the Brothers would have to depend entirely on the generosity of the people, poor as they then were. Possibly the words of the famous pastoral letter of Dr. Hussey were still in the mind of the Founder: “The poor were always your friends – they inflexibly adhered to you and to their religion, even in the worst of times. I call on you to stand firm against all attempts which may be made under various pretexts to withdraw any of your flocks from the belief and practice of the Catholic religion. Remonstrate with any parent who will be so criminal as to expose his offspring to those places of education where his religious Faith or morals are likely to be perverted.”<sup>32</sup> Though these words had not been addressed to the Brothers themselves, the sentiments expressed therein were the ones that inspired the chapter to take its stand on the position of true Catholic education. Edmund Rice expressed his faith in the support of the poor by saying, “Providence is our inheritance.”<sup>33</sup>



Stained Glass Window in Mount Sion

This faith, which sustained him in the major trials and difficulties of his life, showed itself also in day-to-day affairs. When a Brother saw with some dismay that the meagre supply of food for the community had been given to the poor and remonstrated about this liberality, Edmund Rice replied, “God will send us enough.”<sup>34</sup> But though he trusted in Providence, he expressed at all times a complete submission to its disposition, sometimes not too easy to understand. A phrase frequently on his lips was:<sup>35</sup> “The Lord gave” to me, “the Lord hath taken away” from me; “as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord.”<sup>36</sup> This spirit of combined trust and submission was summed up in the last years of his life when speaking to a young brother who attended him: “Pray, Brother, that God’s will may be fulfilled in me.”<sup>37</sup>

### A LIFE OF WORK

The first community at Mount Sion soon expanded into other cities and towns. All the new communities up to the acceptance of the Brief of 1820 were separate entities but the members, trained under the Founder, looked to him as their inspiration, leader, and guide. They had adopted the *Rule of the Presentation Sisters*, suitably adapted for a male community. The life required a very high degree of dedication and self-sacrifice. The details of the daily horarium of prayer, work, and recreation were most specific and demanding. Regularity at all the spiritual exercises was regarded as of the greatest importance. This importance was stressed in the Rule of 1832: “The Brothers shall, therefore, hold in particular esteem whatever concerns regularity, no matter of how small consequence in may appear,





and they are ever to regard it as a great means of their sanctification...Regularity is also the best support – nay, the sustaining power of all religious communities.”<sup>38</sup>

Brother Rice followed the horarium as prescribed, with its daily rhythm of prayer, work, and recreation. Apart from the occasions when he was absent from Mount Sion on business, he took his full share of classroom duties. School hours were long and the teaching more than usually difficult and demanding; the numbers in the classes were large, and it was not unusual to have up to 150 boys per brother. Then there were open-air classes when the pressure in the

available rooms became too great. In the late evening he held a night school for the accommodation of adults and for others who could not attend the day classes. “A very large number was in the habit of attending on these occasions for religious instruction, and Brother Rice was in the custom of preparing them himself for the reception of the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. I recollect the names of many of those who attended this night school in Mount Sion, and my own two brothers were among the number, and the classes were not over until nearly ten o’clock at night.”<sup>39</sup> Is it any wonder that he was sometimes very tired and inclined to sleep at his prayers, but “he placed pebbles under his knees at prayer to enable him to combat the sleep.”<sup>40</sup>

### **AUSTERITY OF LIFE**

The diet was sparse, only two meals a day in the early years of the Congregation, with many days of fast and abstinence. Brother Rice himself was most abstemious: “his breakfast was one of two cups of tea and some bread and butter – no eggs or meat; his dinner was very plain and his drink only pure spring water. I saw in the novitiate many instruments of penance – hair shirt, chains, and disciplines – and I am certain the Founder must have used them in his day. He was now too old and feeble to be allowed their use.”<sup>41</sup> One young brother visited the convent of the Presentation Nuns with the Founder and later wrote: “A present of a richly made dish fell to my lot, and never was I more prepared for something in that line as our brothers then took only two meals in the day – breakfast and dinner. Often did we go to our pillows hungry and thirsty, after a dinner well seasoned with salt.”<sup>42</sup> Even then their room accommodation was of the poorest, so that Brother Rice could write after some changes in their regimen had been effected in the Chapter of 1829: “For want of (financial) support we could not take a postulant into the novitiate and we were obliged to suspend the work of our building, now half finished, and for want of which four brother are obliged to sleep in one chamber detached from the house, exposed to the suffocating heat of summer and the pinching cold of winter.”<sup>43</sup>

The same poor conditions remained in Mount Sion until 1868, when a new residence was provided for the community. Until then “the whole life of this laborious community, outside the hours of school, is passed in a dingy garret, badly lighted and worse ventilated and in all respects unsuited for the purposes of a dwelling. Yet worse, the space is so confined that two or more brothers are compelled to share in common the narrow limits of one apartment.”<sup>44</sup>

### **THE APOSTOLATE OF THE SCHOOL**

The schools were models of order, discipline, and hard work, commented on in the most favourable terms by visitors and government inspectors, many of them Protestants. The most unqualified testimony was that of a Protestant rector, the Reverend George Dwyer. He stated, “I would say that the most perfect schools I have ever seen in my life were the schools in Mill Street in Dublin, and the schools in Cork.”<sup>45</sup> As we would expect they were Catholic in the



best sense of the term. As one who knew Brother Rice well wrote, “If he were not persuaded that more than temporal blessing would follow in the train of education, I am convinced he would not have a single day in its advancement.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Prayer**

The day began and ended with prayer, with familiar and moral instructions being given occasionally as opportunity offered, at the time of reading or otherwise. There was a half-hour’s moral instruction every day. This Brother Rice considered “the most salutary part of the system. It is the most laborious to the teachers; however, if it was ten times what it is I

must owe we are amply repaid in seeing such a reformation in the children.”<sup>47</sup> His main purpose in his apostolate was to bring his pupils to the knowledge and love of Christ. To this end he brought the boys to the heart of the apostolate, the Blessed Sacrament. “There was frequent attendance in the chapel within the walls of their school-house. Great stress is laid upon a regular appearance at Mass, and at confession, and the priests are very attentive to the pastoral charge of the young.”<sup>48</sup>

### **Kindness**

Brother Rice was opposed to corporal punishment. When a mother brought her son to him in the O’Connell School and asked him to punish him, he replied “that it was against the rules of the school for him to punish the boy and that I should do the punishment myself. ‘Wait till I catch him home!’ I said. Brother Rice laughed heartily and took the boy with him. I’d give the world to Brother Rice, if I had it; he was so good to the children.”<sup>49</sup>

His kindness to the children was proverbial. How like the Good Shepherd he must have appeared one day, “walking through the streets of Waterford, four boys with him and one of them in his arms. ‘Brother Rice,’ he was asked, ‘where are you taking those boys?’ The answer was, ‘I’m taking them to Mount Sion to have them go to school and to give them bread.’”<sup>50</sup> He was not satisfied with providing for the material needs of the boys while they were with him in Mount Sion, clothing them, “but in such a way that their dress does not distinguish them from other scholars. Boys leaving school for situations are, when in need of it, provided with decent and comfortable clothes.”<sup>51</sup>

## **SOME ASPECTS OF HIS PERSONALITY**

All contemporary accounts mention the Founder as a most kindly man and very easy of approach. How attractive his personality was may be gauged by the case of Joseph Watson, a rich Dublin merchant and a Protestant. He had heard of the work of Brother Rice at Mount Sion and went to visit him. He then returned to Dublin, became a Catholic, sold all he had, joined the Congregation, and taught in the very poor school of St. Patrick’s until his death in 1843.<sup>52</sup> Others influenced by the Founder were Francis Manifold, and ex-yeoman, Joseph McClelland, once a Presbyterian, and many others.

But if many men came to him, Brother Rice went out to others with an invitation reminiscent of the call of St. Matthew in the Gospel. When residing in Hanover Street, Brother Rice became interested in a group of young men who had opened an evening school in the city and were accustomed to attend Mass at Clarendon Street Church. He approached one of them and said, “You should join us.” The reply, given in a half-joking manner, “You are too grand for



us,” brought the answer, “Come and see – join us for breakfast tomorrow.” Like the two early disciples he did come, joined the Congregation, and persevered in it until death.”<sup>53</sup>

There was also the case of the young orphan who paid a visit to Mount Sion. He happened to meet the Founder. “He asked me whether my father and mother were alive. I said that they were dead and that I lived with an uncle. He put his hand on my head and told me to be back

in three weeks to commence my novitiate under him. The words never left my mind, and twenty-four years afterwards they had an effect on me, and in 1861 I joined the Institute and I have completed my golden jubilee as a Christian brother and I am now in my ninety-fifth year.”<sup>54</sup>

### **COMMUNITY LIFE**

The kindness and ease of approach of the Founder was reflected in the happy life that existed in the communities. A young boy who later joined the Congregation remembered very vividly the impression made on him by seeing the welcome given to the Founder on one of his visits to a community. He wrote, “He was surrounded by the brothers like affectionate children around their father.”<sup>55</sup> “His motto was that each community should be a happy family, the directors, father and kind fathers, never masters, but having the confidence and affection of their Brothers, who themselves should not be eye-servers or flatterers, but candid, confiding, and dutiful, having an affection for the director and great fraternal union among themselves.”<sup>56</sup>

“His visits spread a charm. One house where he visited frequently became known as ‘the House of Benediction.’ There he used to join the community in singing, and one song of his was, ‘Oh, had we some bright little Isle of our own.’ On those occasions it was said that his large heart seemed to overflow and pour itself out on his spiritual children. This he did by his familiar conversation and his charming simplicity, which won all hearts and served to make his stay among the brothers a most agreeable treat.”<sup>57</sup>

### **Care for the Sick**

He was more than usually concerned about the sick and for these he had a special care. “Brother will be with you,” he wrote,<sup>58</sup> “some day this week. Until he gets better than he is at present you must give him as little to do as possible in the school and let him take a good deal of air and exercise. You had better not allow him to fast and, as to abstinence be guided by the advice of the physician.”

He required all superiors to contribute to a fund for the aged and infirm brothers and wrote to one superior who seemed unwilling to send the stipulated payment, “We know you now pretty well and know you to be always generous even to a fault, and therefore we are surprised a little that you should claim any exemption from the obligation of paying your dividend to so desirable and necessary a fund.”<sup>59</sup>

### **Consultation**

He consulted his brothers on all matters of importance: the drawing up of the new Rule; an offered opening for New South Wales in 1833; and the proposed opening of pay-schools. A typical letter on such an occasion is as follows: “there may be some objections to what I here propose for your consideration, and in order to know the sentiment of all the professed Brothers on a matter of such importance to our institute, I wish to know your and their opinion without being influenced by any person.”<sup>60</sup>



### **Overflowing Charity**

His charity and kindness were not confined to his brothers and his pupils at Mount Sion, but extended to the needs of other cities. He had received an invitation from Dr. Murray to open a school in Dublin. Though personnel and finances were lacking he sent two brothers to Dr. Murray and “resigned every dominion whatever over the subjects in Dublin; and shall allow them during their lives a stipend of forty-four pounds each ever after.”<sup>61</sup> This was at a time

when, according to Dr. Power, Bishop of Waterford, Brother Rice had “sadly miscalculated, as his income falls short by £200 a year of what he had then counted on (£350). The loss falls so heavy on the community here that I know them to be obliged to have recourse to the most rigid, I may say, distressing economy.”<sup>62</sup>

### **EVANGELICAL DEMANDS**

His charity went beyond the narrow limits of the school-room. In Waterford he provided a continuous supply of food for the Mendicity Institute and gave some money donations anonymously.<sup>63</sup> He was not satisfied with supplying material aid alone but on Sundays and holydays he and some of the brothers attended at the Institute to give religious instructions and to prepare some of the inmates for the reception of the sacraments. This interest in spiritual affairs also showed itself in his concern for the condemned prisoners in the jail. Brother Rice and one of his disciples used to instruct the condemned and help them at the place of execution. This was a special privilege extended to Brother Rice as he was credited with having a wonderful power of moving to repentance some of those hardened people who seemed callous when appealed to by the clergy even.”<sup>64</sup>

There was also the case of the lady who, when close to death, refused to see a priest. Brother Rice, who had known her in earlier days, heard of her sad condition and “paid her a visit, but still she was the same. He called again and found no change for the better, but with God’s blessing he brought her to a sense of her duty and before his departure she was prepared to confess, make her peace with God, and some days after died in peace.”<sup>65</sup>

One more personal aspect of his charity must be mentioned. According to St. James, “If a man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.”<sup>66</sup> Brother Rice fulfilled this condition. Brother Ignatius Kelly, one of the early brothers and a lifelong intimate of the Founder’s could write of him, “I never heard him use an uncharitable expression towards his enemies; for, good as he was, he had his enemies.”<sup>67</sup>

### **THE INTERIOR LIFE**

Brother Rice was frequently involved in matters purely secular; many of his letters refer to financial affairs he had inherited from his life as a businessman; others were imposed on him by circumstances beyond his control when obligations of justice demanded his assistance. However, he considered the spirit of the interior life so essential that he did not wish his brothers to neglect it for external works. As he wrote to one brother, “These matters give you something to think of besides your school and your religious duties for the remaining days of your life.”<sup>68</sup>

The yearning for the contemplative life, which had been with him in early years, still showed itself in his appreciation of the necessity of a deep interior life for himself and his brothers. Even though the external duties of the apostolate were so important and demanding, and possibly because of this fact, he required that “the brothers shall always manifest a love of

holy retirement.”<sup>69</sup> They were to make “the presence of God the object of their particular attention”<sup>70</sup> and recollection was to be “held by the Brothers in such veneration, that they are to regard it as one of the principal supports of the Society.”<sup>71</sup> From this spirit of recollection and retirement was to come the love and practice of “prayer, which they are to consider the first and principal of their daily duties.”<sup>72</sup>

In his writings he frequently exhorted the Brothers to prayer. To a newly appointed superior he wrote, “You will require great watchfulness over yourself and you should frequently beg of God the light and grace to effect it.”<sup>73</sup> One other quotation, from among many, will have to suffice here. “I need not remind you or the Brothers,” he wrote, “how frequently or how fervently we should all now pray that God in his infinite mercies will direct us in the choice of those individuals whom he wills to govern our Body.”<sup>74</sup>



**Blessed Edmund's statue of the Blessed Virgin**

He practised what he advocated. “He was always first in the oratory to adore the Blessed Sacrament.”<sup>75</sup> “His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was intense. It is here, according to the tradition of Mount Sion, that he brought his letters, cares, difficulties, and doubts.”<sup>76</sup> Another special feature of his spirituality was his love for the Mother of God, which had been noted by his contemporaries before he became the Founder of the Congregation. Devotion to her is mentioned frequently in his Rule, a particular aspect of it being the rosary, said by the brother twice each day and prescribed for the pupils every day during Lent.<sup>77</sup> When out for a walk, “he would take out his beads” and say the rosary with a friend who accompanied him.<sup>78</sup> “His own genuine devotion to our Lady,” he regularly showed, “in honouring a statue of the Blessed Virgin. A spot was worn on the statue from the frequent impression of his pious lips.”<sup>79</sup>

### **THE CROSS, THE GREATEST PROOF OF LOVE**

It was the Founder’s faith and submission to the designs of Providence that sustained him in the continuing Calvary of his life. There was the coolness of his patron, Dr. Hussey;<sup>80</sup> the frustration of being refused permission to open pay-schools when such openings would have saved his brothers the need to go out begging after their day’s work in the schools.<sup>81</sup> He had been complained to the Holy See by one of his Brothers for alleged maladministration.<sup>82</sup> The Holy See had also been told that the brothers were teaching heresy.<sup>83</sup>

The Brothers of the Cork community, who had joined the Institute more from necessity than conviction, caused him untold anxiety down to the day of his death.<sup>84</sup> One of these brothers wrote long letters to the superior general of the De La Sale Brothers complaining of the Founder, who, on learning of the replies received, reproved the general in a most gentle manner for his action.<sup>85</sup>

He was accused of being of unsound mind, a calumny that persisted though refuted at the time by a letter from the Second Assistant. “I have ample proof that one of our brothers did say in a certain house in Waterford and in the presence of some ladies (and I need not remark



to you that ladies never tell what they hear in conversation) that Brother Ignatius Rice ‘was insane’ in Dublin. This false and very malicious story was not told by any of the brothers stationed at Mount Sion, but it was told by a brother who was rambling at the time.”<sup>86</sup>

One of these same Cork Brothers wrote to Brother Rice “a letter of seven pages of close writing – I tell him I have a thousand fond questions to ask him, only eight I put on the first page. I have actually, if he has a soul, harrowed it up.” The writer finished this account

saying: “The good old man wrote a long and valuable letter full of charity, apologies, and kindness. I sent him another long letter by this day’s post, which will fully open his eyes.”<sup>87</sup>

For many years the Founder had set his heart on setting up in Dublin a novitiate and model school, but the project was impeded by financial difficulties, by the obstruction of the civic authorities, and, even when finished, was so poor in accommodation that Brother Bernard

Duggan could write, “Nobody knows, or can know, the privations endured during those first years in Richmond Street.”<sup>88</sup>

### **CONSCIENCE AND OBEDIENCE**

It was, however, in the last six years of his life, when he had retired from the office of superior general that the clouds of trouble really enfolded him. There were some debts, incurred when he was Superior General, that Brother Paul Riordan forbade him to pay. Brother Rice explained the matter to his confessor, Father Colgan OCC, who told him that “such prohibition commanded what was contrary to justice and consequently sinful.”<sup>89</sup> Brother Rice, with courage and conviction acted on his confessor’s advice and the resulting distressing situation remained until the chapter of 1841, in full session, having examined the full position decided that “the Founder had not violated obedience,” ordered payment of the debts, and recommended that the whole matter be buried in oblivion.<sup>90</sup> When<sup>91</sup> the matter was being discussed in chapter, Brother Rice appeared at the door of the room but by vote of the chapter was refused admission.

One further indignity suffered by the Founder may be mentioned. He had been in the house at Hanover Street in September and October 1840, and the house account book records: “To beds borrowed from an upholsterer for Mr. Rice and A. Dunphy, the sum of £1. 18.0, having been refused the loan of two beds from Richmond street house, on two applications, though there were many beds vacant there, one of which, a feather bed, had belonged to the Hanover Street house.”<sup>92</sup> During all these trials and sufferings there has not been recorded even one word or letter of complaint from the Founder.

### **LAST DAYS**

In the last years of his life Brother Rice resided at Mount Sion preparing for death. The brother appointed to take charge of his room wrote: “I was appointed to attend on him at his meals, helping him upstairs after his breakfast. I had to fix his chair, if in winter near the fire, place the Holy Bible before him, which he read for a considerable time daily.”<sup>93</sup> There was a small wheel-chair provided for his use and in this he was taken sometimes into the garden, where on one occasion the young brother overturned it causing the Founder some shock, cuts, and bruises.<sup>94</sup> On other occasions he was wheeled by some of the boys through the streets of the city, “when he used to talk to the people freely.”<sup>95</sup>



## THE FINAL HOURS

Sixty years ago a woman testified that her mother was a night nurse to Brother Rice during his last illness and that she had been employed by him before he got invalided. Her mother often spoke of what a loss he was to her and to everybody as he was so kind and charitable a man. Her recollection, that her mother spoke of Brother Rice as a very kind and loving man, devout, prayerful, and patient always during the few years she nursed him, was still fresh. When he was dying it was her mother who rang the bell to call the brothers to his bedside. As she was leaving the room when the Brothers came in, he thanked her for what she had done

for him by shaking hands with her and blessing her. It was his wish that she and her family would never want and that the Brothers would be good to all of them.<sup>96</sup>

And so he died, but his spirit lives on in the Congregation he founded. The people of Waterford rendered him the tribute of devotion, affection, and gratitude for what he had done for the city and its inhabitants. His mission had been accomplished and they gathered in the Cathedral for the last rites and again for the month's mind. Mr. Michael Lawlor, an inmate of

the Little Sisters of the Poor in 1912 was present at the month's mind and wrote: "All Waterford mourned the loss of their great friend. Brother Rice, I would say, lived and died a saint. He was the poor man's friend, and it was the poor, young and old, who alone could write his epitaph. May he rest in peace."<sup>97</sup>



## 2. *Renewal in the Spirit of the Founder*<sup>98</sup>

One hundred and seventy years ago our congregation had its beginning. It happened at one of the most disturbing times in the history of the Church. The doctrines of the French Revolution were ravaging religion and religious life in Europe. One pope had already been in captivity and another seemed doomed to the same fate. The Industrial Revolution was daily gaining momentum and mankind was rapidly losing respect for his neighbour. It was at this time that the Holy Spirit, who watches over the Church, saw fit to inspire many good men and women everywhere so that a whole phalanx of nursing, missionary, and teaching religious institutes sprang up to meet the exigencies of the times and to help to continue the mission of Christ in the Church in the emerging nineteenth century.

Teaching institutes arose in many places: in France the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploermel (1817), the Marist Brothers (1817), and the Marianists (1817); in Belgium the Brothers of Charity (1807) and the Xaverian Brothers (1839); in America, the Sisters of Charity of Emmitsburg (1809) and the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy (1829); in Ireland the Brigidine Sisters (1807), the Patrician Brothers (1808), the Sisters of Charity (1815), and the Sisters of Mercy (1831); in England the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus (1864) and the Poor Servants of the Mother of God (1868). It is estimated that almost eighty per cent of all congregations approved by the Holy See by the year 1968 had their beginnings in the nineteenth century.<sup>99</sup>

Edmund Rice and his institute were part of this great movement, which, side by side with the awakening older orders, placed a growing army of dedicated religious at the service of the Church. Today, 170 years later and again in trying times, new institutes are once more mustering under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to fulfil the prophetic role of seeing beyond the limit of sight and seeking to reveal and make plain today God's manifestations to man. In a world that no longer counts antiquity in centuries but in decades, we Christian Brothers are now one of the older institutes. It is our turn now to renew and refurbish our armour, to regain our youthfulness and our spirit of freedom and initiative for God. The Church, which needs us as much as ever, has provided us with two guidelines in the work; we are asked to renew in the spirit of the Gospel and in accord with the spirit of our founder and the wholesome traditions that have grown through the years from the original inspiration given to Edmund Rice.

Genuine founders of religious orders are inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are given a charism – a special gift or inspiration, a specific mission or message which God conveys through them for the Church. A founder emerges in his time as a visible manifestation of Christ's hidden presence in the Church in that particular era. He embodies in some new form "the unchanging ideals of the Gospel,"<sup>100</sup> pinpoints some aspect of Christ's working in the Church. This particular or special aspect eventually becomes part of the institute founded, and the reason for its continued existence. In treating of this special charism we are dealing "with an intervention of God himself in the history of the Church."<sup>101</sup> That is why we should study his charism in all its dimensions, conscious of the reverence due to the work of God in the person of the Founder. Our task is to place Edmund Rice and his early brothers in their historical context, in their social and educational context, in their contemporary Church context. We must compare them with ourselves. We must then simplify the equation; cancel out the irrelevant elements from each side until we reach the constant that





was and is the particular charism of Edmund Rice and his congregation within a particular mission of the teaching Church.

Some few founders, such as St. Francis, have a universal charism – for the whole church, for all time and for all places. The majority of founders like our own and others of the nineteenth century were chosen to found an institute which met a contemporary need in the Church. This special charism of our Founder was approved as early as 1794 by Bishop Lanigan of Ossory (who assured him that, in his opinion, the “inspiration was from God”)<sup>102</sup> and later by Bishops Hussey, Power, Troy, and Murray. Unlike St. John Baptist de La Salle, Nano Nagle, Theodore Ryken, and many others, Edmund Rice lived to see the official approval of the Church on his vocation when his institute was granted its brief in 1820.

Where and when did this charism of Edmund Rice manifest itself? When exactly did the Holy Spirit first inspire him? We cannot say. We do know that Edmund Rice bought a Bible in 1791 – two years after the death of his young wife – and seemed to live by that Bible for the rest of his life. By 1802 he had started his work among the paupers and had built his plain and “unpretending house with scant accommodation”<sup>103</sup> at Mount Sion. In that providential way that God seems to spread good news men came to hear his work and flocked to Waterford from far and near. It was to be expected that the men of his own town land in Co. Kilkenny should come first: Patrick Finn, Thomas Grosvenor, Austin Dunphy, and Francis Grace. But soon they were joined by others from different places and with a wide divergence of backgrounds. There was Francis Manifold, a captain in the Wicklow militia before he became a Catholic in 1816 at the age of 36 and joined Edmund Rice to become eventually one of the committee that framed the first rule book of 1832. There was Joseph McClelland, former Presbyterian, whose father had been a minister of the Presbyterian Church. There was another Joseph – Joseph Watson – a Protestant merchant of Dublin. The Dublin merchant, we are told, visited the former Waterford merchant at Mount Sion, saw the work he was doing, talked to him, eventually went back to Dublin, sold all he had, and, becoming a Catholic, joined Edmund Rice’s institute at Waterford and spent the rest of his life teaching in St Patrick’s school in that city.<sup>104</sup> There were Catholic merchants, too, who were drawn towards Edmund Rice and his work for God. Thomas O’Brien, in his sixties (surely, one of the oldest postulants ever) sold out his wine business in Waterford and financed the building of the second house of the institute at Carrick-on-Suir.<sup>105</sup> There was a silk merchant called Keane from Dublin.<sup>106</sup> Then there was a leather merchant called Ryan from Clonmel, who, at the age of fifty, sold a thriving business and brought himself and his fortune to the service of God and his Church under Edmund Rice.<sup>107</sup> His story is an interesting one. Being found unsuitable by the novice master for the strenuous life of the Christian Brothers, he was told he would have to leave. The residue of his vast fortune was being restored to him. He, however, refused to take the money. He said that it was needed for the work of the brothers and that he could build up another fortune. Happily, however, this won him a reconsideration of his case and he was allowed to continue to live in the Institute, where he became an excellent brother and persevered until death. All these men caught the spirit of this man of faith and constancy, this patriarchal figure who believed so strongly in what God wanted him to do.

Brother Stephen Carroll, when an old man, sat down and wrote in two copy books the story of his life and the manner in which God had called him to the Congregation. He met the Founder in the Presentation Convent in Drogheda in 1835. He writes:



As one of the nuns was aware of my pretensions she sent for me, and there I was brought before him..... Our Founder spoke to me with such kindness and he seemed to think there might be something made of me in after years.<sup>108</sup>

Brother Austin Moloney in 1912 told how God gave him his vocation. Meeting the Founder at Mount Sion, where Brother Austin as a young man of the world had gone to visit his neighbour Brother Joseph Murphy, the Founder gave him the invitation, “Come up here in three weeks time to start your novitiate.” “His words were never out of my mind,” said the old man, “and until he told me to come back to begin my novitiate I had not the least idea of becoming a Christian Brother. Twenty-four years afterwards the words of the Founder had an effect on me, and in 1861 I joined the Institute, and am now in my ninety-fifth year and I have completed my golden jubilee as a Christian Brother.<sup>109</sup>

Such was the charism, the power of the inspiration of Edmund Rice, which attracted even grown men to him; which caused him to give up life and fortune and further prospects for the love of God. Like all founders, Edmund Rice brought the charism into his institute to be used for God in the service of the Church. The force and power of his dynamism was caught by his brothers and brought by them wherever they went. A letter of the De La Salle Brothers in Paris in 1834 mentions that our congregation in that year was on the increase and that postulants were waiting for admission to the novitiate.<sup>110</sup>

The early brothers lived most selfless lives. They taught in crowded rooms from 9 a. m. each day and in many cases taught also evening school from 7 p.m. till 9 p.m. In Manchester such was the fame of Brother McDonnell’s Sunday evening spiritual lectures to the young men that some of his audience had to stand along the walls; and when the school in Lloyd Street was closed and the brothers moved across the river to Salford, the same young men used to attend.<sup>111</sup> In a number of places the English brothers enlisted “oblates” – young men who assisted in teaching catechism on Sundays. Some of these oblates later joined Brother Barry’s novitiate at Preston and became Christian Brothers.

Brother Joseph Murray tells how in the early days in Manchester boys were given religious instruction at the schools on Sunday mornings and then sent out to instruct some groups of adults, so that in all, contact was made with about two thousand adults each Sunday.<sup>112</sup> Religion permeated the work of these early brothers. An interesting and amusing story is told in the life of Theodore Ryken, founder of the Xaverian Brothers, who succeeded us in the towns of Lancashire. It tells of two Xaverian Brothers in Bury who were asked by a poor woman to lay their hands on a sick child. The Belgian brothers did not wish to do so but were reluctantly forced to comply with the poor woman’s wishes. However, returning some time later, they discovered that their failure to effect a cure had got them into disrepute. “These foreign brothers are no good,” said the woman. “God be good to the Irish brothers. It’s they would cure the child if they were here.”<sup>113</sup>

But these stories are from the early days, the youth of the Institute, when all the dynamism, vitality, freshness, and initiative of youth received the added impetus of the vital inspiration of the Founder himself in the midst of his men – the living link with God’s visible and tangible contact with man in a moment of history. They belong to a time when we were young and free (as young institutes like Mother Theresa’s and the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld are free today), unburdened by fixed and encrusted commitments: compulsory education, competitive state examinations, fixed standards, and settled ways.



And now all religious institutes are told to renew. We are warned that we must renew or perish. When we, the Christian Brothers, were young in the early nineteenth century, the Order of Preachers was described by Newman as “a great ideal now extinct.”<sup>114</sup> Still the Dominicans sprang back to life and vitality under the inspiration of their general Lacordaire precisely when that gloomy judgement was being written. There are those who would predict extinction for ourselves at present. There are even some serious-minded Brothers who would ask: Are we a spent force as a congregation? Is our work finished? Some are discouraged by the dramatic quality of the works of other and younger institutions. It is easy to be depressed by a comparison between our results and the visible results they obtain; to seem drab in the light of their youthful energy and dynamism, to see their vocations under God increase and multiply while ours are falling steadily. Are we then out of date, an anachronism? Is our work finished? My answer is, No – far from it! The old sodium is there, though covered with a crust after the long vacation. Cut through this crust and the sodium will be ready to take to the water again with its old vigour. The crust is the outward structure of rule and custom and accepted practice, whose duty is to enclose and protect the life-giving fire of the charism. The structure (and possibly the work) can be changed, and maybe must be changed, to meet new times and circumstances and new needs in the Church. Any change in the structure, of course, must be in accord with our original charism. The charism is a fixture. Change that and we have a different institute, a new congregation. “For a living being,” says the Holy Father in his recent apostolic exhortation on renewal of the religious life, “adaptation to its surroundings does not consist in abandoning its true identity, but rather is asserting itself in the vitality that is its own.”<sup>115</sup>

What then do we seek to do when we speak of renewal in the spirit of the Founder? It means we must become sensitive with the mind of the Founder to the Gospel and the needs of the Church today. What is the mind of the Founder? Who is to tell us what it is? It belongs to us all, to the youngest man amongst us. Its strength, its power, its force has called thousands of men from the beginning. Our congregation is the Founder’s most important relic.

First, there was a charism, an insight, an inspiration placed by the Holy Spirit in the person of Edmund Rice. He responded with docility to the Holy Spirit and, with a *sensus ecclesiae* – a sensitivity to the mind of the Church – common to all founders, he submitted this charism to the hierarchy of the time. After approval and with the passage of time the Founder and his charism merged into the congregation he had founded. There the charism was concretized towards a given objective in the service of the Church. It has been the responsibility of the Congregation to be faithful to the charism of the Founder ever since.

There are two dangers to be specially noted in this work of returning to the Founder. One is liberalism: that is, over-emphasising the letter; returning literally and unquestioningly to the exact thing done by the Founder and his brothers in their day. Take, for example, the following Sunday horarium followed by the early brothers in your own province here, at Preston:

Rise 5 a. m.  
Mass 7 a. m.  
Breakfast after Mass  
Mass with the boys in the public church 9 a.m.  
Sunday school after Mass until 11.30 a.m.



Talk for one hour by the superior to the young men of the district 3 p.m.  
Boys marched to church for evening devotions 4 p.m.  
Then Vespers and a walk until 6 p.m.

Such a programme would not suit the increased intellectual and even physical demands of today. To state that we should return to that Sunday programme would be foolish.

The other danger is to over-emphasise the spirit of the Founder. It is not enough to say that we must meet all the needs – social and otherwise – of today because the Founder met social needs in his day. Any new work we undertake must be in accordance with the living traditions of the Congregation. We cannot go off as we wish, answering every need in the Church today. We must keep to our original charism. If we do not, we are founding a new congregation.

A real return to the Founder and his spirit is, rather, a rediscovering of his total dedication to the teaching of the Gospel and the needs of the contemporary Church, a listening to the calls of the spirit in the Church and answering them.

There are three general principles governing renewal in the spirit of the founder in any congregation:

1. Fidelity to the Founder must be in accordance with the laws of human activity – research, reflection and observation.
2. No individual can claim for himself the thought of the Founder.
3. The community cannot invent a new congregation.

Let us take the first point: research, reflection, observation. The charism of the Founder reached men before it was expressed in a rule. There must be a juridical renewal, but there must also be a renewal of heart in the men. It is easy to find fault with the constitutions. Often it is not the constitutions that are at fault (after all, they were approved by the Church); the fault is often in how they are observed. Dialogue, confrontation and exchange of views are all necessary. There must be research; historical, theological, educational. All research should be objective and guided by principles that are theologically and spiritually sound. There still remains a vast amount of research and correlation to be done on our sources. First, the existing sources must be verified and authenticated beyond the limits of doubt. Then new sources must be sought. Meanwhile, all genuine sources must be passed on to the brothers that all may work and study and compare.

This brings us to the second point: no individual or age can claim a monopoly on the thought of the Founder. Each generation of brothers will have its own strength and weakness and its own peculiar and particular insights governed by the contemporary conditions and needs of the Church. There are adaptations (possibly even a change in our work) to be made today which had never to be made before and which may not be necessary at a future age. The spirit can find different expressions in different ages. We must grasp the situation as we see it. We must together pray and meditate and study until eventually we discover, not alone what the Founder did in parallel cases, but how he did it, and, above all, why he did it. Eventually, with the co-operation of our historians, our theologians, our experts in spiritual affairs, we shall arrive at the point of discovery. We shall have found the basis or ultimate criteria upon which the Founder acted – the hub and centre around which all his work



revolved. When we have established this basic governing idea or set of criteria, we shall have captured what we seek; we shall have discovered our congregation's eternal yard-stick –

the original charism of the Founder, against which all things present and future should be measured, all decisions made. We may be surprised at the result. Religious institutes more advanced than ours in this work – we are but starting – have been surprised at their discoveries already and have been greatly facilitated in their decisions as to what adaptations are to be made, and where. Take an example in our own case. We had always believed that the Founder was against the National Board – the system of state schools introduced into Ireland in 1831. A recent discovery – a letter from Father Kenney SJ to Archbishop Murray of Dublin – contains the following:

Thus in good Mr. Rice's time, despite all his wishes they (the brothers) gave up their connection with the Education Board on the principle of being more free to attend to the religious education of the poor and in confidence of being supported by the people, if they took no money from the Board.<sup>116</sup>

This is against all we ever believed about this contact between the state and ourselves. Which is correct? We shall have to find out.

The third point raised regarding renewal in the spirit of the founder is that the community cannot invent a new institute. This is something to watch for when people are proposing unusual or radical changes in either work or structure. The structure, as has been said, is but the container and guard for the charism. The structure can be changed – radically changed. The essence of the institute can never. This essence in the case of our congregation would seem to entail five outstanding, basic features which must always be present:

1. The apostolate
2. Catechises
3. The school
4. The poor
5. A community

I should like to treat of each of these five features in turn.

### **THE APOSTOLATE**

The apostolic end truly specifies the institute and the religious life of the brothers. The institute was not created for the Brothers but for the Church, that is, for the community of believers in Christ, the people of God. We do not become Brothers in the first instance for our own sanctification; though obviously within the light of our mission within the people of God personal sanctification is a *conditio sine qua non* if our apostolate is to be fulfilled, since the religious life of the brother is that of witness to Christ. Formerly it was believed that a religious was either contemplative or active. Now all religious are declared to be contemplative and apostolic. All, even the most active, must be part contemplative. Our action should be the fruit of contemplation. We can only bring to our work what we have gained in prayer. Edmund Rice was an example of this. Brother Xavier Weston in his evidence for the Cause of the Founder in 1912 wrote what he had heard from the old brothers of the Founder's devotion to the Blessed Sacrament:



His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was intense. It is here according to the tradition of Mount Sion that he brought his letters and cares and difficulties and doubts during the fateful and trying years that intervened before the shattered threads of his great work were woven together by papal authority.<sup>117</sup>

Thus we must remain apostolic; we must be men of action powered by prayer and contemplation. We must work for and in close union with the Church, universal and local, in the spirit of the Gospel. We must avoid the danger of the spirit of exemption becoming a malignant growth on the body of the Church. If we hope to follow our founder we must be integrated closely with the Church and be available at the universal and local level.

## **CATECHESIS**

We were founded to teach religion; and we must still teach religion. The 1832 rule book is definite on this point. Our brief, the charter of our existence, is just as explicit:

That these Religious Brothers, being instituted under the protection of the Holy Child Jesus, and the Patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, his Mother, shall make it their principal care to teach children, particularly the poor, the things necessary for a virtuous and Christian life; and that the main end and spirit of their Institute, must be an anxious solicitude to educate youth according to the maxims of the Christian law.

As early as 1810 the Founder declared the same thing in a letter explaining his system to Dr. Bray, Archbishop of Cashel:

The half hour's explanation of the catechism I hold to be the most salutary part of the system. It is the most laborious to the teachers; however, if it was ten times what it is, I own we are amply paid in seeing such a reformation in the children.<sup>118</sup>

Though founded to teach religion, we were not founded to teach religion only; we were not meant merely to be catechists. From the beginning, secular subjects were taught – in some cases taught at a high level – but they were always subordinate to religious instruction. It was expected that religion should permeate all subjects. Ours has always been a complete teaching structure, a school system in which we teach all subjects but in which there is a primacy which brings them all together – the primacy of catechetics. This primacy of religious instruction arises from the end of the Institute, preaching the Word of God.

## **THE SCHOOLS**

By our title “Religious Brothers of the Christian Schools” we were committed originally to schools and school work. The Founder regarded the school as having an importance in itself. The letter to Dr. Bray in 1810 – already referred to – stresses the importance of order and discipline as part of the fulfilment of our mission. It is noteworthy, however, that Edmund Rice and his early brothers achieved a wonderful flexibility around this concept of schools. There were day schools, night schools (in some establishments) from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. for the apprentices and from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. (again in some establishments) for adults. There were Sunday schools, pay schools, pauper schools. The Founder, as is evident from one of his letters,<sup>119</sup> even canvassed for the new Clongowes Wood College opened in 1814 by the Jesuit fathers. Hospital wards, prisons, a Mendicity institute, all became part-time schools for Edmund Rice and his brothers. North Richmond Street was not only a training school for the brothers but for a while was a training school for Catholic lay teachers as well.<sup>120</sup> We had our own teachers' handbook, *School Government*, based on a De La Salle Brothers'



publication – nevertheless our own. Biographies of Mother Mary Aikenhead all tell of the role of the remarkable Brother Duggan in the training of Mother Mary Xavier, one of the great pioneer educators among the Sisters of Charity. Brother Bernard Dunphy, being examined under oath by a parliamentary commission in 1825, when asked how many Protestants were then attending our Hanover Street School replied: “Only one, and he is not a poor man’s son; he is a sailor who is taught navigation.”<sup>121</sup> Competence, too, seemed to have been an outstanding feature of our school work from the beginning. Father Kenney was the Founder’s guide and counsellor in these matters. “He insisted strongly on the obligation of the brothers, as Christian teachers, to study assiduously in order that they might acquire the broad liberal scholarship demanded by their profession.”<sup>122</sup> That those early brothers certainly took that advice to heart is evident from the many independent testimonies paid to their work by parliamentary commissions and school inspectors. Even when they had withdrawn from the National Board of Education in Ireland, they were often cited as models for others:

The superiority of these schools [wrote Dr McBlain in evidence before a commission in 1854] is doubtless in great measure to be ascribed to the extraordinary personal interest exerted by the teachers over the pupils – an interest based on the distinction that these teachers have devoted their lives to the cause of education for no personal reward or gain, but solely in the discharge of a sacred and self-imposed duty.<sup>123</sup>

In this context it is interesting to quote a tribute paid by an inspector of the Kildare Place Society in 1825 to the Founder himself as an actual teacher in school:

In the town of Waterford there is one who has devoted his time in a most praiseworthy manner to the benevolent purpose of educating the ignorant and destitute of his countrymen. I inspected that school by his permission and feel great pleasure in being able to add, that everything was admirably conducted. I never saw more order, more regularity or greater system, than in that school under the superintendence of a Mr. Rice.<sup>124</sup>

## **THE POOR**

The brief granted to us in 1820, our charter, and the Church’s official recognition of the authenticity of the charism of our founder states:

And whereas, according as it has been related to us.....a pious society of laymen, in the kingdom of Ireland, considering the many great evils to which the poor children of that Nation are exposed, in consequence of their ignorance; and being very desirous to provide for the education and instruction of those amongst them, whose poverty prevents them from going to Schools where payments are exacted; and whence it happens, that being entirely ignorant, they know not the rudiments of the Catholic Faith – have come forward, and applied themselves to the instruction of the said children: and, for this purpose, undertook, a few years ago, to erect a Congregation under the title of “Religious Brothers.”

There were schools, even Catholic schools, when Edmund Rice started his work. Returns for the year 1824<sup>125</sup> show that there were thirty-eight Catholic schools in Waterford itself that year; even two in Barrack Street, where Edmund Rice built his first establishment. But these were Catholic pay schools. For the great majority of Catholics – the paupers who could not



afford it – there was nothing. They could, of course, attend the Charter Schools or the Bible Schools or any of the other schools in the vast network of proselytizing establishments financed most lavishly by the State and by evangelically minded individuals (acting no doubt in good faith). But if they did attend those proselytizing schools there was grave danger of their losing their religion.<sup>126</sup> Edmund Rice knew that he would have to relieve the pressure on these sorely tried people. In 1797 his bishop, Dr. Hussey, had thundered against the blandishments held out by the proselytizing schools in a pastoral letter that caused him to flee the country. Edmund Rice, under God's inspiration took up the fight. He knew he would have to match free book for free book, loaf for loaf, coat for coat with the proselytizers to relieve these paupers from the strong temptation that would rob them of their Faith. So he

founded his schools for paupers (although he had by no means all the pauper boys of Waterford in Mount Sion; he would not have had room for them). True he favoured pay schools, even asked the Holy See on a few occasions for permission to establish pay schools.<sup>127</sup> But the type of pay school he desired was merely a room in the poor school where the sons of shopkeepers and tradesmen who could afford it would pay a small fee and learn some subjects above the curriculum prescribed for the poor children. His pay schools were to follow the model of the continental schools. Their main purpose – while providing education to paying pupils – was to support the poor school by freeing the brothers from the necessity of begging or collecting so that they might be available for full-time teaching.<sup>128</sup> Archbishop Murray was of Edmund's mind on this point.<sup>129</sup>

## **COMMUNITY**

The fifth basic feature of our congregation is that we are religious living in community. The Founder's keen sense of a close-knit community life is quite evident from the sources available for a study of the early history of the congregation. One is reminded of St. Luke's description of the ideal Christian community in Acts 2:42: 'They remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.'

This community life was the source and strength of their apostolic work. We are, thus, a community, a consecrated people, dedicated by the contract of our vows to give a 24-hour witness, 365 days a year, by our conduct, by our work, and even by our dress, to our dedicated poverty, chastity, and obedience in the service of God and our search for union with him. We were raised up as a community to embody in a new form the unchanging ideals of the Gospel and the needs of the Church. The Gospel and the person of Christ are all-important to us. People must see that; they must sense it just as they sensed it in the Founder.

## **CONCLUSION**

And so having taken cognisance of all the guidelines afforded by the Church in her appeal to us and to all religious institutes to renew and adapt ourselves in the spirit of the Founder, we summarise. We have been asked to muster our powers of intellect and will to search, to probe, to examine, to discuss, so that we may discover the charism, the touchstone, the governing principle by which our Founder met all the demands of the Gospel and supplied the particular needs of the Church in his time. Finding this point of reference, this aspect of Christ working in the Church which is part of the character of our institute and our reason for existing, we shall have our own yardstick, against which all new decisions can be judged, all old decisions reassessed.





This is a work for us all. The Church needs us all, needs us individually. Spiritual health and vitality come to us only in so far as we heed the Church and integrate with the Church and her mission. We are by modern standards a relatively old congregation. Do we show our age? Can we recognise in ourselves all or some of the signs of decay?

A decline in prayer life

Partial or occasional withdrawal from the full life-long dedication we made of ourselves to God when we took our vows

Loss of initiative in the interest of the Church

Rationalisation of comfort and complacency

Fear of change

Apathy

Divorce from the life of the local church?

Somewhere along the line did a hardness come into our congregation? A coldness and even harshness so very different from the true humanism<sup>130</sup> of Edmund Rice? Have we lost the great community dimension of consultation which Edmund Rice had? St. Benedict says that even young monks should be listened to, for “God often reveals what is better to the younger”.<sup>131</sup> Do we seem to have settled into a groove; found something that worked well and continues to work; something standard that decides almost unconsciously for us the type of boy we take into our schools, for instance, and the type of boy we reject as well as the comfortable thinking that rationalizes the rejection? Somewhere have we lost Edmund Rice’s compassion for the deprived?

If we study the life of Edmund Rice we shall be agreeably surprised at what we shall find. We shall be amazed at the timeless, almost contemporary, quality of his message. We shall wonder at the sheer ability and versatility of the man, the vastness of his investments in lands and cattle and housing and stocks and shares and inns and dairies in order to support and expand his work for God and the needs of the Church at his time. And yet, side by side with this, we shall see his great trust in Providence and the prayer that so often appears in his letters and in accounts of him by others: “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. We will marvel at his availability for God and the neighbour; his willingness to administer complex wills and bequests for the poor and the destitute at the request of the bishops; his constancy, when as an old man approaching eighty and suffering from arthritis<sup>132</sup> he could yet set out on a sixteen-hour journey from Waterford to Dublin in a swaying coach and on bad roads for the sake of charity to the neighbour. In an age of consciousness of the ecumenical it is noteworthy how ecumenical this man was. From 1820 on, he was a member of the committee of a relief society run by Quakers whose chairman was the Protestant bishop of Waterford. As educators we shall realize the flexibility and breadth of his system of education; the Memorial School built in 1846 in his honour was opened as a nursery school for children of three years and under.<sup>133</sup> We shall see how sensitive the Founder was to the contemporary needs of the people of God; how the brothers supported Father Mathew’s very necessary temperance campaign; and how for several months during the terrible cholera of 1832 some of our schools were turned into hospitals and the brothers, at the direction of the Founder, served in the wards. We shall wonder at the progressive and professional outlook of the Founder and his men, the publication of his own textbooks, the sending of brothers to Paris to study the system of the De La Salle Brothers as early as 1834. The old brothers who wrote of him in 1912 spoke of his kindness: “he was very mild and homely in his dealings and correspondence with his brothers.”<sup>134</sup> We shall learn of his insistence on reservation of the



Blessed Sacrament in all our houses from the beginning – a source of scruple to some bishops even as late as 1846. Finally, in a call from the Church that has as its first norm the return to the Gospels is it not encouraging to be able to record that as far as can be ascertained Edmund Rice is the only founder ever to have been represented in a picture with his hand on the Bible.

In some of our provinces we are alarmed at the steep decline in vocations. Some of us take refuge in saying it is the evil of our times. Is not this to belittle the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who can work and inspire at all times. In one of our bigger provinces 583 young

people have come and gone in fourteen years, have tried to live our life, and have rejected it. What could we have done, under God, with even 300 of them on the missions – in Liberia, in Zambia, in Peru?

What is wrong? How much of the fault is in ourselves? Religious institutes like charisms do not just die; they are killed by neglect or suffocation. Youth has an uncanny sense for discerning the moribund or unsure. But there is still room and great room for hope. We have in our Founder a pattern for ourselves and an inspiration for youth; a man with all the qualities admired so much by youth today: “the worshipful heart of Benedict, the infectious joy of Francis, the concern for the poor of Charles de Foucauld, the merry zest for life of Philip Neri, the flaming love of Teresa of Avila.”<sup>135</sup>

Edmund Rice is a man for our times. In the stress on the importance of the layman in the Church we recall that he in his own lifetime was called by God to live a very full life from baptism through his lay state – his married state, his religious state. He is, among other things, an example of what a man, under God, can do even when tied to riches and commerce. For us, though, he is something special. He was the first Christian Brother – the first to live our life. He showed us its potential. Let us renew in his spirit.

Let us take to heart the second chapter of the book of our founder and six other brothers, in consultation with Father Kenney and all the brethren, wrote in 1832:

The spirit of this Institute is that spirit of faith, which inspires its members to view nothing but with the eyes of faith, to do nothing but with a view to God, and to ascribe all to God; at all times entering into the sentiments of Holy Job; “The Lord gave” to me; “the Lord hath taken away” from me; “as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord.”



### 3. *From Mount Sion to the ends of the earth* <sup>136</sup>

This year, 1975, we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication in Ireland of a book written by a small, frail genius of a schoolmaster. The man was Daniel Corkery and his book bore the title, *The Hidden Ireland*.<sup>137</sup> The very title stirred interest, for it connoted a hidden world, an unrecorded Ireland, and unease with standard historical treatment of the past. It was, and still is, a seminal work. Tonight we treat of a man that had contact with several aspects of the many hidden Irelands of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Tonight we treat of Edmund Rice.

In an international gathering such as this it is right that we seek to place Edmund Rice in an international setting; to see him in the universal situation of time and place; to measure his stature and his achievements against his peers; to place him and his work in universal contexts: context of time; context of phenomenon; context of place in God's unfolding plan in history.

We live in strange and wonderful times – times of tension. But was not the world always full of tension: the small men doing great things; the weak men strong; and the unlearned with the gift of wisdom? “History is the teacher of life” said Pope John in his opening address to the Second Vatican Council, which has shaken the world with the wonder of its message.<sup>138</sup> And has not history told us that God's ways are not our ways and that God's ways are wonderful. And this must necessarily be the tone of our lecture tonight, for we are dealing with a man of God. It is as impossible to treat of Edmund Rice without speaking of God's dealings with man as it would be to write a biography of Napoleon without mentioning that Napoleon was a soldier. A unique property of Judaism and of Christianity, says a modern Scripture scholar, setting them off among the world's great religions is their historical character.<sup>139</sup> The others are generally sets of beliefs and practices. But with the Judaeo-Christian religion the historical facts are altogether essential. God's successive intervention in the history of man is the very fibre of both the Old Testament and the New Testament religion. For the 600 million Catholics in the world (and we in Ireland are only three and a half) and for the many millions of our separated brethren the Incarnation is still the greatest thing that has happened in the history of the world.<sup>140</sup>

Edmund Rice was many things in his time: husband, father, victualler, landowner, cattle merchant, and above all and through all these human activities a good Christian man. Yet, it is not of Edmund Rice in any of these roles – beautiful as his living of each in turn seemed to have been – that I speak tonight. It is of Edmund Rice in his capacity as founder. For these were my terms of reference - the Edmund Rice that went from Mount Sion to the four corners of the earth.

We live in a world that looks only for uniqueness; that seems at times governed by *The Guinness Book of Records*. We ask that any man that is raised to fame or notice provide his credentials as the first to do something or the fastest to achieve. The qualities we seek must be measurable, visible and of universal interest. This mind, born of the mass media – possibly one of its faults as against the great body of its blessings – creates difficulties when dealing with our subject. Edmund Rice was not the first, under God, to found an official religious family out of the hidden Ireland of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The great Nano Nagle was before him there. There were others: Bishop Delaney, Teresa Ball, Mary Aikenhead, and Catherine McAuley. He was not the greatest founder that ever founded a



religious family in the history of the Church. Who can measure such a distinction? But, at least, he was a founder. And that in itself is remarkable enough to bring us from the ends of the earth to the city where he founded the Christian brothers. And, as we shall see, it is remarkable enough for that city to enable it to stand up and be counted among the privileged cities of the Christian world.

There have been a total of 276 religious families of men – and a much larger number of women – officially recognised by the Church since religious life began in the West in the fourth century.<sup>141</sup> Each of these had a founder. Edmund Rice is one of these – one of 276 remarkable people in the course of 1600 years.

Religious life was born of the *Pax Romana*, of the peace declared between Church and State by the rise of Constantine, the first Christian emperor. The relaxation of the persecutions against the early Christians and the amnesty granted to those who had apostatised under pressure gave rise to a mediocrity in Christian living. Is it always the way, I wonder, when Christians come into prosperity? Inspired by the Holy Spirit, men and women went out into the desert to do battle with evil – of which the desert itself was a symbol. They were, I suppose you could say, heretics; heretics in the original meaning of the word in that they opted out, opted out of mediocrity.<sup>142</sup> They felt, under God’s inspiration, called to make a vigorous re-statement of the Christian life, to establish once more the presence in the world and in the Church of a radical living of the Christian life. Thus was born, and thus has continued, religious or consecrated life as we know it today, and with it a duality that has been ever since at work in the Church – a duality that for a long time was called the “Church of the Monks and the Church of the Bishops”.<sup>143</sup> the charismatic and the authoritative elements – complementary, each mirroring respectively the creative power and the authority power of God. The Church is slow to grant official recognition to new religious families. The Council of Lyons in 1274 forbade any more mendicant orders to be founded.<sup>144</sup> The Second Vatican Council more or less echoed this restraint.<sup>145</sup> It is not that the Church does not want these charismatic movements but that she wants to be sure that they are of the Spirit and from God.

All are called to holiness, each according to his gifts.<sup>146</sup> Holiness is a gift, as poetry or art of music is a gift. Founders receive a gift, or charism, usually of a very high order. The common denominator of all founder gifts is God-centeredness. Still each founder receives a gift that is a unique gift, a charism which the Holy Spirit implants in him for the good of others. With this gift a founder is helped to live the full Christian life. But, aware of the times and circumstances in which he lives, a founder is struck by some particular aspect in the life of Christ and reads the gospel in the light of this aspect. He is driven to action by the sight of hardship and misery and want of many kinds about him. The gift is at the beginning an extremely intense personal grace which makes the recipient know and love Jesus Christ in himself and in his mystical body, which is the Church. There is an intense quality in such a charism, characterised by the power of witness and illumination, which accompany it. It shines forth as a light and attracts to itself those that are sensible to it. Thus emerges a new way of life, a new manifestation of the Christian thing; a new radical restatement of the Christian way of loving. Thus, with the blessing of the authoritative Church, a new religious family is born. God, in the age-old manner, has intervened in the on-going history of humankind to create something new – a dedicated body of people coping in a stress situation of time and place, meeting the “joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age”<sup>147</sup> first in the local and later in the universal situation.



Edmund Rice, then, is remarkable in that he was a founder – one born to be an object of the intervention of the Holy Spirit of God, in the affairs of mankind; a prophet like the prophets of the Old Testament; a man with a mission. Founders come and congregations follow when the People of God “in exodus through the desert of history towards the promised land of the ultimate future”<sup>148</sup> need a new sign, a radical restatement of the Gospel and the Christian life.

St. Benedict, for example, came when Europe in the sixth century, devastated by the inroads of the barbarians and the collapse of the *Pax Romana* – the peaceful co-existence of Church and State – was in need of order. “The Benedictines spread the Christian Faith, and with it an idea of order based on loving obedience and a civilisation that was the by-product of their life of prayer and work.”<sup>149</sup> After the collapse of the Carolingian empire they contributed greatly to the re-building of Europe. From their centralised monasteries they radiated order and stability and bequeathed to western man an education, a social and agricultural legacy that was enormous.<sup>150</sup> All this, under God, was the fruit from the blossoming of the charism given to a humane Christian genius, Benedict, who, among other things, adapted religious life to the capabilities of Western man and wrote a rule of great wisdom and moderation; one of the paragraphs is often quoted as typical: “We do, indeed, read that wine is no drink for monks; but since nowadays monks cannot be persuaded of this, let us at least agree upon this, to drink temperately and not to satiety.”<sup>151</sup>

The work of the founder Finian of Clonard came at a time when the Church was in need of enlightenment, and the gift, or charism, given to Finian grew, under God, in the congenial setting of a trouble-free Ireland that was at the time, as it were, an oasis in the desert, where trees of the spirit could flower and seeds of faith could be later blown afar to scatter and give continuity to the Christian thing. Colmcille, Columbán, and many other disciples of Finian, ascetics, purified in the Spirit to such an extent that they wrote some of the loveliest lyric poetry of all time, brought the light of faith and learning to a devastated Europe. Father Tomás Ó Fiaich in his recent life of St. Columbán tells us that where the saint preached, a flood of vocations followed in that district. Continental monasticism, deeply affected by Eastern influence, viewed pastoral and missionary activity as beyond the scope of a monastery.<sup>152</sup> These Irish monks found no contradiction between the contemplative life and involvement in the pastoral ministry. In the Spirit fed like a stream from the mountain lake of the soul of Finian they left Ireland in white martyrdom to go into exile for Christ, many never to return. A book published in 1639 on the propagation of the Faith in Belgium gives the name of thirty-nine male and three female saints who came from Ireland to evangelise Belgium alone.<sup>153</sup>

Francis and Dominic both appeared in the thirteenth century to meet the needs of the changing world. The orders that grew from the flowering of their charism were designed to meet the problems of the cities. After the Crusades the town rather than the lord’s chateau, the artisan and the merchant rather than the serf and the knight, had become important. And where you have trade you have inequality, rich and poor. The old Benedictine stability, where the world came to the monastery, was not able to cope with the new situation. And so the founders Francis and Dominic, through their friars, reintroduced under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the incessant journeying of the Apostles for the sake of the Gospel and introduced a flexibility and mobility into the service of the people of God that was completely new in monastic history.<sup>154</sup> Standing on the threshold of the modern world, St. Dominic and St. Francis fought to keep it Christian.<sup>155</sup>



Ignatius of Loyola and the Society of Jesus came at a time when the Christian world was being rocked by the Reformation and the poverty of Christ by the disturbing riches from the new worlds being discovered. Ignatius was the founder of a religious family that, among other things, exploited the power that came from the fusion of the priestly and religious vocations and harnessed it in the service of the Church. The Jesuits responded to the mentality of a new society as radically different from that of Dominic and Francis as the latter had been from that of Benedict and Bruno. To a world in turmoil, seeking, in doubt, with Christian unity shattered, Ignatius and his Jesuits, under God, shone forth in the age-old prophetic mission of witness as an organised, united, strong, central and authoritarian movement, masterfully accommodating religious life to the needs of the time.<sup>156</sup>

Thus founders arise. They are gifted by the Holy Spirit with an insight into the reading of the Gospel that lives the whole Gospel radically and still emphasises some aspect or dimension of the infinity of the mystery of Christ. “A person gradually comes to realise that he has been given the charism to be a founder when he recognises that the way of following Christ and the service of men to which he is called does not yet exist in this specific form in the Church. He is called to a beginning.”<sup>157</sup> Thus St. Benedict and the Irish monks were a pertinent response “to the decay of the Roman empire, St. Bernard to feudal chivalry, St. Dominic to adventurous free thought, St. Francis to irresponsible wealth, St. Ignatius to bourgeois society, St. Vincent de Paul to secular rationalism.”<sup>158</sup> And today the families of Brother Charles de Foucauld (who rediscovered in the desert the spiritual power of the hidden life at Nazareth); the Focolare groups of Chiara Lubich of Trent, founded in 1943 and now numbering their affiliates in millions; the Sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, founded twenty-five years ago and now composed of 1132 sisters and 180 brothers, with 100 houses around the world; the ecumenical community of Robert Schutz, near Cluny in France, drawing 30,000 teenagers last year to a council of youth; and many others are meeting the immediate needs of our times, “bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel”<sup>159</sup> in circus wagons and fair grounds and factories, on farms and in offices, as well as in schools and clinics and hermitages.

And what of Edmund Rice? It is not often such gifts as founding gifts, or charisms, are given. The history of the rise of founders of the charismatic movements that flow from their God-given genius is a long one in the Christian way of life. They have come at stress points in the history of the Church, at a time when the Church has been in need or in turmoil. The authoritative called on the charismatic when the Church has been in need or in turmoil. The authoritative called on the charismatic when the church was low and a tension was ridden in tandem, for tensions are not necessarily evil.

And there were tensions in society when Edmund Rice began his God-given work as founder. Seldom was the position of the Church so critical. With the French Revolution she was facing radical unbelief, the passing of the old social and political order, and the dechristianising of society. Though the old religious orders survived they were weak and ineffective. A great number of new congregations rushed in to fill the vacuum. Responding to local needs and tensions they created a bewildering variety of congregations “that were often very close in character, organisation, purpose, and time of foundation.”<sup>160</sup> A great number of these post French Revolution congregations were created for teaching on all levels. Teaching brotherhoods, many of them modelled on that of the saintly founder St. John Baptist de La Salle, sprang up mainly in France and Ireland. There were at least twenty of them in France and five in Ireland. “It was,” says one writer, “a period in which bold entrepreneurs with a



goal and a knack for organisation put together great commercial combinations.”<sup>161</sup> The founders of the nineteenth-century brotherhoods,” continues the same writer, “were children of their age. Invariably they were strong personalities, leaders of men. Each stamped his institute with his own character, so that even today the influence of the ‘Founder’ is strongly felt.”

And what of Edmund Rice? The Holy Spirit struck him, as is the case with all founders, when he least expected it. First, God seemed to fell him with an insupportable blow in the death of his wife. After purgation (again a standard pattern with founders) there followed a complete conversion. How Providence works! Someone, possibly, knocked on his door; asked for a subscription to Dr. Troy’s new bible, modernised by a Father Bernard McMahon from the archaic English of Dr. Challoner’s version of the Douay Bible.<sup>162</sup> This English language bible was printed and published in the hidden Ireland of the intense little world of Catholic printers and publishers that grew up in the time of the late Penal Laws among the nest of Irish speakers – among them Seán Ó Neachtáin – that surrounded the chapels of the religious orders in Sráid na gCócairí, Cook Street, in the Lower Liberties of the city of Dublin.<sup>163</sup> Dr. Troy’s bible, which was to become the standard Douay version in America as well as in Ireland, was published in 1790, and now by 1791 was in its fifth edition – a tribute in itself to the hidden Ireland of a deeply spiritual people facing a post-Reformation tension where the Word of God had been used to polarise the People of God for or against the Scriptures.<sup>164</sup> Our greatest tangible relic of the mind of Edmund Rice is his signed copy of Archbishop Troy’s bible.

From all that was lost in the passage of time and the lack of realisation of its importance, one precious sheet remains and it is probably a key to the greatness of Edmund Rice. On the first sheet of this big bible Edmund Rice wrote his name and the date, 1791. Then followed under the heading “Texts against Usury” a list of texts from the Old and New Testaments in his own handwriting. A Scripture scholar, in studying this list of texts,<sup>165</sup> tells us there seems to be a definite pattern in them from Exodus 22:25, the “Book of the Covenant” where man has accepted partnership with God and the implications here specified, right through to Matthew 5:42 and Luke 6:35, where in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ teaches the higher ethic of the New Covenant, the ideal of active merciful love towards the unloveable. There is no question of deciding now whether someone is worth working for; we are not to judge, but to act as Christ did. “What we have in these texts,” he says “is a line of development from a civilised code of justice, where the poor and the deprived are taken care of because it is the right thing to do, to an internal idea of total love for all.” Thus interpreted this list of texts – and it is the only handwriting there is in the pages of this big much-used Bible – it would seem that the unique aspect of the Christ life that penetrated the soul of Edmund Rice was Christ’s compassion for the multitude, which found expression shortly after the Sermon on the mount in Christ’s going about teaching, proclaiming, and healing the wants and wounds of his people. Have we here discovered the charism, or special gift, of Edmund Rice? I should be inclined to think so. Compassion for the multitude – a great Christian compassion for the multitude of his people, wounded and in want. One could imagine Edmund Rice asking himself as in Psalm 14 (15), note by him in his list of texts:

Who shall sojourn in your tent?  
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?  
He who walks blamelessly  
And does what is right  
And speaks truth from his heart;



Who does not slander with his tongue,...  
 And who does not put out his money at interest  
 And does not take a bribe against the innocent.  
 He who does these things shall never be moved.

And thus he went from Arundel Place and dwelt on the holy hill, the little hill that he called



**Mount Sion, Edmund Rice's First Monastery.**

Mount Sion – a name reminiscent of the little hill of Mount Sion in Jerusalem, where the Jews had set a sanctuary to help them remember the tent set apart that in their wanderings spoke of the presence of Yahweh among them; a people remembering the desert and the Covenant; a rural people gone urban.

Christ had said: “Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on

earth? No, I tell you, but rather division,” foretelling the tensions and turmoil that would come on the earth. With his Christian compassion Edmund Rice leaned out to meet the tensions of his time. Basically I suppose it is the man of God more than the statesman who can meet tension and even, in part at least, heal or resolve them. One of the elements of Edmund Rice’s genius was his gift to harness tensions and guide them in the service of God.

There were political tensions: Church versus State; Church versus people; and people versus people. Edmund Rice faced these tensions. Because of his Christian compassion he worked where he could with the other side. There did not seem to have been an ounce of bitterness in the man. His God-centeredness (a quality shared by all founders) resulted in a love which liberated his spirit to love all. When the Government in 1797 saw the appointment of the brilliant Doctor Hussey to the See of Waterford they saw it basically as a political appointment. However, when Bishop Hussey amazed the Government by acting as a bishop and issuing a pastoral on the rights of Catholics to Catholic education, he was forced to leave the country. Years later a new and chastened Doctor Hussey came back, meeting the tension between Government anger and his duties as a pastor by an understandable compromise. When he returned to Waterford, among the political problems facing him was that a layman had built a house with his own money on the grounds of the thatched chapel of Faha, behind





the houses in Barrack Street. People must have known that this was a monastery, the beginnings of a new religious congregation. This action blatantly contravened one of the latest of the Penal Laws. We read of the bishop's displeasure with this "mad" merchant who left all the moved out into a stable; into where the action was; in the midst of a broken people, many fleeing from recurring famines and all centred on the mud-walled thatched chapel fourteen feet in from the road. A well-known authority on founders says: "In many cases their strongest apostolic drive was towards the Lord in the persons of the most abjectly poor, the most repulsively ill, or even the most morally reprehensible."<sup>166</sup> Bishop Hussey was angry – understandably angry – as he was torn by the tension between his consciousness of Government presence and his still deep concern for the education and uplifting of his teeming pauper flock.<sup>167</sup> There was tension between the charismatic Edmund Rice and the authority figure Bishop Hussey as there often is between the creative and the person within whose authority he works. But with a true *sensus ecclesiae*, as in the manner of a true founder, Edmund Rice submitted to the Church in the person of his bishop and won him to his cause. Bishop Hussey made his will on 10 July 1803, and died while taking a morning swim the following day on holidays in Dunmore. In his will Bishop Hussey left all he had, £2,000, to Edmund Rice for his work.

Ireland was virtually a military state at the time, with normally over 20,000 regular troops stationed in the country.<sup>168</sup> There were over 100 barracks in the country, many of them newly built or abuilding.<sup>169</sup> Two risings of the people against the state took place during the founding years of Edmund Rice's congregation. Though the feelings of his family must have been known – some of them were involved – Edmund Rice, as his contemporary Brother Austin Dunphy tell us, was one of the few men who could pass unchallenged from barrack to barrack in Munster in 1798.<sup>170</sup> His Christian compassion was evident in his visiting the gaols and assisting the condemned at public executions. The sons of some of the poor soldiers from the adjoining barracks were among the first pupils in Edmund Rice's pauper school in Barrack Street.<sup>171</sup> And when times had calmed somewhat, two men, one from either side, came to this Christian man, Edmund Rice, and joined his congregation: Benjamin Manifold, six foot six, a former captain in the Wicklow militia, became a Catholic in 1815, and joined Edmund Rice. Thomas Cahill of Callan had been strung up at the Cross of Callan in 1798 and released with a warning. He came to Edmund Rice to Waterford to be trained for the Thurles house in 1815. Both became excellent brothers and died in the Congregation.

There were social tensions in Edmund Rice's Ireland. There were early marriages and large families and recurring potato famines. There was flight from the land after the famines of 1817, 1819, 1822 and 1836. Almost half the farmers had less than five acres of land.<sup>172</sup> There was hunger and want and overcrowding in the cities. There was a whole world of hidden Irelands in the Ireland of the time. Among them were two Irelands, rural and urban, apologetic rural and sophisticated urban. The case was aggravated by a rift in communication and thought, because of two languages: one, Irish, dying into a rich world of things forgotten, things of the spirit, in the face of the other, English, tailor-made for the march of commerce and *laissez-faire*. For over two hundred years have we not been at heart a peasant people trying hard to urbanise? The tension between these two, urban and rural, tore Edmund Rice's Congregation in its early years, estranging one whole house from the parent body. He reached out to these men when they could not go it alone and, against the advice of those in the congregation who would avoid tension by refusing them readmission, he took them in and treated them with the utmost kindness and consideration, buying for himself in the process suffering, misunderstanding, calumny, and the necessity of painful confrontation. His great



Christian compassion reached out to the multitude, buying cloth for innumerable shirts and trousers, and thread and buttons for clothes. He acted since 1820 on a committee for a mendacity institute sponsored by the good Protestants of Waterford, headed by their bishop, sending onions from his community garden to heal scurvy, vegetables for nourishment, and, on one occasion at least, a whole pig for the Christmas festivities. And he and his brothers brought to these destitute families the message of the Gospel, instructing them on Sundays and holidays in the house in Mendicity Square.<sup>173</sup> He sponsored old men and old women and fought their battles with the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests, who, caught in red tape, were slow in sending down to Waterford the moneys that would keep these helpless people alive. On one occasion he warned the Commissioners that if they delayed any more he would go to Dublin and haunt their offices until the moneys due were paid.<sup>174</sup> One of his last journeys was made in pain and suffering, eighteen hours in a coach to Dublin, on the usual quest. "I had a letter on Tuesday for Brother Francis," he wrote on 10 February 1839, "on which I am obliged to set off for Dublin this evening. It's well if this work does not kill me." And yet, after his death, Mr. Mathews the accountant of the Commissioners could pay Edmund Rice this handsome tribute: "I found also that the books of Mr. Rice to which I had to refer had been so regularly kept by him since the year 1815 to the present period that I experienced no difficulty in the exercise of my judgement of admitting the several credits claimed upon this evidence solely."<sup>175</sup>

Edmund Rice hovered with compassion over the jailed, the hungry, the condemned, the dying, and literally lived in his life the conditions for the inheritance of the kingdom mentioned in Matthew 25:35-37: "For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me."

Finally his God-given mission focused down to the teaching of the multitude of pauper boys the truths of their Faith and the things necessary to protect and nourish it in a world teeming with the tensions of injustice. And he had time for the bereaved:

I...had on Saturday last the account of poor Phil Kirwan's death in a letter from Br. P. Ellis. May his soul rest in peace. I wrote poor Mary a letter yesterday. May the Lord help her; she is now the dregs of misery and misfortune. I pity the poor mother, it will break her heart. I told Mary in my letter that they ought to give to the poor in handfulls part of the poor fellow's property and you ought to tell her the same, which would be a great relief to his poor soul.<sup>176</sup>

His friendships were so deep that he could write these words to Bryan Bolger, a wealthy Catholic friend in Dublin, in the middle of a business letter:

I am sorry to be giving you so much trouble; perhaps it may come in my way to do as much for you; however, I hope God will supply our inability in this way. It's a poor thing, I must own, to be expecting the reward of labour from creatures, who frequently are forgetful and ungrateful for favours done them, but let us do ever so little for God we will be sure he will never forget it, nor let it pass unrewarded. How many of our actions are lost for want of applying them to this end, and were we to know the merit and value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God we should prize it more than Gold or Silver.<sup>177</sup>



His friend Bryan Bolger kept this letter for twenty-four years. It was found among his papers after death.

There were religious tensions in Ireland at the time. During the first thirty years of the nineteenth century the “Second Reformation” was in full progress – the last all-out effort to win the Irish from the “errors of popery.” The Protestant archbishop of Dublin, Doctor Magee, in evidence before the select committee of the House of Lords on the state of Ireland in 1825 stated:

Of this I have little doubt that the principle and spirit that must lead to the conversion of Roman Catholics to Protestantism are in most active operation. There has been lately an excitement of attention to the subject of religion through the people, such as perhaps there has not been before at any period since the Reformation. In truth, with respect to Ireland, the Reformation may, strictly speaking, be truly said only now to have begun.<sup>178</sup>

The evangelical spirit of John Wesley, who had visited Ireland several times, was abroad permeating and renewing the Church of Ireland and also the Presbyterians. According to the census of 1834 there were in Ireland that year 6,287,000 Catholics, 852,000 members of the Church of Ireland, and 642,000 Presbyterians.<sup>179</sup>

The Established Church placed its greatest hope of gaining converts in the Protestant-controlled schools. It is estimated that in Ireland in 1824 there were 11,823 of these schools, 12,530 teachers, and 560,549 pupils.<sup>180</sup> A number of these school organisations, such as the Charter School society, were proselytising in aim.<sup>181</sup> Exactly 1,466 of these schools were supported by Government grant.<sup>182</sup> On the other hand, the schools under Catholic control numbered only 422, and Catholic resources were utterly inadequate to provide any more. Bible societies multiplied and spread bibles in Irish and in English. The Religious Tract and Bible society founded in 1810, in ten years distributed 4,400,000 tracts, many of which were insulting to Catholics.<sup>183</sup> Itinerant preachers like the Hon. Baptist Noel, Mr. Wolff, and Captain Gordon (descendant of Lord Gordon of the London Riots)<sup>184</sup> came from England and Scotland and challenged the Catholic clergy to defend their doctrine. Fathers Maginn, Maguire, Maher, McSweeney, and others accepted the challenge. Huge crowds assembled at the various encounters throughout the country, including Waterford. Feelings ran high. Some Priests had been won over to the Protestant cause. There was the Reverend Denis Leyne Brasbie of Dingle, against whom Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin wrote a strong poem.<sup>185</sup> There was a Father Tomás Ó Muirheartaigh from Fionn Trá, who was locally called Tomás an Éithigh (Tom the Liar).<sup>186</sup> One of Edmund Rice’s own brothers in Preston, England, became a Protestant for a while, though he later returned. The Veto Question caused strife and division among Catholics themselves for the first twenty years of the nineteenth century. There were doubt and controversy and betrayals and polarisations, as well as recurring incidents in the age-old misunderstanding between the secular and regular clergy. Through it all, Edmund Rice moved, faithful to the Church, allaying fears: a man with a genius for friendship with Protestant and Catholic alike, a genius for administering legacies that hovered in tension between the law and the justice denied, or at least begrudged, by that law to the poor, the old, and the hungry, a man with a biblical faith, a man with a genius for believing that something could be done, a man of vision, oven-fresh for the times, a charismatic as of old, often in tension between what he felt God was calling him to do and the authority figure who represented for him, as a true charismatic, the sanction that he must get, a man who thought so big, so wide that his friend Bishop John Power had to rebuke him for thinking of



thinning his effort out beyond the limits of his hard-pressed diocese of Waterford to the relief of the sister see of Cork, of the metropolitan see of Cashel, and even when almost financially embarrassed to heed the cry from the heart from the bottom of Townsend Street, Dublin, in the archdiocese of the primate of Ireland, and later, with three schools in the Liberties and one north of the Liffey, in the parish of St. Mary's, to help the great Archbishop Murray in his bid to revitalise the spiritual life of his people. A big, warm-hearted suffering servant. A rock in the ocean. A charismatic rock with wave after wave of tension riding it – waters streaming down its sides but still there – a Rockall, a stone of contention, a stumbling block.

Thus God works in shaping new religious families, as he worked in this time of great stress in the Irish Church in the souls of other suffering founders and foundresses, Bishop Delaney, Mary Aikenhead, Teresa Ball, Catherine McAuley, and later Margaret Aylward, so much so that in this vital first thirty years of the nineteenth century no fewer than nine new congregations of men and women sprang up in this small island of Ireland (and there were more to follow) to relieve the pressures on a hard pressed people. Truly, God is the God of human history.

What, then, went out from Mount Sion to the four corners of the earth? And what do we come back here to commemorate? Edmund Rice, like all founders, faded into his congregation with the passage of time, and what went out long ago from Waterford and expanded was a living and growing corpus of men perpetuating the charism, or gift, of Edmund Rice in all its details: hard work, efficiency, common sense, flexibility, high standards, trust in Providence, loyalty to the Church, and all this, under God, in the service of a living concern for the Faith of boys. This, as we have seen, was an immediate fruit and gradual focus of his original gift of compassion for the multitude – always the multitude. Canon Patrick Power, historian of the diocese of Waterford, on one occasion stated that five million poor boys had in Ireland alone passed through the schools of the Christian Brothers in the 100 years after the Founder's death.<sup>187</sup> Possibly with the passage of time, the vision, or some element of it faded somewhat; and we, the brothers of Edmund Rice became less aware that our origins were in Christian compassion for the multitude. The challenge is there for us and it is an exciting one. I think we are beginning to meet it. Pray God that we meet it more.

What shall we remember of Waterford? Many things, I suppose. Its hospitality, its friendliness, its religious consciousness. But above all we shall remember it as a remarkable city – a city remarkable in that a man, one among 276 in the passage of sixteen centuries, was called by God to be a founder here. A man with a genius, a genius for Christian compassion – compassion for the multitude; nevertheless a human man. A big, warm-hearted, battered, human man, whose spirits could at times be as he said himself “as low as ditch water.” A man who lived and loved and ate and drank, and walked your streets, and made love and married, and fathered a little daughter and later a bigger mystical family, in which he still lives, and through which he has gone out from Waterford to the four corners of the earth. What he and his beloved Sisters of the Presentation and the other heroic sisters and brothers of the early nineteenth century in Ireland accomplished under God, Ireland can always recall and Waterford can remember, with love and pride.

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#### 4. *Edmund Rice and the Spirit of Poverty*<sup>188</sup>

Give me neither poverty nor riches,  
grant me only my share of bread to eat,  
for fear that surrounded by plenty, I should fall away  
and say, “Yahweh – who is Yahweh?”  
or else, in destitution, take to stealing  
and profane the name of my God (Proverbs 30: 8-9).

Poverty is as old as the world itself. The attitudes expressed towards wealth right through the Old Testament and into the New Testament vary so much that it is impossible to make a synthesis of all that is said.<sup>189</sup>

The history of all human living for us believers has been a history of God’s intervention in the life of man from the creation of the world to the greatest intervention: the *kenosis* of Christ – God emptying himself, in order to come down to the level of man, in the Incarnation.

Early on, the Bible regards wealth as a blessing from God, especially so in the story of the patriarchs. There are six references in the book of Genesis to the wealth of the patriarchs. Certain portions of the Wisdom literature not only regard wealth as a blessing and reward but look on poverty as a punishment, the wages of laziness.<sup>190</sup> Deuteronomy regards poverty as an evil which should never appear in the midst of God’s people: “There will be no poor among you” (Deut 15:4). Such poverty it holds to be inadmissible, because it means that the rich have been neglecting their brothers. In other words, there has been a denial of covenantal brotherhood. And Edmund Rice’s poverty had much to do with covenantal brotherhood.

Israel was part of the world of the Middle East, where it was an age-old tradition that the rich, the rulers, and the landowners, no matter what their religion, had an obligation to the underprivileged.<sup>191</sup> Biblical revelation added a revolutionary dimension to this ancient concern for the poor people. God revealed himself to Israel and made her his people precisely in a situation of oppression. He was a liberator, a revolutionary, one who took the side of the oppressed. Israel was really a people created by God in favour of the oppressed.<sup>192</sup> Isaiah (3:13) goes a step farther and equates the oppressed with the people of God.<sup>193</sup> It is not mere physical want that makes people dear to God; it is a poverty that is the fruit of oppression, of the breach of covenantal love and brotherhood. What called forth the protest of the prophets was not so much the plight of the poor as the breach of the covenant with God. The prophets looked at history from the side of God rather than of men.<sup>194</sup>

In the psalms, poverty is not a social condition, not even a social condition created by oppression. To be meaningful in the Yahweh-Israel relationship physical poverty must exist in a constellation of attitudes:<sup>195</sup> trust in God, sorrow for sin, humility, thanksgiving, and worship. Psalm 25 introduces us to the idea of developed biblical poverty that is the *anawim*, the Hebrew word for the poor. The Greek translation renders this as a not so much “poor” in our sense, as “meek” (relating to one who is not vindictive even in the face of glaring injustice). Here we find our second pointer to the poverty of Edmund Rice. In biblical theology physical poverty is no good unless it be a seed-bed for biblical virtues.<sup>196</sup>



During his earthly life, our Lord showed himself to be a typical Jew. He did not despise material things; he knew how to use them and to enjoy them. He completely entered the human situation when he became man.<sup>197</sup> The human condition became Jesus' condition; the human tragedy became his tragedy. In this especially is the poverty of Christ situated. Accounts of the passion of Jesus are shot through with recollections of the classical Old Testament passages dealing with the plight of the poor, especially Isaiah and the psalms. In recounting the last hours of Jesus upon earth, the evangelists point to him as *the* poor man of the Bible, the meek one "who opened not his mouth."<sup>198</sup> Like the *anawim* Jesus turns to the Father, the vindicator of the oppressed. The answer is the Resurrection. From the risen Christ comes all that religious poverty and religious life itself can really mean. For it is in the setting of a love-relationship with Christ, God and man, that all Christian living can have real meaning. We Christians are called to impoverish ourselves – whether in personal terms, or according to a life-style chosen in response to his call with the specific purpose of sharing as closely as possible his own total impoverishment, or *kenosis* – to enrich those to whom he gives us and sends us, the members of his body. To enrich them, to love them, and to show our love for them is to enrich him and love him in the one deed or gesture.<sup>199</sup>

The miracle of Christianity, the miracle of God's love, is surely first that all our human weakness (self-love, self-will, self-interest, human brutality, greed, and pitilessness), our common possession which Christ shared as a scapegoat, *can* be rooted out of human living by the very fact of Christ's having impoverished himself and become an ordinary man so as to share their effects with us and in that sharing to begin the transformation.<sup>200</sup>

An interesting early example of the power of Christian poverty working in a people is seen in Acts 2: 40-45. The Jerusalem community had no vocation to religious poverty. Still, it bequeathed to us some scriptural texts which illustrate what a community should be: a brotherhood united in body and soul and having all things in common. For religious this experiment, which failed at the time but has since been lived successfully by countless communities, is primarily an example with a special appeal. But they will also find matter for sober reflection in the fact that it failed.<sup>201</sup>

The life of Christ between birth and death was not the life of a pauper, or even of one living in the desert like John the Baptist. There is no evidence that the group of his apostles suffered want or exposure.<sup>202</sup> There is definite evidence that they had a common purse, from which they not only bought necessities but also were able to give alms to the poor. On the other hand, no feature of our Lord's life is more emphatic than his warning against the dangers of wealth. He worked a miracle with the coin in the mouth of the fish to pay taxes; he could have worked many more in order to provide funds for his group, yet he did not. Always he seemed to be aware of the *anawim*, the poor of the Old Testament, the suffering servant of Isaiah, the one oppressed, whom Yahweh had long since made into his own people. The Sermon on the Mount (Christ's New Covenant, the gospel of the gospel), and especially the Eight Beatitudes, gives the picture of the perfect disciple of Christ. Here is a picture of the true people of God, and so of each individual who has been chosen by God.

And now we come to the mysterious and extraordinary phenomenon of our vocation, of Edmund Rice's vocation. Christ did not call all his friends as he called Edmund Rice, as he called each of us. Jesus did not ask Lazarus or Joseph of Arimathea to give up all. Poverty, religious poverty, is a gift that goes with the vocation to the religious life. It is a specific type of gift with unexpected dimensions.<sup>203</sup> It is an attitude that grows out of love-relationship between God and ourselves. It is God who takes the initiative. In the initiative the real gift is the person of



God to man. To accept this gift leads to poverty. Poverty of itself means very little; it becomes meaningful in so far as it enriches others, after the example of Christ, who “though he was rich became poor for your sake so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). Evangelical poverty is at once a great enrichment and a measure of sacrifice. Its pattern is that of death and resurrection – like that of Christ himself, the poor emptied one who was vindicated by Yahweh, the God of the oppressed, in his resurrection.<sup>204</sup> This death-resurrection is essential to and is part of the whole Christian life. If the element of enrichment is not in our poverty, that poverty is not desirable. The enrichment is always connected with the kingdom – the coming of Christ’s kingdom among us.

We should not so much speak about “poverty” as of the relations of the religious to the material world. A religious is a prophet, and the life of a prophet is unpredictable, full of surprises.<sup>205</sup> St Francis stripped, not because he was seeking nakedness and misery, but under a mysterious impulse of love. Benedict and his monks collected solid stones to build their monasteries – a shelter for the peace they were seeking. Both movements, deprivation and enrichment, were acts of love.<sup>206</sup> One of the signs of the presence of the kingdom is unity of mind and heart in Christ. This unity, on the level of persons, suggests, indeed requires, a unity in possessing material things. Common ownership is thus a natural outcome of community life. Poverty is always a communitarian virtue.<sup>207</sup>

In religious life there have always been two ways to poverty, *either* to leave all (a total gift) *or* to share all (motivated by love). Within St Benedict’s Rule we have the nucleus of the entire medieval monastic tradition on poverty. St Benedict never uses the words “poor” or “poverty” in connection with his monks. With his Rule the asceticism<sup>208</sup> of poverty was shifted entirely from the material to the spiritual level. The monk needs not be seen to own nothing, but he must abandon both the right and the natural satisfaction of owning anything. He must not own, must not possess, and must not monopolise anything. As regards monopolizing, Benedict would ask, “Is there anything in this monastery that regards me as its master?” So, for Benedict, spiritual poverty meant absence of ownership.<sup>209</sup>

For Francis the essence of poverty was freedom, but a freedom that demanded expression in physical abandonment. Akin to the desert fathers Anthony and Macarius rather than to Cassian and Benedict, Francis took the words of Christ literally and lived them.<sup>210</sup>

With the Dominicans – contemporaries of the Franciscans in the order of foundation – poverty, though austere and mendicant, was kept on a level of sobriety by the doctrine of spiritual poverty elaborated by St Thomas Aquinas, who said that the essence of the virtue of poverty was interior detachment.<sup>211</sup>

With St Ignatius of Loyola poverty is not uniform. It depends primarily on indifference, spiritual force and balance, liberty of heart necessary for discerning and fulfilling the divine Will. The goal of St Ignatius’s poverty was to make apostles, wholly dedicated to God and man. These were then to be at the disposal of Christ in his Church in the person of his vicar on earth, or of the general on behalf of the Holy Father, in order to be sent.<sup>212</sup> When the apostle is sent, it is for the one who sends him to decide how he should live while performing his apostolic task. It is clear from this that for Ignatius, apostolic poverty must be extremely flexible: it will take into account differences of temperament, talent, health, and the preparation which apostolic works demand; it will be sensitive to different environments, climates, and countries. Its dimensions are determined by the mission, and the criterion is apostolic service.<sup>213</sup> Ignatius, like many other founders, saw that the choice of apostolic work



(and the poverty called for by that work) was not so much a question of organization as of discernment of a charism.

The spirit of all these founders, and of Edmund Rice, had a common element in their poverty. In responding to God's call, a founder attempts to repeat the life of Christ. For this task the Holy Spirit gives him a charism, a spiritual gift linked to his natural inclinations, to be for the community a focus of some aspect of Christ's presence in the world.<sup>214</sup> Founders have so much in common: deep faith, great hope, and boundless love; they are all God-centred, all people of prayer. And yet each one was an individual; and the precise point of his difference from the others lay in the special charism, or gift, planted in him by the Holy Spirit. This special and unique gift mirrored or highlighted still another aspect of the infinite presence of the risen Lord. Of this particular aspect are born (1) a new manifestation of the Christian life, (2) an apostolic task that never before existed in its precise form in the Church, (3) an individual style of poverty. All three form part of a whole – an individual love-relationship: God, Christ, and ourselves – in basic historical continuity with the life of the counsels as lived by religious down the centuries.

If, then, the particular style of poverty is closely associated with the charism of a congregation, it is important to establish, as clearly as possible, what was the unique charism given to our founder; in other words, what unique aspect of Christ's life on earth is at the centre of the founding of our congregation? With St Francis it seems to have been the credibility of the New Testament life-style for all times and places; St Dominic seemed essentially concerned with the Truth and the Word; St John of God stressed the Christ that went about healing the sick; St Paul of the Cross preached Christ crucified; Brother Charles de Foucauld saw the hidden spiritual power of the life at Nazareth; Nano Nagle stressed the *kenosis*, or emptying, of Christ in favour of the poor; John Vanier in his life and work emphasizes the gentleness of Christ to the fragile people of the world.

And what about Edmund Rice? What aspect of Christ on earth was at the core of his inspiration by the Holy Spirit? This writer believes it to have been the compassion of Christ for the multitude, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9: 35-38), so that Christ was constrained by his love for them to go about teaching and healing them.

Almost without exception, the charism given to a founder eventually finds expression, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in a definite apostolate.<sup>215</sup> The basic exigencies of this apostolate form one of the governing factors in the kind of poverty practised in each individual congregation. It is important, therefore that an attempt be made to trace the unfolding of this special founding gift, or charism, in our founder. In this respect the writings of Edmund Rice are of great importance.

The most intimate piece of writing left by Edmund Rice, giving us our deepest insight into his mind and soul, would seem to be the twelve texts noted by him on the first page of the Bible he bought while still a layman, in 1791. Ten of these texts are from the Old Testament and two from the New. All ten from the Old Testament deal with the poor, the oppressed, the *anawim*, the people of God. Edmund Rice was still a young merchant in 1791. His wife had died two years previously, and the sad memory of her and of their married life must have been enshrined in his little retarded daughter. Here could easily have been the beginning of his great kindness, sympathy, and compassion. In these ten texts there is a deep and loving concern lest he himself, as a merchant, might oppress the poor, the people of God, around





him. In the age in which he lived, there was little open to the initiative of Catholic men of ability but buying and selling. There was a temptation for a merchant in such a situation to indulge in usury – some did. Money was loaned to a depressed and improvident people with a view to gaining later from their further improvidence.<sup>216</sup> Edmund Rice entitled his selection “Texts against Usury” as if he feared that he might be tempted to prey on his brethren in a similarly heartless way. His God was Yahweh, the God of compassion and steadfast love, the God of the oppressed. All around him Edmund saw people oppressed; he must have felt deeply about their being further oppressed by usury.

The two texts from the New Testament that he included in this list also concern the poor – in this case, those incapable of repaying kindness for kindness, or those who will repay kindness with embarrassed hostility or worse:

Give to him that asks of you; and from him that would borrow of you turn not away (Mt 5: 42) and

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish (Lk 6 : 35).

Father Dermot Cox OFM gives a fine summary of the twelve texts chosen by Edmund Rice, and I think his insights have much to tell us concerning our Founder’s poverty:

What we have in these texts is a line of development from a civilized code of justice, where the poor and deprived are taken care of because it is the right thing to do, to an internal ideal of total love for all.....All these texts deal with the community – not merely the protection of the community but the up-building of the community, rich and poor. In the Old Testament texts this is done as an exercise of civic justice – the fulfilling of the Covenantal Brotherhood. In the last two texts, one from Matthew and one from Luke and both from the Sermon on the Mount, the motive is changed from *within*. Now it is not justice alone that is demanded, but unrequited love.<sup>217</sup>

The rule book of our Congregation compiled by Edmund Rice and a committee of brothers in 1832 is, like St Benedict’s Rule, a mosaic of borrowings. Yet it contains elements which are distinctly our own. One of these is the poverty concept of *holy disengagement*. Here we see shades of St Thomas Aquinas and his identification of the essence of the spirit of poverty with *interior detachment*. By holy detachment, I am sure, Edmund Rice did not mean the kind that turned us off in years gone by.<sup>218</sup> Rather he would have meant the theme first introduced in the Old Testament and brought to its full development by Christ himself – that ownership tends to corrupt the owner, and only by never letting ownership possess one’s heart can a person avoid its power of infection. The only way to be poor in spirit is to understand one’s position as steward, not absolute owner, of material goods. Here we are back to Benedict and his explanation of spiritual poverty. Here we are reminded of Edmund Rice and the obligations of covenantal brotherhood.

Of the six articles in the chapter on poverty in the rule book of 1832, five deal with that absence of ownership of which St Benedict speaks: neither to own, possess, or monopolize anything in the community. There are echoes too of St Ignatius and his doctrine of complete dependence. The poverty of Edmund Rice was in historic continuity with religious poverty down through the ages. With him, poverty was not an abstract noun to be discussed but a reality to be lived. The keynote of our founder’s poverty was to express open-hearted love and open-hearted generosity. The opposite of poverty with Edmund Rice, as with other founders, was not riches, but meanness and possessiveness. Poverty was not a way of



depriving himself of what he needed, but a way of making sure that he could be a continual giver with the Giver of all good things. Apostolic service seems to have been the criterion of his poverty, as it was of the poverty of St Ignatius.

Like St Ignatius, Edmund Rice realised that there can be diversity in the living of religious poverty and that there must be. For every congregation has a different charism, which governs, among other things, the style and quality of its poverty. Very few congregations are called to vow stern and harsh privation and penury.<sup>219</sup> We, for example, are not called to the poverty of Mother Theresa and her Missionaries of Charity, nor of the Little Sisters and Brothers of Jesus, who live sub-proletariat poverty and work in sub-proletariat surroundings. But these differences, governed as they are by the situation and nature of the apostolate, local culture, local customs, local conditions, should all express the same fundamental inspiration. For our poverty is a measure of our love. There could be no greater travesty than to isolate poverty or chastity or obedience; or to reduce poverty to a matter of having or not having things, obedience to doing things, and chastity to abstention from the bodily expression of sexuality.

Poverty with Edmund Rice was a way of manifesting the personal love of Christ for all mankind and the consequent sanctity of all human love. Poverty for Edmund Rice, as well as simplicity of life, meant hospitality – the open door that manifests the open heart. His way of showing poverty was by his generosity. When he was poor and depressed and his institute just declared illegal in 1829, he threw his bread upon the waters, and gave what he had in stipends to necessitous priests in Ireland and England to have masses said to ask God's blessing and aid. Again, when troubled concerning a new building which, for want of funds, was at a standstill, half-built, in the rains of winter, he put 20 pounds in an envelope – possibly a subscription received to help the work – and directed that this badly needed sum be passed on anonymously to the Mendicity Institute for homeless Waterford families. His answer to the pitiful cry from Archbishop Murray for help for the sorely tried Catholics of Dublin was to give one of his best men to the work and to promise a support *per caput* for the members of the Hanover Street community that left his own men in Mount Sion much poorer and even threatened with further poverty. Like all founders, he knew that there was no true religious poverty without some experience of material poverty. "Simplicity of life," says Father Arrupe, "is the measure of our poverty, and poverty is the measure of our love."<sup>220</sup> And in these times of change each man has it in his power to simplify his own personal life-style while living the particular poverty of his own congregation.

Edmund Rice knew that any genuine religious experience must begin with a movement of conversion, a change of heart. Just as any real contact with another human being changes us, real contact with the living God of all change invites us to a transformation of our former selves. The interior violence of his personal change of heart – like that of long-haired, long-nailed, ragged Ignatius of Manresa – led Edmund Rice to an asceticism that, with two meals a day, proved too much for his ordinary "monks." And he realized that eventually. Mrs. Butler, a sister of Brother Austin Dunphy, told the story of Edmund Rice asking his brothers to do penance for Lent by putting salt instead of sugar in their ale. A few days later, when he asked one of the brothers to pass the salt, he discovered that the salt-cellar had been filled with fine castor sugar. We are told that he laughed heartily. What can be said of the spirit of poverty of Edmund Rice? I think he would have agreed with St Ambrose, as quoted in a recent encyclical:



You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all and not only to the rich.<sup>221</sup>

Edmund Rice knew that he was called to impoverish himself according to a certain life-style chosen in response to a call, with the specific purpose of sharing in the total impoverishment, the *kenosis*, or emptying, of Christ, who left a heaven of many mansions to be born in a stable and to be the poor man of all time.<sup>222</sup> Edmund Rice, filled with the spirit of God, loved life and song and the beautiful things of the world – the wine, the corn, and the oil. But he knew that they were all gifts from a generous and loving God. So too were his talents, his patience, his personality, his time, his money, his brain, his leisure. His poverty seems to me to consist in his realization that he was the steward of all these riches, never the true owner. From the poverty of his life of toil and calumny and misunderstanding and failure and pain he reached out in compassion to the poor man of Galilee through his Bible, through the Eucharistic Presence in the tabernacle and through God's Mother in prayer. And through the colouring of his own special gift of loving and tender concern, the compassion of God for the multitude waiting to be enriched with the Bread of Life, he weighted our destined apostolate of the schools in favour of the poor, always the poor. Like God himself, and like all the saints and founders that ever lived, Edmund Rice seemed drawn to the multitude of the poor. And his poverty being a generous, warm-hearted, all-day-long giving, it is no wonder that he and his early brothers realized – almost drifted unwittingly into the knowledge – that to give and to serve means there is little left; that sharing all with the poor means also sharing their poverty.

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## 5. *Edmund Rice and Vatican 2*<sup>223</sup>

In the church of S. Maria dell' Anima, near Piazza Navona, Rome, Pope Adrian VI, the Dutch Pope, lies buried. On his tomb is carved a judgement he once pronounced on himself: HOW DECISIVE IT IS FOR THE WORK OF EVEN THE FINEST MAN THAT HE BE ATTUNED TO THE TIMES. Pope Adrian died in 1523. A few months previously he had sent instructions to his nuncio at the Diet of Nuremburg to tell the German people that he saw and believed that there was much at Rome that needed repairing. His message went unheeded and the Protestant Reformation was born.<sup>224</sup>

Of the thousands of insights that have come our way in the last seven years I think that the old message of Pope Adrian VI is the most telling one coming to the Church from the Holy Spirit through Vatican II. I choose this insight and couple it with Edmund Rice because I think this would be the insight that would have appealed most to him. For whatever else he was by the grace of God, Edmund Rice was a man who read the signs of the times in which he lived.

To talk of the Second Vatican Council and the signs and needs of the times one must start with Pope John. Here you are dealing, as in the story of Edmund Rice, with God's ways, so different from man's ways. Human means may solve human problems. They seem inadequate in the face of spiritual ones. The Holy Spirit, disregarding logic and common sense, chose what was taken to be an interim pope, old, fat, and homely, to make the world sit up and realise that we were at an end and a beginning in the story of man and of God's dealings with man, and that the new wine must be prepared all around for the new bottles that would assuage the new thirsts of mankind. The Counter-Reformation was over. It died gloriously with the death of Pius XII.

John, elected in 1958, should have followed in the Pius tradition. There were Pius XI and Pius XII, thirty-six glorious years when the Church was the static rock of truth; when all was sure, and defensiveness was security. It was an age of numerous famous converts and of great consolidation within the Church itself. John, by all the laws of logic and reason, should have been Pius XIII and should have continued for his few short years the success story of his predecessors.

But the Holy Spirit, who has kept step with man through all the changes and evolutions in Salvation History, decreed otherwise. The new pope was to be called John. By taking this name, as he himself explained on one occasion, Pope John swung back to a Johannine tradition and succession that forged a link with the fourteenth century, when the previous Pope John had died. With this inspired act he bridged 600 years, and awoke the Church to the riches of the pre-Reformation, and even pre-Renaissance, days. In so doing he gave new life to Thomistic theology and to a monastic theology that drew new insights about the knowledge of God from contemplation, from Scripture, and from a consciousness of the importance of the Christian sources.<sup>225</sup> Pope John, too, spoke of his desire to recall to the minds of Christians the message of the Baptist and the legacy left by the Lord through his favourite disciple in the Gospel of Saint John. With this rediscovery the Holy Spirit inspired the old pope to call a council of the Church. This great council, the Second Vatican Council, gave further impetus to the search for roots and the re-examination of the origins and nature of the true church, founded by Christ. The Second Vatican Council was at once a revelation and an inspiration. It was a spiritual explosion which laid bare ancient roots and patterns of



growth that had been left in the ground outside the walls of the Counter-Reformation. The Counter-Reformation was over. The walls were down – 400 years of defence and bulwark. An era like the Middle Ages or the Renaissance or the Age of Kings had finished. But what was to be read much more in the sign of the times was that another era as yet unnamed, probably as great, as famous in years to come, had just been born. The great Pope Pius XII had had an inkling of this momentous truth when he said in 1950 that he saw a new role for the Church in the future “to revive and re-animate minds and wills in such a way as to grapple with the spiritual agonies of our age.” Here Pope Pius XII was stressing what Newman had discovered over 100 years before, what Adrian VI had said in 1523, and what the great St. Augustine in the year 400 had recalled of St. Cyprian, who had given the same message in AD 245: “Now as to St Cyprian’s admonition that we should return to the sources – namely the apostolic traditions and the Gospels and that we channel that tradition into our own time. This is altogether desirable and something that should be done without delay.”

The Second Vatican Council did many things for us religious and many things for our Congregation. For religious life it gave us a very definite and glorious identity. With the inspiration of the Holy Spirit it looked at the Church as it was in the 1950s, and placed against that what the experts had seen and noted from the fathers of the early Church. It discovered that a faulty image of the Church’s structure had grown with the passage of centuries, and had calcified with the intransigence of the Counter-Reformation. The old triangular image of the pope at the apex and the power structure widening through archbishops, bishops, and the priests to a base of ordinary Christians was inadequate and left us religious in a very indefinite position somewhere between lay people in the world and the clergy above them.

The cry now was “back to the sources”. And from that cry being heeded by the Church in the council the old and authentic structure of the Church emerged. Christianity was a Person – Christ, the Light of the World, the *Lumen Gentium*. The Church was the pebble Christ dropped in the sea of the world, radiating concentric circles wider and wider to the end of space and the end of time. All were called to holiness, not just the clergy.<sup>226</sup> All were members of the Church, some – our separated brethren – in circles farther out from the common centre, Christ. But in there, close to the centre in an inner circle – the first circle around Christ himself – we religious, called mysteriously from clergy and laity alike, were given our identity. Henceforth, Christian Brothers and all religious were sure of our identity and sure of our role in the Church – people picked mysteriously (why us?) by the Holy Spirit to be called to holiness in a special way, with a special intensity;<sup>227</sup> this was due to our close proximity to Christ. And our role was that of witness to the power of God and his love for all mankind radiating from Christ through us to the new world. Returning to sources, then, was one of the inspirations of the council. And we, like other congregations, were told to return to our Founder and to the early inspirations of the Congregation. The Holy Spirit thus, through the Council, gave us back our Founder in a special way. And among the things we discovered was that our Founder was aware of the needs of the Church in his time and heeded the times in which he lived. Also, that he too came at the end of an era in history, and was destined, as we are today, to move with the Church into the beginnings of a new age. And we discover that he has left us a most valuable legacy of the very qualities the Church needs us to have to meet the needs of such times as ours: courage, flexibility, mobility, adaptability, initiative, loving tolerance, understanding based on the compassion of Christ, and faith – biblical faith – that throws bread on waters, willingness to take divine risks, all this plus the CB instinct (a feeling of what is right and what is not right for a Christian Brother to do) together with a first loyalty to our *given* apostolate of the school.



I once thought of the Founder's divinely inspired charism as a unique gift. Now I would see it as a cluster of gifts. And particularly I would like to point out one of the most important elements in his charism – the form that his divine inspiration was to take for the good of the Church of his time. He could have been called to found a secular institute – a form of consecrated life just then coming into being. He could have been called to found a charitable organization for laymen living in their homes, something like Frederick Ozanam's Society of St Vincent de Paul. Both a secular institute and a pious society would have suited him admirably. He could have given himself to God and the poor and still lived with his retarded child and his sister at home in Waterford. But God's ways are strange ways, and the Holy Spirit fired this man's soul with an urge to found a religious institute. The intensity of this urge to get such an institute off the ground in the most official manner possible, resulting in his obtaining a brief of recognition for his congregation from Pope Pius VII within a year of application.

This linking of Edmund Rice and Vatican II is rich in that it opens up tremendous fields of research and inspires a succession of insights into the richness of the heritage of this man of God, and through him God's plan for us and for the Congregation. A congregation such as Edmund Rice envisaged would have three essential ingredients: prayer, community life, an apostolate. We are called to an assembly. Our power, our strength for good, our inspiration, is in combination, assembly. Our task as good Christian Brothers, as I think Edmund Rice would see it, lies in keeping a right balance between our prayer life, our work life, and our community life – all three. A child can juggle with one orange; many could juggle with two. But it is only the professional that can handle the three. We are the professionals. School, prayer, and community – all three. There is comfort and security in extremes, one or the other. But Edmund Rice would hold that all three must figure in the life of a Christian Brother. This can be a problem. There can be tension. Tensions are there to be ridden for Christ, and Edmund Rice rode them all his life. If we are to judge from our documentation, he was the most active Christian Brother that ever lived, and I have yet to discover a brother who could beat him at the prayers. As for community life we know that the brothers in Carrick-on-Suir and other houses used to look forward to his coming, and we even know the name of his favourite song. Now, as then, the stakes are high. We are men called, as Edmund Rice was called, to work for the Kingdom. That is what Vatican II is about; that is what Edmund Rice is about.

From the documentation unearthed and re-examined in the light of Vatican II, telling insights such as the following come across the years. Stephen Curtis was a barrister, an educated and intelligent lawyer with a legal mind. Speaking of Edmund Rice at a soirée to celebrate the dedication of the new memorial chapel in honour of our founder in 1845 he said these words, so prophetic when read in the light of what the Church through the council is asking of us today:

But far am I from thinking that it was even the strong assertion of liberty for the people or raising their social condition that alone, or even chiefly, called Brother Rice to their assistance. These motives, I doubt not, influenced him not a little, but they held no proportion of his breast with another motive which in this and every other action of his chequered life was the ruling principle of that great man. He looked beyond the world. He counselled others so to do, and if he were not persuaded that more than temporal blessings would follow in the train of education, I am convinced he would not spend a single day in its advancement.



Here is Edmund Rice and here is our position in the Church today in a nutshell. Edmund Rice was called to use education to bring people to God. He could have opened hostels. He could have founded a congregation to care for displaced children or poor prisoners or destitute families or the condemned. All these would have been logical and practical solutions for the time. God called him – the Holy Spirit inspired him – to use not these but schools to bring about the Kingdom. Theresa of Calcutta uses the loneliness of people to bring them to God. Charles de Foucauld’s little sisters and brothers are inspired to work among the sub-proletariat and live their life to bring the sub-proletarian people from the Nazareths of the world to God. John Vanier was inspired to work among the fragile people of the world – the mentally handicapped adults – to bring these people and his own people to God. The followers of St John of God use hospitals to bring people to God. All in God’s plan. Edmund Rice’s call was to use education among the deprived people of the world to bring them to God, to bring about the Kingdom among them. And who are the deprived people? They are any people deprived of the Kingdom. And I would think our mission is to those most so deprived. To sum it up, is not Edmund Rice asking us today to meet the needs of the Church today by a shift of emphasis in our apostolate from the supremacy of the school to the supremacy of what happens in the school – the coming of the Kingdom?

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1975 Pope Paul VI would seem to be speaking especially to us, so direct is the message: “As an evangelizer Christ first of all proclaims a kingdom, the kingdom of God, and this is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes the ‘rest’ which ‘is given in addition’. Only the Kingdom, therefore, is absolute and it makes everything else relative.”

Good results, team victories, school discipline, and school managership are important. But they are relative things. There is only one absolute for us: the coming of the Kingdom in our houses and in our schools.

As I have said, we are at an extraordinary time in the history of the Church and in the history of man: the end of the Counter-Reformation and the dawning of a new and as yet unnamed era. Most of us spent our formative years in religion during the thirty-six years of the reign of Pius XI and Pius XII, when the Church’s emphasis was on the rock of truth; when defensiveness was security. Times have changed. The barque of Peter, in dry-dock since the Council of Trent – 400 years – secure, walled about, safe, has been asked by the Holy Spirit to move about again on the stormy waters of the world; to launch out again into the deep and cast the nets again, to become again fishers of men. The Church has become the pilgrim church, moving, concerned with the Kingdom. Pope John said, “I see mankind as entering upon a new order, and perceive in this a divine plan.” The Holy Spirit inspired the council – 3,000 bishops and 6,000 *periti*, the brainiest and some of the holiest men in the Church working for four years - to meet the needs of the new times. Ten years after the council, in 1975, Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the duty of the successor of Peter to continue to confirm his brethren in the objectives of this Second Vatican Council. These objectives he summed up definitively “in this single one: to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the gospel to the people of the twentieth century.”<sup>228</sup> Could we not parallel this for Edmund Rice’s congregation today: to make the Christian Brothers today ever better fitted for proclaiming the gospel to the people of today?



The three great trends of the Council were:

1. from a law-centred to a life-centred church
2. from defensiveness to dialogue
3. from fixed ideas to historical change.

We, as vital parts of the Church, must keep pace with the efforts and trends of the Church. We are the Church in miniature, and her concerns are our concerns. I would see, and I think Edmund Rice would see, a tangible objective, a target in our paralleling these three trends in our life:

1. From a law-centred to a life-centred congregation: This does not mean that law will not be important any more. *Perfectae Caritatis* points out that hope for renewal lies in a more diligent observance of rule. But it also says that all institutes must share in the life of the Church, and mentions specifically biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary, and social matters.
2. From defensiveness to dialogue: I think our founder would like us to be more open to others: to other congregations, to the local church, to the universal Church, even to local schools and pastors of other denominations. Since the council the Church has been conscious of the Lord's desire that all should be one. We must move with the Church. We must think with the Church.
3. From fixed ideas to historical change: I think our Founder is calling us all to a second conversion, like that of Francis, John of God, Ignatius, Paul, and Edmund Rice himself. I think he is telling us that we must seek practical and professional help in the field of prayer and in interpersonal relationships that would help in the growth of a Christian community in each house. And for what? For what Vatican II has highlighted: so that each house and school in all aspects may become settings for the coming of the Kingdom. Every religious congregation has its own particular cluster of charismas as exemplified in its founder and in its greatest members.<sup>229</sup>

One such son of Edmund Rice, the late John Mark Egan, has left us some inspiring guidelines in the living of our vows. Who can forget his definition of the vow of chastity as a consecration to be "professional lovers of the world"; to become professionals in the art of Christian loving; to be filled with the loving compassion of Christ for all those boys, their parents, the teachers, their families, the school cleaners and janitors and their families?

In other words, as in the time of Edmund Rice, I would think of Father Peter Kenney's advice to our congregation as being still valid today. He said that as a congregation we must know twenty times as much as we will ever be called on to teach in order to do the work we are called to do by the Holy Spirit with skill, confidence, and efficiency. Does not Edmund Rice, then, seem to be calling, in the light of the wishes of the Church in Vatican II, for a vast re-education plan for our brothers? And for what? That we may become aware of and meet the needs and challenges of our day as Edmund Rice was aware of and met those of his time. And why? To bring the Kingdom into existence among ourselves and in the world of the school, which is our inspired area of operation.





What is this Kingdom so stressed by the Church today, so spoken of by Christ Himself, so stressed in the Synoptics: Matthew 6:33, 5:3-12; Luke 4:43, 16:16, and so forth? It is the eternal life spoken of by Christ in St John's Gospel: "that they may have life and have it more

abundantly," and "this is eternal life that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Knowing God in the biblical sense means experiencing God. A man experiences God when God takes over in his life. It is a gift to be sought, to be wished for, to be prayed for. The three essentials of our apostolic life – prayer, apostolate, and community – help us to bring it about in our midst. There are skills to be learned in all three fields, and professional expertise to be sought. When God has taken over in a man or in a community, all else comes right. And such a man or such a community cannot but bring, as Pope John said, "the medicine of mercy" to a world of youths deprived of the Word and harassed by the new proselytizers of drugs, drink, and contraceptives on sale in or around some of our schools. "The school must be a community," says the new document on the Catholic school, "whose values are communicated through the interpersonal and sincere relationships of its members and through both individual and corporate adherence to the outlook on life that permeates the school."<sup>230</sup>

Edmund Rice by the grace of God transformed people and places. That was the divine mission he was called to plan – transformation. I believe he would understand completely and give assent completely to Vatican II and to the call of the Church to his brothers today. For he was an ecclesial man, a biblical man, and a listening man, always in tune with the Church, which is not fundamentally a teaching Church (that is not where she starts), but a listening Church, listening to what God wills at any particular time.<sup>231</sup> And how can we gauge the spirit of this great man, Edmund Rice, in our time and for our time? I would say by listening and pondering on his *attitudes* and his *concerns* and asking whether his attitudes are our attitudes and whether the things that were his greatest concerns are our greatest concerns today. "Pray, Brother Stephen, that God's will may be done in me" was still his prayer when old, retired, and feeble. Is it the prayer of our congregation today? Will it be for the future?

To neglect the call of Vatican II, I believe, is to reject the Church and to betray our Founder. And what does the Church ask of us today? To transform ourselves and by the grace of God move with the Church into the opening decades of a new and as yet unnamed period of Salvation History in order "to revive minds and wills in such a way as to grapple as soon as possible with the new ways of life of our time and the spiritual agonies of our age."<sup>232</sup>

What a programme for Edmund Rice's men. In the light of the existing message of the Kingdom not even falling numbers and dwindling novitiates can daunt us.



## 6. *What is a Founding Charism?*<sup>233</sup>

For a religious Order, Congregation or Institute, then, the roots count.

No renewal is possible if it is not united to them.

Every authentic renewal is measured against this initial design, which remains the standard.

J. M. R. Tillard OP

Among the many riches lying dormant in the treasury of the Church and brought to light by Vatican II are the notion of the founding charism of each institute and the immense potential that this notion unleashes for the service of the Church. *Perfectae Caritatis* states that “the up-to-date renewal of the religious life comprises both a constant return to the sources of the whole of Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed condition of our time.”<sup>234</sup> And Pope Paul VI, speaking on the same subject, says: “Thus the Council rightly insists on the obligation of religious to be faithful to the spirit of their founders, to their evangelical intentions and to the example of their sanctity. In this it finds one of the principles for the present renewal and one of the most secure criteria for judging what each institute should undertake.”<sup>235</sup>

But what is a founding charism? A charism is “an evident gift given by the Holy Spirit to an individual for the good of others.”<sup>236</sup> A founding charism, then, is such a gift given to the founder of a religious institute. It is a three-fold gift by its very nature; for it involves (i) a unique faith-vision, (ii) a unique response to needs, (iii) a unique form of holiness which is both dynamic and attractive.

### **A unique faith-vision**

A founder, in his own time and governed by the conditions of the time, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. He perceives the world (his own world in particular) in the light of his personal understanding of the Word of God. He is attracted by some element in the life of Christ and begins to read and live the gospel in the light of this element. Some founders have been fascinated by Christ teaching on the mountain; others by the travelling Christ, who moved from place to place, teaching and preaching; others by Christ healing the sick, or living humbly in submission to Mary and Joseph at Nazareth; at least one founder spent his life preaching Christ crucified. Each founder, in his turn, and in accord with the needs of his time, is drawn to Christ, especially by some facet of Christ’s life that appeals to him personally. Thus, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a founder strives to be totally identified with Christ and to incarnate his life and mission in the particular historical setting in which he finds himself.<sup>237</sup> Each founder is attracted by something unique and individual to him in Christ, and this attraction, this original insight and action of the founder, is responsible for the birth of his congregation. The original insight flowers and is prolonged in the resulting congregation, which in turn fosters holiness and service in the Church.

### **Response to a need:**

Inspired by this insight into a particular feature of the gospel and reading the gospel in the light of this inspiration, a founder perceives the needs of the people of God with a sensitivity that calls forth a response.<sup>238</sup> A founder’s response to “the joy and hope, the grief and anguish,” of the people of his time, especially “of those who are poor and afflicted,”<sup>239</sup> is sometimes unusual and even illogical. Often the answer to the problem is not obvious to human eyes. This is so precisely because it is not of this world. It is inspired. It is God’s way of answering the particular need through the genius given to a chosen person who has been infused by the Holy Spirit with a gift of particular wisdom.



***A unique form of holiness:***

Because by its very nature religious life tends towards the perfection of charity, this charity, or holiness, is given to a founder in an eminent way.<sup>240</sup> In his life and person it exercises a power of attraction which seems to be essential to the charism of foundation. The founder's charity is the grace of the spirit which "informs the faith-vision of a founder so that it expresses itself in concrete service related to specific needs."<sup>241</sup> Indeed, it is charity which is the heart of the charism, the locus of union between the founder's vision and the needs of man. It informs his own grasp of revelation and is characterized by it. His followers will later share the same evangelical sensitivity and will be attracted by the same basic evangelical preoccupation.<sup>242</sup> They will be shocked, as he is shocked, by the appalling conditions and the crying religious need of the people of God around them.

Thus a new congregation is born. A new gospel way of life is created, a new manifestation of the Christian vision. Yet another manner of living the gospel has been brought to light: a manner of living it in full but with peculiar emphases and from a particular point of view. And why? So that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a new and particular need within the Church at the time can be met in a specialised manner. For the characteristic note of every genuine charism must always be service, a service which is a response to God's call.<sup>243</sup> Service is not merely the consequence but the outward form and the realization of the charismatic grace.<sup>244</sup> Thus a *given path* is mapped out by the Holy Spirit for each emerging congregation: *a given work* to do, and a particular and unique life-style to live, which both grow out of the faith-vision that is at the heart of the founder's charism. It is precisely because they are given a fixed course that religious congregations are different from other religious groupings, such as The Legion of Mary or Charismatic prayer groups.<sup>245</sup> Each congregation must pray and work communally to discover what exactly its given function is, and it must always strive to safeguard it when found.

All we have spoken of is the work of the Holy Spirit. However, it is affected by the principle of limitations. We are all limited in our power to live the fullness of the life of Christ. We are also limited in what we, even as a body, can do. The Holy Spirit assures us that there will not be needless overlapping or repetition in the work; in other words, there is a divinely inspired coordination, so that the advance of God's kingdom on earth can be striven for on as many fronts and among as many kinds and categories of people as possible. New needs among the people of God call forth new congregations to meet these needs.

A founder's charism is a gift of prophecy. It is a rich gift – even a cluster of gifts – adorned with insight and the competencies necessary to protect and transmit it within a living tradition. A congregation has a charism in a participatory sense. The members participate in the gift given to the Church through the life, spiritual experience, faith-vision, and service of their founder.<sup>246</sup> The faith-vision is the axis of a founder's charism. It is his inspired insight into the heart of the human agony of the time. It is closely connected with and partly governed by the life that the founder has led and the needs of his time. From it flows the response that gives birth to the new congregation. Informed by the founder's spirit through the dynamic memory of his life and words, it allows future generations to share in the dynamism of his faith-vision in their own localities. The gathering of a community based on a common faith-vision has been termed the proper object of the charism of foundation.<sup>247</sup>

A founding charism brings with it responsibility but not authority. The responsibility rests with the founder and with the institute he founds to be faithful to the original faith-vision given by the Holy Spirit, and to be faithful to that radical intention of the Holy Spirit for which the institute came into existence. This divinely inspired function is the only reason for the congregation's existence. The authority in the case of a founding charism is vested in the



Church. It is for the pope or for his delegate to decide, after mature consideration, whether the new institute is a genuinely inspired work of the Holy Spirit. A founding charism is given to an individual for the good of the Church, and it is the Church alone that can declare, by a brief or otherwise, that the work is from God. A founding charism looks to the Church for its authority, first to exist as a recognised apostolic institute, and then to continue its existence and to multiply.

And so it happened by divine plan that a wonderful variety of religious communities grew up. This variety contributed mightily towards making the Church experienced in every good deed and ready for a ministry of service in building up Christ's Body. Not only this, but adorned by the various gifts of her children, the Church became radiant like a bride made beautiful for her spouse; and through her, God's manifold wisdom could reveal itself.<sup>248</sup>

A founding charism has a beginning. It begins with the founder. Strictly speaking, charisms are present only at the origins of situations and not in the situations themselves.<sup>249</sup> A founder receives a divine insight, a faith-vision, a new way of looking at the agonies around him. Something happens to him. He feels called to God in a special way, and he receives special graces to help him to respond radically to the gospel. A particular element in the gospel story appeals to him. He begins to read and to live the gospel in the light of this element, so that his love for God bursts forth into service for the neighbour. The nature and objects of this service come from the particular emphasis with which he sees the Risen Christ at work in the world: healing or teaching or preaching or travelling or suffering or praying on the mountain. In this way, his response is a natural expression of his divine insight.

His holiness and his radicalness attract people who admire what he is doing and who see the need being answered in what they feel is *the* manner of answering it. This attraction is part of every charism of foundation. In other words, they are gifted with the same divine insight or faith-vision, though at a lower level. They recognize it and respond to it when they see it in action. Thus the divine assembly is called. The founder and those who share his vision are brought together and a new institute is born. Each one who enters such an inspired community brings his or her enrichment, or individual touch, to the original founding charism, which continues to grow and expand and develop so that it becomes an ongoing dynamic inspiration which changes and adapts but always keeps its essence. And so there grows a communal, or community, charism which is the fruit of recurring and combining personal versions of the founding charism. A person joins or stays in a religious institute because his God-given charism is of the same nature as the founder's.<sup>250</sup>

Thus a founding, or a founder's, charism is a different gift, adorned with all the competencies necessary to incarnate it in an apostolic venture, given to an individual by the Holy Spirit for the good of others, that is to say of the Church.

## 7. *Edmund Rice and the Blessed Sacrament*<sup>251</sup>

His devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar was intense, and to it, according to the traditions of Mount Sion, he brought his letters and cares, his difficulties and doubts, during the fateful and trying years that intervened before the loosely connected threads of his great work were woven together by papal authority. The saintly old Brother from whom I have gathered these traditions of the venerable Founder said that he and the brothers in those early years often heard from the older members of the Congregation that it was the prudence, the almost inspired foresight, the charity, the forbearance, the enlightenment of the Founder, all of which were the fruits of silent prayer before the tabernacle, that enabled him to steer his bark through many storms into the harbour that was opened to it by the apostolic brief of 1820.<sup>252</sup>

Of all the wonderful things that have happened in the life of the Christian Brothers as a Congregation since the re-opening of the cause of their founder in 1962, the transfer of Edmund Rice's remains to the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in Mount Sion Waterford, must surely be the most significant. It is a return to the base, to the source. It is a new realization of where the motivation came from that built the Congregation of Christian Brothers originally, and from which the greatness of their power for good among people flowed. The men who planned the idea of a chapel, and the bishop who asked that it be a Blessed Sacrament chapel, must surely have been inspired. The greatness of Edmund Rice, I think, was that in the face of a nation's utterly hopeless struggle for sheer survival (comparable to that of India today) this mighty entrepreneur turned his back on the opportunity for a family commercial empire in France or Spain, and made a deliberate decision in favour of God and the people. It was a big decision. It cannot be overstressed that the one, living, constant presence in the Ireland of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was famine and famine fever. There was hunger, injustice, misery, depravity, and despair to an extent that we today cannot remotely understand. There was a rising population that aggravated the problem and that further strengthened the idea that there was no solution.

Edmund Rice was no ordinary business man. He was the first of a race of Irishmen becoming so evident today; a man with a potential for the colossal in business affairs. He was away before his time, and today he is so contemporary. His talents needed other lands and other conditions to flourish. He made his choice and stayed in Ireland. The power to make such a humanly foolish choice could only have come from some great supernatural source. I believe that source to have been the constant presence of the Blessed Sacrament under the same roof with him and with the early brothers in the humble house he built behind the cabins of the poor in Barrack Street, Waterford. It is sometimes argued that there is nothing unusual in the name chosen for this first Christian Brothers' establishment, that there was already a Mount Sion across the river in Ferrybank. That is true. But would not the very postal inconvenience



**Edmund before the  
Blessed Sacrament**



of having two places with the same name in one city militate against using “Mount Sion” for the name of Edmund Rice’s first house? There must have been some deeper reason. Is it too much to speculate that possibly Edmund Rice, the lover of the Bible, was aware of the biblical significance of the Mount Sion in Jerusalem --- the little hill in the city that became a symbol to the urbanised Jews of the constant presence of God among them after their wanderings with the Ark of the Covenant in the desert --- and that he consciously decided with the name to establish just *where* the everlasting base for his new congregation would be: around the divine presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament ? It is interesting to note that in 1846 some bishops in England were reluctant to grant reservation of the Blessed Sacrament to a new Christian Brothers’ residence in that country. One of the earliest Christian Brothers, Patrick Joseph Murphy, was present at the time, and was able to point out that the brothers had reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in Mount Sion from the very beginning. Likewise, when the second house of the Congregation in England was being established in Manchester, Edmund Rice asked that the dwelling house be in from the road to create an atmosphere of peace and contemplation, and that there would be facilities for the brothers to hear Mass each morning.

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament has taken on different emphases down through the centuries. In our own time, and particularly since Vatican ii, we ourselves have witnessed changes. In the early centuries the Blessed Eucharist was regarded as a sacred thing. From the twelfth century on, it was regarded as a sacred person. Before the twelfth century the Sacred Host was not elevated at Mass. There was no tabernacle; the Host was reserved in some out-of-the-way place in case Viaticum was needed. People might pray privately in church, but visits to the Blessed Sacrament in our sense were unknown until about the fourteenth century. The early Church was not lacking in appreciation, but the conclusion had not yet been drawn that where the living Body and Blood were present, there was the whole Christ. Once this truth was realised, all sorts of new ceremonies were introduced: the elevation at Mass, prompted by the desire to look on Christ in the Host; genuflecting to the Blessed Sacrament; and the light always burning before it. Many of these same changes in attitude have come into question in recent years. But the basic fact of the Eucharist and the efficacy of Christ’s special presence among us in the Blessed Sacrament has remained constant. The transfer of the remains of Edmund Rice to a Blessed Sacrament chapel and the power to pray which that chapel will release, please God, for the brothers and for the people is, to me, a sign and a return to contemplation, one of the most fundamental things in the origins of the Christian Brothers.

The Blessed Sacrament was always a very important facet in the inspired spirituality of Edmund Rice. When a layman, he was a member of an association of young apostolic men who, among other good works, assisted at daily mass. He was one of the five gentlemen who in the city of Waterford at the time received Holy Communion every Sunday and on the principal religious festivals. Weekly communion was then rare, and even monthly communicants were regarded as very devout people. It is no wonder, then, that the school life of Mount Sion in the early days revolved around the Blessed Sacrament. Edmund Rice was publicly criticised in parliament on one occasion for bringing the boys in, class by class, every day to the house chapel for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. The house chapel was the school chapel, as is the case today in many Christian Brothers’ establishments in other parts of the world. This custom of classes visiting the Blessed Sacrament was part of the brothers’ religious apostolate. Their reason for existing was to bring Christ in all his fullness to boys and to their families. Education was but a means for them to bring about the kingdom of God on earth. They believed that this absolute was to be achieved both by the teaching Christian



doctrine and by training in Christian piety. The Christian doctrine was taught at specified times in the schools. The presence of the Blessed Sacrament, so close at hand, was to be a natural centre for the practical training in Christian piety.

Shortly after the death of the Founder, in 1844, Bishop Foran of Waterford, the mayor of the city, and hundreds of the outstanding citizens assembled to record their esteem for Edmund Rice. Within a year they had erected their memorial in the form that showed how much they appreciated what he had tried to do. They had at first contemplated a statue by a great contemporary sculptor. However, the committee had succeeded in collecting so much money that they were able to erect a new school and a chapel, all in one building. The school was used to house the pre-school children whose people were so poor that both father and mother had to work in order to support the family. And the chapel --- basically the same as in Mount Sion today --- served the community as a new oratory, and also served the school in its traditional devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

Mount Sion, above all Christian Brothers' establishments --- as would be expected --- seems to have kept closest to the original spirit of the Founder. When Brother Stanislaus Flanagan founded the Sodality of Mary Immaculate in 1869, this great Mount Sion institution incorporated and perpetuated much of the mind and spirit of Edmund Rice. Mount Sion boys made preparation for their First Confession and First Holy Communion in the house chapel. After their First Communion in that same chapel they were entertained to breakfast by the brothers. Reception into the sodality was always in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. And if the young sodalist lasted to old age and grey hairs there was the possibility that in the same chapel he might have the honour of being inducted into Our Lady's Guard of Honour. The annual sodality retreat, held among the desks in the school, and usually given by a past-pupil priest, united all old pupils in a week of prayer and meditation that centred on the Blessed Eucharist and our Lady. And at the procession on the following Sunday, all the families, so steeped in the age-old traditions, took part in the annual walk around the grounds and in the Rosary, sermon, and Benediction, which concluded one of the greatest weeks of the year. Later, when a flourishing Pioneer centre worked wonders at Mount Sion, reception of new members and presentation of the badge and diploma were always held in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the Memorial Chapel.

Edmund Rice always had devotion to the holy Mass and great confidence in the power of the Mass. When all seemed lost in 1829 and the building of North Richmond Street novitiate, house, and schools in Dublin seemed doomed to failure for want of funds, Edmund Rice had 2,773 masses offered by necessitous priests to ask God's help on such an important work. When the brothers were about to open a house in Co. Clare, he had 1,000 masses offered to help them in the great work they were setting out to accomplish in saving the Faith of the people from the proselytizers who were active around Ennis at the time. In 1826, though racked by famine fever, Edmund Rice heard Mass from his sick bed, for he could not rise at the time. Brother Patrick Ellis has left it on record that the custom among the brothers of never leaving the house or returning home without visiting the Blessed Sacrament dates right back to the time of Edmund Rice and the early brothers.

The very aspiration "Live, Jesus, in our hearts," which Edmund Rice borrowed from the Brothers of St John Baptist De La Salle, was a regular reminder throughout the day of what St Paul wrote so beautifully in Ephesians 3:17-19: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ



which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” This love, this knowledge of Christ, was the centre of things and the driving power of Edmund Rice. And it was through his contemplation in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament that he received it.

Edmund Rice knew that there was no Christian holiness without contemplation, just as there is no Christian holiness without action. One flows from the other. Edmund Rice had left too much, had made too great a sacrifice, to be satisfied with mediocrity. He was a big man who had to do in a colossal manner anything he did. He loved God with the great love of a mystic, and it is well known that the love of God in its fullest sense leads to a most selfless dedication to the neighbour. Men such as he are frequently capable of unbelievable activity. It took a whole committee of trustees to handle all the charity funds that this giant man of God had handled and distributed lovingly for years. His power came from his prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. It was only there he could possibly have received the strength of soul that kept him working in spite of calumny, misrepresentation, frustration, injustice, and sheer physical pain for almost forty unbroken years. It was in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament that he grew into a mighty machine of loving service for God and for the people of God. Christianity is Christ. Christ is love, is concern, is caring for people. We shall be judged on love. Edmund Rice’s life was a double love-life. The first was in his love for his wife. The second was in a new love-life he started with God himself. This continued on the base of the first and grew mightily from daily communion with Christ in the Blessed Eucharist.

Many people hope and pray that the overpowering love of this servant of God, Edmund Rice, for the people of God may be felt by these same people, and that he may be soon canonized if it is God’s will. The removal of the remains of Edmund Rice to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel must surely be one of the greatest means available to make him known and loved, and also to spread his own basic personal devotion to the Blessed Sacrament among his brothers and among his beloved people of Barrack Street, its locality, all Waterford, and indeed the whole world.

If Edmund Rice were capable of wishing for a final resting place for his bones on earth, surely that wish is now being fulfilled in the opening of the new Blessed Sacrament Chapel in Waterford. May this great act of love and reverence for his memory help us all to a greater appreciation of why God called him to the special work he initiated over 170 years ago. And may it be a source of much good for many people.





## 8. *John the Baptist and Edmund Rice*<sup>253</sup>

I have been asked this morning to share a few thoughts with you on the Word of God from St. Mark. Today is the Feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, the date of the entry of the prophet John to the presence of the Father. It also happens to be the commemoration of the death of Edmund Rice.

John was a prophet. Therefore he was a genius, a man specially gifted by God. He was a prophet: therefore he had to suffer. He had to die. All prophets suffer; all prophets die – even in life: Edmund Rice, Cornelia Connelly, Ignatius Loyola. When John the Baptist came, prophecy had been dead in the land beyond the memory of man. Therefore he had to be spectacular in life and in death for he had been the greatest of the divine barkers to the carousel of life in that his glorious role was to announce that at last *the* Prophet, Jesus the Christ was on the way; that the long reality of human sorrow was now and forever a new reality of hope and joy.

Christianity is Christ. Christianity is the divine paradox that out of death springs life, ever since Christ died and passed over and was raised from the dead by the Father that we and the whole world would have life. Of all forms of creativity that mirror the beauty of God, the genius for holiness – God’s gift – seems most to survive. Herod had feared John the Baptist. He had killed him out of weakness. And now when Jesus walked the land, Herod cried out that John the Baptist, whom he had killed, was still alive. You cannot kill the power of God.

Edmund Rice is dead. This morning we commemorate him together with St. John the Baptist. In both cases we commemorate the diving paradox of the seed that dies in order that new life may be born. We thank God for the gift he gave them both of a public and spectacular witness to the people of God, the covenant people that the kingdom is already and always at hand.

It is appropriate in the infant days of the growth of this new community here of thirty-five Christian Brothers that we remind ourselves of the Paschal Mystery and of the parallel passing over of our Founder to the God he loved; of what his life meant and what his death gave birth to. Who was the God of this founder of ours? Was it not the God that Jesus worshipped, the God of kindness, and compassion to the lost and lonely and broken people of the world? This is a good morning to recall and to ask Edmund Rice and St. John the Baptist that this present infant community of ours be filled to overflowing with compassion and kindness and understanding and love and tolerance for one another. May these two prophets, St. John the forerunner and Edmund Rice the close follower of the Lord Jesus, fill us all with an awareness of our own roles as prophets so that by their prayers we may grow and *become*, so that later we may help to bring the kingdom of God in all its fullness and richness alive in the hearts of all we meet in our work and in all the families whose burdens we are called on to bear.

Out of death springs life – life that leads to the Father – eternal life. “And this is eternal life that they know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).



## 9. *The Reality of Edmund Rice*<sup>254</sup>

The developing steps in the history of our Congregation, in one sense, can be read in the various editions of the constitutions from general chapter to general chapter. So many things have changed or disappeared down the years. One thing remains in there, holding on as if the conscience of the Congregation would not let it go. The 1978 Constitutions states it this way: “The particular apostolate of the Brothers is that of Christian education, in which they should exercise a special care for the poor and underprivileged.” The most recent chapter, 1984, in its new constitutions states it in another and even more powerful manner: “We are gifted with the charism of Edmund our founder, and we are responsible for nurturing it. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we share this gift with all our brothers and sisters, but especially with the poor, the powerless and the oppressed.” What we are being called to here by our Congregation and by the Church today is a fresh awareness of reality – the reality of Edmund Rice in his time. What is this reality? Edmund Rice, touched by God in his life, saw things in the world around him. Those things touched him deeply. He took practical steps to meet the needs and religious necessities of the people. These steps cost him very much.

### **What he saw:**

What did he see in his time? One living, constant reality that surrounded Edmund Rice in his life was famine and famine fever. There was dysentery, typhoid, typhus, hunger, dirt and disease all around him all his life. These evils were the fruits of injustice, the result of political and historical circumstances that gave all power and all privilege to a minority of very wealthy and very influential people, who mostly without malice and most unwittingly, oppressed the poor and the powerless.

He saw a people, God’s people, broken. He would have heard of, if he did not personally see, a man publicly flogged through the streets of Waterford for stealing a bag of coal. He would have heard of many incidents such as that recorded by Wakefield in 1813, when the English traveller saw a poor man have his cheek ripped open with a horsewhip because he got in the way of the view of an all-powerful landlord at the winning post at Carlow races. He would have seen destitute rural families trudging homeless, after famine and failure on the land, into the town where their hope of employment and a new life were but a dream. He would have seen public coaches arrive in Waterford and their doors blocked to the arriving travellers by hordes of unwashed beggars; malformed creatures crippled at birth by desperate parents to ensure that they would grow to be objects of pity and therefore of charity all their lives; poor people covered with sores which they aggravated to continue to excite pity that might stir generous people to help them with an alms so that they could eat to live.

He would have seen the secret societies that fed on the injustices of the times and that sometimes brought more suffering than ever on the poor whom they were founded to serve. He saw the Whiteboys, who rode at night covered with white sheets, tear down the fences of greedy landlords, attracted by the wartime high prices for cattle, placed around common land where the destitute majority formerly grazed free a cow or two for milk to go with the potatoes that were almost the sole means of subsistence for them and their children. He saw these cottiers reduced to potatoes and water and knew why they were angry and hostile, and why their men-folk in the secret societies burnt barns at night and hocked the cattle of the landlords and brought reprisals on the heads of all. He heard these poor creatures denounced in their own chapels by the Catholic clergy in the sacred name of “law and order”.



He saw and visited three jails in Waterford city alone; the one in Reginald's Tower for bankrupt men and their families who depended for food and firing in winter and in summer on the charity of passers-by; one at St John's Bridge close to the place of public execution where desperate sheep stealers and highwaymen lay awaiting a public hanging; and Bottamy Jail close to Mount Sion, where the "fortunate" ones (such as the widow's only son who stole firewood from the vast estate of Lord Waterford) awaited transportation forever by slow and filthy sailing ship to a world unknown to them far away at the other end of the earth. He knew of the pain in the hearts of all these poor prisoners and of their despair and the hopelessness, their frantic concern for their poor families and their powerlessness in the situation.

On the other hand, he saw comfortable Catholic traders like himself. He saw their children provided with schools – albeit illegal schools – because they could pay. He saw these Catholic traders build charity homes for poor old men and women. He saw these Catholic traders in Waterford build a beautiful Cathedral. He saw these good traders distribute food and clothing to naked, dirty, swarming, hungry paupers. He would have given all credit to these good Catholic traders for their generosity and goodness. But he knew that they, like himself, were good Catholic traders with full bellies and nice homes.

He would have seen the desperate rising in arms of the Wexford people after the burning of the Catholic chapels in 1798. He would have heard of the pathetic rising led by an idealistic and brilliant young Protestant, Robert Emmet, in 1803 through the streets of Dublin. He would have seen the mistrust and the harassment that followed for years afterwards; the continual searching of houses; the half-hanging; the flogging; the boiling pitch-cap on the naked head; the torture. And it was always in poor areas; always the poor. He himself was immune although some of his nearest and dearest were involved. He was immune. He, as a trader with government contracts to feed the army, had a pass into all the military barracks in Munster. He was immune. But it is unknown the amount of suffering he must have seen in these barrack squares and in the crowded jails around.

He would have seen the utter destitution, the brokenness and the ever-worsening situation of a growing population of Catholic people. He was aware, as the Church in the whole world at the present time is beginning to be aware, that there were families, Catholic families, his own people, born to lifelong destitution, lack of schooling, insecurity, life-long lack of opportunity, and sheer, naked and continuing injustice from day to day. He saw that all that was left to these poor Catholic people was their Faith. He saw the poverty of that Faith and how they were threatened in that very Faith – the only consoling thing that they and their children had.

He saw a disorganised, frightened, and sometimes unlearned clergy emerging from years of persecution; a timid and sometimes absent hierarchy upon whom these people depended for enlightenment and consolation. He saw and must have prayed in the many drab, small, seatless, mud-walled cabins that passed as Catholic chapels. These chapels had no Blessed Sacrament reserved, no baptisteries or confessionals. Priests lived quietly, as a general rule, with comfortable Catholic families in their private houses. Often the Blessed Sacrament was the luxury of that private family as was the daily Mass of that priest. He saw the broken Bishop Egan of Waterford living in partial hiding, and no formal administration of the Sacrament of Confirmation in the diocese for over seventeen years. Again it was the poor who suffered. He saw human squabbles between regular clergy and secular clergy who resented the interference of outsiders where stipends were so few and so small. He saw



confusion of doctrine in the scattered catechesis of the time. Many of the secular clergy were either untrained or had come from French seminaries tainted with Gallicanism. The regulars, often trained in Rome, were usually staunchly Roman and somewhat ultramontane in their views. It was the poor who were mostly confused.

Finally, he saw ten strongly financed evangelical societies, two of them working in the Irish language (the language of the poor), fired with the burning spirit of John Wesley, moving in on the Irish scene to evangelise the Irish out of their Faith. The most vulnerable targets of these well-meaning people were the poor. There was reading and writing and food and promise of employment and of security in the process of conversion, for the children of the poor.

### **How it touched him:**

The man, Edmund Rice, purified in the Providence of God by deep personal suffering and loss in his own life, saw, perceived, and was touched by this lost world around him. How did all he saw, felt, smelt, sympathised with, tried to right, touch Edmund Rice? It rocked him to the foundations of his soul. By nature and by training (from his father's will this is evident) Edmund Rice was a just man and a good man. The savage injustice, noted by the historian Maureen Wall, of some wealthy Catholic merchants, lending money at usurious rates to their destitute fellow-Catholic countrymen caused this very private man, Edmund Rice, to lift the veil and mark some very powerful texts in his new Bible in 1791. Twelve texts in all he marked. Ten are from the Old Testament and emphasize the covenant that God made with the poor. God revealed himself to Israel and made her his people precisely in a situation of want and oppression. God was a "revolutionary", a "liberator", one who took the side of the oppressed. We are asked by Vatican II and by four successive Popes to renew our Congregation on the vision of two men – Jesus of Nazareth and Edmund Rice. There is no question of just restoring the observance that held some thirty or so years ago. We are asked for that and much more. We are asked to go far beyond the memory of the oldest brother living today. We are asked to go to the very origins of our Congregation and to try to recover the Christ-like vision of Edmund Rice and apply it at the present time to the local and world-wide situation of poverty, exile, unjust distribution of wealth and opportunity, despair, brokenness, marginalization, which the Church in general is trying to meet and serve to the full extent of her God-given powers.

Edmund Rice looked in pity and in just anger at the Catholic situation of his day as other Catholic merchants in Ireland did. But Edmund saw things differently. Christ met the woman taken in adultery and saw a poor frail mortal woman who would repent if given help. Edmund Rice, with his inspired vision of a people so broken as not to see how God could be present in their lives, looked with compassion on those lost and leaderless fellow-Catholics and was transformed. Henceforth every waking moment was spent in the pursuit of this vision of the God who was present in the midst of all the chaos in these lives without hope and all that he would do would be towards making a tangible reality of that Presence in these lives. Edmund Rice became a man totally taken up with this vision, a man of single but powerful purpose. Every moment of every day until the end of his eighty-two years was in the service (as much as he could at the time) of the broken, the lost and the powerless. It gave birth, in God's Providence, to a special work of God, to a congregation that would perpetuate the vision.



### **He took practical steps:**

The first step Edmund Rice took was to open a trial school in a disused livery stable in New Street, Waterford. In doing this he risked his reputation for good sense and practical business dealings. He risked losing the acceptance and respect of his peers – the successful businessmen whose very success depended on the presence of law and order and normalcy. He risked his credibility as a sane man. He stirred the animosity of the wealthier citizens of New Street who saw their street and houses devalued by the daily influx of the dirty and the dreadful from out beyond the adjacent city walls. All this he did for a vision, a powerful vision. When he felt half-measures were not enough he moved out to where these dreadful people lived beyond the walls of respectability, in justice and charity, and broke the sacredness of the law by founding and endowing with all that he had, a society of lay men consecrated by vows in flagrant violation of a new law just promulgated in 1791. The reality of Edmund Rice for us is that, take it or leave it, we are sons of a man willing to become even an outlaw for Christ. He built a fire, the Eucharist, in his first monastery to keep the vision bright. He left us that action as part of a long and rich legacy. Before the Blessed Sacrament this hitherto practical, pragmatic genius made all his big decisions and wrote his important letters. Here he learned to sit and listen and solve the insuperable.

Edmund Rice spent all his money on this school and monastery in a dreadful social ghetto. He was profligate with his time and talents and money. His vision became a reality in this great apostolic centre of religious house and schools to such an extent that the poor and powerless all around now saw God present among them in the life and presence and solidarity of Edmund Rice and his brothers. Through this lighthouse of school and house he restored human dignity. He began the great task that God had waiting for him, “the moral and intellectual regeneration of a degraded and down-trodden people.” Through Mount Sion a universal practical paradigm for living out the vision was born. The monastery was vital. It was to be the divine workshop for “concretizing” the vision of God present in the heart. And the school was to be the channel through which the “concretized” vision would be transferred into a practical realization of God present in the lives of the poor. And these poor were to be God’s way of recharging the vision in return. Monastery and school together, as we said, were to be an apostolic centre serving both soul and body.

### **What it cost him:**

The reality, then, of Edmund Rice was that a man of God believed that Jesus of Nazareth was really the Messiah and the Lord of the life that the Father was calling for. Edmund Rice set about following Christ to his limits, refusing to be discouraged, to be overawed by the hopelessness of the situation, to be beaten by misunderstanding or calumny or failure. He lived in a world and at a time when even the poor did not expect any government to help or feed them. He broke through the powerful rationalizations that could see, unmoved, families born in want and doomed to stay in want and without dignity until they died. His option was for the poor in a time and at a level that frightened some of his friends. This is the Edmund Rice we wish to canonize. This is the man who asks us to canonize what he did, in our hearts, by following in his footsteps for the sake of Christ and the poor. He is calling us, his brothers in a special way today. It is heartening to know that we have the whole Church at the present time, thinking with us in a conscious and deliberate awareness of this great Christian option. The Origin, Rise and Progress of the Institute, (our oldest congregation manuscript) gives us a contemporary and detailed account of how Edmund Rice and his early brothers lived that option in their day: “Their motives in thus associating together, were...to sanctify themselves by frequenting the Holy Sacraments, by prayer, by pious reading, self-examination, retirement, and works of mercy, especially that of instructing poor ignorant boys in the principles of Religion and Christian piety.” This was the reality of Edmund Rice. I suppose the question is: “Can we face reality?”



## 10. *An Edmund Rice Discovery:*

### *Two new letters*<sup>255</sup>

On Sunday, 24 June 1985, as the Tertians were relaxing in Mount Sion after a beautiful Mass celebrated by Fr William Hogan CSC and a tasty supper, the telephone rang to announce that the Presentation Sisters in the nearby convent had just discovered two new original letters in the handwriting of Edmund Rice. Naturally, we were all excited and when Sister Assumpta O'Neill delivered two photocopies to Mount Sion the following morning, the 27<sup>th</sup> Tertian group felt they had been privileged in their pilgrimage to Waterford to be part of something big in the on-going development of God's plans for the cause and for the resurrection among us and among the people we serve of the power and the deep love and devotion of the great servant of God who was our Founder.

Just a few hours previously, on the afternoon of the 24th, the Tertian group had visited the historic convent and had been shown the ciborium which Edmund Rice bought in Dublin for his beloved sisters and the folding table which he had given them on another occasion. After a delightful cup of tea and a short visit with the sisters, the tertian group proceeded on their tour of Waterford. Sister Assumpta O'Neill, who is the convent archivist, and some other sisters were working in the bedroom of a sister who had died some time before. Among the articles of furniture in the room was a large and ancient press or closet which seems to have been part of this historic house since it was built in 1847. That evening the sisters succeeded in opening a drawer of this press which had not been opened in a long time. To their delight the two letters and the two documents connected with them which were in the drawer bore the signature of Edmund Rice. Naturally the sisters were excited and Sister Assumpta phoned Mount Sion immediately although it was very late in the evening.

The two letters are short, one dated 1835 and the other 1839. Both are in the firm, unmistakable handwriting of the Founder of the Christian and the Presentation Brothers. Both are business letters and yet each one is important in so many ways.

The first letter is addressed to Mrs. Mary P. Keshan, Presentation Convent, Waterford. The address and the letter itself are on the same sheet of paper which, as was the custom of the time, would have been folded with the address on the outside for posting or mailing. The text of the letter is as follows:

My dear Mary Patrick,  
I had a letter for you when I recd. yours of 1 (May) by Mr. Corcoran desiring me to send the enclosed which I do to save you double postage. The (stop) for the £50 I can't send you till I have some opportunity of sending it by hand, but the money was invested the very day you sent it.  
I remain  
My dear M. Baptist  
Yours M (ost) affedly,  
Edm. I. Rice  
Monday Evening  
May 4th 1835

The logo for Edmund Rice, featuring his name in a stylized, cursive blue font with a registered trademark symbol.

Accompanying this letter was a document which recorded the investment of £300 sterling in the New Three and One Half per Cent Annuities which were made transferable at the Bank of Ireland in Dublin. The money was invested in the name of Mary Mullowney, Lydia Hearne (deceased), and Ellen Knox, Hennessy's Road, Waterford, Sprs. and the date of the investment was 1 May 1835, the very day that the sisters sent it.

The second letter was addressed in the same manner as the first, on the same piece of paper as the letter itself. The letter was addressed to Mrs. M. J. Wall, Presentation Convent, Waterford, and the text of the letter is as follows:

My dear Mother Joseph,  
I have done nothing to facilitate my business since I came to Dublin, but we must wait for God's time. Poor M. Catherine's Mother did her business well at last. Love to M. Patrick and to all the Sisters.  
I remain My Dr Joseph,  
Yours M (ost) Sincerely,  
E. Rice.

There was a similar investment document with the second letter. It certified that £250 sterling had been invested in the New Three and One Half per Cent Annuities in the names of Margaret Keshan, Mary Mullowney, Ellen Knox and Mary Wall.

What is to be said about these letters? Perhaps, first, it would be best to identify the people mentioned in the letters. Then something had best be said about the time and place of their writing and the quality of the handwriting itself. Finally, the riches of the letters themselves in the context of their writing bear close examination.

The names of the sisters mentioned in the letters: Margaret Patrick Keshan, Mary Mullowney, Ellen Knox, Catherine Mullowney, Lydia Hearne, are among a host of Presentation Sister' names that pass in and out of the correspondence of Edmund Rice and of the documentation for his Cause. They are well known. He knew them all personally, knew their individual life-stories, and must have loved them as daughters. Between 1801 and 1820 he had become executor of the wills of eighteen sisters of the Waterford convent and most of the sisters mentioned in the letters were among those who confided their dowries to the safety of his name and reputation. Mother Catherine Mullowney's mother belonged to the distant past when, as a devout widow, she had been one of a band of Christians aware of the needs of the poor and the deprived and had bequeathed her monies to their welfare. Mother Catherine herself had died almost twenty years before this, 6 April 1819. The late Sister Lydia Ahearne he would have remembered in a very special way. She had been the Waterford Presentation Convent's first local postulant in 1801. In a gesture of joy and encouragement to the young community Edmund Rice had granted at the time, in her name and out of his own funds, a life annuity of £30 as well as investing her dowry and paying a generous rate of interest. The name of Mother Mary Mullowney, one of the founding Sisters of the Presentation in Waterford, features in a document as far back as 1 June 1799, describing a lease taken in trust by Edmund Rice "for the sole use and benefit" of the sisters of the Waterford Presentation.

The "dear Mary Patrick" of the first letter was Mother Margaret Patrick Keshan, formerly Miss Margaret Cahill of the Cahill family of Upperchurch, Co. Tipperary. Edmund Rice was an old friend of the family. Margaret Cahill had married and become Mrs Keshan, but her husband died shortly after the marriage. While Mr and Mrs Cahill were still alive they desired that Edmund Rice would become executor for Margaret and for her sister Catherine.



Later, when these two Cahill girls decided to enter religious life, our Founder steered them and their dowries to the Waterford Presentation Convent. As a gift on her entering the convent, Edmund Rice had given Margaret a piece of the True Cross which she passed on to her niece, Mother Joseph Meagher, who later also had become a member of the Waterford Presentation. Mother Joseph showed this precious relic to Brother Mark Hill in 1912. The relic was at a later date given to the cathedral in Waterford. Edmund Rice had known and loved the two Cahill girls since they were children. Margaret entered in 1821 and became Sister Mary Patrick. When Catherine entered in 1827 she received the name Sister Mary Baptist. Both lived long and faithful lives in the Waterford community. At the time of the writing of the first letter (1835) Mother Patrick Keshan was in her first six years as superior (1832-8) of the Waterford convent. Later, she was to be superior for two further six-year terms. She died 27 February 1881.

The second letter (1839) is addressed to Mother Joseph Wall, who succeeded Mother Patrick Keshan as superior in 1838. The Mr Corcoran mentioned in the first letter was probably working for Messrs Hayes Drummond, public notaries and stockbrokers, who had done much work for Edmund Rice over the years.

The time and place of the writing of each of the two letters is significant. When the first letter was written in May 1835, Edmund Rice was seventy-three years of age. He was still superior general and was living in North Richmond Street, Dublin. Three years previously he had been re-elected for life. He still seemed to be in reasonably good health and this letter is an example of the great Christian availability of the Founder and of the breadth and universality of the multiple cares he carried for the Kingdom along with the government of his own congregation.

The second letter, 20 February 1839, was sent by Edmund Rice who had resigned the previous year and had written his last will and testament because his health was broken and he did not expect to live. There is an appreciable deterioration in the quality of his handwriting in the second of the two letters. He was now seventy-six years of age and had, in God's plan, begun his six final years of suffering and misunderstanding. He was living in Mount Sion, Waterford. He wrote this letter from Dublin to where he had been called to appear before a court of justice to answer with other brothers, under oath, a bill filed against the Congregation by the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests. Ten days before this, 10 February 1839, in a postscript to a letter to Brother Austin Dunphy, director of Limerick, Edmund Rice had described his situation: "I had a letter on Tuesday from Brother Francis (Thornton) on which I am obliged to set off for Dublin this evening. It's well if this work does not kill me." In the midst of all his trouble and possibly in physical pain, he found time to look to the concerns of the Waterford sisters.

There is but four years between the writing of the two letters. The first letter shows us our Founder still full of life and vigour. The opening line, "My dear Mary Patrick," shows his ease in writing to the sisters and the love he must have had for them. He is anxious to spare them the expense of double postage and even seeks a means of sending the letter and the investment form by hand. His solicitude for them and for their interests is shown in the speed with which he implemented the investment of their money. Though the bold handwriting is adorned with an occasional flourish there is a slip of memory in that he finishes the letter begun to Mother Patrick with a closing line to her sister M. Baptist. He does not hesitate to sign himself "Most Affectionately, Edm. I. Rice".





As was often the case in the few personal and even business letters that survived from his pen, little jewels of other-worldliness inserted themselves in the framework of the practical instructions that his expertise and business knowledge imparted. One such shines out in the second letter. In his failure to act with his usual speed and precision on coming to Dublin he comforts the sisters, and incidentally he comforts us today, with the thought that “we must wait for God’s time.” The flourishes and the calligraphic adornments are absent in this letter. Still, his compassion is seen in his memory of a good woman long since dead. And he does not forget to send his “love to M. Patrick and to all the sisters.” Again he signs himself, although painfully, “Yours M(ost) Sincerely, E. Rice.”

Though both are business letters and both are short they are intimate letters. They show how close he was to the sisters. They reveal his feelings and attitudes towards the apostolate, towards the poor, towards women and towards life. They highlight his love for people, his compassion, and above all his reverence for and devotion to the Presentation thing; their work for God and the sisters themselves.

These short letters are two more tiny pebbles by the wayside; two further minor avenues through which the warm humanity of Edmund Rice finds an almost hidden and stealthy expression.



## 11. *Edmund Rice and Canonisation in the Heart*<sup>256</sup>

You have asked me to speak to you on something that is dear to us all, the Cause of the Beatification Edmund Ignatius Rice. When working on any great project it is good, from time to time, to refresh the mind on the various aspects of the work and on the hopes and the implications that are involved. First, a little bit about the Cause itself and how it came about.

When Edmund Rice died in 1844 there was no tradition of canonization in either Ireland or England. These countries were just emerging from a long period of penal laws, and the Catholic Church was only beginning to reassert its public image. The provision of church buildings and schools was much higher in the list of priorities than having processes initiated for the universal veneration of some of its more saintly members. The Protestants, who were in charge of both countries, were still liable to hysteria at the mention of such a thing. Again, the years of the Great Famine which followed immediately on the death of Edmund Rice pushed the whole idea of canonization into an area of low priority.

Nevertheless, the name of Edmund Rice was held in very high esteem in the second half of the nineteenth century. One of those present at the Month's Mind in Waterford on 1 June 1844 described the scene thus:

All Waterford, young and old, mourned the loss of their great friend. Brother Rice, I would say, lived and died a saint. He was the poor man's friend and it was the poor, young and old, who alone could write his epitaph.

A constant trickle of people visited the farmhouse at Westcourt, Callan, where Edmund Rice was born in 1762. Among the visitors were Cardinal Cullen of Dublin and Cardinal Moran of Ossory and later of Sydney, Australia. We are told that it was the custom of some of the visitors to take little bits of plaster from the bedroom where the Servant of God was born. Writing in 1867, Brother Austin Grace, a native of Callan, recalled:

It is now over fifty years since I first saw him, and even then, when I was only a boy, I remember how deeply his great soul impressed me. He was evidently destined to accomplish great things, and even now the fruits of his labours in the Lord's vineyard have not yet been fully developed. They are still growing and will still continue to grow as long as there is a Christian Brother to carry out his heaven-inspired work.

As the twentieth century dawned and the centenary of the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers was celebrated, new interest developed in Edmund Rice and in his work. The Irish Church could now hold its head high once more and it no longer feared giving offence to Christians of other denominations. Brother Mark Hill was appointed in 1912 to collect all relevant information about Edmund Rice with a view to a possible canonization. Cardinal Logue of Armagh approved of the move. Brother Hill collected over 200 statements concerning Edmund Rice from old people who had known him or whose parents had known him. Many of these statements were sworn in the presence of the bishop of Waterford. A picture began to emerge "of the most pious and saintly man of his time."

Then, as often happens in the affairs of God, there was a delay and a shelving of the work. World War 1 and the Irish War of Independence intervened and there was little chance to go



about gathering information about Edmund Rice. In addition, a letter surfaced in the Irish College in Rome which cast doubts on certain aspects of the life of Edmund Rice. In passing, this seems to be a pattern down the years in working on Edmund Rice. You find something. It seems to set back the Cause. Then something else turns up and Edmund Rice is seen in even a better light than before. For example, there was this letter in Rome. It was a serious letter. It was rather harsh in its treatment of the Founder's successor and even called for his removal from office. Brother Rice's signature was at the head of the list of brothers who signed. Brother David Fitzpatrick, who was in charge of the Cause in those days, was very concerned about the letter. I was assisting Brother David at the time. The lovely tribute in Father Peter Kenney's report to Archbishop Murray concerning the state of our Congregation came immediately to mind:

I have been in close bonds of sacred friendship with good Mr Rice for nine and thirty years and the signing of this memorial is the only fault I have ever found him guilty of.

I remember how Brother David and I worried over the possible damage to the Cause of that signature. And then, one day, with the simplicity of a beginner in the work, I suggested that it might possibly be a forgery. We both got to work and I found that there was a professional handwriting expert in Naas, the only one in Ireland. I went down to Naas with a large batch of sample signatures over the years. Mr. Brooks, the expert, put everything aside and concentrated on the job for a week. He gave his verdict that the Edmund Rice signature was a "carefully simulated forgery." And look what happens when you reread Father Kenney's statement in the light of the opinion of the expert. Mr. Rice has always been a difficult man to work for. You discover something new. It is often a jolt, a disappointment or a puzzle. Then a delay and things come right again. He was a very shy man, somewhat secretive about his good deeds. Incidentally, I remember Brother David Fitzpatrick telling me something when I started working with him full time in 1968. Thursday was always a day for our special congregation commemoration and for prayers for the Cause. In the thirty years that Brother Fitzpatrick worked on Edmund Rice, he said that no Thursday ever passed without something new or some new explanation coming to light. And often on a Thursday accounts of favours came in - always on a Thursday. So, I think that God really wants him to be canonized.

The celebration in 1944 of the centenary of Brother Rice's death caused a new interest in his life. The superior general at the time was Brother Pius Noonan and he did everything possible to stimulate devotion among the brothers. Cardinal Montini, later to become Pope Paul VI, was a friend of Brother Clancy in Rome and he urged the brothers to introduce the cause. In the early 1950s the diocese of Waterford and Lismore was asked to take charge of the Cause. It is usually a diocese associated with the servant of God that is asked. It just happened that there was nobody at the time suitably qualified for the work in that diocese. This meant another delay.

Finally, in the sixties the archbishop of Dublin, Dr. McQuaid, took on the cause although the diocese had a number of other causes in hand. In 1961 a diocesan historical commission was set up to inquire into the reputation for sanctity of Edmund Rice. At first things moved smoothly and then there were seven years of total silence. The priest most involved in the historical research was having trouble with his vocation and finally left the priesthood. The archdiocese set up a new commission in the early 1970s. Again there was delay since it was decided to start all over again. Brothers Normoyle, O'Toole, Cullen and others did wonderful



work and helped the new commission, whose excellent secretary was Rev. Dr. Kevin Kennedy. Their findings were published. The final paragraph of the report was very positive:

The picture that emerges, after a meticulous examination of the information provided and careful reflection on it, is that of a man of remarkable faith, and of outstanding response to the inspiration of grace. The commission submits that there is ample justification for proceeding with the Cause.

This was a great boost to the work. The next step was to transfer the Cause to Rome. Mgr Seán Kelly, Rector of the Scots College in Rome and a former pupil of the CBS in Limerick, was appointed postulator of the Cause. Brother Columba Normoyle was appointed vice-postulator. In May 1979 the Cause was officially introduced in Rome. To date rapid progress by Roman standards has been made. The writings of Brother Rice, including his letters, educational material, Rule of life for the Brothers, his account books and his last Will and Testament were presented to the Congregation for the Canonization of Saints in the autumn of 1979. In October 1980 the official reports of two independent assessors were published. One was in Latin and the other in Italian. In translation the closing sentences of these reports are as follows:

Our admiration for the Servant of God, Edmund Ignatius Rice, after reading his writings, is most profound. The undersigned asserts, confirming the judgement already given, that the writings of the Servant of God, Edmund Ignatius Rice, do not contain anything contrary to the Catholic Faith or to Christian morals; moreover indeed, they manifest an exemplary life dedicated to the instruction of the poor, inspired by a spiritual motive, and adorned by Christian virtues.

In February 1981 tragedy struck. Mgr Seán Kelly was knocked down and killed by a speeding car outside the Scots College, Rome. This again was a tragic blow for the Cause of Edmund Rice. Monsignor was well known and highly esteemed in the Congregation for the Canonization of Saints. He was one of their consulters on other causes and was quite an expert at his work. After some time another postulator was appointed, Father Dermot Cox OFM, a past pupil of O'Connell's School, Dublin, and professor of Old Testament Studies in the Gregorian University in Rome. The work continues. Brother Columba Normoyle retired as vice-postulator. Brother John Heneghan replaced him for some time and now Brother Regis Hickey, a member of the General Council, is vice-postulator working with Father Cox. Brother Stan Blake did excellent work preparing the material, and his successor, Brother Dominic Taylor, is at present completing the entire positio for the Cause.

The question is often asked: How is the Cause going? In the Congregation for the Canonization of Saints there are many causes being considered over a great number of years. Some of these causes are dormant. It seems that God does not want them yet. Some are progressing. What is the difference? The Church takes it for granted that any cause which is presented to Rome deals with a man or woman who led a life of great sanctity. That is accepted. What then differentiates between causes? If certain causes are progressing they are the causes of those servants of God whose canonization the Church believes would be of

service to the people of God in the world today. I recall on one occasion, speaking to the parents of the boys in one of our schools in the United States of America. At the end of the talk the people who were present stood around chatting and discussing. I noticed a woman standing apart who seemed to want to talk to me. I approached her gently. She was visibly



disturbed. After explaining that she did not know why she came to the hall that night, she proceeded to tell her story. She had two sons attending the Brothers' school, but she never knew that Edmund Rice had been married and had a retarded daughter. She herself had a retarded daughter, eleven years old. She explained that she was angry with God for giving her this retarded child and had not attended church nor received the sacraments all down the years. Now she felt that there was someone, Edmund Rice, who would understand her case and would intercede with God for her. I thought immediately of how our Founder could be a patron, if canonized, for parents in similar situations.

As a matter of fact, there are many situations today that would make him an ideal candidate for the altars. I remember meeting an old Augustinian, a Spaniard, in Rome. He was the official devil's advocate at the time. He is since retired. A fellow Augustinian, who is very devoted to the Cause of Edmund Rice, introduced him to me. The old priest asked me to talk to him about Edmund Rice. All the time I was talking he kept nodding in approval as I listed the various details of the life of our Founder. I pointed out that Edmund Rice had been many things in his time: a married man; the father of a retarded child; a successful businessman; a butcher; a cattle dealer; a teacher; a friend of the homeless; the guardian of orphans, of old people and of dispossessed. The old priest listened carefully. And then he asked a question: "And was he always a layman?" When I answered yes, he clapped his hands together enthusiastically and said: "Wonderful! The type of man that is wanted!" I was thinking it was a great pity that the old man was about to retire.

Is there any other important point? There is. Father Paul Molina SJ said on one occasion that he did not think a candidate for canonization had much chance unless he or she was first canonized in the hearts of those interested in the Cause. What is meant by canonizing in the heart? Getting to know more and more about the Servant of God, in this way getting to love him, and then, as a result, beginning to imitate him as you would a loving and loved father. Edmund Rice was a most compassionate man. We should pray that we may become compassionate like him. Edmund Rice lived to love and serve God and the neighbour. We should pray that through his intercession that we become more aware of the suffering and lonely Christ in the suffering and lonely neighbour. That is canonizing Edmund Rice in the heart. It is canonizing in our own hearts what he became in his lifetime.

Incidentally, I think that the canonization in the heart has already got under way in many places in the lives of the friends of Edmund Rice. More and more people – pupils of our schools, men, women, and young people – are beginning to discover this great, big-hearted man of Waterford. He is slow sometimes to respond to our cries for help and intercession to the Lord. But many people find him powerful in the depth of his concern. For example, I have been leading the Tertian Pilgrimage to Ireland for the past eighteen years. The weather in summer in Ireland is no problem. However, in the wintertime the weather is a continuing source of concern. I have always prayed through the intercession of Edmund Rice for three good days for our visit to Waterford, Callan and Dublin. I have never been disappointed. Lists of favours, great and small, are constantly coming in and some of the most significant of these favours will be examined officially and minutely to establish if they can be classified as miracles. And the Church is very careful.

The League of Prayer is gaining ground in Ireland. The Mount Sion Eucharistic League is also very active. Many people, young and old, are giving time to something that was dear to Edmund Rice, prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. In Buenos Aires in Argentina, 820 young people in their teens, boys and girls, have formed a group called "The Beatitudes" in



the spirit of Edmund Rice. They feed the homeless and do other apostolic work. Once a month a Brother sends them a newsletter about Edmund Rice. In the same city a group of wealthy parents, identifying with the parenthood of Edmund Rice have formed what they call *Fraternidad Edmundo Rice* (The Fraternity of Edmund Rice). They meet a few times a month to study Edmund Rice and to imbibe his spirit. They seek to imitate his love for God and the poor. Already they have opened and are financing a house where seventeen homeless children from the streets find refuge and shelter. In Papua New Guinea, several hundred young teachers, men and women from the Christian Brothers' Training College, are members of the Mercy Mission. This is a group dedicated in the spirit of Edmund Rice the Teacher to a deliberate choice of places where no one else would teach. They apply for posts among the mountains and in places far away from towns and cities among backward and sometimes primitive people. In England a group of young men and women have come together in a community to live the values of Edmund Rice and especially his concern for the strengthening, nourishing and safeguarding the Faith of young people. In Brisbane, Australia, there is an Edmund Rice Society, a group of lay people who follow a rule of life modelled on the life of Edmund Rice. In a wealthy Christian Brothers' school in Melbourne there is an annual lecture in honour of Edmund Rice the Businessman, when a prominent businessman is invited to come and speak on integrity in business.

What about the two congregations founded by Edmund Rice? How are we canonizing him in our hearts? Outside Ireland many initiatives have been taken to fulfil his mission of making the presence of God a reality in the lives of the lost, the broken and the destitute people of the world. The most recent opening of the Christian Brothers is an international house in the Sudan, north-east Africa. Here terrible famines, civil war and a Muslim government make life almost unliveable for millions of Christian people. The brothers will work with the Italian Verona Fathers. They hope to make our great tool, quality teaching, available for the educational uplift of the people and for the training of local teachers. They hope also, in the spirit of Edmund Rice, to become involved with the people and to help them in their needs. The Indian Province has decided to open a house and school in Gambia in West Africa. The brothers of the English Province have been working in Liberia for years. Recently they have expanded their work to Sierra Leone. In Zambia, our Irish brothers have started a new project in favour of lesser gifted children. Three brothers have moved north into a very Christian but very poor region called Muilleora. They are studying the situation at present and hope to create a system of education that will suit the needs of these people.

In Los Angeles two brothers are seeing what can be done about the plight of illegal immigrant families from Mexico. Both brothers are of Mexican origin and both speak Spanish. In Queensland, Australia, some brothers have commenced work among the Aborigine people. Some others work with the homeless and the deprived. In Sydney for quite some time now, a group of brothers are living in a very difficult suburb and are working among the underprivileged families there. In Rome two brothers have joined Mgr Carroll-Ebbing in his great work for 162 poor boys of various nationalities, including Ethiopian, in the famous Boys' Town. Recently the Monsignor has established a small venture for late teenagers just out of prison. One of the brothers is helping here.

And what about Ireland? At present the brothers are preparing to face with the courage of Edmund Rice the growing problems of their country. They are concerned about the more than 500 children sleeping rough on the streets of Dublin each night. They are learning that this number is increasing and that the average age is decreasing. A high percentage of these children are illiterate and the dangers to their Faith are very real. The brothers are beginning



to be concerned about the vast new spiritual deserts stretching in state housing schemes far beyond the limits of the capital city. Already the Irish provinces have committed their brothers to work in increased numbers among the poor, the deprived and the marginalised. They hope also to increase the number of brothers working in South America. Some brothers have made a start with the children of travelling families. Of the 6,500 travelling children in Ireland, it is estimated that only 3,400 ever go to school on a regular basis. Two brothers, working for the archdiocese of Dublin, are pioneering a scheme that will help homeless teenagers to find themselves. The Brothers live in an apartment house with these boys and teach and train them towards a healthy Christian life. Another team of two brothers is part of a priest-sister-brother team that is trying to sustain, encourage and uplift a depressed parish in the city. Yet another team of two brothers has become expert in retreat work and, as in the long-established Emmaus, they facilitate retreats away from school for senior boys and girls. Our training college in Marino is still in existence and the Brothers on the staff there are educating young men and women teachers who seem to catch the spirit of Edmund Rice. These young teachers are much in demand in schools throughout the country.

So Edmund Rice is coming into perspective in so many ways. His brothers are becoming more aware of the profound depth of his unique spirituality, his knowledge of deprivation, his compassion for God's poor and his creativity in meeting the needs and religious necessities of the People of God in their various milieus. Coming into focus again is Mount Sion and all it stands for. It is beginning to dawn on many people that Mount Sion was the first and only one of our foundations that had a bake house and a tailor shop attached; that had a home for destitute old ladies on the very grounds; that had a welcome for all the neighbours who wished to come in; that it was a centre and an encouragement for all sorts of apostolic initiative. Mount Sion has become a veritable parable for new beginnings and for new life. Mount Sion is telling us that it was the first of the Edmund Rice establishments and that it became from the very beginning and ever remained a true centre of apostolic activity and an ever-visible landmark in the heart of a people.



## Section 2

# ARTICLES FROM THE WELLSPRINGS\*

\* Published periodically in Ireland. Editor Br. John Barry.





## **12. *Edmund Rice – a Man for Today’s Journey***<sup>257</sup>

Pilgrimage is part of our Irish heritage – a journey to a holy place to worship God or to commemorate someone who, in that holy place, brought honour and glory to the God who made him/her.

Journeys are often mentioned in the Scriptures. These journeys are always journeys with a purpose – sometimes with a very great purpose or significance. There is the original journey of Abraham in Genesis 12: “Go forth from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and make your name so that it will be a blessing.” How contemporary for us today!

There is the journey of Moses leading his people in to the desert. (Exodus 3)

There is the supreme tragic journey of Jesus when He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem to leave Galilee of the lake, of the hills, the vineyards of his people, to go to his fate in a hostile Jerusalem. (Lk. 9:51)

There is the journey of the men to Emmaus (Lk. 24) and how their hearts were set on fire “in meeting Jesus and then when they recognised him in the breaking of bread,” how that same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem and to new life in the Spirit. Again new life!

A pilgrimage, in Irish spirituality, was always a journey, usually with others, mixed with story and song and happiness and inspiration. Today our group goes on a journey, a pilgrimage in search of a man lost 150 years ago.

You know Edmund Rice founded a Brotherhood in 1802. He founded us, the CB’s, as a group in 1822. We were to be a type of Congregation new to religious life in Ireland, a congregation of papal status; i.e. a congregation in the service, not only of the diocese, but of the Church Universal; that is, of the Church wherever it is at its weakest. We were to be a congregation – and we shocked at least one Irish bishop at the time – that would seek to transform the lives of the most abandoned, and having done so, leave the work to others and move on to the next weakest section of the people. We were to be a MOVE-ON GROUP!

We lost this and we lost the man himself about 150 years ago.

In 1838, Edmund Rice retired, broken and sick from his 30 years of continuous leadership as superior general. In 1841, while Edmund Rice was still alive, a biography of John Baptist De La Salle was translated from French and published by our Congregation. A final chapter was added to the translation under the title of “The Rise and Progress of the Institute in Ireland”. Edmund Rice was mentioned but not as founder. Nine years later our General Council sent a letter to the Superior General of the De La Salle in Paris enclosing £5 towards the beatification of our Father and Founder, John Baptist De La Salle.

For the next sixty years the name of Edmund Rice was never mentioned in our novitiates. In my own novitiate (1939-40) even, I cannot recall his name being mentioned much either. I believe that this was all in God’s good plan. The men who succeeded Edmund Rice in charge of the Congregation were following a different star; living a different text of Scripture. And a



lot of good work was done down those years. But we lost Edmund Rice. I believe that this was not a negative thing but a very positive thing. God works in strange ways. We have been hearing at this chapter of troubles and pains and rejections and disappointments. To some of us these seem to be death knells. I do not think so. I believe them to be birth pangs. I believe that God our Father, in His divine Providence, has been waiting until now (until this crisis period in the Church; a period of deep transformation and radical upset) to call forth again a buried treasure; the spirit and spirituality of Edmund Rice. This spirituality will come into its own again to help us heed the call of the Vatican Council to meet the agonies of our age. I repeat, our troubles today and our losses are not a sign of death but of new life. But I believe that it is up to us to follow the original star, to live Edmund Rice's text of Scripture.

As we know, the Gospels begin with the mission of Jesus. It is out of this mission that Jesus' spirituality and lifestyle and teaching evolve. It was also out of his own difficult mission that Edmund Rice's own spirituality grew. Spirituality, according to the experts, may be described as a way to holiness. But more technically spirituality is woman's/man's possession by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Pope Paul VI, probably the greatest of the modern Popes, was asked on one occasion for a definition of the spirituality of a founder. His answer was: "All the ways in which God spoke to the Servant of God and all the ways the Servant of God responded."

We are seeking to make new again after 150 years, our beloved Congregation. *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Vatican document on the religious life, says that, to do this we must become perfect in loving God and ourselves and the neighbour. It points out three processes that we must follow:

- (1) There must be a continuous return to the Gospels, the source of the religious life.
- (2) We must reclaim our founder as our own.
- (3) We must combine the Scriptures and the knowledge and love of our Founder to recognise and meet the needs and necessities of our times.

"Spirituality" said Sister Elizabeth Starcken at the recent Synod on the Religious Life, "is a movement towards God." For us, Edmund Rice is our movement towards God, our unique way of living the Gospel. Therefore we follow the call of the Church and the trend of the Synod and go seeking all that we can find out about our Founder.

After 45 years working on and researching our Founder, I believe that the charism or gift given to our Founder (cf. *Mutuae Relationes*, 11) is a threefold gift:

- (1) A powerful experience of God's love
- (2) A unique spirituality
- (3) A unique apostolate.

There is an old saying that knowledge is power. A knowledge of what that unique spirituality of ours is, and what that unique apostolate of ours is, would be a key to new life. I believe that new life is what God is calling us to as a Papal Congregation in the service of the Church wherever it is at its weakest. I believe that our spirituality is a spirituality of Presence and that our unique apostolate is an apostolate of Transformation of the lives of the poorest of the poor, and then a moving on to those who are now even poorer.



One tradition says that Bishop Hussey was the one to give Edmund Rice's first foundation the name of Mount Sion. But Bishop Hussey did not return to Ireland until late in 1802. Edmund had, according to the late Father Dermot Cox OFM, a deep knowledge of Scripture and was cognisant of the importance of Mount Sion in Jerusalem. For that reason it is more than likely that it was Edmund who called it Mount Sion and established the Mount Sion thing. It is basically the Mount Sion thing, our thing, that we are recalling and celebrating in our little morning prayer today. To him, I believe, Mount Sion was not a place so much as a spiritual concept.

The original Mount Sion, as explained at the recent retreat by Br Dermot Barrett in Emmaus, was the shrine that King David established on the little hill of Ophel in his own city of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12). It was to be a shrine to the Ark of the Covenant. This was to be a permanent sign of God's presence with and amongst His people. They had now come in from their wanderings in the desert. They were now an exile people set free at last and settled down to live with and in God's presence.

Edmund Rice's Mount Sion was a spirituality, our spirituality, a spirituality of presence. The Eucharist and the Mass were to be central to that spirituality. We were to be a Congregation present to God, present in the Eucharist and in people – especially in the weakest and most abandoned of the Universal Church – and God in them present to us. Our spirituality was to be a spirituality of Presence and brotherhood (with a small 'b').

We were to be brothers to Christ, to one another and to God's people. Christianity is different from many other religions. Many of these are codes of rules. Christianity, on the other hand, is a person. That person is Christ. And he is to be found in people, especially the poor.

Edmund was a spiritual giant – a man raised up by God in an appallingly difficult time to do an appallingly difficult job. He was a mystic – a man possessed by God; a man who felt that God loved him and loved him as he was; a man who accepted his weakness that the power of God might work through him; a man who thanked God always for the wonder of his being. To bring this spiritual giant alive, to reclaim him, what we need is to pray that we too might become possessed by God. What we need therefore, even before new vocations, are men of God among ourselves.

There is a trinity element in Edmund Rice's spirituality:

- (1) His love of the Eucharist
- (2) His love of the Word of God
- (3) His love of God's mother.

Waterford was and is a city of the Holy Trinity. The Catholic cathedral is the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity. His parish church was the Church of the Holy Trinity Without. We celebrate this morning as an introduction to our journey – our pilgrimage to where Edmund Rice began – a trinity of psalms: Psalms 125, 126 and 127. These psalms are in continuity. They are Mount Sion psalms. They could help us pray for a continuity in us of what, in God's Providence, died 150 years ago and which we hope to regain and re-own today for God and for the Church. The antiphons for the psalms are taken from the sayings and writings of our Founder and they incorporate gentle elements of the Mount Sion concept of



Spirituality. The Scripture reading is from Mt. 25:35-40, a reminder that this gentle leader of ours actually lived the Gospel and lived it literally:

- As a professional lover of the world;
- As God's auditor and financier for the poor and broken;
- As God's original educator;
- As a one-man department of education;
- As God's father and brother to generations of exiles wanting to be free.

As I said, for 150 years we followed a different star. We lived a different text of Scripture. It was all in God's plan. Today we are coming to an awareness of buried treasure. We are realising in some way that we lost a leader 150 years ago. I suppose the question is: Do we really want to find him again?



### 13. *The Essential Blessed Edmund Rice* <sup>258</sup>

God brings prophecy out of the bowels of the prophet: the human person in the terrible human condition. “If prophets look to the future for the fulfilment of God’s plans, it is for the same purpose with which they meditate on God’s revelation in the past, to focus both on the needs of the present.”<sup>259</sup>

Edmund Rice was one of these “human people in the terrible human condition”. The tragic death of his wife and the birth of his retarded daughter must have put an end to his dreams for the expansion of his flourishing business and the hope for strong sons to succeed him. All prophecy has its unique message. The man is the message. The broken man goes to God and touches God at that point. This is seen in the lives of such people as Hosea, Jeremiah and Blessed Edmund Rice. God burns in the soul of the prophet awareness of covenant<sup>260</sup> and of Covenantal Brotherhood. See these in the text of Job 31:16-25:

Have I been insensible to the needs of the poor?  
Or let a widow’s eyes grow dim?  
Have I eaten my bit of bread on my own  
without sharing it with the orphan?  
I, whom God has fostered father-like from childhood,  
and guided since I left my mother’s womb,  
Have I ever seen a wretch in need of clothing,  
or the poor with nothing to wear,  
without his having cause to bless me from his heart,  
as he felt the warmth of the fleece from my lambs?  
Have I raised my hand against an orphan,  
presuming on my credit at the gate ?  
If so, let my shoulder fall from its socket,  
let my arm break off at the elbow!  
For the terror of God would fall on me  
and I could not stand my ground before his majesty.  
Have I put my faith in gold,  
saying to fine gold, ‘Ah, my security’ ?  
Have I ever gloated over my great wealth,  
or the riches that my hands have won ?

Or in Job 31:31-32:

The people of my tent, did they not say,  
‘Will anyone name a person whom he has not filled with meat?’  
No stranger ever had to sleep outside,  
My door was always open to the traveller.

These texts are quoted by Edmund Rice in the first page of his 1791 Bible. One also sees the fulfilment of these in Edmund Rice’s living of Mt 25:35 et seq. (“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome,” et seq.).

God worked in the whole person of Edmund Rice to bring a



certain unique divine service into being for the People of God. God gave Edmund Rice a charism. A charism, according to St Thomas Aquinas, is “an evident gift from the Holy Spirit to an individual for the good of others”. This divine gift or charism has many elements:

- a) A core
- b) Human competencies
- c) Spiritual gifts
- d) Mission
- e) A particular colouring to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience
- f) A unique spirit
- g) A unique spirituality

In the case of Blessed Edmund Rice I would see these particular elements as follows:

**The Core:** A vision of the Shepherd, Christ, looking with compassion on the lost and leaderless (And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Mt 9:36).

**Human Competencies:** (a) efficiency (b) high standards (c) order (d) organisation (e) discipline (f) generosity (g) hospitality.

**Spiritual Competencies:** (a) loyalty for the Faith (b) concern for parents (c) flexibility (d) belief in self (e) loyalty to the Church (f) loyalty to the Church’s teaching (g) a sense of mission (h) trust in God (i) ability to take divine risks (j) daring (k) divine mobility.

**Mission:** A special mission to the Faith, with love, wherever most needed.

**A unique spirit:** (a) providential freedom, risking all (b) an awareness of God in the needs and religious necessities of the People of God in their time.

**A unique spirituality:** Open to God’s will, with core devotions to the Blessed Eucharist, the Bible, and the Blessed Mother.

With all this in mind, it is interesting to see how, in the passage of a few hundred years, a congregation can gradually (without being aware of it) move from its real origins. It has to do with growing old. It need not be the end of that congregation. Rather it can become the re-capturing of the spirit of the Founder and of the early days, the beginning of a vibrant new and contemporary life within the Church. The prayer and rethinking, as Perfectae Caritatis points out, should come from the Gospel and from the Founder.

There are a number of steps in the waning of an aging congregation:

- 1) It can slowly lose its dynamism and be reduced to mere observance.
- 2) There can follow non-observance, and then the growth of individuality.
- 3) Its last steps may lead to depravity.

When a congregation moves from the dynamic position, it moves from a spiritual towards a human level. It leans more heavily on the human than on the spiritual competencies of its Founder. It moves from the direction of Divine freedom towards human security. It weakens in mission, in spirit, and in spirituality, and loses the Divine vision which



formerly revealed the needs of a particular time and place and the means to meet those particular needs.

However, the Covenant tells us that God works in weakness, and the Divine law of prophetic progress seems to be: move when you are at your weakest. We are living today in an age of transition, in a time of change in history. Many congregations find themselves in much the same position as us. We are facing a weakness in the manifestation of Faith and a scarcity of vocations in the First World (though with a growth in vocations in Third World countries). We must remember that God is in the middle of all that is happening – and God is good!

Edmund Rice was a man of the Covenant. His Brothers were to be covenantal Brothers. “Both the Sinai Covenant and the Covenant in Christ’s Blood brought into being a People of God and called for complete surrender to God in response to His love.”<sup>261</sup> Edmund Rice knew that he was not the owner of all his time, talents and energy. He was merely the steward of them all, for the poor of Yahweh.

Being ‘covenantal Brothers’ colours our vows.

Our Poverty calls for total availability in Christ.

Our Chastity, in the words of the late Br Mark Egan, calls us to be “professional lovers of the world”.

Our Obedience is to be found in the words of our Founder, Blessed Edmund Rice: “Pray that God’s will may be done in me.”

We are like many other congregations, growing old. At this time our senior members can be our most important members.

They can pass on the remembered legacies of the congregation.

And by their prayers they can help us to carry our Blessed Edmund’s wish that God’s will may be done in us as we await our Second Coming as Covenantal Congregations for “the glory of God and the salvation of soul.” Let us pray for new prophets in the Church and in the Congregations founded by Blessed Edmund Rice.



## 14. *Edmund Rice and the Penal Laws*<sup>262</sup>

I have been working on Blessed Edmund Rice for almost fifty years and I find there are things about him that I have still to learn! The power of this saintly and very human man comes, I think, from the great love he had for God and the love he had for people – especially the poor, the oppressed and the deprived.

Recently I have been studying the Penal Laws and the effect they had on Irish Catholics ...and on the depth of this great man's dedication to the education and uplifting of the Catholic people and, later, throughout the Catholic Church worldwide. The Penal Laws had begun in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. They forbade schools for Catholic children.<sup>263</sup> From the early days of the Tudor conquest, English policy in Ireland aimed, through education and encouragement, to promote schooling as an agency of conquest with a view to spreading the use of the English language and the Protestant Faith.<sup>264</sup> In Ireland a couple of hundred thousand Protestants had all power, all privilege, as against four to six million Catholics who, with early marriages and large families, were growing constantly in numbers. The Protestants were frightened of these growing numbers. They had a parliament to themselves, no Catholics allowed. For many, many years Catholics had not even the right to vote. They could not enter the professions, could not be members of town or city corporations. Even in 1836, seven years after the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829, Daniel O'Connell wrote a letter to the people of England, published in the Morning Chronicle, 19 May, 1836, describing the condition of the Catholics:

The state of Ireland is this: upon a population of eight millions there are existing more than two million three hundred thousand beggars living on alms, supported by charity. Yes, after thirty five years' union<sup>265</sup> with the richest country in the world, more than one quarter of the population of Ireland are actual beggars.

The cumulative effect of all those years left its mark on the Catholics of Ireland, and there are relics of these marks to be seen and felt even today. The depth of this effect was conveyed in all its starkness by a Chief Baron of the Exchequer, John Bowes, when he declared in 1759 that "the Law did not presume an Irish Papist to exist except for the purpose of punishment."<sup>266</sup>

What were Catholic people of Ireland like after a century of these Penal Laws? Rev. R. Ryland, in his *History of the County and City of Waterford*, pp. 382-383, written as late as 1824, states:

The Irish peasant is shrewd and suspicious in an extreme degree; he looks on all as his enemies; he dreads his superiors; his mind has lost its energy and elasticity; his heart is hardened against every man because he is persuaded that everyman's heart is steeled against him....The farmers and cotters, I speak of them indiscriminately, for they compose of only one class.... are perfectly aware of their degraded state; they can understand and value the superior civilisation of their English neighbours, but they are accustomed to consider it hopeless to emulate it....They are taught to account themselves an inferior cast, and have no expectation, scarcely any desire of improving their condition. The great misfortune of Ireland appears to arise from the state of degradation in which the peasantry exist, compared with the intelligence and knowledge which they possess...





This piece was written in 1824 by a Protestant clergyman whose sympathy was with the poor and the oppressed. It gives some kind of inkling of the awful challenge faced by Edmund Rice and the early Brothers of his Congregations, when they sought to transform the lives and the hopes and the self-respect of their poor fellow-countrymen. It was a daunting task they undertook. It called for heroic courage and tremendous faith in God and hope and charity towards the neighbour.

The *History of the Institute*, vol.1, p.4 confirms the words of Rev. Ryland. Speaking of Mr Rice it describes the life of the poor Catholics of Waterford:

In his walks through the lanes and the poorer parts of the city, in his ministrations of charity, he was often struck by the sight of the groups of poor boys that everywhere crossed his path. Their gross ignorance, rudeness of speech and conduct, and their neglected appearance impressed him painfully. There were no schools in which they could be taught, and no one seemed to take any interest in them, except their wily enemies – the proselyters – who sought to entrap and pervert them. Could nothing be done to improve their sad condition? This was a question that often occurred to him, little imagining that God had destined him for that mission.

He must have prayed and prayed and sought advice from many people. But light came from a most unexpected quarter. He had a confidential chat with a friend of his, Miss Power, a sister of Fr John Power, afterwards bishop of Waterford and Lismore. He unfolded his views to her, and told her that he had more or less made up his mind to leave the country and embrace a life of perfection abroad. The lady listened with some surprise, and, when he had finished, spoke to him:

Mr Rice, it is a strange thing for you to think of shutting yourself up in a monastery abroad while the boys of this city are running wild through the streets and lanes ignorant alike of human and Divine knowledge, unacquainted with the first principles of religion, their passions in full growth, rude and gross in their actions and conduct and with blasphemy on their lips.....The words of his friend rang in his ears: “Go and rescue these boys from their wretched condition.”

When Edmund started his work among the youth he met with terrible difficulties. First he employed two teachers, paid them, and kept on his business to finance the school and to open more and more schools for the lifting and healing of the youth of Ireland. After a while these two teachers could not handle the unruly multitudes that came, and he had to run the whole school by himself. But gradually other people, Catholic and Protestant, came to see the injustice of how the Catholics were treated. They came to help him in his appallingly difficult work of trying to lift a whole nation out of the chronic unemployment, despair, anger, and utter poverty of more than 100 years. For many years past, we the Brothers of Blessed Edmund Rice, had men on the road seeking postulants to continue his work in the schools. These postulants were usually teenagers. In Edmund Rice’s time it was grown men who came to share his work. Many of them were merchants like him. Some of these sold their businesses and brought in the money to open more schools to continue to educate more and more young boys so that they could get good employment and so help themselves and their parents and families to improve the standards of their lives, in housing, in basic comfort, and in some security. These grown men who came to him were attracted by the power and generosity of a man of 40 years, with no training as a teacher, and



like him, they were willing to live in poverty and teach large classes of between 100 and 150 pupils per teacher.

A young tea-merchant, a Protestant named Lawrence Watson, saw the Herculean work that Edmund Rice's Brothers were doing in a desperately poor area in Hanover Street on the Quays of Dublin. He came down to Waterford to meet Edmund Rice. They talked for three hours. The young businessman was so impressed that he went back to Dublin, sold his flourishing business, became a Catholic, and came down to Waterford to join the community of Mount Sion. He spent the rest of his life in Waterford, teaching in the poorest of Br Rice's schools, St Patrick's. He died, aged 51, in Waterford and is buried, like Br Rice himself, in the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in Mount Sion.

A Mr. Tom Brien, a Catholic wine-merchant of Waterford, aged 60, saw what Edmund Rice was doing, sold his very prosperous business, and, with the money, joined Brother Rice and opened a new house and school in Carrick-on-Suir. The house is still there. The poor children who came to the school were tough and wild....and poor Mr Brien did not last very long! The new school was killing him. He left the Brothers, and asked for all his money back. At that time there was a continuous demand for clothes and food for many of the pupils, and money was becoming scarce. Some of the other Brothers suggested that they take Mr Tom Brien to law. Br Rice said, "No, we cannot put the poor man to the test." He stayed friendly with Tom, and they came to some arrangement. Tom is buried in the little graveyard of the Brothers behind the house in Carrick. A few years ago, I found, in our archives, a document by Tom Brien....and it was signed "X", his mark! Poor Tom could neither read nor write! No wonder the poor man found it hard to teach! He was an example of the appalling lack of education for Catholics at the time. Like Blessed Edmund, Tom had built up his fortune as a merchant, the only avenue open to Catholics at that time.

Francis Manifold, member of a wealthy Protestant family from Arklow, had been a captain in the Wicklow Militia. He too had heard of Edmund Rice and saw the extraordinary work he was doing to raise the poor Catholics of Ireland. He saw the injustice that was being used against Catholics. He became a Catholic, joined Edmund Rice, and became the first superior of a new school and house in Ennistymon, Co. Clare in 1824. He is still remembered for the sanctity of his life. He eventually died of famine in Ennis Hospital. At his funeral the people of Ennistymon went seven miles out the road to meet the hearse bringing the remains home. It was a dark night and many people left on record that there was a shining light over the coffin for the seven miles into Ennistymon.

A Callan man, William Baptist Cahill, was hanged at the Cross of Callan as a United Irishman. When the crowd had moved away somewhat, a sympathetic Protestant clergyman saw that there was still some life in the body. He, and some of William's friends, stole the body and hid it. Sometime later William Cahill turned up in Thurles. He was a boot-maker by profession. After some years he and some other boot makers got the idea of opening a school for the poor Catholics of Thurles. They came to live together, worked at their trade during the day, and taught boys at night. The Archbishop of Cashel

took an interest in them and wrote to Br Rice in Waterford asking him for some good advice for these good men as to how best to run a school. Br Rice replied, and in two valuable letters he outlined his methods and how the school in Mount Sion was run. An interesting sentence in one of the letters runs: "The half-hour's explanation of the Catechism I hold to be the most salutary part. It's the most laborious to the teachers: however if it was ten times what it is, I



must own that we are amply paid in seeing such a reformation in the children....” The Thurles men with their leader, William Baptist Cahill, eventually joined Br. Rice.

In 1832 the Asiatic cholera devastated the East, then came across Europe, and finally reached Ireland. Dublin was the first place to suffer. Soon it spread death and terror all over the country. There was a grave shortage of hospitals and hospital beds. The newly founded Sisters of Charity and the Sisters of Mercy did heroic work helping in the hospitals in Dublin and Cork. All the schools were closed. Br Rice turned the schools in Dungarvan, in Thurles and in Limerick into hospitals, and the Brothers helped in caring for the sick people. In other places the Brothers gave up their dwelling houses as temporary hospitals.

Two years ago a new source of important information about Blessed Edmund Rice was found in the archives of the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin. It was in the form of a letter sent by Edmund Rice to Father James Doyle, later the famous “JKL” (James of Kildare and Leighlin), bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. From the letter it is evident that Blessed Edmund was friendly with quite a number of distinguished people associated with the struggle for Catholic Emancipation: Archbishop Murray of Dublin, Bishop Doyle, Daniel O’Connell and members of the Catholic Association, Richard Lalor Shiel, son of another wealthy Waterford merchant.

Catholic Emancipation in 1829 was a wonderful thing for Catholics in Ireland and in England.... But to allay the fears of some extreme Protestants in England, the male religious orders were banned in Ireland. However the ability of Daniel O’Connell saved the orders from extinction. Meanwhile the Kildare Place Society<sup>267</sup> began what turned out eventually to be a severe drive for proselytism. Model schools, with training colleges for teachers attached, were opened with textbooks printed especially for the conversion of poor Catholic children. Archbishop Murray of Dublin was asked by the Catholic Association to help in facing up to this new challenge. He asked Edmund Rice to open a model school and training college and to publish books to oppose the effects of the Kildare Place Society’s schools and books. Blessed Edmund was 66 years of age when he came from Waterford and undertook the building of the school and training college.

In 1832 100,000 Catholics paraded from the Catholic Rooms on Burgh Quay, up what is now known as O’Connell Street as far as Parnell Square and on to North Richmond Street where the new school was to be built. Members of the Catholic Association, the clergy, and Daniel O’Connell himself formed part of the procession. O’Connell travelled in his coach, from which the people removed the horses and pulled it themselves. At North Richmond Street O’Connell turned the first sod of the new venture. In his speech he pointed out that “today is a day of great triumph for the cause of Liberty”. He adverted to the transfer of Catholic foundlings by the Kildare Place Society from the North of Ireland to the south, and vice versa, as an unchristian means of upholding Protestantism. He referred to Br Rice as “the Patriarch of the Monks of the West” and thanked him and his disciples for the noble work they were accomplishing “and which would start anew from this auspicious day”. A Mr O’Keefe, author of a life of Daniel O’Connell, speaking of the event said,

In June 1828 a great ceremony took place at which a hundred thousand persons were present. This was the foundation in North Richmond Street of the Christian Brothers’ Schools....The object of the foundation was of the most meritorious character: it was to enable a teaching order, recently established in Ireland, to give gratuitous instruction to the children of the Roman Catholic people who had withdrawn their offspring from the Kildare Place Society Schools.”<sup>268</sup>



Page 149 of the above-mentioned volume tells an interesting story about a Fr. Fleming, a friend of Br Rice. He was a Franciscan friar in Carrick-on Suir. He had such a love for Br Rice and for the work of the Brothers that he abandoned his own Order so that he might join the Brothers...but found on presenting himself, that he could not be received as, according to the Brief of our foundation, ecclesiastics were not admissible. Fr Fleming subsequently became an outstanding Bishop of St. John's Newfoundland, and always retained his affection for the Institute of Br. Rice.

A further story from the History of the Institute highlights the warm humanity of Blessed Edmund:

Towards the end of 1834, the railway line from Westland Row to Kingstown (now Dún Laoghaire) was opened to the public. In the spring of 1835 Blessed Edmund decided to take some of the Brothers in Dublin for a trip on this new mode of conveyance. They travelled from Dublin to Kingstown and spent the day by the sea. In the afternoon they came back to the railway station in order to return to Dublin. Who was on the platform but Daniel O'Connell! The meeting of the two old friends was warm indeed. Notice of starting was given by the guard. O'Connell had a first-class ticket. "We travel second class", said Br Rice, "and you, Dan, had better get in at once to your first-class carriage". "No, indeed", was the answer. "I will travel second class with the Patriarch of the Irish Monks". Thus they entered the second-class carriage together, and O'Connell talked with the brothers about education for the poor all the way to Dublin.

A question is often asked: What does Blessed Edmund mean to the many people who come to visit Mount Sion and pray at his tomb? He certainly seems to be an important figure in their lives. A small group of elderly people, men and women, meeting in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, for the past sixteen years have been praying the Rosary for his canonisation. And many times each day the prayers of petition are said by visitors to the chapel. A first class relic of Blessed Edmund is an almost constant request for sick people in Waterford and beyond. The annual Edmund Rice Retreat is crowded for the two sessions held every day of the five days of the Retreat. A similar annual Edmund Rice Retreat is held in Callan, and is likewise crowded. Many of the participants mention each year how lonely things are on the week after the Retreat.

It is interesting to see how Blessed Edmund meets the rules for beatification or canonisation.

The Church asks that candidates be not only holy people who have lived holy lives, but also how qualified they are to provide help and patronage to so many of the People of God. In the case of Blessed Edmund his life offers patronage to so many different kinds of people:

1. He was a lay person – and thus can understand, and be understood, by all men and women.
2. He was a married man – so married people can pray to him in times of difficulty.
3. He was widowed after a few years of marriage – and many widows and widowers turn to him in prayer.
4. He was a father – and fathers turn to him in prayer for their children and families.
5. He was the father of a retarded child – and so can understand the sorrows and difficulties of parents who have retarded sons and/or daughters.
6. He was a very successful businessman – and so would understand, and be understood by, businessmen. Incidentally, in Melbourne, Australia, there is an annual award called the Edmund Rice Award for integrity in Business.



7. Above all Blessed Edmund can be a new patron for teachers:
  - a. For teachers dealing with difficult children;
  - b. for young teachers starting out and finding things discouraging at the beginning. He certainly went through very difficult times himself, dealing with hordes of wild undisciplined children and persuading them to take an interest in their work;
  - c. he can be an inspiration for helping young teachers to realise the important potential in their work for being “second parents” to disturbed or deprived children from weak homes;
  - d. he can help all teachers to understand how noble and how fulfilling a profession it can be; how a teacher who always calls a pupil by his or her Christian name can help growth of self-worth in dysfunctional children from dysfunctional homes;
  - e. he can teach how to love all pupils and how to be concerned about their future;
  - f. he can help one to be patient with them...and with their parents;
  - g. finally he can be with us all in the difficult or anxious times in our lives. He would certainly understand if we called on him.

A few incidents in my own life come to mind. I recall giving a talk about Edmund Rice at a Mass in a church in Kilkenny. There was a man in one of the front benches with a little girl beside him. When I mentioned that Blessed Edmund had a retarded daughter, the man put his arm around his little daughter and gave her a loving hug. She too was retarded. It made me understand that such a loving person as Blessed Edmund must have really loved his only and retarded child. I often think that the greatest cross that the Good Lord asked of him, in giving his all for the uplifting of thousands of broken children, must have been to part with his only child. He certainly provided for her in life and made provision for her for the time when he himself would be dead.

Another incident I would like to mention happened at an Edmund Rice Retreat in Mount Sion two years ago. At the morning session the chapel was well filled. Among those standing at the back was a very well-dressed gentleman. At the evening session on the same day the same man was standing at the back of the chapel. When the Mass was finished and all those present were making their way out, the man sought a Brother to speak to. “You might have noticed”, he said, “that I was here at the morning session, and maybe wondered why I came back again this evening. I am a businessman and come from a business family. Some years ago our firm met with a difficulty with another local firm. This difficulty damaged both firms in many ways for several years. I had heard that Edmund Rice had been a businessman, so I came here this morning to ask, through his intercession, for this long and difficult entanglement to be healed. I am back here this evening to make it known to whoever is in charge here that during the day a ‘phone call to my office from the head of the rival firm asked that we meet to solve this particular problem. And I want to say a great ‘thank you’ to this extraordinary patron, Edmund Rice, and I hope to do something in his memory that would imitate him and make him happy”.

Edmund Rice was one of those extraordinary founders of the nine Irish religious congregations that came into being in the first 30 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These congregations worked in hospital work, in homecare, and in teaching..... and it was these who all laid the foundations for a new Ireland. Their work had a powerful impact that set out to offset the dire effects of over a hundred years of Penal Laws. Edmund was a friend of many of these founders and foundresses. A few years ago we found a letter he wrote to Rome supporting Catherine McAuley. When Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the Sisters of Charity,



decided to go into teaching to help young girls whose parents were sick and poor, her Sisters had great difficulty in managing the girls. She called on Br Rice, and he sent one of his best teaching Brothers to help them. He did this so well that one of the Sisters later published a manual for successful teaching that was used by many new congregations for years after.

Two little messages come from the pens of two different writers, one of whom was a personal friend of Blessed Edmund and the other was the author of a wonderful biography of Nano Nagle. The first writer was a lawyer called Stephen Curtis. He had known and admired Blessed Edmund for years. Here is what he said:

This great man looked beyond the world. He counselled others to do so. And if he were not persuaded that more than temporal blessings would follow in the train of education to the Irish, I am convinced that he would not spend a single day in its advancement.<sup>269</sup>

The second tribute is from a recent writer, T. J. Walsh, biographer of Nano Nagle:

Nano Nagle and Edmund Rice and the 19<sup>th</sup> century founders and foundresses were lonely figures in the battle for the spiritual birthright of the Irish child. For them the real purpose of education was the formation of the true and perfect Christian. They proclaimed the truth of the moral and social order that the education of youth belongs to the Family and the Church.



## 15. *Blessed Edmund Rice and Saint Teresa of Avila*<sup>270</sup>

When Edmund Rice was born in Co. Kilkenny, the decrees of the Council of Trent were beginning to influence the Catholic Church in Ireland. “The religious life of the people”, says Patrick Corish<sup>271</sup> “was being rooted in the catechesis of the Counter-Reformation.” Things were changing, particularly in the towns. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, one of the very successful instruments of the Tridentine Reform, had become quite popular throughout Ireland, particularly in certain rural areas and in the towns.

Through the Confraternity and its libraries the spiritual classics of the Counter-Reformation, in translations from various European languages, were becoming popular. Old values were being re-discovered through these writings, and new life was resulting in the growth of the Spirit in many people.

A whole fresh flowering of consecrated life followed in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Today, the influence of another Church Council, Vatican II, is slowly seeping through to the People of God and, in spite of some upheaval and some evident disorganisation, the receding waters of the high tide of its newness has laid bare some old treasures and some forgotten influences. The attempts at renewal of religious life have opened old mines, and a realisation has been born in some congregations that these old mines could be productive of new riches and new life in the spirit for these congregations. In the Congregations of the Presentation Brothers and the Christian Brothers devotion to St Teresa of Avila is just one such area for exploration.

There was always a tradition, or rather a memory, in the Congregation of Christian Brothers that Edmund Rice, their founder, was very devoted to St Teresa of Avila. It was also believed that some of the early Brothers, and some aspects of the very life of the Congregation in the early days, were influenced by this great doctor of the Church. This ancient tradition was like a map, a family heirloom, that people believed existed but were not sure where it was or what it signified.

Br. Stephen Carroll (born 1813) entered the Brothers in 1835. He knew Edmund Rice personally and has left it on record, in 1888, that the Founder “was very devoted to St Teresa and fond of reading her works.”<sup>272</sup> He reports a conversation he had with Edmund Rice: “I heard him say he took particular notice of that saying of hers where she described the poverty she experienced in one of her foundations, where she says she had not so much fire in the house as would roast a sprat upon.” Certainly Edmund Rice’s Rule of 1832 shows a similar desire to be poor as Christ was: “No Brother shall have anything in propriety; all things should be in common in each house.”<sup>273</sup> Br Alphonsus Collins (born 1841) also left, in writing, that Edmund Rice was “exceedingly devoted” to St Teresa. He says that her feast day “was kept a festive day with the old Brothers.”<sup>274</sup> Br. Collins refers to an early colleague of Edmund Rice, Br Austin Grace: “There was one saint in particular, Br Grace used to tell us, in whom the Founder had great confidence and to whom he practiced a special devotion, and that was St Teresa. He had great faith in her intercession.”<sup>275</sup> Continuing, Br Collins adds: “It is to be noticed that St Teresa has been a favourite with our people, and she and St Brigid are the two female saints with whose names they are most familiar. A number of Irish girls are called after them.” Br Regis Hughes (born 1841) wrote that Edmund Rice “was a

great admirer of St Teresa and very much resembled her in the practical, sensible view she took of everything.”<sup>276</sup> A niece of Br John Wiseman (born 1795, one of the contemporaries of

Edmund Rice), wrote in 1912 that her uncle “was devoted to the Blessed Virgin, to St Joseph and St Teresa.” “This devotion,” she said, “was promoted under Brother Rice.”<sup>277</sup> Br Dominic Burke, in his account of the early days of the Christian Brothers, tells us, concerning Brother Rice: “He was remarkably devout to St Teresa; her feast day was always one of special devotion with him, and from him all his early companions took up this devotion. He kept a picture of the saint in his room, and often would be seen pressing his lips to it. His devotion to this great saint became more remarkable as life drew to its close; but, as might be expected, his devotion to the holy Mother of God was most intense.”<sup>278</sup>

Br. Mark McCarthy, in his biography of Edmund Rice, published in 1926, also refers to the Founder’s devotion to St Teresa: “After the Holy Scriptures, no spiritual book attracted him so much as the writings of St Teresa. He always observed her feast day with much solemnity, and had it noted with many others as a day of special devotion for the Brothers.”<sup>279</sup> Br. David Fitzpatrick, in his work on Edmund Rice, which was published in 1945, also refers to Edmund Rice’s devotion to St Teresa: “His sentiments and aspirations were in complete accord with those of his great exemplar, St Teresa....In Br Rice’s favourite volumes, The Bible, Butler’s *Feasts and Facts*, and the works of St Teresa, penance is ranked equally with prayer and alms-deeds in the devout life.”<sup>280</sup> And again: “Another of his patrons was St Teresa of Avila whose picture he kept in his room and whose feast day he observed with special devotion.”<sup>281</sup> Incidentally, there is a copy of an old engraving of St Teresa in the present museum in Mount Sion. This writer recalls pictures of St Teresa in some of the bedrooms in Mount Sion in the 1940s. There was also a tradition in Mount Sion that the fires in the house were first lit, and cloaks were first worn on the feast of St. Teresa.<sup>282</sup>



**St. Teresa of Avila**

There is evidence that Edmund Rice was familiar with many of the spiritual classics of the Counter-Reformation. He was well acquainted with the works of St Ignatius of Loyola and of St Francis de Sales.<sup>283</sup> He had a special love for Scupoli’s *Spiritual Combat*. Scupoli was a Theatine and his book was as important to the Theatines as was *The Spiritual Exercises* to the Jesuits.<sup>284</sup> Thomas A’ Kempis and Scupoli were quite popular at the time. “The reverence which St Ignatius of Loyola had for *The Imitation of Christ* was matched by that of St Francis de Sales for the *Spiritual Combat*.”<sup>285</sup> “Scupoli’s *Spiritual Combat*,” says O’Toole, “had been the vademecum of St Francis de Sales for over twenty years; it had been his primer in the school of holiness”. “For Edmund Rice too,” he continues, “this dear book, so clear and so practical in its teaching, was to become a prolific source of spiritual blessings.”<sup>286</sup> Edmund Rice was close to the Jesuits in Waterford City and devoted to St Ignatius. Eventually, however, as he progressed in the ways of the spirit, says O’Toole, “St Teresa, her life and her writings, was to become the major influence in his spiritual life.”<sup>287</sup>





“Finally, “continues O’Toole, “it could be said that his favourite books were the Bible and the works of St. Teresa.”

What was the particular attraction of the great saint of Avila for Edmund Rice? It is possible that he had a devotion to her from quite an early period in his life. St Teresa was a popular saint in Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, presumably because of Irish historic links with Spain. Moreover, Kilkenny, which was his native county, had been a Carmelite mission since the thirteenth century. The White Friar Abbey of the Holy Saviour at Knocktopher (a few miles from where Edmund Rice was born) was founded in 1356, and was one of the earliest foundations by the so-called “Mitigated Carmelites.”<sup>288</sup> Knocktopher was once the head house of the Order in Ireland.<sup>289</sup> The Irish Catholic exiles who joined the Carmelites of the Teresian Reform in Spain brought back her spirit to their own country. They certainly had introduced the Reform to Ireland by 1625, and by 1683 they had formed an Irish Province. Edmund Rice could have met them while he was a high school student in Kilkenny for they had a monastery there. Besides, from 1795 to 1800, the Parish Priest in Callan (Edmund’s native parish) was Fr Milea, a Carmelite. Could it have been that Edmund Rice spoke to Fr Milea in 1793 or 1794 when he came to consult the local bishop about founding his Brotherhood? O’Toole speculates that Edmund Rice’s knowledge of St Teresa and her teaching probably came from his reading of her Life. Butler’s *Lives of the Saints* was a popular compendium in family libraries in Ireland. Published first in 1780, it contained a comprehensive account of St Teresa and of her life and works. In 1794 an abridged version of Butler’s biography of St Teresa was edited by Rev. John Milner and published in Ireland by subscription. By 1795, *The Life of Holy Mother, Saint Teresa* was being offered to the general public on a list of popular spiritual books on sale from the Dublin publishers, Meighan and Cross.<sup>290</sup> It is interesting to note here what Abbot Butler had written in his *Lives of the Saints* for the 15<sup>th</sup>. October, the Feast of Saint Teresa:

The humble relation which St Teresa has left of her own life in obedience to her confessors is the delight of devout persons, not on account of the revelations and visions there recorded, but because in it are laid down the most perfect maxims by which a soul is conducted in the path of obedience, humility and self-denial, and especially of prayer and the interior life.<sup>291</sup>

The rules of most religious orders or congregations, including even the Benedictine and Jesuit Rules, are generally, as has been said, “a mosaic of borrowings.” Edmund Rice, when he founded his first Brotherhood, also borrowed freely. In 1802 he took the rule of the Presentation Sisters as a suitable rule to hand. In that rule the Sisters mentioned “Mary ever Virgin and Mother of God” as their principal patroness. Then followed a list of sixteen saints towards whom the members were to have special devotion. In his adaptation of the Presentation Rule for his Brothers, Edmund’s Rule kept this list of Our Lady and the sixteen other saints but he added three further saints to the list: St John the Baptist, St Ignatius of Loyola, St Teresa.<sup>292</sup> Edmund Rice owed a great debt to the Jesuits. They were his personal friends, and had helped him in many ways. He took the name *Ignatius* as his new name in religion. And yet, as O’Toole points out, he must have had a very special interest in St. Teresa.

From my recent reading of the works of St Teresa, I am slowly being convinced that the influence of the Saint of Avila on his spirituality and on that of the early Brothers was much greater than we ever realised. O’Toole says that “the spirit of prayer which he subsequently cultivated was certainly Teresian in character.”<sup>293</sup> Certainly this seems verified, for example,



by a change he effected in a section of Chapter VI of the Presentation Sisters' Rule which dealt with the subject "On Enclosure." Realising that strict enclosure would not suit his own busy life nor the lives of the Brothers working in so many ways for the poverty-stricken

families they served, he replaced the directions for canonical enclosure with a "spiritual enclosure" that was certainly Teresian: The religious Brothers of the pious institute should propose to themselves to aspire to one of the most essential qualities of religious perfection, viz., an entire detachment from creatures, and a holy union with God."

From a preliminary study there are certain elements in Edmund Rice's way of going to God that harmonise with well-known elements in Teresa's spirituality. His ideas are very much her ideas. He, a widower, would understand the concept of a spousal relationship with God. Like Teresa, he too suffered calumny and humiliation in his service. Then again, the Presence of God was a living and constant awareness in his life, as it was with Teresa. In the question of his correspondence, there was also an affinity between them. Alison Peers points out that "St Teresa's correspondence, in the main, was concerned not with spiritual matters but with business." "Yet," she continues, "it is the real Teresa, not the saint in the niche that appears in these letters."<sup>294</sup> The letters of Edmund Rice are also, for the most part, business letters. And he too, like Teresa, could, in the midst of discussing business, turn aside to speak of the meaning of a life lived for God. A typical example of this is the oft-quoted letter of Edmund Rice to his business friend, Bryan Bolger, on 10 August, 1810:<sup>295</sup>

I am sorry to be giving you so much trouble; perhaps it may come in my way to do as much for you; however I hope God will supply our inability in this way.....How many of our actions are lost for want of applying them to this end, and were we to know the merit and value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we should prize it more than gold or silver.

In the final paragraph of the letter he returns to the business on hand, and ends with: "The will of God be done in this and in everything we undertake".

In his book *Spiritual Pilgrim*, John Welch, O.C., summarises Teresa's message: "God calls us into life and into the fullness of our personhood. Centring our life in God does not rob us of our personality but guarantees it."<sup>296</sup> This paper is but the beginning of a search. I hope to make it the initiation of a study of how much St Teresa influenced the spiritual growth of Edmund Rice. On 27 December 1970 she was proclaimed, along with St Catherine of Sienna, a Doctor of the Church, by Pope Paul VI. Pope Pius X had said of her: "So great has been her influence that it is second only to that of the greatest Fathers and Doctors of the Church, if indeed it is second to them."<sup>297</sup>

At this stage I think it would be useful to compare some of the statements and ideas found in the writings of Edmund Rice with similar ideas and statements from the works of St. Teresa:

### **The Will of God**

St Teresa: But never, not even in its first stirrings, does the will turn from its desire that God's Will be done in it.<sup>298</sup>

Blessed Edmund: I must confess that I am not very desirous of having them permanently settled in that parish.....May the Will of God be done in it.<sup>299</sup>

### **The Vanity of the World**



St. Teresa: I began to understand the truth I knew in childhood (the nothingness of all things, the vanity of the world, and how it would soon come to an end).<sup>300</sup>

Blessed Edmund: The world and everything in it is continually changing, which proves to us that there is nothing permanent under the sun, and that perfect happiness is not to be expected but in another world.<sup>301</sup>

### **God's Time**

St. Teresa: Once again it is very important for the spirit not to ascend unless the Lord raise it up.<sup>302</sup>

Blessed Edmund: But we must wait for God's time.<sup>303</sup>

### **Recollection**

St. Teresa: This prayer is called 'recollection' because the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God.<sup>304</sup>

Blessed Edmund: Thus will they preserve the spirit of holy detachment. They shall always manifest a love of holy retirement and strictly observe it as far as it is compatible with their state; they shall seek by holy recollection and prayer to draw down this spirit from God.<sup>305</sup>

### **The Presence of God**

St. Teresa: It used to happen, when I represented Christ within me in order to place myself in His Presence or even when reading, that a feeling of the presence of God would come upon me unexpectedly, so that I could in no way doubt He was within me or I totally immersed in him.<sup>306</sup>

Blessed Edmund: On entering their cells, if the Brothers intend to remain for any considerable time, they shall place themselves on their knees, for the space of a Hail Mary or thereabouts, to adore God present; also on their entering the community room at the hour of recreation; and in the study-room immediately before study.<sup>307</sup>

### **Nature**

St. Teresa: Those who follow this path of non-discursive reflection will find that a book can be of help for recollecting oneself quickly. It helped me also to look at fields, or water, or flowers. In these things I found a remembrance of the Creator.<sup>308</sup>

Blessed Edmund: He loved to sit at his window, as an old man, and look at the fields, the trees, the birds, the cattle – for all that lifted up his mind to God.<sup>309</sup>

### **Patience**

St. Teresa: His majesty gave me a great favour from the Lord, for this patience was clearly seen to come from Him..... I kept these words of Job very habitually in my mind and recited them: 'since we have received good things from the hands of the Lord, why do we not suffer the evil things?' This it seems gave me strength.<sup>310</sup>

Blessed Edmund: Although our trial ended on this day week, no decision has yet taken place.....It is a painful anxiety, but to some of us it is not so much as one may imagine. 'The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away, so blessed be His name forever and ever.' This should be all our motto.<sup>311</sup>

### **Service**

St. Teresa: While reflecting on the friendship with our Lord.....the Lord told me that from now on I should try hard, that I was going to have to serve Him more than I did up to this point.<sup>312</sup>



Blessed Edmund: O God, did we even now rightly begin to serve you, your loving heart would take us again into your fond embrace.<sup>313</sup>

### **Creatures**

St. Teresa: The soul is left with greater contempt for the world than before because it sees that nothing in the world was any help to it in that moment and it is much more detached from creatures because it now sees that only the Creator can console and satisfy it.<sup>314</sup>

Blessed Edmund: It is a poor thing, I must own, to be expecting the reward of labour from creatures who frequently are forgetful and ungrateful for favours done them, but let us do ever so little for God, we will be sure he will never forget it, nor let it pass unrewarded.<sup>315</sup>

### **Detachment**

St. Teresa: The soul detaches itself from everything so as to abide more in God.<sup>316</sup>

Blessed Edmund: ...to view nothing but with the eyes of faith, to do nothing but with a view to God..... Thus will they preserve the spirit of holy disengagement.<sup>317</sup>

### **Compassion**

St. Teresa: It is good and necessary sometimes in loving to show..... and to feel some of the trials and sicknesses if the Sisters, even though these may be small. Little things can bring much distress to persons who have sensitive natures.<sup>318</sup>

Blessed Edmund: Maybe you'd have the goodness to apologise for me with our Sisters in James's Street. I neither took my leave, nor did I see them for near a week before I left Dublin. Tell them the only excuse I have to make for my ingratitude is to acknowledge it. Tell them that for the last days I was a good deal occupied and, what was worse, that my spirits were for the most part as low as ditch water.<sup>319</sup>

The above quotations are but a cursory study of some indications that Edmund Rice was influenced by St Teresa. Her warm humanity and her practical single-minded pursuit of union with God seemed to have allied themselves with the spirit of Edmund Rice. This combination seems to have been assimilated by some of the early members of the Brotherhood. A letter from Br Myles Kelly to Edmund Rice when the latter was old, retired, and broken in health, captures some of that spirit:

It is happy for you to have no care on you but to enjoy a dignified repose for the remainder of your days, increasing hourly in the love of God, and preparing to quit this exile and take possession of Jerusalem.<sup>320</sup>

This is a spirit that seems to have faded with the changing historical circumstances of our story as a congregation. We Christian Brothers, for many years back, have seen ourselves, like other nineteenth century congregations, as cast in an Ignatian mould. Maybe a study of St Teresa and of her system of working towards union with God would be fruitful in a rediscovery of our Founder. Who knows but that it would give us a basis for a new approach to our life and work as an apostolic congregation?

As I have already stated, the study of St Teresa and the parallel study of Edmund Rice and of his devotion to the saint is a new area that has definite possibilities. It could hold the key to the knowledge of much of the inner life of this man. Teresa's writings and reform coincided with the reform of Carmel and indirectly with the reform of many other forms of religious life. Maybe today it could initiate a particular approach to renewal and to new life in Edmund Rice's two Congregations. We are all, at present, still in the process of



implementing the documents of Vatican II for the renewal of the Church. It is interesting that Edmund Rice's initiative for God came out of the flowing waters of another renewing process that followed on the results of a previous Church Council. The teachings of that Council

helped God's People through a transitional period in the history of the Church and of the world at that particular time. Much of what was happening then is also happening now. Their situation parallels many of the elements of our situation in the Church and in the world today. Maybe some of their solutions and some of the great spirit of the Founders and the Foundresses of so many movements for God that came alive in those years may come again. For the two Congregations of Edmund Rice there could be special benefits and blessings awaiting their return to the devotion to and study of St. Teresa of Avila.



## 16. *Blessed Edmund Rice - From Charism to Mission to Ministry*<sup>321</sup>

### **Introduction**

In the year 1793, Mr Rice of the City of Waterford formed the desire of creating an establishment for the gratuitous education of poor boys. In the following year he communicated his intention on this subject to some friends, and particularly to the Right Rev. Dr. James Lanigan, Roman Catholic bishop of Ossory, who strongly recommended him to carry this intention into effect and assured him that in his opinion it proceeded from God.<sup>322</sup>

There is a wealth of meaning about Edmund Rice in the above statement from the opening lines of the oldest manuscript in the Generalate Archives of the Christian Brothers in Rome. In the first place it was neither a secular “hedge” school nor a mere private school for the Catholic boys that this wealthy merchant was contemplating. If it had been, he would not have had to consult anyone except, maybe, to ask permission from the local Protestant bishop. Secondly, it sounds strange that he consulted the bishop of Ossory (Kilkenny), when Edmund Rice was living in the Diocese of Waterford at the time. Edmund Rice was a native of the diocese of Ossory. Why then did he turn to the bishop of his home diocese rather than consult the local bishop? The answer was that the bishop of Waterford was not living in the City of Waterford at that time. No bishop of Waterford had lived in his titular city for a hundred years.<sup>323</sup> The Penal Laws in Ireland did not acknowledge Catholic bishops. Chief Baron of the Exchequer, John Bowes, had declared publicly in 1759: “The law does not presume an Irish papist to exist.”<sup>324</sup> Therefore, the bishop of Waterford, Bishop Egan, chose to keep a low profile and lived in seclusion in Clonmel, 30 miles from Waterford City.

The British in this year, 1793, were at war with the French. To please their Hapsburg allies, who were Catholics, the British Government pressured the economically dependent Anglo-Irish nation to lighten Catholic burdens.<sup>325</sup> It was the year when Catholics (of a certain standing) were first given permission to vote in elections. And yet so many Irish Catholics were still frightened and subdued. “Indignity, chronic wretchedness, and occasional episodes of the most acute agony made up the permanent norm of the lives of many of them.”<sup>326</sup>

This paper tells of Edmund Rice, the man chosen by God to liberate these poor Irish people. It is also an account of the heart-break and the high hopes of the first twenty years of a nineteenth century Irish congregation. It is particularly the record of the courage and enterprise of a successful Irish merchant, Edmund Rice.

### **THE CHARISM OF EDMUND RICE**

It would be good at this point to say something of the charism that came to birth in the soul of the merchant, Edmund Rice. There are many definitions of a charism such as that bestowed on the founder/foundress of a religious congregation. The standard definition is that of Thomas Aquinas: “A gift given to an individual by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church.” Hans Kung expands the definition: It signifies the call of God, addressed to an individual, to a particular ministry in the community, which brings with it the ability to fulfil that ministry.”<sup>327</sup> Usually this gift is a powerful Biblical insight that opens the mind-eye of the founder/foundress to the true conditions of the world around him/her. There is always a transformation. The world is now seen through God’s eyes. There is a totality in the response. “A true charism blossoms where individuals place all that they are, all that they have, and all that they can do, at the service of God and the neighbour.”<sup>328</sup> This God-given



charism emerges in the framework of a specific mission. This, in turn, finds expression in a practical and appropriate ministry.

What was the powerful Scriptural insight that inspired Edmund Rice? Twelve texts (ten from the Old Testament) noted in a Bible that he subscribed to in 1791, seem to be the key. The title he gave to this brief collection of texts was “*Texts against Usury.*” Incidentally one of the texts – the last one, out of sequence and dated 1823 – has led some to suggest that the whole list of texts was compiled in the latter year, 1823, although the date 1791 is at the head of the page. I am convinced that there is no way in which Edmund Rice could be warning himself against usury in 1823. By that time he was Superior-General of a newly established and approved Christian Brotherhood working fulltime for the Kingdom of God. What seems to have possessed this businessman and transformed his life was a realisation of a business contract, a covenant that Yahweh made with all of the poor of the world for all time. They were to be God’s special people for ever and He was to be their God and protector. This covenant idea for Edmund Rice was a merchant concept: a bargain, a contract that he could understand. God works in the human condition. The man chosen was right for the task.

It is interesting to note that the twelve texts selected by Edmund Rice from his 1791 Bible have an Old Testament bias (ten are from this source). The remaining two, however, are from the New Testament or “New Covenant” (the Beatitudes as in Matt. 5:42 and Luke 6:35) and continue the concept of covenant, the New Covenant which Christ made with the Church. They are a natural continuation of the other ten. The first of the twelve texts (Ex 22:25) is from the heart of the Mount Sion Covenant, part of what is called the “Book of the Covenant.” The last (Luke 6:35) is from the heart of Luke: the “Gospel of his Gospel.” The concern throughout is the oppression of the poor.

There is a prophetic quality about this calling of Edmund Rice. The Covenant was ever the agenda for prophecy in the Old Testament. Prophecy comes alive and prophets are called when a prophetic need arises in history. For God is the God of history. God’s people, who had been faithful to their religion under fearful and continuing injustice for centuries, were reaching the end of their endurance.

Edmund Rice, founder of the largest Brotherhood in the Church after the de La Salle Brothers and the Marist Brothers, was an unusual founder. He was unusual in the very breath of his experience. This influenced his perspective and vision. He was the only layman to found a religious congregation in Ireland in the great nineteenth century wave of Irish foundations. He was the founder of two Irish Brotherhoods: the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers. He was the first Irish founder to get official recognition for a congregation of Papal status in Ireland. In addition, there is a tradition that it was he who managed the finances of the suppressed Jesuit Order in Ireland until their restoration in 1814. Certainly, his letter to Fr Peter Kenney, S.J., the new provincial (11 May 1814) on the opening of the Jesuit Clongowes Wood College in Co. Kildare, indicates that he was very knowledgeable concerning the ins and outs of the said property.<sup>329</sup> He also helped to finance the work of the Waterford Presentation Sisters by investing their dowries and endowing their first postulant. He was not a founder who “gave up all” to follow Christ, but rather one who kept his money and lands and properties and investments to finance God’s work.



## 1789-1802: THE MERCHANT IS PREPARED FOR MISSION

In her book, *Reweaving Religious Life*, Mary Jo Leddy defines “mission” as “shared meaning.”<sup>330</sup> The mission of Edmund Rice was to liberate the destitute people of Ireland by opening up an alternative for them and their families. His mission was to be, under God, the transforming of the depressed and the broken of Yahweh by putting a new meaning (a ‘shared meaning’) into their lives, a meaning derived from his own experience.

There were a number of well-defined and painful steps in Edmund Rice’s life that marked his transition from charism to mission and from that to practical ministry. On Saturday, 17 January 1789, a simple but historic statement appeared on the pages of the *Dublin Evening Post* and was copied over the weekend by two other Dublin newspapers. It was certainly a simple statement, just one line: “Died at Ballybricken, the wife of Mr Rice.” Years of research have established that the deceased was the wife of Edmund Rice. Waterford is 100 miles (160 km) from Dublin, and the idea of death notices and obituaries was a rare thing in Irish newspapers then. That a Dublin newspaper should note the death of a lady in Waterford, “the wife of Mr Rice”, is a measure of the status of this man. The newspaper said nothing of the child, their first and only child, who was born prematurely before the accidental death of her mother. That child, Mary, was born retarded. What that double tragedy meant and would mean to this wealthy and successful merchant of 27 years of age, we will never know. Many years later, he wrote to a Presentation Sister concerning the death of a friend of his who left a young widow in circumstances similar to his own: “I had on Saturday last the account of poor Phil Kirwan’s death.....May his soul rest in peace. I wrote poor Mary a letter yesterday. May the Lord help her, she is now in the dregs of misery and misfortune...”<sup>331</sup>

## IRISH SOCIETY

New life comes through death and resurrection. The times themselves were difficult for the birth of any initiative in favour of Irish Catholics. There was trouble all around. The poor were dispirited and the Church was disunited. There was a glimmer of hope from one sector only: the rising Catholic merchants. It was a complex society with many latent tensions.<sup>332</sup> Society was based on privilege arising from ownership of land. The privileged landowners were almost all Protestants. The bulk of the population was Catholic, with a lively memory of past wrongs. A small colonial minority had been granted most of the land of Ireland as a result of conquest in the seventeenth century. A rigid code of Penal Laws deprived Catholics of their land, of their civil rights, of education, and of their very identity as a people. Records and observations make it clear that landless labourers and cottiers (*cottagers*) formed a numerically large class in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century their number seems to have increased (which meant less for more people), in spite of major set-backs, such as the terrible famine of 1741, in which it has been estimated that half a million of these poor people died of hunger. The gross maladministration of wealth which was to breed several generations of misery was already a part of the colonial scene.<sup>333</sup> Catholics were 75% of the population, in some places 90% - yet they owned only 5% of the land.<sup>334</sup> Edmund Rice’s own family farmed 160 acres in a land where the bulk of the Catholics lived and reared their families on 5 acres. Rural Ireland at this time was a society poised on the brink of disaster. Part of the problem was a rapid rise in population from 3.6 million in 1772 to 4.7 million in 1791 .....to 6.8 million in 1821. It was a growing population that could not find employment. There were no factories. Instead, these people stayed in the countryside steadily swelling the





ranks of the rural poor.<sup>335</sup> The recurring famines (1741, 1756, 1817, 1822, 1836) were almost always accompanied by smallpox and famine fever.<sup>336</sup>

### **THE POOR**

In these disastrous conditions, England was at war for the great part of the second half of the eighteenth century. During the period 1770-1780, beef exports to Britain quadrupled. The exports of butter doubled, and exports of pork increased four-fold.<sup>337</sup> The demand for cattle, dairy produce, and pigs, raised the value of land and made it almost impossible for poor people to rent. Added to this, the landlords, greedy for pasture land, decided to fence in for themselves the common land that from time immemorial was open to everyone. Violence broke out in many places. Secret societies, such as the “Levellers” and the “Whiteboys”<sup>338</sup> rode at night and sought crude justice for the poor people who had no votes, no rights, no power, no redress. These secret societies were part of an underground movement that tried to achieve transformation by intimidation.<sup>339</sup> The poor again suffered by the reaction of the authorities.

A further deep source of grievance among the Catholics was the fact of having to pay tithes for the support of the clergy of the Established Church (*The Anglican Church in Ireland*). Anger was added to grievance when potatoes, the staple diet of the poor, were tithed ... while pasture land was free of tithing. Rising prices for agricultural produce, owing to the wars, brought no relief but rather further hardship for the poor. They had to pay cash rent for their few acres and were without enough land to supplement their incomes by producing some agricultural produce themselves for the market.

### **CHURCH LIFE**

The Catholic Church in Ireland in this period was not without its difficulties. There were tensions and divisions among the clergy. Some of the bishops were living away from their dioceses, some even abroad. Not all the priests enjoyed a sufficient level of education. Then there was the centuries-old feud between the secular and regular clergy, mainly over stipends and Mass-offerings. Owing to government restrictions on religious orders during the Penal Laws, the number of regulars (who generally had a better preparation than their secular counterparts) had dropped to about 400 in the whole country.<sup>340</sup> To the Irish Catholic (especially the poor) the Faith was a family inheritance, never to be abandoned or betrayed. The priest was a symbol, a leader – a man of power. Sometimes they may have quarrelled with his decisions but he always remained the father-figure, the strong one, God’s gift to the people. The bishops, on the other hand, were respected and revered...but at a distance. Many of them still believed in the “Divine Right of Kings” and considered respect for law and order to be absolute. In general they tended to favour the *status quo* and revealed a reluctance to favour and support the efforts of the poor to obtain some kind of justice. In adopting this attitude, they generally acted in good faith wishing to avoid provocation of the colonial parliament in Ireland<sup>341</sup> or the wrath of the government in London which would have led to increased suffering for their flocks. They did not add to their popularity by their condemnation of those priests who sympathised with the poor and appeared, on occasion, to approve of even acts of violence perpetrated by the same in their quest for elementary justice.

### **THE MERCHANTS**

The only real power among the Catholic population in Ireland in the late eighteenth century was the merchants. Ireland was an agricultural country and whatever wealth was accumulating, it was in the towns. A new and silent power was at work in these towns, especially in the port towns along the eastern and southern seaboard. The merchants were growing in importance. By the end of the seventeenth hundreds, trade was flourishing.<sup>342</sup>



The Protestant Ascendancy was inclined to despise money made by trade. Their standing and prestige were in the land. This suited the Catholic merchants. In 1774 one third of those in Waterford were Catholics.<sup>343</sup> They had crept up on fate. Their wealth and their silent organisation made them “central but underrated figures” in eighteenth century Irish life.<sup>344</sup> Between the 1780s and 1790s Catholics were able to purchase and bequeath land but the merchants were the only class of people who could really afford to buy. Being Irish, the land was in their blood, and they had a hunger for what it meant in the Irish society of the time. Some of them were holding mortgages, although this was against the law – and, sad to say, “some of these Catholic merchants were adding appreciatively to their fortunes by money-lending.”<sup>345</sup> One remembers here Edmund Rice’s “texts against Usury” and wonders in what exactly his conversion lay.

### **GOD’S GRACE AT WORK**

Edmund Rice had served many apprenticeships in life. Others were awaiting him in his providential preparation for God’s final work in his soul. The French Revolution and the general radicalisation of ordinary living, together with the fruits of the Enlightenment, influenced Ireland as well as other countries. In Ireland there seems to have been a deepening of religious fervour, probably as a reaction to what the Enlightenment promised and did not fulfil. The Tridentine reform had grown silently through the sufferings and upheaval of eighteenth century Ireland. Spiritual classics, translated from the French and Italian, together with O’Gallagher’s sermons in Irish,<sup>346</sup> had been printed and widely circulated by underground printers. The Bible was read, and *The Imitation of Christ* had been twice translated into Irish and was very popular. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, founded in Rome during the early days of the Counter-Reformation, strong in the area where Edmund Rice was born, had spread widely, establishing religious libraries wherever it went.

All these things must have penetrated the consciousness of the merchant, Edmund Rice. There were also individual incidents that spoke to the charism developing in his business mind and soul, such as the arrival of the Presentation Sisters in Waterford in 1798 and their great work among the poor girls of the city.

Somewhere around 1796 Edmund Rice wrote to Pope Pius VI about his project,<sup>347</sup> an unusual thing for a merchant (and layman) to do.

The seed had been sown in sorrow with the death of his wife in 1789. The germination continued through the building of a fortune and in the daily presence of his growing retarded daughter, a symbol of all the retardation in human growth, opportunity, and Christian dignity all around him. The loneliness of eleven years in his Garden of Gethsemane was making him ready for a death and resurrection to a new life.

### **1802 – 1816: THE MISSION BECOMES A MINISTRY**

The divinely inspired mission of Edmund Rice was the fruit of a merchant mind and heart transformed. As a rising and successful businessman whose work, especially in his early years, brought him up and down the country, he saw where things were going in Ireland. Land was not really the answer to all life’s problems. The rich were getting richer and the poor poorer and more miserable. The half-starved farm labourers and the one-to-five acre cottiers with their families fleeing from famine, famine fever and lack of work were taking refuge in the towns and cities where they found out that they were worse off than before. Looking around his own city of Waterford with its “dirty narrow streets..... and the whole place swarming with people,”<sup>348</sup> Edmund saw the young boys “running wild through the



streets and lanes, ignorant alike of human and divine knowledge, unacquainted even with the first principles of religion, their passions in full growth, rude and gross in their actions and conduct and with blasphemy on their lips.....no one to instruct or educate them.”<sup>349</sup> What was a merchant to do? What could a merchant do? Already Mr Rice was involved in many of the lay movements that flourished, especially in the towns, due to the influence of the Counter-Reformation. He was devoted to reading the Bible. He was a member of a new charitable society to assist indigent room-keepers. In 1793 he assisted in the establishment of the Trinitarian Orphan Society.<sup>350</sup> The poor of Yahweh were all around him and they were at their lowest. There were ten well-financed proselytising societies ready to move in and win them from their Faith in exchange for food, clothing and opportunity for their children. God was calling him.

### **DEFINING THE MISSION**

The land had betrayed these long-suffering people. The key to God’s fulfilment of the Covenant in their regard would seem to be a ministry of transformation – but it had to be total transformation from what had hitherto barely sustained them and now could no longer do so. It was necessary to involve them in something that gave them greater security. What commerce had done for him and for others like him, might it not also serve others? Involvement in commerce would surely lead to greater basic security and give some security to their families. This would lead to a growth in the conditions necessary for a flowering of the Christian life among them and a further growth in the Christian dignity that was their due. Thus a man with the power and the presence of an Abraham opened the windows of his vision to a ministry with a meaning that had not been evident before.

The first step would be to liberate them from their present degrading condition, and this could only be done through schools. It would be necessary to make them literate in English, the language of commerce, and proficient in handwriting. Thus they could seek positions as clerks in business offices, whether Catholic or Protestant, and eventually they would be sought after. The Carmelite Brothers (founded 1802) and the Patrician Brothers (founded 1808) would teach trades in their schools, many of the Brothers themselves being tradesmen.<sup>351</sup> However, we read in the annals of the Christian Brothers, Carrick-on-Suir, Edmund Rice’s second foundation: “The Brothers make it a point that the following should be well taught in their schools: correct spelling, sure and expeditious calculation, good handwriting and thorough knowledge of book-keeping.”<sup>352</sup>

The doer of deeds no sooner saw the clear outline of that God-given mission than he took the appropriate action. Twenty years later, in a letter to the Holy See, answering charges against him and his Brothers that it would have been better if their congregation had never been founded, he could refer to..... “the countless number of poor boys who, having received a religious and literary education in their schools, have been sent forth to trades, to shop-keeping, to merchants’ counting houses, some of whom at this present moment (are) coping in commerce and in the accumulation of wealth with the first merchants of the city.....” (20 Dec 1824). In that same letter, Edmund was also able to speak of something that was close to his heart: the safeguarding and nourishing of the Faith of the poor. “They (the Brothers) could appeal to the thousands who now crowd their schools, notwithstanding the bribes held out to them to entice them to the various Bible proselytising schools with which this country swarms.”<sup>353</sup>

“The founders of the nineteenth century Brotherhoods,” says one writer, “were children of their age. Invariably they were strong personalities, leaders of men.”<sup>354</sup> Edmund Rice started



in the loft of a livery stable, possibly owned by his late wife's people. He worked at his ordinary business by day (he would need the money) and taught school at night.

### **COMMENCEMENT OF MINISTRY**

Crowds flocked to his free school. It was a new thing in their lives. The poor families knew Mr Rice and evidently trusted him.<sup>355</sup> There were eight private Protestant schools in Waterford and two schools under Catholic headmasters. All these schools charged tuition.<sup>356</sup> As the numbers increased in his school Edmund Rice paid two masters to help. He must have been a man close to God to work all day at his business and, at 40 years of age, without any formal training as a teacher, face into an evening of coping with ragged boys and young men whose world knew nothing but hunger and violence and injustice. It was when the two masters decided that the work was too hard and left him that the Lord sent him two men from his own home town of Callan who were seeking God in their lives.<sup>357</sup>

### **BISHOP HUSSEY**

Two themes ran like an unbroken thread through the charism, mission and ministry of Edmund Rice. These were his love for the poor and his unfailing loyalty to the Church, even when that Church made it difficult for him to answer God's call in its service.

Three different bishops filled the Sea of Waterford during the vital 20 years of the founding of the Congregation. The bishop of Waterford and Lismore at the close of the eighteenth century was Thomas Hussey, an important figure in the history of Catholic Ireland. He had studied at Salamanca, Spain, and afterwards became chaplain to the Spanish Embassy in London. He came back to Ireland in 1795 to become the first president of Maynooth College, the State-supported national seminary. In 1797 he was appointed bishop of Waterford. From his arrival in Ireland he was outspoken about what he deemed to be profound injustice to Catholics. He made a *cause célèbre* out of the whipping of a Catholic soldier for refusing, in defiance of military discipline, to attend a Protestant service. When he came to Waterford (1797), he caused quite a stir by his Lenten Pastoral which expressed strong disapproval of Catholic children attending Protestant schools.<sup>358</sup> This provoked a public outcry on the part of the Protestant Ascendancy and he was forced to flee the country.

Thus there was no resident bishop in Waterford when Edmund Rice decided to follow his call. He must have been greatly encouraged by the bishop's pastoral, although there is no record of their ever having met in the few weeks that the Bishop spent in the city in 1797. The priest in charge of the diocese in the bishop's absence was Dean Hearn, a learned and holy man who had also studied abroad. Having consulted him, Edmund, using his own money, began to build a house and a school, hidden behind the houses of a busy street, in a very poor area of the city. The Blessed Sacrament was preserved in this little monastery from the day it was opened. A fourth member joined the little group. The school was growing rapidly in numbers and, to encourage the attendance of the poor boys and young men, Edmund supplied free clothes and a loaf of bread daily for boys from needy families.

He knew that this work of God which was beginning would grow to enormous dimensions, and that most of these broken people would have to be fed and clothed and all of them supplied with books. There was little or no hope of financial help from the diocese. And there would be none whatever from the state! He still had his own money and the dowries brought in by some of his companions. A Deed registered in the Records Office in Dublin (15 January 1815) gives some idea of the size of his own holdings and how much administration it must have involved. Besides this he had investments in Government Bonds,



in banks, and in stocks and shares. He was a man of great integrity...as noted by so many witnesses.<sup>359</sup> His deep communion with God seemed to coincide with his “communion with others.”<sup>360</sup>

### **BISHOP HUSSEY RETURNS**

In December 1802 Bishop Hussey returned to Waterford. It seemed that he had made his peace with the government. Sometime later there appears to have been some difficulty in the relationship between the bishop and Edmund Rice. Possibly it was due to the bishop’s finding a house with the Blessed Sacrament reserved – and therefore a monastery – on what was Church land. A recent law, the 31<sup>st</sup>. of George III, chapter 32, forbade anyone to “found, endow, or establish any religious order or society of persons bound by religious vows.”<sup>361</sup> Perhaps the bishop thought that Edmund’s initiative would endanger relations with the government. The whole problem resolved itself when Edmund visited the bishop, handed over the deeds of his monastery to the diocese, and even offered to pay rent on the house which he had built with his own funds.<sup>362</sup>

Bishop Hussey died that same year. In his Will he bequeathed £2,000 in securities to Edmund Rice and the community for their work. Before he died he had sent an account of his diocese to Rome. He praised the Sisters and then spoke of “another institute for the instruction of poor boys. Already,” he wrote, “a monastery has been built where dwell four holy men who request approval of a rule when it will appear advisable to the Holy See.”<sup>363</sup>

### **BISHOP POWER**

Bishop Hussey’s successor was Bishop John Power, a friend of Edmund Rice. He governed the diocese for 13 years. In a letter to Bishop Moylan of Cork, Bishop Power seemed proud of Edmund Rice’s initiative and he even asked why Bishop Moylan could not have such a group of men in his own diocese.<sup>364</sup> Bishop Moylan came to Waterford to visit the monastery at Mount Sion, and later he sent some ‘subjects’ to Waterford to be trained by Edmund Rice.<sup>365</sup> Having completed their novitiate, these men returned to Cork and opened a house and school in 1811.

In the meantime, Edmund Rice was answering calls from further afield than Waterford. In a reply to a request from the Archbishop of Cashel in 1810, he sent an account of his school system.<sup>366</sup> The system was an adaptation of the several different systems for educating large numbers that were common at the time. He included some interesting and original ideas in his adaptation. Pupils were grouped not by age but by the progress they had already made. There were set times for prayers, and children were prepared for the sacraments. Reading was taught from Gahan’s *History of the Old Testament*. Handwriting was considered important. There was a lending library in each school, something unusual for the period. “Boys” he wrote, “read the books for their parents at night and on Sundays and Holydays, and instruct them otherwise when they can do so with prudence, from which we find much good to result.” Adults were instructed in the school in the evenings. The letter accompanying the syllabus describes Edmund Rice’s priorities:

The half-hour’s explanation of the catechism I hold to be the most salutary part of the system. It is the most laborious for the teachers; however, if it was ten times what it is, I must own we are amply paid in seeing such a reformation in the children.....I trust in the goodness of God that it will spread before long in most parts of the Kingdom.<sup>367</sup>



## **HOUSES**

By the year 1816, there were Brothers' houses in five different dioceses. In 1812 Edmund established his first school in Dublin in a very poor area around the seaport. Within a few years he had a novitiate and four schools, with several hundred students in each, in the "Liberties", one of the most depressed areas in a very depressed city. In 1801 the Irish Parliament was merged with the British one in Westminster. This caused a great loss in money and employment in Dublin city. All the Members of Parliament, with their wives, families, and many servants, moved to London. Prior to this, the Industrial Revolution in England had brought about the closure of 600 out of 700 small waving businesses in the "Liberties". In 1793 there were 6,093 unemployed men in the area, without "help from anyone, and their children naked or semi-naked."<sup>368</sup> Hunger was so prevalent throughout the poorer parts of Dublin city in 1817 that mobs attacked and looted the bread shops.<sup>369</sup> It is estimated that there were 5,000 beggars in the city in 1818, wandering about and spreading all kinds of disease and infection.<sup>370</sup>

In Limerick, where Edmund Rice's Brothers opened a school in 1816, the Parliamentary Gazette for that year described the city as "the very acme of those evils of starvation, disease, and putridity which render the poorer sections of the Irish population so many segregations of charnel houses of the living."<sup>371</sup>

## **DIOCESAN CONGREGATION**

All this time Edmund Rice's was a diocesan congregation, part of the Diocese of Waterford in which he had four houses. Bishop John Power of Waterford was a friend of his and admired him. Nevertheless he wrote to Bishop Murray of Dublin (18 June 1815) expressing concern that Edmund Rice, in financing some houses in Dublin, might be limiting his financial support for some of the Waterford houses.

During the year 1808 Napoleon was at the peak of his power in Europe, and Protestants were afraid that he might attack England through Ireland. There was an air of tolerance and the Protestant aristocracy appeared to be more open to Catholics. In Waterford a large Protestant gathering voted for freedom for Catholics.<sup>372</sup> Edmund Rice availed of the opportunity. On the 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1808, the three communities then in the diocese of Waterford made first vows for one year according to a formula drawn up by Bishop Power. One year later, the Founder and seven other Brothers pronounced perpetual simple vows according to the Presentation Rule in the convent chapel of the Presentation Sisters and in the presence of Bishop Power.<sup>373</sup>

## **BISHOP POWER APPROVES**

On two separate occasions after this event Bishop Power wrote to Rome recommending Edmund Rice's congregation for approval by the Holy See: "In the City of Waterford and in three other towns in this diocese there are houses already opened in which these devout men live in community and employ themselves continuously in the gratuitous instruction of poor boys."<sup>374</sup>

## **THINGS CHANGE**

After the death of Bishop Power in 1816, Edmund Rice decided to apply for that which he felt God desired of him: a congregation of papal status in the service of the Universal Church, the sum total of all the dioceses in the Church. It is understood that a papal congregation would opt for those dioceses where the Church was at its weakest. The Presentation Rule which the Brothers were following was a diocesan rule, which, like all Post-Tridentine rules for women, included enclosure and solemn vows.



At this time Bishop Murray of Dublin brought back a copy of the de La Salle Rule after a visit to Rome and Paris. He sent a copy to Edmund Rice suggesting that an adaptation of the French rule would suit the new Irish congregation. The Holy See had been very concerned about proselytising efforts by the Bible Societies in Ireland. A request was forwarded from the Holy See to Archbishop Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, asking him to explain what was being done to counteract them. Archbishop Troy, and his coadjutor, Bishop Murray, pointed out how successful Edmund Rice's group was at its work in Dublin among the poor, who were often the targets for proselytisers. He also warmly recommended Edmund Rice's application for a Brief.<sup>375</sup>

### **1822: FROM LOCAL TO UNIVERSAL**

The closing years of Edmund Rice's 20 year founding period were beset with many difficulties. These years highlight the great patience, perseverance, and outstanding courage of the man.

The fall of Napoleon in 1815 was an economic disaster for Ireland.<sup>376</sup> There followed dreadful unemployment and another famine in 1817. More and more of Edmund Rice's investments were failing, and more poverty-stricken families moved away from the land and into the cities. Those who could, emigrated. The numbers in the school were increasing more than ever. The Irish Exchequer failed and many banks were in difficulties. A lawyer friend of Edmund's, Stephen Curtis, described the period – and incidentally described Edmund Rice as well:

Everything was adverse. Everywhere the task was difficult. But in Mr Rice there was that happy combination of elevated powers and excellent qualities: order, resolution, patience, foresight. These eminently calculated<sup>377</sup> him for gigantic actions, and he was less oppressed by the magnitude of the obstacles than with the means of overcoming them.<sup>378</sup>

### **A FINANCIAL CRISIS**

A financial crisis arose at this time. Edmund Rice tried something new. On 29 June 1816, through the pages of the local newspapers, the *Chronicle* and the *Mirror*, he appealed to the citizens of Waterford for help:

The superintendents of this institution...cannot omit their grateful acknowledgement for the liberal manner in which the citizens of Waterford have come forward these years past in assisting towards the clothing of the children of the said school, while endeavouring to extend as widely as possible, the benefits of education among the poor of the city, without parochial or religious distinction (note). They beg leave to say that, for want of sufficient room, they have been under the painful necessity of refusing admittance into their schools to several hundred poor children who have been making application for three or four years past....<sup>379</sup>

Both newspapers gave the appeal much publicity. A leading article in the *Chronicle*, 29 June 1816, is revealing:

To these schools society has been largely indebted. They have withdrawn multitudes from the dangers of idleness and vice, and have reared them in habits of virtuous and honourable industry....Merchants, traders and shipping agents are anxious to have



them in their employment, relying implicitly on a faithful and undeviating discharge of their duties.

It then highlights the tremendous devotion of the four members of the Mount Sion community:

It is enough to state that they give instruction annually to about 600 young persons, 200 of whom, through want of accommodation, have received their instruction in the open air.<sup>380</sup>

### **BISHOP WALSH**

The new Bishop of Waterford, Robert Walsh, was not friendly. He was a royalist in politics and favoured the *status quo*. Evidently he did not understand the quiet independence of the merchant founder who was not a priest but a layman and a man of the people. Edmund Rice and a Fr. Foran had been appointed joint executors of Bishop Power's Will. Bishop Walsh transferred Fr. Foran to the western extremities of the diocese, where it was difficult for him to come to the city. The bishop sent for Edmund Rice and stated that he wanted all the assets of the late Bishop Power to be applied to the upkeep of the local seminary. Mr Rice respectfully insisted that the wishes of the testator be fulfilled, that is, that one third of the money be applied for the clothing and education of poor girls, one third for the clothing and education of poor boys, and one third for the seminary. This attitude led to great tension between them. A malicious rumour was spread that Edmund Rice was embezzling the money from Bishop Power's Will. In the end, Edmund Rice was forced to write to the Holy See giving a full account of his administration of the Will. He pointed out that legacies or bequests could not be left to the Catholic Church, for it did not exist in law. They had to be left to individual people for the Church. He had been asked on several occasions to accept the difficult executorship of such legacies. On a number of occasions he was ordered by the courts to take out letters of administration. This was the only way to prevent the bequests from being confiscated and lost to the Church. Thus when Bishop Walsh and his Vicar "refused to give credit for £1,500 already expended on the seminary from the bequest," Edmund Rice brought his lawyer to the next meeting "to argue the point with them" in order to avoid a threatened lawsuit which might jeopardise the whole bequest and the poor would thus be at a loss.<sup>381</sup>

### **PAPAL STATUS**

Meanwhile Edmund Rice had initiated the difficult task of convincing his own Brothers that to reach the greatest number of God's poor and the poorest of these, it was necessary to seek Papal status. At three successive yearly meetings he assembled the professed Brothers and explained it all to them, reassuring them and listening to their questions. What he was asking for had never been heard of before. They had already made vows, even perpetual vows, to the local bishop according to the Presentation Rule. And now to accept that a layman from among themselves could be Superior General was too much. It was only at the final meeting that he asked for final commitment. Finally, through Archbishop Troy of Dublin, he made an application to the Holy See for a Brief of recognition as a papal congregation.

The application was eventually sent back to the local bishop in Waterford for his opinion and approval. The Bishop's reply was anything but supportive of Edmund Rice. He wrote strongly against "the idea of having a perpetual chief or general from among them." "This," he wrote, "is what the bishops, priests and laity are not inclined to have done." He also wrote of the Brothers "rambling about as they will without the leave of bishop, pastor or





director...<sup>382</sup> Perhaps he was referring to Edmund Rice's travelling to the Law Courts in Dublin and to the Commissioners of Charitable Requests.

There were nine Lay Brothers in the Society at that time. They observed the Rules and attended all the exercises but had not made any vows – nor did they subsequently until the Rescript of Pope Gregory XVI was received in 1832.<sup>383</sup>

### THE BRIEF

Edmund Rice received the Brief of approval in 1820, two years after his application. The first General Chapter of the new Congregation, in 1822, elected him as Superior-General. Two houses and a number of Brothers seceded. Bishop Murray, by then Archbishop of Dublin in succession to Archbishop Troy, had written to Edmund Rice, 3 October 1820:

I cannot tell you how much pleasure it gives me to find that your institute has at length obtained the approbation of His Holiness...God grant stability to the Institute that promises so fairly to be of essential benefit to the interests of religion in this country.<sup>384</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Two prominent modern Irish historians pay tribute to Edmund Rice's contribution to the history of Ireland in his time. R. B. McDowell would place Edmund Rice among the four "outstanding figures for vigour and originality in Irish Church history in the nineteenth century."<sup>385</sup> Donal Kerr states, "The period witnessed the activities of several charismatic leaders whose social and educational work was to endure. Chief among these must be reckoned Edmund Rice."<sup>386</sup> There is a perennial and contemporary feeling about Edmund Rice. In all colonised countries, and Ireland, in its time, was no exception, the colonisers felt it necessary to keep the colonised ignorant.<sup>387</sup> Special laws forbade education, thus preventing the rise of leaders. Local language and culture were downgraded, and primacy was given to the language and culture of the conqueror in order to guarantee power and supremacy to the ruling minority. Colonialism was part of the life of the countries of South America for centuries as it was in Ireland. Latin America today has highlighted the principal defects of this system. Liberation Theology and Spirituality have come from a realisation of the necessity for liberating the multitude of subjected people from the fruits of past colonisation.

Edmund Rice was a liberator. He was an innovator who saw a human solution through education with a particular bias, a solution which helped to restore justice and Christian dignity in peoples' lives. His was a spirituality very similar to the Liberation Spirituality of Latin America today. Gustavo Gutierrez describes it in *Theology of Liberation*:

A spirituality of liberation will centre on a conversion to the neighbour, the oppressed person, the exploited social class, the dominated country. Our conversion to the Lord implies conversion to the neighbour. Evangelical conversion is indeed the touchstone of all spirituality. Conversion means a radical transformation of ourselves; it means thinking, feeling and living as Christ – present in exploited and alienated people.

To be converted is to commit oneself to the process of the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, to commit oneself not only generously, but also with an analysis of the situation and a strategy of action. To be converted is to know and experience the fact that, contrary to the law of physics, we can stand straight, according to the Gospel, only when our centre of gravity is outside ourselves.<sup>388</sup>



Edmund Rice's own conversion must have been a deep one. One wonders what could have been the basis of his conversion. What could have been his failing? Was it social sin? One wonders was it the exploitation of the downtrodden of his own people by the cruel sin of usury, a common road to riches for the "deprived" but determined Catholic merchants of the second half of the eighteenth century in Ireland. If it were so for Edmund Rice, then certainly, by the grace of God, he made amends a thousand fold. A public inquiry into education of the poor in Ireland in 1824 shows that Edmund Rice and his thirty Brothers, on their own, in their 24 schools "accounted for about 5,500 poor boys."<sup>389</sup> And that meant teaching....and often feeding and clothing them as well.

### **MESSAGE TODAY**

Were we to know the merit and value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we should prize it more than gold or silver. (Blessed Edmund Rice).

The heart of the transformation to opportunity for poor families in a move from land to the world of commerce, by Edmund Rice, was not a human stroke of genius but an inspired insight given to a man of God, a genuine reading of "the sign of the times". The value of this is in the message that his Brothers can learn from him today: they can still be in education, their people will always be the abandoned of God's People, and the prophetic vision for a transformation to new life will come, as it did in the case of Edmund Rice, from the personal conversion of each man to the God of the Covenant. God will work through them and show them the new way to a new liberation: to set a new group of "God's exiles" free. But, as Edmund Rice said, "We must wait for God's time".



## 17. *Seeds for a Revolution*<sup>390</sup>

Of all the helpful definitions of a founding charism, tried over thirty years of study of Edmund Rice, I feel I have recently discovered the one most helpful to me.....even if it is not a very recent one. It dates actually from the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1978, and is found in the Church document *Mutuae Relationes*, published in that year. In it, “The Charism of the Founders”, first mentioned in Paul VI’s *Evangelica Testificatio* (1971), is beautifully explained.

The “Charism of the Founders”<sup>391</sup> appears in *Mutuae Relationes* as an “experience of the Spirit involving a particular style of sanctification and a particular apostolate. These create a definite tradition in the new congregation so that its objective elements can be easily recognised.”

In other words, the charism of our Founder is an experience of the Spirit of God present in the soul and mind of Edmund Rice together with a particular spirituality and a particular apostolate. What was the outcome of this powerful experience of God present to Edmund Rice? To me it seems to have been a compassionate movement within him from knowledge to the realisation that all around him were fellow-Christians who were suffering great deprivation in their lives. He now realised that he himself could be present to them (with the God who was present to him). They then would see that the God they believed in and the God to whom they had been faithful had not abandoned them, but was present through Edmund Rice. With the Founder’s great gifts and his considerable wealth he could transform their poor broken lives, changing them from destitution to lives of some comfort and of increasing hope for their children. Recently, in my studies, I have established that, in his early curriculum in the schools around Waterford, he prepared his pauper students for entry into “white-collar” positions as clerks in “offices and counting-houses.” This was human transformation, and it enabled these boys to take their parents and family out of squalor and despair into circumstances which would make it easier for them to live the Christian life at a fuller level.

I believe that out of his great experience of God, refined through the ten-year Gethsemane of loss and brokenness that must have been his life after the death of his wife, was born in Edmund Rice (for us, his two congregations) a spirituality of presence and a vision of Christ suffering in the lives of these people that led to a full-time apostolate of transformation.

The spirituality of presence seems to have been nourished by the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament in our houses from the very beginning and by Edmund Rice’s devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It is on record that he made all his fundamental decisions and wrote his most important letters in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>392</sup>

The apostolate of transformation in the lives of his pupils came from his inspired system of education for the boys; evening classes for their parents; Sunday school for boys and men in the Mendicity Institute for pauper families; attendance with his Brothers in the wards of Jervis Street Hospital for sick and poor men and boys; attendance at jails for the uplift of poor prisoners; attendance in charity houses to comfort and support old and destitute men and women. The Waterford Mirror (29 June 1816), in a leading article highlights this element of the transformation in the Mount Sion Schools:



We would enquire confidently of any person who knows Waterford and its suburbs now, and who knew the place, thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago, whether there be not a palpable improvement in the morals and in the behaviour of the body of the people.....Whatever co-operation may have taken place, we may safely assume that this blessing has been conferred chiefly through the extension of education, and that the school in Barrack Street has been, beyond comparison, the principal contributor to this valuable fund of local and national amelioration.

The spirit of those early days in our Congregation is summed up beautifully in the closing paragraph of our oldest Congregational manuscripts, *The Origin, Rise and Progress of the Institute*. It describes the last morning of the General Chapter of 1822:

Early next morning they took leave of each other in the most brotherly and affectionate manner, and departed for their respective houses, where they resumed their labours among the poor children with increased zeal and fervour. May God grant us all the grace of perseverance in his holy service, and may our endeavours to diffuse and establish the Kingdom of Christ in the hearts of His little ones be attended with success to His divine honour and glory, and the salvation of their and our immortal souls. Amen



## **Section 3**

# **ARTICLES FROM THE LEAGUE OF PRAYER\***

\* Published monthly at St. Mary's, Baldoyle, Co. Dublin. Editor Br. Aidan Quinlan.



## 18. *An Early Pupil of Blessed Edmund*<sup>393</sup>

From an early document published in 1896 there emerges the gentle story of an early pupil of Blessed Edmund Rice. His name was Thomas Joseph Power. His was one of the many short biographies of the early Brothers, written by Br. Dominic Burke and published in his annual Educational Record. These short biographies highlight the great variety of men who joined Br. Rice in the early days. They came from all walks of life and all of them seemed inspired by the extraordinary example of the Waterford merchant, Edmund Rice, who set out to educate, and thus empower, as many as possible of the hundreds of thousands of pauper Catholic boys in Ireland. This, Edmund Rice resolved to do, without hope of any help neither from the Government of the time nor from the pauper families themselves. The poor persecuted Catholics of Ireland had nothing to offer him. He would have to use, mainly, his own resources. Grown men of all kinds and all ages, with or without money or much education, joined Blessed Edmund, to be part of this inspired plan. The plan was to educate these poor boys towards opportunities that would enable them to procure good employment. They could then help their parents and families to improve the quality of their lives in housing, in living; and in the Faith that meant so much to them.

As I said, the potted biographies of many of those brave early Brothers included this short account of the life of an actual pupil of Blessed Edmund Rice. It was written by Br. Dominic Burke and published in the Educational Record of 1896:

Br Thomas Joseph Power was born in Waterford City about the year 1804. He was educated in the Mount Sion School, and in his boyhood manifested a liking for a seafaring life, which he embraced when of a proper age. He was a devout and virtuous lad, and remained ever faithful to the pious practices taught him by Blessed Edmund himself and his first companions. In all dangers at sea, and they were many and sometimes imminent, he always had recourse to prayer and expressed his great confidence in God. His example had a salutary effect on his companions and many were led to imitate his virtues. His good mother instilled into his tender heart, in his childhood, the greatest love and devotion to the Mother of God. In one of his voyages his vessel was wrecked off the coast of Pernambuco (Recife, Brazil) and the crew had to abandon the ship take to the small boats. The captain managed to get into the boat in which Thomas Power was, as he knew him to be a good man, and felt that he would be safe in his company. The captain would cry out frequently, "Cross the waters, Power", meaning that he should make the Sign of the Cross on the angry waves which he often did, and, no doubt, saved them. They were picked up by another vessel after being exposed for one whole day and night in the fearful storm.

After this adventure, Thomas Power returned home, and resolved, if possible, to devote the remainder of his life to the service of God. In 1828 he presented himself to Brother Rice and asked to be received into the monastery in any capacity. Not having the qualifications for a teaching Brother, he offered to help the community in any way he could. Blessed Edmund welcomed him into Mount Sion. When some time had passed, Thomas Power received the habit and the name Br. Joseph, and made his vows. In 1847 he was transferred to Dungarvan as the work in Mount Sion was becoming too heavy for him. Later he was transferred to Tralee and then to Youghal, where the Brothers had just opened a new house. After twenty years of very useful work in Youghal, he died rather suddenly on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1877, in



the 74<sup>th</sup> year of his age. Brother Joseph was an excellent religious and a popular member in every community. He was always cheerful and ever ready to relate his seafaring anecdotes, sing his song, or tell edifying stories of the Founder and the early Brothers. He was a great favourite, and edified all by his piety and open genial manner.”

When Blessed Edmund was very old and somewhat feeble, he asked permission of the new Superior General to make a last journey from Waterford, through Carrick-on-Suir and Limerick and on to Ennistymon to visit all the older Brothers that he had known in years gone by. The Superior General gave permission and appointed Brother Thomas Joseph Power to accompany Blessed Edmund and to help him in every way.



## 19. *Blessed Edmund and the Jesuit Fathers*<sup>394</sup>

The period from the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 right through the 1700's was a period of severe persecution for the Catholic Church in Ireland.<sup>395</sup> During this period the Penal Laws were enforced in all their rigour. It was very difficult for Catholics to practice their Faith. "The Catholics in Waterford – though constituting five sixths of the inhabitants – were deprived of all places of worship save one, 'the little chapel in the bye-street'" .<sup>396</sup> This chapel was partly on the site of the present Cathedral. Non-Catholics, however, had seven places of worship. In the 1704 lists of registered clergy, under the heading "parishes if which they pretended to be Popish Priests" the names are given of the six Parish Priests of the then Protestant parishes.<sup>397</sup> There were, therefore, in the city and suburbs of Waterford, six Parish Priests of whom five had no chapel for religious services.<sup>398</sup> All through the century a community of Jesuits attended to the spiritual requirements of St. Patrick's, the superior being Parish Priest. Braving the danger of the times these champions of the Faith, under successive superiors, had supplied for the shortage of secular clergy in those parishes.<sup>399</sup>

St. Patrick's Church was originally a corn store. It was opened in 1701 by the Jesuits as a Mass House. It was situated in a laneway behind another laneway, behind a street of high houses. In 1750 the Jesuits built the present Chapel of St. Patrick on the same site. The Jesuit Order was suppressed by the Pope in 1773. Luckily, the Jesuit Fathers in Waterford stayed on as secular priests in St. Patrick's until 1798.<sup>400</sup> This little Church of St. Patrick's still exists. It is still a centre of worship for the faithful. As one writer said: "This little chapel was to the Irish of the 18th Century Waterford, what the catacombs were to the 3rd Century Christians of Rome".<sup>401</sup>

Edmund Rice married in 1785. His wife's name, we believe, was Mary Elliot. They lived outside the walled city, in the Ballybricken area, possibly in what was part of what later became Mount Sion. There was a little thatched Mass House in the area called Faha Chapel. Edmund's business was thriving at the time. He was, of course, looking forward to a family, probably seven strong sons as his father had. This would further enlarge and develop his business. But God had something else in view for him. And the Good Lord usually tries prophets and leaders as he tried his beloved Son in Gethsemane. Edmund's wife, Mary, died in 1789. She was expecting her first child but met with an accident. She died as a result. Before she died she gave birth to a little daughter, Mary, who was retarded. Edmund must have felt the terrible loneliness and heartbreak of such family misfortune. Finally he moved into the city and settled with his daughter, Mary, in No. 3 Arundel Place.<sup>402</sup> This was near his business and close to the port. His step-sister, Joan Murphy, came down from Callan and looked after himself and Mary.

St. Patrick's little Church was within 50 yards of Edmund's new dwelling place. The little Church became a second home to him. Here, in this holy place God gifted Edmund with the presence of the Jesuit Fathers, who were professional spiritual directors. All great things in God's world seem to begin in smallness and humility. Christ, the Lord, was born in a stable. Edmund Rice's two new Congregations came to life, I believe, in his little hidden Penal Chapel in Jenkin's Lane. Edmund prayed there and continued to think of going to the Continent to join a monastery. But the statement of one of his friends was also very much in his mind. He had been to dinner one evening in the inner-city house of this lady. After





dinner they all retired to the upper sitting room. Soon the street outside was filled with the wild cries and quarrels of a gang of poor street-children. The woman of the house called him to the window and pointed to the conduct and roughness of the children. She said to him: "There is your new family, Mr. Rice."<sup>403</sup> This call from God stayed with him and troubled him. It became an important element in his prayer in St. Patrick's.

It was probably from the Jesuit Fathers and from their guidance that his two new Congregations learned all that was necessary in order to carry out God's plan for helping a destitute, lost and helpless people. God seemed, through the Jesuits, to help make the Brotherhoods into a power for the Church, and helped them to discover and put into practice the right answer that would save the Faith and transform the quality of life of these poor people and their families.

Later, when the Brothers first took religious vows in 1809, each Brother adopted an additional Christian name by which they were to address each other. The seven members finally professed were Edmund Ignatius Rice, Thomas Baptist Grosvenor, Edmund Austin Dunphy, and Michael Power, all of the Mount Sion community; William Joseph Hogan of Carrick; John Ignatius Mulcahy and James Joseph Mulcahy from Dungarvan. "The name Ignatius was uncommon in Ireland at that time and its adoption by two of the Brothers, and particularly by Edmund Rice, reflects the early influence of the Jesuit Fathers of St. Patrick's Church, Waterford."<sup>404</sup>

## 20. *Blessed Edmund Rice and the Cry of the Poor*<sup>405</sup>

“Were we to know the merit and value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we should prize it more than Gold or Silver.”

Blessed Edmund Rice



Blessed Edmund Rice, in his time, was an example of God’s listening to the ‘cry of the poor’. He was God’s agent of mercy at a terrible period in the history of our people. Edmund was a typical example of someone prepared in a special way for a special work designed and inspired by God for his poor people. He was one of the many, down through the history of the Church, through different times of distress, who listened to God’s word in Scripture: “Unless you take up your cross and follow me you cannot be my disciple.” With God’s help and love, Edmund accepted the cross of his young wife’s death and the sorrow and heartbreak for his poor retarded daughter.

Out of a situation of destitution, despair, population explosion, absentee bishops, condemned secret societies, squabbling secular and regular clergy, strange foreign doctrines, scandals, bewilderment, poverty, transportation, cold, nakedness, anger and finally proselytism, God raised up and gifted this great Catholic layman and inspired him in a special manner so that he, Edmund Rice, could address the causes of the misery and hopelessness of the poor. This hopelessness was born of injustice. God also gifted Edmund Rice with an inspired and correct response to this

miserable situation: .

At first sight this response of Edmund Rice would not seem to have been the answer. But within a short time it became evident that Edmund Rice and his men were really getting to the root of the problem. Through Edmund Rice and his Brothers, the Holy Spirit worked so that the schools were able:

- to restore human dignity in the boys and in their families.
- to nourish and strengthen the Faith of a dying generation.
- to strengthen through the pupils, the Faith of their parents.
- to train leaders.
- to nourish and strengthen the Faith of adults by evening classes.
- to give opportunities, through educating the boys, to raise families from impossible situations.
- to re-route the charity of others (Catholic and Protestants) by feeding and clothing the poor.
- to reconcile Catholic and Protestant to some degree.

Their education was nondenominational from the beginning. At the public enquiry into education of the poor in Ireland in 1824, the Brothers were asked in their school in Hanover Street, near the docks in Dublin, if there were any Protestants in the school. They replied that



there was one, a poor sailor, who requested instruction in navigation so that he could qualify for advancement in his work and so help his family.

From all these things Edmund Rice and his Brothers, under God's guidance, were able to bring hope and reassurance to a lost people by living among them and sharing their poverty and by helping to raise their desperately poor self-image and that of their children. For this Edmund Rice had to continue earning money to open more schools, to manage bequests of wealthy donors, to employ someone to collect rents from sections of land and even to employ men to continue his work of buying and selling cattle. Meanwhile, he and his Brothers at the General Chapter of 1829, agreed to cut their meals down to two a day; a breakfast at 8 a.m. and dinner at 3 p.m. This was to spare money to open more schools for the poor. This was hard on the Brothers, especially the younger Brothers, who often went to bed hungry. They managed and taught classes sometimes of 100 – 150 pupils each day and often had classes for apprentices and adults at night. Blessed Edmund Rice seemed to endeavour to educate and uplift the whole Catholic population of a destitute country without a single penny from the government. Half of his Brothers who were buried in Mount Sion died under 40 years of age. All the poor loved him and he loved them and loved the Christ that he knew was in them. And wealthy people helped him and loved him also.



## 21. *Blessed Edmund Rice and Carlo Bianconi*<sup>406</sup>

“Have courage, the good will grow in the children’s hearts later on” – Blessed Edmund.

Blessed Edmund was always on the alert to attract to his school any poor boys that he met. On one occasion he even bought a poor slave boy from a ship’s captain who was beating the young slave unmercifully. Blessed Edmund brought that boy to Mount Sion, housed him in the monastery, fed and clothed him and educated him and later set him up in business. Another time he befriended a young Italian boy whose name was Carlo Bianconi.

Carlo Bianconi was born in Italy in 1786. He came from a respectable family. He was apprenticed to a vendor of religious prints and other devotional objects. Both arrived in Dublin in 1802 and started on their business. They went from place to place selling their wares and returned to the city at weekends. They did well. In 1804, after two years, Carlo Bianconi started on his own account and chose the south of Ireland as his region. He travelled through Clonmel, Thurles, Carrick-on-Suir, Waterford and other towns, with his large box of prints on his back and walked from 20 to 30 miles a day.

Blessed Edmund first met him on the docks of Waterford. He saw the boy who had just come by barge from Carrick-on-Suir. The boy had been drenched by the rain and was looking wretched and ill. Edmund spoke to the boy and found that he had only a very imperfect knowledge of English. Edmund helped the boy to learn English, gave him religious instruction and encouraged him to develop his native ingenuity. The boy profited by the advice and was soon able to set up a little business in George’s Street, Waterford. He and Blessed Edmund became great friends. Edmund assisted Bianconi in his early struggles, advising him to be strictly honest in all his dealings and faithful to his religious duties.

In his pecuniary troubles in the early days, Blessed Edmund and the Brothers were always his resource. Bianconi was virtuous and pious and always manifested towards Blessed Edmund a warm affection and veneration. He worked very hard and by the sale of his pictures he was able to open a shop in Clonmel and finally settle down there. Whenever he went to Waterford for the purchase of goods for his business he always called to see his old friend, Blessed Edmund.

By degrees Carlo Bianconi prospered and being active and enterprising, he set up the first cheap regular passenger service in Ireland in 1815, running horse-drawn carriages between different towns to enable people, as he said, to economise time and do their business expeditiously. It was the want of quick conveyance that pressed so heavily on him in his travels from town to town in his poorer days that gave him the idea. In this way Bianconi became a benefactor to his adopted country. He started his first carriage in 1815 and before 1845 Bianconi’s two, three or four-horse carriages were to be found running daily between all the towns in the whole south, west and north of Ireland and always crowded with passengers. Thus, long before railways were established, he brought the people of different places into contact with one another. Blessed Edmund and his Brothers always travelled free on his carriages.

Bianconi was a man of no ordinary ability. In his prosperous days he did not forget the Brothers: he was always a subscriber to many of their houses and was always the advocate of education. He never forgot about his early benefactor, and sent £50 and twenty suits of



clothes for poor boys every year to the Brothers. The Will he left contains the following clause: “Failing direct issue, I bequeath to the Christian Brothers, the reversion of all my property.” As he had three children, a son and two daughters, this article of his Testament fell through, but it indicates how his mind and heart were turned.

Within a few years Bianconi became a very rich man. He purchased property and became friendly with the leading men of the country who were working for Catholic Emancipation, Daniel O’Connell, Fr. Matthew and Edmund Rice among others. He received Irish citizenship in 1831; was appointed a Justice of the Peace and later Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Tipperary. He purchased the beautiful residence of Longfield near Cashel and died regretted in 1875. His only son died rather young leaving a few children; the eldest daughter died young and unmarried; and the youngest daughter married Morgan John O’Connell, nephew to Daniel O’Connell, the Liberator.

She later wrote a biography of her father.<sup>407</sup> A few years before his death in 1875, Carlo Bianconi spoke of the great influence which the example and instructions of Mr. Rice had upon his mind and character. In his unpublished autobiography Bianconi speaks of Blessed Edmund: “This pure-minded man owes his elevation to considerable affluence and to his persevering industry. He must be happy in the reflection that he had the courage to invest the whole of his means in the foundation of the invaluable Institution that contributes so much to the improvement of the country. Feeling as I do, the want of education myself, I know how great a blessing a man confers when he instructs the ignorant.”



## 22. *Blessed Edmund Rice and some Long-ago Correspondence from Africa*<sup>408</sup>

Many years ago a dear friend of Blessed Edmund Rice, Rev. Fr. Francis McNamara O.P., wrote an article on Edmund Rice in the English Language edition of the Vatican newspaper "Osservatore Romano". Among the responses to the article which we received in Rome were two letters from one of the most prominent Catechetical centres in the Third World:

St John Bosco Catechetical Centre,  
P.O. Box 43,  
Lira,  
Uganda.

Dear Rev. Brother,

With much pleasure and interest I read your article (it should have been Fr. McNamara's article) on "The Founder of the Christian Brothers – Edmund Rice" published in "Osservatore Romano" on April 11, 1974. Since I am in charge of a Catechists' Training Centre, I would like very much to get a copy of Edmund Rice's life which I consider an inspiration for a good training of African leaders too.

Please, where can I get it? Can you help me? I thank you cordially in advance for any information and support.

With best wishes in the Lord,  
Sincerely Yours,  
Father Luigi Varesco  
(Director, Catechetical Training Centre).

Dear Rev. Br. Carroll,

Many sincere, heartfelt thanks for pamphlet life, some literature and pictures you have sent me to enrich our catechetical library. The life and heroic endeavours of your Founder will surely enlighten and strengthen our catechists, who, at times, are engaged in a very exhausting work.

The shining example and full dedication of Br. Edmund Rice will, no doubt, exercise a determined influence on many apostles working among the people for the same purpose: the coming of Christ's Kingdom on earth, especially among the poor and sincere folk.

May God speed up the time for the beatification of His devout and faithful servant, who long in advance, foresaw the radical changes brought about by the Vatican Council 11.

Please Brother, accept my best wishes and best regards to you and to all your confreres from me and from all my dear catechists.

Sincerely Yours in the Lord,



Father Luigi Varesco  
Director, Catechetical Training Centre.

Since then, Brother Rice was declared Venerable and in 1996 declared Blessed. The life of this good man and the lives of the other Founders and Foundresses of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland, Catherine McCauley, Mary Aikenhead, Teresa Ball, Margaret Aylward and, of course, Nano Nagle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, were God's gifts to a broken and loyal people. Today, their inspiration is working in God's plan for many other countries of the world.

Recently, Pope John Paul 11 spoke of the need for a "new evangelisation" in the world, in the Church and in religious life. "Religious life will always be the choice of the few rather than the many" says Sr. Doris Gottmoeller, RSM, in a recent article in *Religious Life Review*. "However it is an enduring form of life which seems to flourish in one epoch or cultural milieu and diminish with another, only to revive again with new vigour."

It is wonderful to report that on January 26<sup>th</sup> last "eleven young men were received into the novitiate of the Zambia Region of the Christian Brothers. Five nations from around Africa are represented in this new group of novices, bringing the total number of novices in the novitiate to twenty two in all."

We pray God's blessing on these young men as they begin their new life in the family of Blessed Edmund Rice. "Let us pray" as Blessed Edmund used to say: "that God's Will may be done in us."



## 23. *Blessed Edmund Rice and the Lost Pearl*<sup>409</sup>

A motto can say a great deal about a person or a movement. There have been different mottoes, down the years, for the congregations founded by Blessed Edmund.

The most recent motto used by the Christian Brothers has been “To do and to Teach” (Acts. 1.1). This motto has been used since 1920. It mirrors and dedicates all that the Brothers were involved in, in this century, in the pursuit of what were the greatest needs of the People of God at the time, at home and abroad. It highlights the response of the Congregation to the then current needs. It saw those needs as education for opportunity for the less privileged in society. It saw also the possibility of raising Christian leaders from among the ordinary people. The Brothers and the dedicated teachers who worked side by side with them in often overcrowded schools “did” and “taught” and opened avenues to the professions, to business, to positions of trust and security to the children of the poor. Many of their students reached the heights and so many of them were able to help their parents and their families to live in some comfort and in peace.

As I said, there have been different mottoes guiding and confirming the inspired work of Blessed Edmund’s followers down the years. Some time ago, in the course of research on the life of Edmund Rice, a motto was unearthed that is not only beautiful but full of meaning for us all. It is for Brothers and lay people alike, as they endeavour to live the Gospel in these difficult times. This motto is a real pearl. It dates from a General Chapter in the year 1822. A very famous Jesuit, Fr. Peter Kenney, was directing the Chapter Retreat. Br. Rice had just received permission from the Pope to found a second congregation which would be under the direct charge of the Holy See. This would enable him and his Brothers to widen the field of their apostolate in order to reach the poorest of the poor, no matter where they lived. Br. Rice’s work was in its early years. He asked Fr. Kenney to choose a motto that would inspire them and describe what God wanted them to do. The motto chosen by Fr. Kenney was from Isaiah 30:15: “In quiet and in trust, there shall be your strength.” Fr. Kenney knew the mind and heart of Edmund Rice. They were old friends.

The “quiet” in the text, I believe, was the quiet of contemplation. Blessed Edmund was well-known even then for his great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. We are told that he often spent time in adoration and that he made all his big decisions and wrote his most important letters in the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The “trust” mentioned in the text, I believe, was the trust in “Providence”: God being always present, always aware, always ready to provide what was necessary for the apostolate.

How wonderfully contemporary this motto is for today! In these tangled times in the history of the Church, more and more people feel called to contemplation. There are groups in many parishes devoted to adoration – even in at least one Irish diocese, to round-the-clock adoration. Men and women are giving time to God, knowing that He alone can direct us and the Church through these trying times. He alone can help us to discern the particular pressing needs of today. He alone can inspire in us the means to address these needs. We must trust Him. Edmund Rice believed in a big way in the Providence of God. He used often say that “Providence is our inheritance.”





Truly, “in quiet and in trust, there will be your strength” is a motto for us today who live in a world so changing and so changed from what many of us remember. The Providence of God

– God always aware of us and always ready to provide help, inspiration and creativity, so that, like Blessed Edmund and Nano Nagle and all the other founders and foundresses, we may be able and willing to serve Christ today in the person of the very poor and deprived.

“In quiet and in trust, there will be your strength.” What a lovely and a lively motto from Isaiah and from the life of Blessed Edmund? It is truly a pearl, once lost; now waiting to be found again.



## 24. *Blessed Edmund Rice and the Mendicity Institute*<sup>410</sup>

In the quiet part of Waterford City near St. John's Bridge a plaque on a house reads: "Site of Mendicity Institute where Edmund Rice ministered to poor families". Later, he was also active in administering, with others, The Mary Power Charity; The James Dunphy Poorhouse, The William Aylward Charity; The Captain Foran Charity and the Trinitarian Orphan Society.<sup>411</sup>

Waterford at the time was noted for its charity to the poor. There were probably more charitable institutes in Waterford than in any other city in Ireland. Many of these charities were founded by Waterford merchant families who transferred their businesses to France or Spain, in exile from the Penal Laws. In the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century economic depression was so universal all over the country that hordes of beggars were to be found in all the cities. It was not until 1821, with the foundation of the Mendicity, that an organised effort was made in Waterford to eliminate street begging which had become an "intolerable nuisance" in the city.<sup>412</sup> It was a city poised on the brink of disaster. Part of the problem was a big expansion in the population of the country from perhaps 3.6 million in 1762, to 4.7 in 1791, and to 6.8 million in 1821.<sup>413</sup> At this time outbreaks of small-pox and famine fever were frequent. There were fourteen partial or complete famines between 1816 and 1842.<sup>414</sup> It is amazing how Edmund Rice and the early Brothers, without any salaries, commenced and even more so, how they continued their work during those terrible times.

It was in this atmosphere that the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in the City of Waterford was founded in the year 1821. It was specifically stated that the function was "to cope with the plague of beggars."<sup>415</sup> The Patron of the Mendicity Institute was the Protestant Bishop; its President was the Protestant Mayor. Eight Vice-Presidents, all Protestants with the exception of the President of St. John's Seminary, together with the Management Committee, made up the first Executive Council. Edmund was one of the few Catholic members on this committee.<sup>416</sup>

The Mendicity Institute was housed in a large three-storied building. All street-beggars were expected to report there every morning for both work and maintenance. The middle floor was equipped with all the necessaries for combing and spinning wool, spinning and weaving wax, knitting and darning stockings at which the women were employed for most of the day. The men and the boys, having swept and cleaned the city streets in the early morning before breakfast, were engaged during the day grinding oyster shells and limestone. This was considered an excellent top-dressing for the soil in farming districts. Owing to limited sources the Mendicity Institute was non-residential. This meant that the doors were closed each evening and each of the poor people had to find his/her lodging for the night.

It is difficult to reconstruct the full story of Blessed Edmund's involvement with and work for the Mendicity Institute. But just one leaf from Blessed Edmund's many account books, for example the book for the period 1822-1827, gives a clear insight into his deep involvement with the Charity:

From May to December 1822 Edmund Rice supplied to the Institute 252 yards of linen; coats for poor men; coats for little girls; cash to teachers for teaching the poor children prayers and catechism; timber; 53 yards of flannel; money for releasing clothes from pawn; a quarter of beef; coats and shoes; money for plastering the Mendicity Institute; cash for the mendicants



(on many occasions); money for sick children and for prayer books; 100 coal tickets; 40 pairs of breeches for mendicant boys; blankets and sheets; gifts of money to various poor families.

Edmund Rice became Chairman of the Mendicity Society in September 1826. Plenty of further donations down the years appear in the newspapers. For example, “50 yards of linen for the boys of the Institute”. And in the “Waterford Mail” for 27 December 1826, it is recorded that Mr. Rice “sent a live pig, evidently for the Christmas festivities”. The same newspaper on 12 February, 1831, reports that Mr Rice “sent 15 shirts, 65 chemises for women and 50 for girls.” And again, on 20 July, 1831, it tells us that “Mr Rice had sent his usual subscription, a donation of £2-10-0 and a load of coals.”

Edmund Rice was living in Dublin at this time. It is interesting to note that, at this period, £2-10-0 was the average yearly wage for a labouring man. Rev. R. Hyland, in his *History of the County and City of Waterford* (1824) records a resolution of appreciation that was proposed and seconded in the Mendicity Institute by two Protestant clergymen: “That to the gentlemen of Mr Rice’s establishment we return our most cordial thanks, for their prompt attendance on all Sundays and Holidays at the Mendicant Asylum, to impart Religious Instruction to the male part of the establishment.”<sup>417</sup>

The *Waterford Mirror* of the 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1840, published a letter from the Mayor of Waterford’s office, saying that the Mendicity Institute was in danger of closing, due to lack of means, and asked for help “to prevent the fearful alternative of closing its doors, and turning out to perish on the streets the unfortunate inmates, at present consisting of the following 245 miserable beings: ten old men – some blind, decrepit and epileptic; 88 women – widows, some deserted by their husbands, and many having families of five or six children; 76 boys – many destitute orphans; 52 girls, ditto; some in hospital – some cripples and incurable.” The almost extravagant anonymous gift of £20 (multiply by 60 for today’s equivalent) by Edmund Rice, at a time of great financial stress, to the failing Mendicity Institute, illustrates that, for the Founder and his men, Providence was in fact and in practice their inheritance.



## 25. *Blessed Edmund Rice and the Providence of God*<sup>418</sup>

“In quiet and in trust, there shall be your strength.” (Isaiah 30:15)  
(Father Peter Kenney gave this motto to Blessed Edmund for the new Congregation)

Blessed Edmund Rice was a man of great trust in God. A saying he left with his Brothers was: “Providence is our inheritance.” To him, Providence meant that God would always provide. There were times, especially in the early days of his inspired work for the destitute and hopeless young Catholics of Ireland, that his trust in God would be tested.

When he started this work he sent out word to the hundreds of pauper Catholic families that he was about to open a school – a school of a completely new type, a school free from any payment whatsoever. This was a resounding message that would tell the downcast and downtrodden that help was near and that by means of this school opportunities would arise for the uplifting of Catholic boys. The boys then, like the girls in the new Presentation Convent School, could help their parents and families to something they had never experienced: comfortable housing, employment and a self-esteem that would raise them to a new life. That life would raise them to a life that St. Irenaeus in the early Church described as the Glory of God – “Man and woman fully alive.” The families would come alive in mind and body and in the central theme of Christian living: Love for God and for their poor neighbours.

Catholic boys and even young men came in their hundreds to the school. Blessed Edmund employed two teachers to manage the new school. He, himself, kept on his business in order to finance this mighty and ever-growing venture. But God tried him as He does His friends. The two teachers just could not manage the vast numbers and eventually they retired from the schools. The prospering Waterford merchant in his forties, and without any training as a teacher, had to take on the work of the school on his own. The depth of his sorrow at the death of his young wife and the birth of his little retarded daughter could have broken his spirit. But he trusted the Good Lord at a deeper level and believed firmly in God’s infinite Providence, although the numbers in his free school were ever growing. A Waterford historian describes conditions in Waterford at the time:

the contrast between the lifestyle of the Big House in Waterford and that of the worker, the labouring peasant, was enormous. The influx of poor country folk to towns like Waterford was considerable. This was due to the repeated famines of the time. Waterford had a population at that time of 23,126 people and slums were spreading not only in the Liberties outside the city walls but also inside. Poor housing and squalid living standards were on the outskirts, and right into the middle of these conditions came Brother Rice<sup>419</sup>

Things in Dublin when Blessed Edmund opened the first of his schools there in 1812 were just as bad. “The Industrial Revolution at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century had caused the closure of 600 out of 700 small weaving businesses in the Liberties. In 1793 there were 6,093 unemployed men in the area, without help from anyone and their children “naked or semi-naked”<sup>420</sup>. Hunger was so prevalent throughout the poorer parts of Dublin City in 1817 that mobs attacked and looted the bread shops.<sup>421</sup> It is estimated that there were at least 5,000



beggars in the city in 1818, wandering about and spreading all kinds of disease and infection.<sup>422</sup>

Grown men, many of them successful businessmen saw and felt the courage and superb trust in God of this great fellow businessman. Some of them sold out their businesses, joined him, and brought in the money to help him continue to finance his growing system of free schools. One of these was a 60 year old wine merchant, Thomas Brien from Waterford. It was he who paid for the building of the house and school in Carrick-on-Suir – the second foundation of the new congregation.

Blessed Edmund Rice was one of those great men and women whose immense trust in God resulted in the coming to life of five new congregations of Brothers and four new congregations of Sisters in Ireland within the first thirty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. T. J. Walsh, a biographer of Nano Nagle, has paid a lovely tribute to these great founders and foundresses who were God's gift to a suffering and deprived people whose trust in God was constant for so long: "Nano Nagle and Edmund Rice and the Irish Foundresses and Founders were lonely figures in the battle for the spiritual birthright of the Irish child. For them, the real purpose of education was the formation of the true and perfect Christian. They proclaimed a truth of the moral and social order – that the education of youth belongs to the Family and to the Church."



## 26. *Blessed Edmund Rice Remembered*<sup>423</sup>

In the year 1910 there was a General Chapter of the Christian Brothers held in Dublin. The Congregation, at the time, had gone through a very difficult period. But things had improved and the Congregation was growing anew. It was decided that the Cause for the beatification of Edmund Rice should be opened. Br. Mark Hill was appointed to travel around the country and to interview old people who had heard about him from their parents or grandparents. Over 250 submissions were taken and among them some from Brothers who had lived in the Founder's time or shortly afterwards.

One of the most interesting of these submissions came from the pen of Br. Michael Xavier Weston. Br. Weston was from Co. Meath, but he was educated in Kilcock by the Christian Brothers. He was a brilliant student and he entered the Brothers in 1884, just 40 years after the death of Blessed Edmund. Later he was to be the first editor of "OUR BOYS" magazine. He was well-known in the various places where he taught as a most entertaining speaker and a noted story-teller. His love for Blessed Edmund flows through his submission:

In January 1893 I became a member of the Community of the Brothers, Mount Sion, Waterford. I had from my entrance into the novitiate of the Brothers always entertained a deep reverence for the venerated Edmund Ignatius Rice, the Founder. This reverence was strengthened and intensified after my coming to Mount Sion, by the pious traditions, memories and associations of him and of his work with which the community then abounded...

An old Brother, full of years and virtue, Br. Kyran Flynn, was a member of the Mount Sion Community at this period. Full 50 years before I had the pleasure of living with him, he had left his Waterford home to enter the Novitiate at Mount Sion. Often I heard him speak of those Novitiate days. When he entered Mount Sion the Founder was dead but the whole atmosphere of the place was glowing with his spirit. While a novice Br. Kyran learned of the Founder's virtues; above all of his great spirit of prayer; of his remarkable charity; of his spirit of reverence which showed itself in his attitude towards all things concerned with the worship of God.... His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was intense. It is here, according to the tradition of Mount Sion that he brought his letters and cares, and difficulties during the fateful and trying years that intervened before the shattered threads of his great work were woven together by papal authority. Br. Kyran often heard how it was the prudence, the almost inspired foresight, the charity, the enlightenment, all of which were the fruit of silent prayer before the tabernacle that enabled the Founder to steer his bark through many storms.

One little incident of those early days, related to me by Br. Kyran and indelibly imprinted on my memory, will serve to show the spirit of reverence for the Founder and his work which animated the novices at Mount Sion – two youthful novices, at a very early hour are taking a last farewell of their loved novitiate, Mount Sion. In order not to disturb the rigorous morning silence all leave-takings were got through on the evening preceding. They have to catch an early boat which is to take them to the schools in England, the scene of their first labours. Regarding themselves wholly unobserved they kneel and impress a fervent kiss on the ground hallowed by the steps of the saintly Founder. Then each takes with him a little gravel from off the walk as a



precious relic. Br. Kyran who was a postulant in Mount Sion was a witness of the touching scene from one of the windows in the Monastery...

I think it is a duty to record these facts and impressions. I feel I owe much to the intercessory prayers of the Founder on my behalf. To such intercession, I believe, I owe the graces which have enabled me to endure some of the heaviest crosses of my life. I have frequently invoked his intercession and never without having benefited by my doing so. When in very ill health in Waterford suffering from extreme weakness and spitting of blood, I asked him as I knelt at his grave to obtain from God that I might gain strength enough at least to continue my work in the schools. My request was granted; the blood-spitting ceased and I have ever since been able to carry on my work."

Signed this fourteenth day of June in the Year of Our Lord nineteen hundred and thirteen (1913).

Michael Xavier Weston.<sup>424</sup>

## 27. *Blessed Edmund Rice - The Waterford Connection*<sup>425</sup>

Born in Callan, Co. Kilkenny, Blessed Edmund Rice came to



**Waterford in Blessed Edmund's time**

Waterford in the 1780's to work for his uncle, Michael Rice, who was a merchant. The only real power among the Catholic population in Ireland in the late 18th century was the merchants. The towns were growing and whatever wealth was accumulating, it was in the towns, especially in the port towns along the eastern and southern seaboard.<sup>426</sup> In the year 1774 one third of the merchants in Waterford were Catholic.<sup>427</sup> The seasonal migration to Newfoundland from

Waterford grew to large proportions in the third quarter of the 18th century.<sup>428</sup> Waterford became the second largest port in Ireland.<sup>429</sup> Edmund Rice's uncle was a ship's chandler or supplier and Edmund succeeded him in the business. He became a very rich man.

Edmund Rice married Mary Elliot in 1787. Two years later they were expecting their first child. His wife, Mary, was badly injured in a fall from a horse and shortly afterwards she died. Before she died she gave birth to a baby girl, Mary. The little daughter was retarded. The young merchant's life fell apart. For eleven years after God seemed to be purifying this good man and leading him towards an extraordinary future. He, among several other founders and foundresses, was to be part of an educational revolution that was to liberate hundreds of thousands of poor Irish children and their families from the slavery of a most oppressive poverty.

Recurring famines, right through the 18<sup>th</sup> century and into the 19<sup>th</sup> century drove hordes of half-starved Irish farm labourers and small cottiers with their families into towns and cities like Waterford. Here they found that they were worse off than before. Outbreaks of fever were frequent mainly due to overcrowding and to primitive sanitary conditions in the more ancient and therefore poorer parts of these towns and cities.

Looking around his adopted city of Waterford, Edmund Rice saw crowds of young Catholic boys: "running wild through the streets and lanes, ignorant alike of human and divine knowledge, unacquainted even with the first principles of religion, their passions in full growth, rude and gross in their actions and conduct with blasphemy on their lips.....no one to instruct or educate them."<sup>430</sup>

What was a merchant to do? What could a merchant do? The poor of Yahweh were all around him. They were at their lowest. He knew that he had to do something. He started his





first school in the loft of a livery stable, possibly owned by his late wife's people. He worked hard at his ordinary business by day – he would need the money – and taught school at night.

Crowds flocked to his free school. It was a new thing in their lives. The poor families knew Mr. Rice and evidently trusted him.<sup>431</sup> As the numbers increased in his free school Edmund Rice paid two masters to help. He must have been a man close to God to work all day at his business and at 40 years of age, without any formal training as a teacher, face into an evening of coping with crowds of ragged boys and young men whose whole world up to this was the streets. When the two masters decided that the work was too hard and left him, the Lord sent him two men who were seeking God in their lives.<sup>432</sup> Thus, a new Congregation was born.

Edmund Rice opened his first school in Waterford in 1802. By the year 1816 he had houses and schools in five different dioceses; Waterford, Cork, Dublin, Cashel and Limerick. He had established his first school in Dublin in 1812 in a very poor area. Within a few years he had a novitiate and four schools, with several hundred pupils in each, in the Liberties – one of the most depressed areas in a very depressed city. Edmund Rice and 16 of his Brothers and a Mayor of Waterford lie buried in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel at Mount Sion, Waterford. Nine of the Brothers died under 40 years of age. Brother Rice, worn out by his great labours, died aged 82 years.



## 28. *Edmund Rice – Some Waterford Traditions*

In the year 1920, Brother Mark Hill, first official researcher into the life of Edmund Rice, wrote an article in which he gave some of the traditions that, at the time, still remained in Waterford concerning Edmund Rice.

“It does not seem to be generally known,” he writes “that the Founder, when a businessman in Waterford and a long time before he opened his first school in New Street, was intensely interested in education. When he lived as a private gentleman in the upper part of Mount Sion grounds, it was not an unusual thing for him to invite boys to his own house and while he plenteously feasted them he prepared them for Confession and Communion.”

“It was believed” says Br Hill “that Edmund Rice was very fond of boating on the River Suir and, at times, when he drifted with the current he would speak to his companion of his deep concern for the educational wants of the coming nineteenth century.”

The spirit and hopes of the French Revolution had caught the minds of the people. When it failed, there was a breakdown in all the old values. Things looked very bleak for the Church and for society.

Brother Hill repeats the story that we all have heard, that Edmund Rice resolved to devote himself to the education of the youth of Waterford at the suggestion of a Waterford lady. That lady may have been Miss Power, sister of Fr. John Power (later Bishop) or Mrs. St. Leger, as others hold. But Br. Hill says that, according to the traditions in Waterford, it was his step sister, who was his housekeeper at the end of the eighteenth century, who sowed the seed in his mind. He had two step sisters and the family tradition was that they were very religiously inclined and that they possessed considerable wealth. The Rices, according to Brother Hill, believed that the step sister, his housekeeper, gave him a considerable amount of money to help him carry out his educational projects. They also said that in later years when he was making arrangements to pay back the money she, with the approval of her friends and family, made a “gift of the money”.

Again, according to a Waterford tradition, says Brother Hill, the school in New Street was opened exclusively for the poor. There were numerous Catholic pay-schools – private schools – in Waterford at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The number of Catholics who could pay for the education of their children was considerable. But poor Catholics had no opportunity of having their children educated. The social history of Catholics in Ireland in the eighteenth century led to this state of things. The wealthy Catholics made their money from commercial pursuits. They were excluded from politics, from higher education, even from the power of voting at elections. They invested any money made, mainly in land and in property. Many of them became very rich. They frequently lent money to Protestants who were living beyond their means Brother Hill said that when Edmund Rice opened his school in Mount Sion in Waterford he supplied a great want. The children of the poor got such a good moral and religious training in Mount Sion that wealthy Catholics became jealous. They then took their children from Catholic private schools and sent them to Mount Sion. In this way the rich and the poor attended the Mount Sion schools almost from the beginning. Some wealthy Catholics in Waterford said that their



grandfathers had a conscientious objection to sending their children to Mount Sion at that period, in case they might exclude poor boys whose parents could not pay for their education. In the controversy that arose later about the introduction of pay schools, the Founder was in favour of establishing them.

“That he was a school organiser is evident” says Brother Hill “from a letter written by him to the Archbishop of Cashel and Emly. It was written in 1810 and it is in the archives of that diocese. “It is one of the most important” writes Brother Hill “if not the most important of his letters extant, because of the subject with which it deals, and also as it shows that he possessed excellent knowledge of school management.”

This article, written by Brother Mark Hill, although it contains some information which we already had, is important. It gives fresh possibilities in areas where there was much uncertainty. It has further importance in that it was written by the first full time researcher on the life of Edmund Rice and it dates back over seventy years nearer to his time. For this alone it is worth recalling.



## 29. *Edmund Rice and Blessed Frederick Ozanam*<sup>433</sup>

On 22 August last, (1997) in Paris, Pope Paul II declared Frederick Ozanam, founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Blessed. Like Edmund Rice, the Church, through the Pope, wished to recognise officially the virtue and charity of Frederick Ozanam's life in order, once again, to give the People of God today an example of what true Christian living is about.

Edmund Rice and Frederick Ozanam were contemporaries. Frederick was born in Milan, Italy, of French parents. He grew up in Lyons in France and spent most of his short life in that country. Frederick's father was a medical doctor in Lyons. Both father and mother were devout Christians and it was from them that Frederick inherited his strong faith and his love for the poor. Frederick's parents spent much time and a lot of money helping the sick and needy in the tenement houses of Lyons. Frederick Ozanam was a brilliant young man. At the age of 18 years he wrote a book defending the Faith, which was very much under attack in France. He was a Doctor of Laws at 23 years of age and a Doctor of Literature at 26. He was recognised as an expert in many European literatures.

At one stage, in his teens, Frederick went through a severe crisis of Faith. A dear friend of his, a priest, helped him through this troublesome period and he emerged strengthened more than ever in his beliefs. Frederick studied at the famous Sorbonne University in Paris. There was a very anti-Christian spirit in the university. Some of the professors sneered at religion. Frederick had the courage to challenge some of these professors although he was only a young student. Fortunately a number of other students supported Frederick. They formed a group which later grew into the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Something the same happened in Italy about thirty years ago. Communist youth tried to take over the universities. They beat up students who opposed them. But one or two students stood up to them and a small Christian group emerged which now is the powerful St. Egidio Group of thousands of young women and men praying the Divine Office each evening and working for the poor and for the old people in Rome and in other European cities.

Frederick Ozanam became a professor in the Sorbonne. It was he who persuaded the Archbishop of Paris to get the great Dominican preacher Lacordaire, to give his now famous series of Lenten sermons in Notre Dame Cathedral in the 1830's. These sermons replied to the attacks that were being made on the Church and on the Faith in the popular press at the time.

Frederick married the daughter of a professor in Lyons. He had one daughter, Marie, who was born in 1845. He was almost constantly at work: writing, travelling, lecturing and visiting the poor. He attacked the false liberalism and the faulty economic policies current at the time. He encouraged priests to show more sympathy with working-class movements. He travelled extensively in France and visited Spain and England. In London in 1851 some Vincent de Paul members brought him to visit slums where poor Irish workers, emigrants from the Famine, lived in terrible poverty. In one cellar he found two families sharing a single room – nine people with only three beds. Frederick was mainly responsible for the French St. Vincent de Paul Society sending 150,000 francs to relieve distress in Ireland during the famine of 1845-48. Ireland reciprocated during the upset in France due to the 1848 revolution. Worn out with all his work for the poor, Frederick Ozanam died of fever at the age of 40 years. After his death many of his ideas were borrowed, even in various Papal



encyclicals, starting with the famous *Rerum Novarum* (On Social Justice) in 1891. The St. Vincent de Paul Society is now established in 131 countries on all five continents and has about one million members.

Edmund Rice had much in common with Blessed Frederick Ozanam. They lived at the same time. Both discerned the particular needs of the time in their own countries and both responded prophetically to these needs. Both were lay men. Both married. Both had one child – a girl. Both named their child, Mary. Both gave their lives and fortunes as dedicated Christians working for justice and for the poor.

Both Edmund Rice and Frederick Ozanam were beatified within one year of each other. It was as if the Church recognised how contemporary these two great Christians were for their time and still are today, and how much Blessed Edmund Rice and Blessed Frederick Ozanam can inspire and encourage us all in these difficult times in which we live.



### 30. *Edmund Rice and the Cholera Epidemic of 1832*<sup>434</sup>

The lifeline of a living Congregation parallels the life of the Church. Founders and Foundresses are often influenced by movements and trends in the history of the Church. Where people suffer the Church usually responds. Certainly this was true of Edmund Rice. He always read and met “the signs of the times.”

The early spring of 1832 was unusually fine in Ireland. But the people were worried. They had heard that a vigorous form of cholera had run through Asia and was on its way across Europe. Many hoped that our situation as an island on the western edge of Europe would save us. But when the cholera reached France and was moving westward through that country prayers were offered that the dreaded scourge would not reach us.

On March 22<sup>nd</sup> cases were reported in Dublin. The cholera had arrived. Dublin was an old city and since the Act of Union of 1800 it was a very poor city. The sanitary condition of the city had not been attended to for a long time. The disease raged through the poorer parts of the city which were crowded with a population sunk in indescribable misery. Every morning a fresh list of the dead was posted on the doors of the churches. There was fear and depression all over the country. Between fifty and sixty people died each day in Dublin. The Archbishop of Dublin, the clergy and the religious of the city helped in nursing and comforting the victims.

Soon, however, the cholera spread outside the city. Public authorities everywhere took measures to meet this dreadful scourge. Temporary hospitals were set up in addition to those already existing. Belfast, Cork, Drogheda, Thurles, Galway, Dungarvan became in quick succession scenes of awful suffering. Edmund Rice directed that his Brothers should help wherever they could. In Thurles the Brothers gave up their monastery and schools to the Board of Health to be used as hospitals and they looked for lodgings for themselves. In Dungarvan the Brothers, with the sanction of their founder, likewise surrendered their house and schools and went to live in the empty house of a lady who had fled the country.

In Cork also, the Brothers helped. The Sisters of Charity, then only five years established in Cork, did heroic work, as did the Brothers, Archdeacon O’Keefe and the famous “Fr. Prout” – Fr. Francis O’Mahony. The cholera came to Cork a month later than Dublin. There was panic in the city. The number of deaths in Cork was so great that some people lost all hope and refused to go to the hospital.

There was a shortage of hospital accommodation in Limerick. A Board of Health was established. Barrington’s, the principal hospital in the city could not cope. Edmund Rice advised his Brothers to help all they could. They placed their house, their new school (just built) and themselves at the service of the Board. The schools were closed until further notice. Sexton Street schools were fitted up as a hospital. The upper and lower rooms, each 64 feet long, were supplied with beds, the women upstairs and the men downstairs. Part of the monastery was given over to the chaplain and to the doctor on duty. Limerick had no nuns at the time. The Presentation Sisters did not come to Limerick until 1837 and the Sisters of Mercy in 1848. On May 26th the cholera set in with great malignity. On the night before, the city was covered with a deep and damp fog that almost suffocated the people. The first cholera patients were brought to St. Michael’s Hospital (Sexton Street Schools). Two brave Clare ladies, Miss Reddin and her niece, Miss Bridgeman (aged 19 years) took up residence



in the parlour of the monastery and superintended the school hospital, day and night. These two great ladies had charge of a hostel for street girls. These girls worked side by side with them as nurses in the hospital. Some years later, Miss Bridgeman entered the Sisters of Mercy and became famous for her heroic work for the soldiers in the Crimean War, 1854.

Barrington's and St Michael's both filled rapidly. The cries of the people were heard daily in various parts of the "English" and "Irish" town. The appearance of the hospital carts in the streets spread the wildest confusion. Labourers with carts spread slack lime on the footpaths and the channel ways. Wealthy families went to the seaside or to friends in the country. No mail coaches ran either into or out of the city. There were hearses on the streets every hour of the day. Many poor people died on their way to hospital. The Brothers of Sexton Street went at all hours among the male patients in Barrington's and St Michael's. They sat by their bedsides, rubbed down aching limbs and prepared them for the Last Sacraments. There were ten to fifteen deaths each night. The cholera lasted six weeks in Limerick.

Towards the end of the outbreak The Board of Health saw the necessity for a convalescent home for patients recovering from cholera. The Brothers gave over their other schools in Clare Street. It was a big building and had housed 300 pupils. During the cholera 525 patients were treated in the Brothers' schools. There were 225 deaths.

Edmund Rice wrote about the work of his Brothers: "I am not one bit in dread that a priest, a nun or monk will sink under the cholera....." While his trust in Providence was not realised as regards the priests – two died, one in May and the other in November - no Brother or nurse in St Michael's Hospital caught the disease.

### 31. *Edmund Rice - Loving Parent*<sup>435</sup>

*“Have courage. The good seed will grow up in the children’s hearts later on.”*

- *Edmund Ignatius Rice*

A Phobail Dé, a Chairde, a Thuismitheoirí daltaí ár gcuid scoileanna, go mbeannaí Dia is Muire dhíbh ar maidin, agus fáilte go Port Láirge.

Welcome to the city of Edmund Rice. Thank you for choosing Waterford this year for our annual conference. It is a particular year, the Year of Edmund Rice; the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his death. I am sure he is with us in spirit here this morning.

Waterford was the city where Edmund Rice spent most of his years, where he died and where his remains lie in a special chapel. Below you is the River Suir which meant so much to him in his life and business. Spanning that river is a beautiful bridge, the one and only bridge in the city that crosses the river. Eight years ago the Corporation of Waterford dedicated this new bridge to the memory of Edmund Rice and called it by his name; The Brother Edmund Ignatius Rice Bridge.

Who was this man, Edmund Rice? To us here this morning, and particularly in this Year of



**Edmund and his daughter, Mary**

the Family, we are especially interested in the fact that he was a parent. He was born in Westcourt, Callan, Co. Kilkenny in 1762. His father was Robert Rice and his mother was Margaret Tierney. There were seven boys and two girls in the family. The Rices farmed 90 acres of rented land. Times were very hard for Catholics in Ireland when Edmund Rice was young. Land was life at the time. There were about four million Catholics and the Protestants held 95% of the land and the Catholics 5%. The population of Ireland was increasing all the time. The country was full of young people. The vast majority of these were Catholics, young Catholics who had little or no hope in life; and for whom their parents could do very little. Imagine, no Catholic was allowed by law to go to school or to teach in school. No Catholic could attend a university or be admitted to a profession or trade. No Catholic could be elected to parliament or to

the corporation of a town or city. We were a conquered and broken people.





The only way a Catholic with intelligence or initiative could do well was by buying and selling. Robert Rice had seven sons and a big farm. So he started buying and selling. He and his sons took to the roads all over Munster and parts of Leinster and bought cattle. These they drove to their farm and fattened them. Later they sold them and they were shipped through this port of Waterford. It was Ireland's second port at the time.

Edmund Rice's parents did the best they could for him and his brothers and sisters. Edmund was probably educated in a hedge school and at home and then – an unusual thing at the time – he was sent to a second level school in Kilkenny. At the age of seventeen he was sent down here to Waterford to his uncle, Michael Rice, who was a merchant and a victualler or ships' provisioner. After some years Edmund Rice took over his uncle's flourishing business. At twenty five he married. He was probably hoping, like his father, for some daughters and seven sons to expand and develop his business. After just two years of marriage his wife, we are told, was badly hurt in a fall from a horse. She had been expecting their first child. She gave premature birth to a little girl, Mary, called it is believed after her mother Mary Elliot. The child was retarded. The mother died.

This must have been a tremendous shock for the young merchant and father. For ten years Edmund Rice threw himself into his work. I suppose he was trying to cope with his sorrow. He never spoke of those years afterwards. He worked so hard that he amassed a huge fortune. But he was not happy. He could have married again but he did not. Finally, he was thinking of giving up everything and burying himself in a monastery on the continent. There is a tradition that he was at dinner with the St. Leger family, an influential city family who lived at the "Blue Bell" in High Street. Mrs. St. Leger was a widow. She had two sons in the Jesuits. She, herself, later became a Presentation Sister. Looking out an upstairs window they saw a wild, rough, squabbling, dirty, ragged crowd of boys come running around the corner. "What are you thinking of going to Europe for Mr. Rice?" said Mrs. St. Leger. "There is your new family!"

Edmund Rice kept his business going and opened a school in a livery stable in New Street – a wealthy street of big houses. This was something new – a school where the children had to pay nothing. Absolutely free. Crowds of poor, ragged children came – all sizes; all ages. Mr. Rice employed two teachers and paid them out of his own money. He worked all day at his business and taught parents at night. As a parent himself he knew that to help restore the self-respect of the father and mother would benefit the child. The numbers grew and grew.

But the people of New Street were unhappy with the growing number of noisy and ragged children coming in every day from a very poor area outside the city. They suggested to Mr. Rice that he move his school. The Presentation Sisters had gone out to teach and to help the poor girls in that same area. Edmund said goodbye to his little daughter. Her aunt came down from Callan to mind her. It must have broken Mr. Rice's heart to say goodbye. In behind the houses in a poor street called Barrack Street (poor at the time) he built his first monastery and a school for 220 boys. He was a brave man. He had broken the law by building a monastery and he could have been put in jail. He built a high wall all around the property. All this cost him £3,000. Multiply by fifty to get an equivalent in today's money. The streets and lanes around had hundreds and hundreds of poor Catholic children. If they had given up their Faith they could have had food, clothes and better conditions.

But they and their parents would not give up their Faith. Brother Rice went out into the lanes and asked the mothers to send their boys to his new school. "We can't" they said, "they



have no clothes.” So he built a little tailor shop and bought cloth. In one year alone he bought 980 yards of cloth – 100 yards longer than a half a mile of cloth. He employed a tailor and sometimes a couple of tailors and paid everything out of his own money. He must have loved those poor children. The boys came. But he found that they could not learn. They were hungry. He bought flour and employed bakers and gave them bread. On one occasion he bought 90 pairs of new hand-made shoes for the poor boys. He did not give up everything for God. He kept his land, his properties and bonds of money in the bank and houses so that he could have a steady flow of money to buy clothes and food and books and furniture for the schools and for the boys. He became a whole Department of Education financing everything with his own money and the money of the other Brothers. The number of boys grew from 200 to 300 to 400. In 1816 he put a notice in the local papers in Waterford saying that he had 400 boys in the school and 200 more in the open air. He asked for help to put a roof over the 200 with winter coming. The people of Waterford, Protestant and Catholic alike helped him.

And then an extraordinary thing happened. Everyone was talking about this rich businessman who gave everything to help the poor. Other businessmen followed his example. A wine merchant in Waterford, aged 60, sold his business, joined Brother Rice and financed the opening of the second house and school in Carrick-on-Suir. A professor of Mathematics in St. John’s College, Waterford, John Mulcahy, joined Brother Rice and opened the third house and school in Dungarvan.

In 1812 Brother Rice sent two of his best men to open a school in one of the poorest parts of Dublin. Things were so bad in Dublin in 1817 that crowds looted the bread shops and soldiers with fixed bayonets were on duty in the meat markets. The same thing happened in Dublin that happened in Waterford. Again businessmen joined him. The only Catholics that had money and some power were the businessmen. There was money from the Government for Protestant schools but no money for Catholic schools. A silk merchant sold out and brought himself and his money to help the work.

A wealthy Protestant wine merchant visited Brother Rice, spoke to him, and then sold his business, became a Catholic and joined the Brothers. Within a few years the Brothers had four schools in the poorest part of Dublin City with hundreds and hundreds of poor boys attending. Each Brother had between 100 and 150 boys to look after. A Protestant captain in the Wicklow Yeomen, 6’ 6” in height became a Catholic at the age of 36 and joined Brother Rice. A Callan shoemaker, Thomas John Baptist Cahill, who had been half-hanged in 1798 recovered and joined Brother Rice and his schools. The whole thing had its origin in pure charity; in the extraordinary compassion and love that an inspired broken-hearted businessman had for his poor Catholic neighbours.

Brother Rice had a wonderful system of education to help the poor boys of his schools. He knew that buying and selling were the best way at that time for his boys. Waterford was a very busy port and had large numbers of merchants, Protestant and Catholic, importing and exporting. They all needed efficient clerks. Brother Rice supplied them from the schools. Within a few years these boys had their own businesses and were employing other boys from the schools.

A Government Blue Book on the Education of the Poor in Ireland in 1825 stated that Brother Rice had 30 Christian Brothers in 24 classrooms in 12 different towns or cities and that the 30



Brothers between them were educating (gratis) 5,500 boys. Many of these were fed and clothed as well.

We have this morning really being speaking of Edmund Rice, the parent: at first the father of a powerless little daughter for whom he could really do little but love her. Through the purification of terrible loss and sorrow in his married life he was destined by Providence to be the father of thousands of poor boys and a help to their parents. He loved them all, knew them all, fed and clothed most of them and faced insurmountable obstacles through a long life to provide jobs and opportunities for them.

He was a parent, raised up by God, Himself a loving Father, to help other parents to cross a wide bridge over poverty and helplessness to new life and new hope for them and their children. We salute his courage, his heroic generosity, his deep faith and trust in God's goodness, his love for his own people and his practical concern for their welfare.

He was a good man, an understanding man, a tolerant man, a loving man, a transforming man, above all a listening man, who heard the real pain of others and, by God's grace, heeded them. In his time he met and broke danger to the Faith, injustice, the railroading of parents, terrible hunger, nakedness and blatant lack of opportunities for Catholic families. He, a parent, is now declared Venerable by the Universal Church and can become for us, parents, an inspiration and a patron for all our strivings. His life and ideals could be a powerful agenda for our work.

32.

*Edmund Rice's Bethlehem*<sup>436</sup>

Christmas is the greatest and most joyful feast in the year. It brings us all close to the most beautiful thing that ever happened on earth: the birth of the Son of God in a stable in Bethlehem. The name Bethlehem means “House of Bread”. Every one of us had a Bethlehem – a place or a memory of something we did that brought great joy and love to other people. Edmund Rice had his Bethlehem – a real “house of bread” that must have been for him a personal shrine to the God he loved in his neighbour.



**The Bake House, Mount Sion**

Of all the wonderful things to be seen and experienced in the Edmund Rice Centre in Mount Sion, Waterford, Edmund Rice's

Bakehouse and Tailor Shop are certainly unique. Here is a little house (reconstructed alright; but still the actual house) where Edmund Rice himself stood and watched wretchedly poor, cold, half-naked boys being fitted for the first new suit they would ever wear in their lives. Here, too, he smelt the warm and appetising bread being baked that would be taken home in triumph by a hungry boy to a very hungry family.

As I said, it is a small, even a tiny, building; two little rooms downstairs and two corresponding rooms upstairs. As you enter, a plaque on the wall on the right records the words of an old man, James O'Rourke of Peter Street, Waterford. And the year was 1912: “A few days since I visited the Mount Sion schools. I noticed the old bake-house where the bread was baked and distributed to the poor and hungry boys. The buildings are all changed, but this old house stands alone to speak out after the lapse of ages of the charity of Edmund Rice.” Quite close, on another wall there is a Scripture reference, Luke 12:42: “Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his Master will put in charge of his slaves to give them their allowance of food at the proper time?”

In the little bake house proper, there is a real bake-house oven with a baker's shovel or peel, with which the freshly baked bread could be taken out. On a stool stands a white deal losaid or losset where the dough was placed overnight. And, of course, there is the shining white deal table on which the dough was made from the flour. On the wall nearby there is a



description from a Book of Trades issued in 1823, of the process of bread-making at the time: “To a peck of flour are added a handful of salt, a pint of yeast, and three quarters of water, cold in summer, hot in winter and temperate between the two. The whole being kneaded, will rise in about an hour: it is then moulded into loaves, and put into the hot oven to bake.” On the back of a door is a quotation from one of Edmund Rice’s personal letters: “Let us do ever so little for God, He will never forget it nor let it pass unrewarded.” Over the door a picture hangs depicting the actual bakery with a baker in the dress of the time at work on the loaves. Beneath the picture the artist gives the title: “I was hungry and you fed me” and his name, Joseph Hunt BA, ATD.

In a corner of the first room is a fine replica of Peter Hunt’s famous statue of Edmund Rice and a barefoot boy, the original of which stands opposite the parish church in Callan. An old man’s story from the early days is recorded. He tells of Brother Rice bringing four poor boys to Mount Sion to “feed them and have them go to school.” There is also a recent gift of two beautifully crafted chairs designed and inscribed in memory of Brother Rice.

A steep stairs takes you to the two tailors’ rooms above. On a table the tools of the tailor are laid out, together with thread and thimbles and several heavy irons. There are also samples of the rough but warm ratteen cloth, made in Carrick-on-Suir, which Edmund Rice bought for his boys. An excerpt on the wall from an account book for the year 1813 tells us that Brother Rice “had a special tailor who got constant employment in making clothes for poor boys.” We are told that at times the number of tailors rose to six or seven. From two items listed it is evident that the number of suits made must have been very large: “for making 95 coats and 91 trousers, £9-6-0; for making 42 suits and trimmings £4-8-0.”

In the second room there is another reference to the extraordinary charity of Edmund Rice. This is taken from one of his account books for the year 1825. It tells of his purchase of 191 yards of ratteen, 501 yards of linen and 194 yards of corduroy. It also mentions his purchase of between 80 and 90 pairs of new shoes for barefoot boys. There is also an account of his having spent in the nine years between 1813-1822 the equivalent in today’s money of over £77,000 in food and clothes for the poor. It mentions that donations of over £70,000 in today’s money, received from both Catholic and Protestant business people. The time and effort spent in administering these huge sums of money must have been very great.

A plaque on the wall says that boys preparing for their First Holy Communion are provided with new suits and that on the morning itself they are brought into Mount Sion for their breakfast. In another place there are quotations from the famous book written by Mr. and Mrs. Hall who visited Ireland a number of times between 1827 and 1837. In their books they describe their visit to Mount Sion and their meeting with Edmund Rice. They noted that boys going for an interview are provided with good clothes. Again on the wall there is another picture by the artist, Joseph Hunt. It is a drawing of the tailors at work in this room and the tall figure of Edmund Rice presenting an emaciated barefoot boy to the master tailor for a fitting for a new suit. The title beneath the picture reads: “I was naked and you clothed me.” What a man! What a Christian!

A short poem by An Br. B. C. Ó Maoláin, hang on the wall near the exit to this Bethlehem where Edmund Rice so often made his shepherds’ visit to the new-born Saviour in the person of hundreds of poor and hungry children. It says it all.



**LOVE**

Love is a loaf when a stomach is starving,  
Love is a coat when a body is cold,  
Love is a fire when the east wind is carving,  
Love is a smile on a child's face aglow.

Love is being taught for a week – for a penny,  
Love is a deed, to give bread – not a stone,  
Love is a great man come here from Kilkenny,  
Love is a merchant changed silver to gold.

An Br. B. C. O Maolain, CFC, 11/12/1989.



### 33. *Graces attributed to the Intercession of Edmund Ignatius Rice*<sup>437</sup>

Besides the many recollections which circulated among the faithful in the nineteenth century and were passed on to later generations concerning Edmund Rice's character and work, and the love of God that motivated him, there are numerous stories of quite recent origin in which Edmund figures. Our knowledge of them stems from the gratitude felt by many persons for favours received and a desire to testify to the efficacy of Edmund's intercession before the throne of God. That these testimonies come mostly from the laity points to the attraction Edmund Rice's life has for people of our own times.

Hundreds of individuals still alive have the profound conviction that God has worked wonders for them through the intercession of Edmund Rice. Many feel an easy rapport with this particular servant of God who underwent sorrows and difficulties similar to their own and faced them confidently, knowing that God was always at hand to help. Edmund has proved to be a man for all seasons, for all the faithful: they feel he is one who knows from personal experience their particular preoccupations, their wants, their sufferings, their aspirations, both spiritual and temporal, and who, through the communion of saints, can come to their aid. "I look upon Br. Rice as the best friend I have got", wrote one person after a successful operation.

These testimonies to the people's high regard for the life and virtues of this servant of God come from many parts of the world, a fact which seems in keeping with the all-embracing, universal character of the charity of Edmund Rice during his earthly life. Not surprisingly, a great number originate in Callan, Waterford and the whole Kilkenny area; but this strong devotion to Edmund Rice is found also in almost every other part of Ireland. At the same time, some remarkable testimonies to cases of favours received through the intercession of Edmund Rice have come from the United States, Argentina, South Africa, Australia, Papua New Guinea, India, New Zealand, Scotland and England. It is clear that the fame of this servant of God is on the increase rather than the opposite.

Impressive as these many domestic, interior and other favours are, more striking still, perhaps, though equally indicative of the people's faith in the holiness of Edmund Rice and the power of his intercession, are those favours which are more immediately noticeable. For example, physical or organic developments which run counter to expert medical prognosis, of which there are many. We shall highlight in this article just one; albeit one of the most dramatic.

#### **THE CASE OF FATHER FRANCIS** <sup>438</sup>

"Fr. Francis McNamara was admitted to hospital on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1978. From the time of admission, in spite of intensive treatment, his condition deteriorated until finally, following an exploratory laparotomy which failed to alleviate his condition, his life was despaired of and his Superiors and community were notified of his impending death. His subsequent recovery was unexpected." This is the statement signed by the Matron of the Bon Succours Hospital, Dublin.



A letter from one of the priest's parishioners gives another viewpoint: "In early March, Fr. Francis McNamara was taken suddenly ill and was taken to the Bon Secours, Glasnevin, Dublin. He was completely given up by Mr. Harold Brown, Surgeon, and Dr. Harry Counihan. All during this time I was attending daily Mass at the Black Abbey, Kilkenny and we were given reports of his illness daily by priests who were celebrating Mass, and one morning we were told that they were waiting hourly for news of his death. The Prior took his religious habit to the hospital to lay him out. Thank God, he recovered and he is back here now doing his full duties. He is a wonderful priest and much loved by all. Br. Rice's Cause has been very dear to him always, and he gives the prayer leaflet to many people. He had given me some before his illness, when he was so ill I went into the Black Abbey, got some more and gave them to several people to say the prayers for his recovery. I said it several times daily. Thank God, our prayers were heard."

This particular favour was so remarkable that care has been taken to obtain signed documentation from the medical and hospital authorities. The priest's doctor was told by the surgeon: "Whether I operate on this man or not, he will die." In fact, "at the present time (1981) he enjoys better health and in appearance looks much better than (before) his illness of three years ago". The surgeon's account contains the following: "For four to six hours after his operation, his condition was very critical and he appeared to be deteriorating and going downhill. He had the usual supportive measures and both the anaesthetist and I stayed with him for a couple of hours and during that time his colleagues prayed around his bed. In my opinion, Fr. McNamara made a most extraordinary recovery which to some extent was unexplained under the circumstances."

Fr. McNamara's own account is very simple and direct. "Last year I was critically ill and deemed to have no chance of surviving. In a sense people were making some preparations for my eventual funeral. A number of my friends prayed for me very sincerely through the intercession of Brother Rice; they had novenas and they visited Callan. Soon after this I recovered."

What was written about St. Wilfred in the seventh century would seem, in the light of all the foregoing data, a fitting summary of Edmund Ignatius Rice's life, work and character: He was a humble and peaceful man, given to fasting and prayers; kind, sober, discrete, compassionate, full of the power and grace of God; modest, prudent, not given to wind; teachable and able to teach; in conversation pure and frank; he cared for the poor, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, took in strangers, redeemed captives and protected widows and orphans, that he might merit the reward of eternal life amid the choirs of angels in the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Fr. Francis McNamara passed away on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2001. May he rest in peace.*



### 34. *The Death and Funeral of Blessed Edmund Rice*<sup>439</sup>

Blessed Edmund Rice died on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 1844 at the age of 82 years. He had been unwell for quite a while before his death. He was all this time confined to his bedroom under the care of his nurse, Katie Lloyd. Katie was a sister of Br. John Lloyd, a member of the Christian Brothers.<sup>440</sup>

The signs of his approaching end were evident on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, and on the following Sunday he was anointed and remained in a semi-comatose state for a few days. The Brothers of the community were constantly at his bedside and the Bishop, Dr. Foran, paid several visits. About 4 a.m. on the 29<sup>th</sup> he was seized with a fit of apoplexy. The nurse rang the bell to call the Brothers to the bedside. As the nurse was leaving the room when the Brothers were coming in, the dying Founder thanked her for what she had done for him, by shaking hands with her and blessing her. It was his wish that she and her family should never want and that the Brothers would be good to her and to all of them.<sup>441</sup> Between 11 a.m. and 12 noon Edmund Rice breathed his last.

His body, dressed in the habit of the Congregation, with a rosary beads and a crucifix in his



**Blessed Edmund's bedroom, Mount Sion**

hands, was placed in the small oratory of the monastery. The Brothers watched in turn, day and night, by the remains. Brothers from the neighbouring houses came to pray. The mayor, leading citizens and many pupils and their parents came to see for the last time that face which for nearly half a century had been so familiar to the people of Waterford.

The Superior of Mount Sion, Br. Joseph Murphy, wrote:

His death was a greater affliction to me than I had expected. You may suppose what I must have felt at seeing such a great man expire – one with whom I was so intimately connected for nearly forty years by the ties of religion and friendship. His life was a long series of sufferings, labours and contradictions under which he manifested a greatness of soul which betokened sublime virtue.

The funeral arrangements were made by Mr. Harrington, 19 Barrack Street, grandfather of Mr. John Thompson, Undertaker, “at his own expense, firstly as a tribute to Mr. Rice, and secondly because he feared the monks would not have the money to cover the expenses.”<sup>442</sup>



On Saturday, 31 August, Rev. Dr. Nicholas Foran, Bishop of the Diocese, and 29 Clergymen attended the final obsequies, and the remains were interred in the north-east angle of the little cemetery which was consecrated on that occasion. The little area was crowded to full capacity and large numbers stood in silence in the neighbouring streets, Catholics and non-Catholics, the well-to-do and especially the poor. One person present, a Quaker, in a letter to a Protestant friend, wrote his impression of the funeral ceremony:

The display of feeling manifested at the interment of Br. Rice shows that the people are neither forgetful nor ungrateful. No wonder, as they see the extraordinary change in the face of the country brought about mainly by his instrumentality. The Roman Catholics believe he was a messenger from God. I knew Br. Rice well. I respected his nobleness of character. I can appreciate the work he has accomplished. Who could stand by his grave and witness unmoved the wave of sorrow of the vast multitude? Seeing it, I was almost moved to cry out: "Why are you sad? Mr. Rice is not dead! He lives. Yes, he lives the highest, noblest and greatest life. He lives in the noble band of Christian workmen to whom he has bequeathed his spirit and his work."<sup>443</sup>

The month's commemoration for Br. Ignatius Rice was celebrated on Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> of October, in the Cathedral of Waterford. Br. Rice had been on the committee that built this cathedral and he had subscribed generously to the cost. The attendance this day was worthy of the occasion and a remarkable tribute to one who during his life had always shunned publicity, and had lived in retirement for the six years preceding his death. Fifty Brothers from Ireland and England gathered in Waterford. The clergy of the city and the diocese were present in large numbers, with 50 students from the local seminary. Fr. Matthew, the great apostle of temperance travelled from Cork. The boys from Mount Sion, 800 in number, attended, and also a large number of girls from the school of the Presentation Sisters. The Mayor and City Aldermen, Catholic and Protestant, were in formal attire. What a change had come over the city since Edmund's early years in Waterford, when admission to the old Catholic church was by a narrow door in a side street, and at an hour when no offence would be given to the eyes of the Protestant ascendancy!

It was necessary to remove the seats in the Cathedral to make room for all the people who attended. The poor, who regarded Edmund as their special friend, were in the majority. One of those present left on record:

I was in the Cathedral on the day of the Month's Mind, when all Waterford, young and old, mourned the loss of their great friend. Brother Rice, I would say, lived and died a saint. He was the poor man's friend and it was the poor, young and old, who alone could write his epitaph.<sup>444</sup>



### **35. *The Lawyer and Blessed Edmund Rice (1845)*<sup>445</sup>**

Blessed Edmund Rice died in August 1844. Within a year of his death, the local bishop, Dr. Foran, laid the foundation stone of “The Rice Memorial”, a beautiful chapel and a school room underneath for 150 pre-school children whose parents were both out begging every day. A great number of people attended and a tea-party was held in the evening, in commemoration of the foundation stone of the memorial being laid. Upwards of 200 people assembled at the Town Hall, “where they were served with tea and coffee in abundance.” Heavy drinking was common at the time among the poor and Edmund Rice had a Temperance Society as part of his school.

Among the speakers at the tea-party was a lawyer, Mr. Stephen Curtis, who had been a close friend of Br. Rice. His comments in the speech<sup>446</sup> are valuable today and give contemporary insights into the mind and fullness of Edmund’s response to God’s call:

I feel deeply the honour of being so generally called upon to give expression to the feelings which have called together the citizens of Waterford this evening, to compliment the memory of the ever-to-be-venerated Mr. Rice; not alone because in private life it was my good fortune have known him, and to have numbered him, from my earliest years, as one of my truest and most consistent friends; not alone, because of the opportunity now offered me of commenting on his character, and on its unostentatious virtue – but principally because of the prominent place in Irish history that wise man filled with honour.

What course did he adopt whereby he stood out before the eyes of mankind as a Christian, a patriot and a public benefactor?.....What did he effect? What, I should rather ask, did he not effect in that pursuit to which every pulsation of his heart and every aspiration of his soul for so many years were devoted – the education of the poorer classes, and the amelioration of their condition? An answer to that question is best given by a review of the facts. Look at the intellectual condition of the Irish people at the time he commenced his labours, and behold it now! Look at those places that are blessed by the presence of the Order of his institution. He commenced in the year 1802, at a time when there was, literally speaking, no system of education provided for the Irish people, at least, for the Catholic portion of them. When the Penal Code was mitigated – when it was just relaxed in favour of the Catholics, to the extent of permitting them to be educated, and to teach each other; when they were labouring still under the temporising effects of that code..... Everything was adverse – everywhere the task was difficult. But in Mr. Rice there was that happy combination of elevated powers and excellent qualities: order, resolution, patience, foresight. These eminently calculated him for gigantic actions, and he was less oppressed by the magnitude of the obstacles than with the means of overcoming them.....Such was the state of things that met the new venture of Mr. Rice in 1802; and to mend that state of things became at once his lofty purpose. How did he proceed? .....What were his resources?

He was a single individual, without power, without influence – his resources his own private fortune. It is true that before a year elapsed he was joined by two associates in the task of instructing an entire people. Who but a man of indomitable resolution,



would have entered on such a task with such assistance? He entered upon it and he succeeded. It is not for me to say what struggles ensued until success was matured – it is not for me to relate the rise and progress of the Christian Brothers, their teachings and example, and the results that ensued. This, Edmund Rice, was the triumph of your life and labour... To you I attribute most of the advancement this country has made in civil and religious freedom. But for my part, it was not the vindication of our liberties alone, and the promotion of the social condition of the Irish people that called forth his assistance.

These motives influenced him not a little in his purpose, but there was another motive and that was the inculcation of great religious principles.

And then the lawyer friend, Stephen Curtis, summed up in a few powerful words the mind and the work of Edmund Rice for Ireland's poor:

This great man looked beyond the world. He counselled others to do so, and if he were not persuaded that more than temporal blessings would follow in the train of education to the Irish, I am convinced he would not have spent a single day in its advancement.



### 36. *The Mind of Edmund Rice from the History of the Institute*<sup>447</sup>

A book entitled *The History of the Institute*,<sup>448</sup> written by Br. Dominic Burke, who had entered the Congregation of the Christian Brothers just a few years after the death of Blessed Edmund, was compiled mainly from statements of older Brothers who had known the founder personally. These statements give us a vivid account of the mind and thought of Blessed Edmund.

A novice who lived with him describes him thus:

I remember how warmly he thanked us for any little service we rendered him. His politeness was of the genuine kind, welling directly from the heart, for he meant what he expressed.

Another Brother said:

It was a joy to him to see the Brothers walking about, either praying or recreating. He would occasionally walk about his room, when he was old, leaning his hand on the shoulder of a Brother, and as they moved on he would tell his helper never to omit saying the Memorare. As might be expected his devotion to the Holy Mother of God was most intense. His own most frequent prayer was the Memorare, and this he recommended to all his novices.

Another Brother recorded that “from the June of 1842 until his death in 1844, Brother Rice was almost entirely confined to his room. He was accustomed for a time to sit at his window looking out on the garden. He loved nature – the fields, the trees, the flowers, the birds, the cattle - for all lifted his mind to God.”

He also had great devotion to his patron, St. Ignatius of Loyola, whose name he bore. He had recourse to him in all his troubles and ever experienced his powerful intercession.

Another young Brother wrote:

The Brothers used to read for him, as his sight was becoming dim. He would enquire of the reader if there was any passage in the book about heaven, and if so, he desired that it should be read for him, thus showing where his treasure was. On such occasions oft and oft would the reader hear the longing sigh or the ejaculation praising the Lord, and saying: ‘How sweet to die!’ Hearing read the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith was very pleasing to him. He would express his admiration for the great missionaries labouring far away among the infidels, and he rejoiced in their successes. ‘Blessed be the Lord’ he would say, ‘who has such noble servants.’ He ever encouraged the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. And of course he had a great love of Scripture.

Continuing, the same Brother tells us that

Brother Ignatius studied the Holy Scriptures deeply and profitably, even long before he became the founder of the Christian Brothers’ Society. He had an intimate knowledge of the sacred volume. Even in his old age, when free from all



responsibility, it was his great joy and comfort to read daily a portion of the book. It was here he imbibed his holy wisdom, solid virtue, exalted piety, and his conspicuous love for God and the neighbour. To his devout daily meditations on the teachings and maxims of the Scriptures, he learned the lessons which guided his steps in the path of virtue through his long and honoured life.

And another novice of the time tells us: “when leaving his room after the reading, he thanked us, and the smile from his benevolent face was a ray of sunshine to us.”

Finally, we are informed by his life-long companions that,

He was mildness itself in his government of the houses of which he was, from time to time, Director and of the whole Institute during the seventeen years he governed it subsequently. He was most considerate for the Brothers and endeavoured to anticipate their wants, knowing how occupied they were by their exercises, schools and studies. He was wholly opposed to severity or harshness and had no sympathy with Directors who were rigid or inconsiderate. He did not approve of too great strictness even in Masters of Novices. His motto was that each community should be a happy family – the Directors, fathers, and kind fathers, never masters, but having the confidence and affection of their Brothers, who themselves should not be eye-servers, or flatterers, but candid, confident and dutiful, having an affection for the Director and great fraternal union among themselves. Such was our holy founder’s idea of what the Communities should be, and such he succeeded himself in making his own when in office; and such he exhorted the Directors and Brothers to make the various houses of the institute.

### 37. *The Newness of Blessed Edmund Rice*<sup>449</sup>

The year 1996 will be remembered as the year that something new happened for Edmund Rice. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of October last, before 7,000 of his friends and thousands of others in a packed St Peter's Square in Rome, Pope John Paul II put the seal on this great man's holy life by declaring Edmund Rice to be Blessed.

It was a new title for Edmund Rice. He had been called a "Servant of God" and then "Venerable Edmund Rice" and was now "Blessed Edmund Rice". All three titles acknowledged the sanctity of Edmund Rice. Each one was a further step in this recognition. And each one has involved deeper research and a deeper sense of what was really central in the life of Edmund Rice.

When God was leading this great man through the joys and sorrows of his married life, the death of his wife and the retardation of his daughter, God was preparing him for a special calling. It was a calling to heed contemporary needs. He was being called, first of all, to a special union with God. He was also being called to establish a new and powerful Christian Community in the Irish Church. There would be nine of these communities or new Congregations to bring hope and courage and new faith in God to the broken and deprived people of Ireland. Nine new Congregations (four of women and five of men) would come into existence in the first thirty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Edmund Rice would be the founder of two of these Congregations, the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers.

First and foremost, then, Edmund Rice founded a Christian Community. It was a



**Stone at Westcourt Callan commemorating the Beatification of Blessed Edmund Rice.**

Community of dedicated men of different ages and from different walks of life. They would pray together, worship together, be God's presence together to the broken and deprived families of the time. These families had no hope of real worthwhile employment and no future. There were many different ways in which the service of God to these poor families found expression. Sometimes it was feeding and clothing the children. Other times it was education. There were Brothers who taught boys and young men by day. There was adult education by night. In both cases education in the Faith was an important part. There were Brothers who



exercised their trade or profession as cooks, carpenters, builders. All felt that they were part of these great praying and worshipping Christian Communities. They felt that the power of their common prayer and their love of God went with each one, individually, to the service of the people of God, especially to those who were marginalised or deprived.

There is a growing sense of the centrality of Christian Community in the work that these men did. The extraordinary work done for parents and pupils in the schools was, first and foremost, the fruit and the expression of that praying community. Since the 6<sup>th</sup> of October last, more and more of today's people of God feel that they want to be part of what was brought into being in Ireland in that early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Having breathed the air and the atmosphere of the Beatification, there is a longing among many people to be part of the Edmund Rice Family. Edmund Rice lived and prayed and loved with all his heart in a Christian Community with others. He then waited to see in what way God would want that communion expressed as an apostolate in the service of the lost and broken and despairing ones of that time.

Times change, and so do apostolates. The Christian Community must remain constant. The new and widespread Edmund Rice Family is keen and is waiting. Already there are green shoots of practical and emerging apostolic initiatives pushing up in different parts of the world. Blessed Edmund Rice is initiating the second and expanding life of his great Christian Community in action. Things may be different. But there will be a constant. That will continue to be the spreading of the Kingdom of God and the comforting and uplifting of God's people, especially those marginalised, broken or powerless.

Incidentally, I saw a traveller's caravan the other day with a picture of Blessed Edmund Rice pasted on the window.





## 38. *The Spirituality of Edmund Rice*<sup>450</sup>

Pope Paul VI once explained the spirituality of a founder as “all the ways that God spoke to the servant of God and all the ways in which that servant responded.”

God spoke to Edmund Rice in the sorrow of the death of his wife after only two years of marriage. God spoke to him in the birth of an only child instead of the seven strong sons that his own father, Robert Rice had, to help his growing business. God spoke to Edmund in the fact that his little child was a girl and that she was retarded. He was young: only 27 years. His business was probably his whole life. The expansion of that business and the passing on of that success to a family was probably and naturally everything to him. God brought him to his knees. God does this with great men and women to prepare them for the great work that God has in store for them. God was harder on Edmund Rice than he was on Abraham. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son. Abraham was ready to obey, but then God let him off the hook and spared Isaac, the son. God gave Edmund Rice one daughter. And she was retarded. And she remained retarded all her life. And Edmund, when he was dying, was not sure that she would be looked after when he was gone. Actually she was.

God wanted the great man, the competent man, Edmund Rice to wake up to a realisation of the horrible fact that thousands and thousands of poor Catholic families were starving, were without hope, were without prospect of employment, were totally unable to help themselves. God inspired him to subscribe to a new Bible about to be printed. And God opened Edmund Rice’s eyes to the fact that he, Edmund Rice, had as a businessman often made contracts with other people – agreements that both sides knew were to be honoured. God inspired Edmund Rice through the words of the Bible that He himself, God, had made a powerful business contract with all the poor and oppressed of the world, thousands of years before Christ was born, and that God had never gone back on that solemn contract. And that contract with all the poor and oppressed people of the world was that God would never abandon them; that they would be His people and He would be their God. Edmund Rice’s realisation that that contract of covenant between God and oppressed people everywhere was still valid. This opened his eyes to the awful condition of his own fellow Catholics around him. Suddenly he had a vision of a situation in which that oppression could be ended and that God’s covenant with these broken people of the world could be fulfilled in Ireland, if he, Edmund Rice, would use his outstanding business talents. He had the money; he could make the time. So, under God’s inspiration, he spent thousands of pounds to build schools, to educate, and uplift poor families.

Soon he saw that the children were hungry too and that sometimes they were naked or semi-naked. He spent thousands and thousands more feeding and clothing these poor children. People were astounded at this man’s great charity and goodness. Some people, Catholics and Protestants, helped him with money and clothes. Others went farther and decided to join him. One was a merchant. Other merchants sold their businesses and brought themselves and their money to the work. At least one Protestant merchant became a Catholic, sold his business and also joined. Young farmers asked their fathers for the money that would come to them, and brought themselves and that money to the work. Edmund Rice used his great knowledge of banking and investment to place this money in lands and properties and in stocks to finance the work. There was no help from any government. Schools kept opening and hundreds and hundreds of poor hungry children crowded in for education and food and clothes. Edmund Rice even sacrificed his life for his little daughter by leaving her in charge of his own sister and giving his whole life to the vision of the time when God’s covenant with the poor and



oppressed would become a reality through the sacrifice and work of himself and his fellow Brothers. This was Edmund Rice's response to God's special call.

A spirituality has to do with a personal relationship with God. Every day Edmund grew in consciousness of God at work through him. He saw that God is to be found where he found Him – in other people, especially the poor and oppressed. As his personal relationship and consciousness of God grew, Edmund himself grew in the compassion that God has for those who suffer. He grew in the understanding that God has of how much goodness was in these poor rough and hungry people. He grew in his love for all God's world, people (rich and poor), the earth itself, the beauty of flowers and birds and plants, the wonder of himself as made by God. And he discovered the power and beauty of God speaking to him through the Scriptures. He was more and more conscious of God present to him in the Eucharist. And he grew in love for Mary, God's own Mother, who became a loving patron of all his work. Let us pray for the canonisation of Blessed Edmund, if it be God's will.

### 39. *The Wife of Blessed Edmund Rice*<sup>451</sup>

From time to time people enquire about Blessed Edmund Rice's wife and his daughter. The first published notification of his marriage was given in 1926 in a book entitled *Edmund Rice and the Christian Brothers*, written by Br. Mark McCarthy. On page 55 we read: "When he was 23 years of age he married but his biographer has left us only meagre information on this event of his life." We only know that his married life was brief, for his wife died young, leaving an only daughter whom the pious father provided for during his life." A statement given by a Mr. Martin O'Flynn (aged 83) of Waterford to Br. W. B. Cullen in 1949 adds to this information: "My grandfather, William Kerwick, a pig buyer, was a first cousin of Br. Ignatius Rice on my mother's side...My great-grandmother was a Tierney from Callan...If I don't mistake, Edmund Rice married a Miss Elliot (Bridget or Mary was her name). It was through his wife that he got the site of his first school in New Street. The site has always been referred to as Elliot's. The Elliots were a very old Waterford family. As a matter of fact I heard that Mr. Rice lived over his school in New Street for a short time."<sup>452</sup>

In 1930 Sr. Josephine Rice, the Mercy Convent, Belvedere, St. John's Newfoundland, gave a



**Edmund Rice and his wife, Mary.**

statement to Br. J. G. Hogan, Assistant to the Superior General, about the Founder's marriage. Sr. Josephine gave the same details in an interview with Br. F. Brennan, 26 May 1962. Sr. Josephine Rice was the grand-daughter of Patrick Rice. Patrick Rice was the son of Thomas, the brother of Blessed Edmund. Patrick, with his sister, Mary, and his two brothers, John and Michael, immigrated to Newfoundland in 1825. In Newfoundland the Callan Rices treasured the family traditions especially about Edmund who had become a person of note in Ireland before they left the country.<sup>453</sup> A note in the Evening Telegraph, Newfoundland, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1883 recorded: "Died this morning Mr Michael Rice of the County of Kilkenny, Ireland, in the 82<sup>nd</sup> of his age, 57 of which he spent in Newfoundland". Thus Michael Rice (brother of Patrick) left Callan about

1825. He prospered in St. John's and a few years before his death paid a visit to Ireland. On his return to Newfoundland he spoke of the magnificent monastery at Mount Sion and the beautiful cemetery where his uncle, the Founder, was buried. He had the greatest respect for the Christian Brothers whom he called "the followers of his saintly uncle."

This is what Sr. Josephine said about Blessed Edmund's wife: "The Founder had been married to a lady of a well-to-do family (who was fond of the hunt). When she was well-advanced with child, she went riding and was thrown from her horse, dying as a result of the accident. The doctor managed to save the child who had evidently been injured by the fall and hence who did not develop normally."



Many people have questioned the authenticity of this description of the death of Mrs. Rice. Yes, it is hardly true that Mrs. Rice went riding on her own. Two interesting sources have come to light recently which might throw some light on the situation. A book by Charles McGlinchy, "The Last of the Name," published in Belfast in 1986, describes how: "Horseback was the only way of going on a journey. There were few jaunting cars. They used to have a pillion behind the saddle for a woman to ride pillion. She held on to the man's coat." Charles McGlinchy was born in 1861, his father in 1810 and his grandfather in 1780. In his book McGlinchy spoke about things that he remembered and things he heard from his own father and grandfather.

The second source is from the novel "*Silas Mariner*" by George Eliot. George Eliot was born in 1819 and the book was written in 1861: "Some women, I grant, would not appear to advantage seated on a pillion...It was all the greater triumph to Miss Nancy Lammeter's beauty that she looked thoroughly bewitching in that costume, as seated on the pillion behind her tall erect father, she held one arm around him and looked down with open-eyed anxiety at the treacherous snow-covered pools and puddles, which sent up formidable splashes of mud under the stamp of Dobbin's foot..."



## 40. *The Wonder of Blessed Edmund Rice*<sup>454</sup>

Were we to know the merit and value  
of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour  
for the love of God,  
we should prize it more than gold and silver. (Edmund Rice)

Edmund Rice was declared Blessed in 1996. The wonder of this wonderful man of God is that having died 156 years ago, he still has much to teach us and to inspire us all in so many ways today. The power of the man comes from the great love he had for God and for people, especially the poor and deprived. He saw Christ in all people and he loved them for it.

In Edmund's time it was grown men who came to share his work for the Catholic people who, for over a hundred years, had been outlawed from public office, from any opportunity to advance in life and even from education. Many of these men were merchants, like himself. Some of these sold their businesses and brought the money to help open more schools for poor boys. There was no monetary help from the Government and the parents of the boys could not afford to pay for their schooling. These grown men who joined him were attracted by the power and the marvellous generosity of a man of 40 years of age, with no formal training as a teacher, and like him, they were willing to live in poverty and teach classes of between 100 and 150 pupils per teacher.

A young tea-merchant, a Protestant, Laurence Watson, saw the Herculean work Edmund Rice's Brothers were doing in a desperately poor area in Hanover Street on the quays of Dublin. He saw also the injustice that kept Irish Catholics ignorant and utterly deprived of any hope in life. Mr. Watson went down to Waterford to meet Br. Rice. They spoke for several hours. Finally Laurence Watson became a Catholic and returned to Waterford to join the community of Mount Sion. He spent the rest of his life teaching in the poorest of Br. Rice's schools – St. Patrick's. Br Watson died in Waterford aged 51 years, and is buried, like Blessed Edmund himself, in the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in Mount Sion.<sup>455</sup>

A Catholic wine-merchant of Waterford, Tom Brien, aged 60 saw what Edmund Rice was doing, sold his very prosperous business and with the money joined Br. Rice and built and opened a new house and school in Carrick-on-Suir. The house is still standing.

Francis Manifold, member of a wealthy Protestant family from Arklow had been a captain in the Wicklow Militia. He too heard of Edmund Rice and saw the extraordinary work he was doing to raise the poor, underprivileged Catholics of Ireland. Francis Manifold became a Catholic, joined Edmund Rice, and became the first superior of a new school and house in Ennistymon, Clare in 1824. He is still remembered for the sanctity of his life. He eventually died from famine fever in Ennis Hospital.

At his funeral the people of Ennistymon went seven miles out the road to meet the corpse coming back to their town. It was a dark night and many people left on record that there was a light shining over the coffin for the seven miles from Ennistymon.

In 1832 a terrible Asiatic cholera devastated the countries of the East. Then it came to Europe and finally reached Ireland. Dublin was the first place it attacked. Soon it spread death and terror all over the country. There was a grave shortage of hospitals and hospital beds. The newly founded Sisters of Charity, and Sisters of Mercy as well as the Presentation



and other new Congregations did heroic work helping in the hospitals. All schools were closed. Br. Rice turned his schools in Dungarvan, Thurles and Limerick into hospitals and the Brothers helped in caring for the sick people. A young Brother of the time left on record that his job was to carry out the corpses every morning. Br. Rice said that neither a Priest nor a Sister nor a Brother would die from the cholera. Some priests did die but no Brother.

A question is often asked: What does Blessed Edmund Rice mean to so many of the people who come to visit Mount Sion and pray at his tomb? He certainly seems to be a big figure in their lives. A small group of elderly people, men and women, have for the past 16 years been saying the Rosary in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel every weekday morning for his canonisation. The prayers for petitions are said many times each day by visitors to the Chapel. A first class relic of Blessed Edmund is in almost constant request for sick people in Waterford and beyond. The annual Edmund Rice Retreat is crowded in Mount Sion for the two sessions held every day of the five days Retreat. A similar Edmund Rice Retreat is held in Callan and is likewise crowded.

Two little messages come from the pens of two different writers, one of whom was a personal friend of Blessed Edmund and the other who was the author of a fine biography of Nano Nagle. The first writer was a Waterford lawyer, called Stephen Curtis. Here is what he said about Edmund Rice:

This great man looked beyond the world. He counselled others to do so. And if he were not persuaded that more than temporal blessings would follow in the train of education to the Irish I am convinced that he would not spend a single day in its advancement.<sup>456</sup>

The second tribute comes from a recent writer, Fr. T. J. Walsh,<sup>457</sup> biographer of Nano Nagle:

Nano Nagle and Edmund Rice and the 19<sup>th</sup> century founders and foundresses were lonely figures in the battle for the spiritual birthright of the Irish child. For them the real purpose of education was the formation of the true and perfect Christian. They proclaimed the truth of the moral and social order that the education of youth belongs to the Family and the Church.”



## 41. *What the Newspapers said at the Death of Blessed Edmund*<sup>458</sup>

Sixteen different contemporary newspapers announced the death of Edmund Rice. This was unusual as death notices were rare then in the papers. It was quite evident that one and all felt that someone wonderful had passed away. They were speaking the thoughts and the feelings of the people on the death of a person treasured and loved as a true man of God.

A few days after his death, 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1844, two Waterford newspapers, *The Waterford Chronicle* and *The Waterford Mail*, had this to say about him:

At Mount Sion in this city in the 87<sup>th</sup> <sup>459</sup> year of his age the venerable Brother Edmund Ignatius Rice, founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Ireland and in England. The health of this venerable man had been declining for nearly three years. He bore his protracted illness with patience and resignation to the Divine Will. In this city, he founded his first establishment for the gratuitous education of boys in the year 1804, which has since branched out to the principal towns of this country and England. He was a man of indefatigable zeal and charity endowed with great prudence, energy and perseverance.....

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1844, less than a week after the death of Blessed Edmund, *The Tipperary Vindicator*, published in Nenagh and edited by Maurice Lenihan, historian and journalist, paid a very full and beautiful tribute to Edmund Rice. Maurice Lenihan was a native of Waterford and had been a close friend of Blessed Edmund. He was also a former secretary of the Temperance Society in Mount Sion. This is how he remembered his friend:

The Waterford papers announce the death of a venerable, a good, and in the best sense of the word, a great man – a man of powerful mind – of vast knowledge of human nature – of pure piety – of immense charity – Edmund Rice, the founder of the Christian Schools – the benefactor of his species, not only in Ireland, but in whatever quarter of the globe the present generation of the humbler classes of our fellow-countrymen have penetrated, because to Mr. Rice is mainly attributed the credit of whatever intellectual training they enjoy.....

We have had opportunities of knowing and appreciating his exalted worth...He first laid the foundation of an educational system for the children of the Catholic poor of Ireland... To his order he was a solid example of every virtue – to the community at large he was the same...The country that gave him birth has given the same to other illustrious men; but there is not one among the role, perhaps, more conspicuous for public usefulness than Edmund Rice, who has just been called to receive the reward of his labours.....

*The Kilkenny People*, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1844, described the scene at the Month's Mind Mass for Edmund in Waterford:

Never was such a scene in the Waterford Cathedral as was presented yesterday. The High Mass and Office were celebrated with the greatest solemnity and the Rev. Richard Fitzgerald preached the panegyric sermon. He spoke with great eloquence, force and research and brought the good work of the venerable Mr. Rice into bold



relief. The altar was surrounded with priests and students...In the middle of the Chapel, thousands – there could not be less – of children, boys and girls, from the schools were present.

The *Galway Vindicator*, 20 September 1845, recorded with other newspapers,

The blessing and laying the foundation stone of a chapel to be erected to the honour of God and under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin, as a testimonial on the part of the citizens of Waterford chiefly, to the eminent virtues of the venerated Ignatius Rice.....

And from the city of St. John, Brunswick, Newfoundland, Canada, where the Brothers had no school, but evidently where there were many Irish people living, *The Liberator* of 11 October 1845, wrote:

Mr. Rice was a man of deep discernment, of high intellectual attainments, and endowed with a spirit calculated to direct him in the path where these abilities should be most efficiently engaged..... Into nearly every city and many a town, through all Ireland, the beneficial results of this most valuable benefit from the instruction imparted by the Brothers found its way. And the change of times and things were the admirable effect of this most important man's labour.... The good people of Ireland deserve our eulogium for their love towards this truly just man.

The *Waterford Freeman*, 8 April 1846, reported the blessing and opening of the memorial chapel:

The beautiful chapel, erected as a testimony to the virtue of the late Br. Edmund Ignatius Rice, the founder of the Christian Brothers' Schools, was yesterday consecrated to God, whose faithful servant Mr. Rice has ever been..... We understand, and we have it on good authority, that when the school-room will be finished, the Christian Brothers will then have the means of educating over 1,000 children, many of whom were it not for the instructions they receive from these truly pious men, would probably become the veriest outcasts of society...





**Section 4**

**OTHER ARTICLES\***  
**ABOUT**  
**EDMUND RICE**

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Published in various periodicals in Ireland and abroad.



## 42. *A Tea Party in Honour of Edmund Rice*<sup>460</sup>

On Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1845, the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, a year after the death of Blessed Edmund, Right Rev. Dr. Foran, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, laid the foundation stone of the “Rice Testimonial” in the yard of the Mount Sion establishment. A local newspaper, The Waterford Freeman, gave an extensive account of the occasion: “A large assembly of highly respectable persons was present to testify their respect for the memory of the illustrious dead, whose unrivalled career of Christian benevolence and practical philanthropy shall cause the name of Edmund Rice to be ranked first among those whose deeds have shed lustre around their country and elevated the character of their countrymen.”

Later, the same newspaper described a tea-party that was held in the evening in commemoration of the foundation stone being laid: “Shortly after seven o’ clock, upwards of 200 persons assembled at the Town Hall where they were served with tea and coffee in abundance. The Rev. Roger Power, President of the Teetotallers Society, presided on the occasion.

The chairman, in opening the proceedings said: “Mr. Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, this room has been the scene of many an important and enlightened discussion. But never has there been brought forward a subject more worthy of our attention than the Christian education of youth. We have met here tonight to pay a tribute of respect to the memory of a man who laboured and laboured successfully, to promote that education. He commenced his career at a time when the difficulties to be surmounted were innumerable, and when it was so difficult for him to advance. Yet he persevered and heaven blessed his exertions. It is, then in Ireland a subject of no small consideration that in the institution of the Order of the Christian Schools, he laid the foundation of a system of instruction for the children of the humbler classes, which must render unnecessary any Godless system which lawmakers consider it their duty to obtrude and force upon the consciences of the people.

“I am sure that there is not an individual here who does not feel he owes a deep debt of gratitude to the efforts of the man whose memory we have met to honour. In our locality, where branches of his Institutions have been established, many beneficial results have been the consequence. But in no place has the salutary influence of religious education for the poor been more intimately felt than in our own city of Waterford. It is therefore, not without reason that you will pay this tribute to his memory, and be determined to raise a monument to it. For as long as gratitude finds a place in the Irish heart, as long as religion is respected and education cherished, so long shall the venerable name of Edmund Rice, Founder of the Brotherhood of the Christian Schools be handed down to posterity, and his memory be held in lasting veneration.”



### **43. *Blessed Edmund Rice and One of his Many Friends***<sup>461</sup>

“And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

Blessed Edmund Rice lived that piece of Scripture literally all his life. In 1791, for example, as a lay man and businessman, he subscribed to a new Bible just published. On the inside page of that Bible, Edmund wrote for himself a list of quotations entitled “Texts against Usury”. At that time and well before it, merchants --- and even some Catholic merchants --- were lending money at high interest rates to poor people, many of whom were near starvation.

When Blessed Edmund started out to instruct the poor in their Faith and in the things that would help the young people grow and develop and so help their poor parents, he found many friends to help him. One of these was a Mr. Bryan Bolger of Little Longford Street, Dublin. Mr. Bolger became an admirer and a close friend of Edmund. All his life from that on, he was a great benefactor of Br. Rice’s Brothers and of their work in the schools. By profession he was a measurer and architect. He worked for Dublin Corporation and was also at liberty to do business on his own account. He was a good practical Catholic and a gentleman of means and position.

For many, many years Catholics had been deprived of education. There were schools supported by the British Government, and Catholic boys and girls could attend. But in these schools they were in danger of losing their Faith. The great Irishman, Daniel O’Connell had been on the Board of the Kildare Place Society Schools, as were also some other wealthy Catholics. O’Connell eventually saw that these schools were, without doubt, proselytizing schools. O’Connell and the other Catholic gentlemen left the Board. Shortly afterwards the Kildare Place Society opened in Dublin a Model and Training School for teachers and for pupils. This school attracted many new pupils, Catholic and Protestant.

Archbishop Murray of Dublin was alarmed and asked Br. Rice to come to Dublin to open a similar Model and Training School in his archdiocese. Br. Rice had already three schools in very poor parts of the city. Catholic Emancipation had not yet been granted. Blessed Edmund decided to move to Dublin himself and have the headquarters of his Congregation in the metropolis. He planned to do as the Archbishop asked of him. Both the Archbishop and Br. Rice felt that the new project required caution in order to avoid the bigotry of a certain class.

Brother Rice opened his mind to his friend, Bryan Bolger. Mr. Bolger was most willing to co-operate in getting a site for the building. This was a very difficult and a dangerous task. For nearly two years Mr. Bolger had been busy in the examination of various sites. During the whole year of 1827 no progress towards procuring a site had been made. Blessed Edmund had prayers fervently offered up, Novenas performed and Masses said. Heaven at last answered. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1828, “Samuel Scott, Esq., of Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin, gave lease to Bryan Bolger, Esq., of a plot of ground adjoining the North Circular Road, term 980 years, dated from 25<sup>th</sup> March 1828.” One year and six months later, Mr. Bolger resigned the lease to three Brothers: Edmund Rice, Edmund Dunphy and Patrick Ellis,



and in the document he declared “that he had no benefit or interest, but just acted as Trustee for the others.”

Mr. Bolger was not only the gentleman who had procured the site for the North Richmond Street House and Model and Training Schools, but he also superintended the erection of the building that was to be an important landmark in the struggle of Daniel O’Connell and Archbishop Murray and the Catholic Association for the recognition of the Catholic Faith in Ireland and for freedom for the Catholics to share in the government and in all opportunities available in their own country.

From the time he first came to know Br. Rice and to form an idea of the educational work in which he was engaged, Mr. Bryan Bolger had resolved to leave to Blessed Edmund whatever he possessed of at his death, for the work of Christian Education.

One of Blessed Edmund’s loveliest letters was addressed to Bryan Bolger. It shows how close they both were to each other and what Edmund Rice thought of Bryan Bolger.

“I am sorry to be giving you so much trouble; perhaps it may come in my way to do as much for you; however I hope God will supply our inability in this way; it’s a poor thing, I must own, to be expecting the reward of labour from creatures who frequently are forgetful and ungrateful for favours done them. But let us do ever so little for God we will be sure He will never forget it nor let it pass unrewarded..I see you have a mountain of difficulties to get over, to be able to save anything for the charitable purposes, but one thing you may be sure of that whilst you work for God, whether you succeed or not, He will amply reward you...”<sup>462</sup>



#### **44. *Blessed Edmund Rice in the Early Days of his Congregation***<sup>463</sup>

I come to you today to speak of Edmund Rice, whose memory will be commemorated by the erection of a plaque in his honour in Lime Street, in this parish. He was a giant of a Christian man who lived in this locality, who walked your streets, who prayed in this Church. He was a man whom Catherine McAuley described as “the man who came down the appalling lanes and streets east of Townsend Street in 1812, bringing help and hope and a future to the brave but desperately poor and oppressed people of this and other parts of our capital city.”

Edmund Rice was born in Callan in 1762. His people had kept the Faith. And in spite of the Penal Laws, they had prospered. Where the average Catholic of the time lived on one to five acres of land, the Rices had 160 acres. The father, Robert Rice had seven sons and two daughters. He and his sons grew wealthy on farming and on buying and selling cattle. No Catholic could become a member of a town corporation. No Catholic could enter a profession or a trade. But the Penal Laws could not stop Catholics buying or selling. So, many of them became merchants or business men. Edmund’s uncle, Michael Rice was a merchant in the port of Waterford. Edmund was apprenticed to his uncle. Catholic business men were becoming a new force in society. Many of them were moving towards great wealth. Edmund Rice eventually took over his uncle’s business.

Edmund came to Lime Street/Hanover Street in 1812. His new Congregation was only ten years old and it was his fifth foundation. The poverty and depression of Dublin in 1812 was unbelievable. The Act of Union (1800) had left the city impoverished. Hundreds of parliamentary families moved their town houses to London. This led to great unemployment in coachmen, farriers, cooks, maids, and shopkeepers. And before this, the English Industrial Revolution had caused the closure of 600 out of 700 small weaving businesses in the Liberties.<sup>464</sup> In 1793, there were 6,093 unemployed men in the area without help from anyone and their children naked or semi-naked.<sup>465</sup> Swift,<sup>466</sup> in his history of Dublin Bakers, tells us that hunger was so prevalent throughout the poorer parts of Dublin in 1817 that mobs attacked and looted the bread shops.<sup>467</sup> It is estimated that there were 5,000 beggars in the city in 1818, wandering about and spreading all kinds of disease and infection.<sup>468</sup> Fr. Henry Young’s *Catholic Directory* for 1821 said that in that year 500 boys were being educated in Hanover/Lime Street by Br. Patrick Hanrahan assisted by one professed Brother and two novices. The Commissioners of Inquiry into Irish Education visited Lime Street in 1824 and reported that the children learned reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, book-keeping, navigation, algebra and geometry. They said that some boys were 18 years of age and over, and that there were a few sailors, still older, learning navigation.

The same thing happened in Hanover/Lime Street as happened elsewhere. Men were attracted by the power and the vision of Edmund Rice. Again merchants joined him, bringing with them their money to help open more schools.<sup>469</sup> Edmund Rice transferred headquarters to Hanover Street in 1828. Here he lived in poverty for three years, until he moved to the new Generalate in North Richmond Street. He shared in the poverty of the people, in their sorrows, even their sicknesses. By 1825, according to a government report, Edmund Rice and his 30 Brothers in their 24 schools in various towns were instructing 5,500 poor boys. It is unknown how many of these they were feeding and clothing.<sup>470</sup>



## 45. *Blessed Edmund Rice - New Sources*

As the fame of Blessed Edmund Rice grows and as the love and devotion of his friends increases, it is interesting to know that, bit by bit, new sources are adding to our knowledge and appreciation of this man of God.

Recently, the *Waterford Chronicle* of Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1844, yielded a description of the details of his Month's Mind. It will be recalled that at the funeral of Blessed Edmund Rice, the cemetery was so small that very many people could not gain admittance. Bishop Foran saw how disappointed Edmund Rice's many friends were, especially the poor and the broken. He immediately decided on a Month's Mind in the Cathedral for all these people. The *Waterford Chronicle* reported:

Never was there such a scene in our Cathedral as was presented yesterday. The High Mass and Office were celebrated with the greatest solemnity, and the Reverend Richard Fitzgerald preached the panegyric sermon. He spoke with great eloquence, force and research and brought the good works of the venerable Mr. Rice into bold relief. The altar was surrounded with priests and students, and the church was crowded as for a festival. Numerous Christian Brothers encircled the emblems of death, in the middle of the Chapel, and thousands – there could not be less – of children, boys and girls from the schools were present...

The account tells us of the presence of Fr. Matthew, the great apostle of temperance and the most famous and best-beloved figure then in Ireland:

The people could scarcely conceal their exaltation when the familiar and benevolent face of Fr. Matthew was observed. He sat next to our apostolic Bishop. This great benefactor of our race, 'doing good even by stealth', came into Waterford privately to attend the Month's Mind for the soul of Mr. Rice. The good people discovered him, and in the evening the Bishop's residence was surrounded by thousands. The Apostle administered the pledge to several batches and left by the Limerick coach at eight o'clock amid the cheers and the benedictions of the people.

Another source tells us that the great Fr. Matthew stated that he came from Cork the night before in order to be present at the Mass and Office for his dear friend of forty years.

Recently it was discovered that Blessed Edmund Rice was, himself, one of the original committee of 1793, responsible for the building of this very Cathedral in which his Month's Mind was celebrated in 1844. The Cathedral was a nine day wonder for the Catholics at the time of its building. It would have been financed by the only wealthy Catholics of the period – the Catholic merchants. And Edmund Rice was one of these.

A few years ago a copy of a circular letter was discovered, asking for funds to build a memorial to Edmund Rice at Mount Sion. The circular letter was headed by a drawing of the proposed new chapel and school. The date was September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1845 – just a year after his death. The text was as follows:



Sir,

Agreeably to the Resolutions passed at a Meeting of the Citizens of Waterford on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1844, of erecting a Testimonial to the memory of the late Mr. Edmund Ignatius Rice, as a 'tribute of gratitude for the important services rendered by that respected Individual to the Kingdom and in particular to this city, by the institution of the Christian Schools.' The first stone of a chapel for the use of the Christian Brothers, and a Schoolroom for the gratuitous education of one hundred and fifty boys, was laid on the 8<sup>th</sup> instant at Mount Sion by His Lordship, the Right Reverend Dr. Foran. The work is now in progress.

Donations are respectfully solicited and will be thankfully acknowledged by the Right Rev. Dr. Foran, the Rev. Gentlemen of the City, Alderman Meagher, or any other member of the Committee, or by the Christian Brothers.

Signed by order,

Roger Power, Secretary.

A document of the following year, 1846, gives an account of the opening of the Memorial School. It stated that the new School would be for the education of 150 pre-school children. These were children whose both parents were engaged in begging to support the family. It was also stated that Blessed Edmund had such a pre-school in Mount Sion 'from the very beginning.'



## 46. *Blessed Edmund Rice's Golden Book*

In Mount Sion, Waterford, there is a collection of old books from the time of Blessed Edmund. He was a book man. He loved to read. But of all his books, his golden book was the Bible. Br. John Norris left it in writing that he was a young Brother in Mount Sion in 1841. The founder was very old then. One of Br. John's duties was to help Br. Rice up the stairs to his bedroom after breakfast. After attending to him, Br. John tells us that he used to fix his chair and place the Holy Bible beside him which he read for a considerable time every day.

One of the great thrills of my life was in the year 1970 in Rome when I saw for the first time the Bible that Blessed Edmund bought in 1791. It had been used so often its spine was broken and it was now in two halves. He bought this Bible in 1791, eleven years before he founded the Brothers. He was a layman at the time and a wealthy and successful merchant. Two years previously, his young wife had died and left him with his little retarded daughter, Mary.

Our great relic of the mind of Blessed Edmund is this signed copy of what was then called Archbishop Troy's Bible, published in 1790 and now in its fifth edition in 1791. On the first sheet of this big table Bible, Edmund Rice signed his name and the date, 1791. Then followed under the heading of "*Texts against Usury*" a list of texts from the Old and New Testaments, in his own handwriting.

The title he gave to the texts is interesting. Edmund Rice was a wealthy merchant, a Catholic merchant, at the time. Land was life then and land meant money and security. Catholics had been deprived of their land. This meant that the only way that Catholics of intelligence and initiative would make a break through the Penal Laws was by buying and selling. Thus there grew a Catholic merchant class. Many of these merchants were quite wealthy. There is evidence that some of these Catholic merchants added very much to their wealth by lending money at high rates of interest to their less fortunate fellow Catholics. Maybe the death of his wife and the birth of his retarded daughter brought about some profound conversion in the merchant, Edmund Rice, so that God opened his eyes to the desperate plight of very many Catholic families around him. Evidently Edmund Rice was warning himself against this usury.

A renowned Scripture scholar, the late Dr. Dermot Cox, O.F.M., saw a definite pattern running through Edmund Rice's chosen texts against usury. The texts start with Ex. 22:25 (the "Book of the Covenant"). They finish with Mt 5:42 and Lk 6:35 (The Sermon on the Mount).

"What we have in these texts" says Fr. Cox, "is a line of development from a civilised code of justice, where the poor and the deprived are taken care of because it is the right thing to do, to an ideal, like Christ, of total love for all."

"Edmund Rice" continues Fr. Cox, "inspired by his Bible, hovered with compassion over the jailed, the hungry, the condemned, the dying. Finally, this great Christian man lived literally in his life the conditions for the inheritance of the Kingdom, mentioned in Mt 25:35-40: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you



The logo for Blessed Edmund Rice, featuring his name in a blue, cursive script with a registered trademark symbol.

clothed me, I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee? And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

Truly the Bible was Blessed Edmund’s Golden Book, his Book of Life.



## **47. *Blessed Edmund, One of God's Giants in difficult times*<sup>471</sup>**

The early years of the nineteenth century saw the birth of nine new Religious Congregations in Ireland. Five of these congregations were of Brothers and four of them Sisters. These nine congregations served our own Catholic people in schools and hospitals. Later they spread throughout the world serving the poor and the deprived people of other countries. They were God's inspired answer to broken and often despairing people.

The Penal Laws against Catholics in Ireland had begun in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. These laws forbade Catholics to send their children abroad to be educated, to set up schools in Ireland or to teach Catholic children.<sup>472</sup>

From the early days of the Tudor Conquest, English policy in Ireland aimed, through education and encouragement, to promote schooling as an agency of conquest, with a view to spreading the use of the English language and the Protestant Faith.<sup>473</sup>

In Ireland a couple of hundred thousand Protestants had all power, all privilege, as against four to six million Catholics who, with early marriages and large families, were growing constantly in numbers. The Protestants had a parliament all to themselves; no Catholics allowed. For many years Catholics had not even the right to vote. They could not enter the professions, could not be members of town or city corporations.

The only way that intelligent or creative Catholics could make progress in their lives was by buying and selling. And this was something despised by the wealthy. Edmund Rice was one of these merchants. However, he did very well in his business and accumulated a huge fortune. After the death of his wife and the birth of Mary, his retarded daughter, he suffered loss and sorrow and terrible disappointment. Then God called him to be the father of another family. This family was to be the thousands of broken Irish pauper children of whom John Bowles, Chief Baron of the English Exchequer, in 1759, declared that "the Law did not presume an Irish Papist to exist except for the purpose of punishment."

Several contemporary accounts give us an insight into the magnitude of what Blessed Edmund and the other founders and foundresses of the time had to face and often to finance. They had to lift all those poor people and their families. They had to educate and feed and clothe their children and instruct whole families in their Faith. John Swift was one who wrote of the time:

Hunger was so prevalent throughout the poorer parts of Dublin City in 1817 that mobs attacked and looted the bread shop.<sup>474</sup> It is estimated that there were 5,000 beggars in the city in 1818, wandering about and spreading all kinds of disease and infection.<sup>475</sup>

John Meagher, in an article in *Reportorium Novum*<sup>476</sup> in 1955, writes:

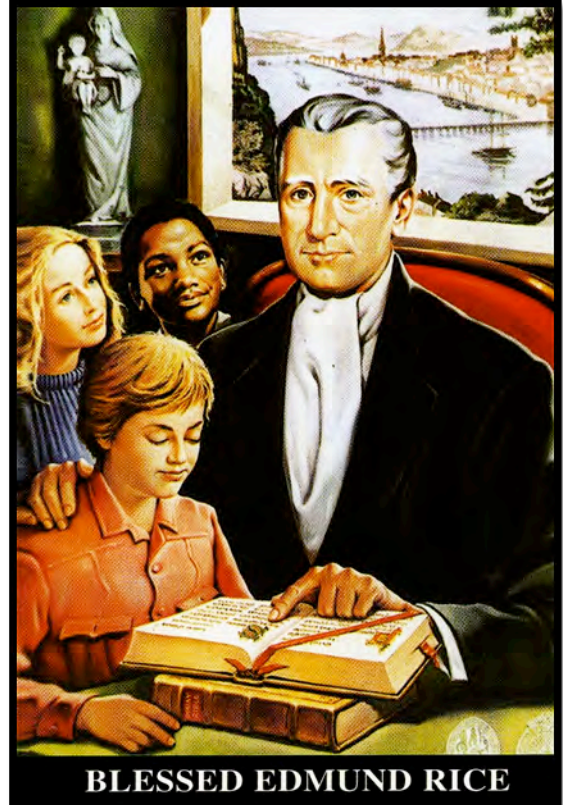
By the year 1816, Edmund Rice had houses in five different dioceses. In 1812 he established his first school in Dublin in a very poor area around the seaport. Within a few years he had a novitiate and four schools, with several hundred children in each, in the Liberties, one of the most depressed areas in a very depressed city. In 1801 the Irish Parliament was joined in union with the British Parliament at Westminster. This caused a great loss of money and employment to Dublin City. Before this, the



Industrial Revolution had caused the closure of 600 out of the 700 small weaving businesses in the Liberties. In 1793 there were 6093 unemployed men in the area, without help from anyone and their children naked or semi-naked.

In 1772 the population of Ireland was 3.6 million; in 1791: 4.7 million; in 1821: 6.8 million; in 1845: 8 million.<sup>477</sup> There were famines in 1741; in 1756; in 1817; 1819; 1822; 1836; and the Great Famine in 1845-1847 when a million people died and another million had to emigrate to England or North America. These famines were usually followed by smallpox, typhus and famine fever.

Edmund Rice and the other founders and foundresses helped the people in every way they could. And Blessed Edmund was a great help to at least three of the foundresses. Blessed Edmund was forty years old when he started his new congregations. And he had never been trained as a teacher. The average number of pupils in each class was between 100 and 150. Twenty three years after he started, according to the Blue Book of Education, published by the English Government (1825), 40 of his Brothers were teaching in 12 different towns or cities in 24 classrooms and were teaching, between them 5,500 pupils. In 1838 they were teaching 7,500 children in 43 schools. And in 1862, 18 years after the death of Blessed Edmund they had 181 schools and 20,280 pupils.<sup>478</sup>



In the little graveyard where Blessed Edmund was buried, 18 other Brothers were eventually buried also. Nine of these died before 40 years of age. Blessed Edmund died aged 82. Before he died, he saw schools also opened by his Brothers in Britain, in Gibraltar and in Australia. He had answered God's call and had educated and strengthened the Faith of as many children as possible.



## 48. *Blessed Edmund Rice's Daughter*<sup>479</sup> By Michael Coady

Later this summer a plaque will be erected and unveiled in Carrick in remembrance of Mary Rice, only child of Blessed Edmund Rice, founder of the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers.

In 1859, Mary Rice died in Carrick at the age of 70, and was buried in Carrickbeg. The historical marker in her memory will be erected by Carrick UDC on behalf of the people of the town, also honouring by association the Christian Brothers in Carrick and their founder who was beatified last October.

The Council's gesture is also an acknowledgment of the incalculable debt of gratitude owed locally to the teaching order which opened its second foundation in Carrick in 1806, and still retains an educational presence in the town almost two centuries later. The Brothers' Carrick house still holds an important and unique oil painting of Edmund Rice, as well as "the Founder's chair" upon which he liked to sit when on visits to Carrick.

### **BIRTH AND DEATH**

The amount we know for certain about Mary Rice and the circumstances of her birth and her life can be briefly told. Her father Edmund had been born in Callan in 1762, and became a very successful and wealthy businessman in Waterford, where he married Mary Elliot, the daughter of a tanner, in 1785. The great crisis and turning point in Edmund Rice's life occurred four years later when his young wife died. One tradition has it that she lost her life in a riding accident, but the well known historian Br Liam Ó Caithnia more convincingly posits as the cause of her death the dreadful fever that swept Europe in 1789, and according to the contemporary Carrick writer Dorothea Herbert "carried off millions in every quarter of the globe".

Mary Rice's birth is dated as the year of her mother's death and apparently coincided with it. The exact nature of her lifelong handicap remains uncertain but apparently consisted of mental disability. Subsequent references during her lifetime are reticent about this matter, variously describing Mary Rice as 'delicate' or 'weak-minded'.

We do know that she spent her secluded life in the care of others after her widowed father Edmund had turned his back on his business career and started on his great mission to provide education for poor Catholic boys. It seems that Mary was first cared for by her father's brother Patrick. In later years, Edmund Rice made financial provision for her welfare and some details of these regular payments are on record.

### **SUCCESSION**

In spite of all of Edmund Rice's self-sacrifice and success in his mission, the last years of his life were sad ones. The great labour of his life had been immense and his health and abilities were failing. He retired to Mount Sion in 1838, and the subsequent transition of power within the order proved difficult and acrimonious.

His eventual successor as superior-general was Clonmel born Paul Riordan, a man who was antagonistic towards Rice, whom he saw as senile at that stage, and whose mental stability he



even questioned. There were occasions when their personalities clashed, with the old man enduring insult and humiliation before he died in 1844.

These unpleasant facts surely illustrate the truth that in the matter of human failings and personal interaction, religious organisations are little different to lay ones in dynamics. The miracle often is that so much good can be accomplished in spite of human weakness or disagreement.

## **MOVE TO CARRICK**

Mary Rice came to live in Carrick in 1849, five years after her father's death and while the dreadful shadow of the famine still hung over all. For one brief period in the previous year of 1848 it had seemed that Carrick might be the centre of a revolution on the part of the Young Ireland movement, but that episode had fizzled out in Ballingarry.

Before she came to Carrick, Mary is believed to have been living with relatives in Callan. We actually know next to nothing about the details of her life in Carrick after she came here in 1849, except that the Christian Brothers made small payments towards her upkeep. It is reasonable to suppose that she lived with her Carrick cousins the Daltons, who were prosperous millers living at Mill Street.

A sister of Edmund Rice's mother had married one of these Daltons in the late 18th century; hence the Carrick-Callan connection. To the best of my knowledge these Daltons petered out in the course of the late 19th century, but they had been well-heeled people of status in the town. In the Griffith's Valuation record of around 1850, William Dalton of Mill Street possessed a house, a miller's house, offices, a flour and corn mill, a second corn mill and land, to a total rateable valuation of £52 7s 0d.

The Christian Brothers' records attest that Mary Rice died on 23rd January 1859, and that she was buried the following day "in the churchyard in Carrickbeg". Thereby hangs a puzzle. In which of the Carrickbeg graveyards was she buried? There are three, clustered only yards apart, viz. that of the parish church of St. Molleran, that of the Franciscan Friary, and the ancient (now disused) burial ground of Reilig na Muc.

Persuasive circumstantial evidence suggests the latter site, though we will probably never know for certain. The late J. J. Healy, an indefatigable Carrick chronicler, author and writer for the newspapers, recorded some gravestone inscriptions at Reilig na Muc in the 1920s and mentioned in a newspaper piece that the Daltons were buried there. Unfortunately, any Dalton tombstone there fell victim (along with other historical markers) to a careless local authority "tidy-up" of the disused graveyard in the late 1940s. My guess however, is that Mary Rice's name was never put on a tombstone. The whole culture of her time (and into our own time) was to keep retarded or otherwise disabled people in seclusion; to render them publicly invisible.

## **FRUITION**

Over fifty years ago, Brother John Nolan (now retired but hale and hearty) was teaching in Carrick and he instituted a widespread but fruitless search for a Mary Rice headstone in all the graveyards in and around Carrickbeg. He has never lost his interest in the subject, and I am glad to say that his enthusiasm has at last borne fruit with the project to erect a memorial plaque. Br. Nolan, along with two of the brethren particularly interested in history, met me in



Carrick shortly after Easter. We had already drafted an agreed text for the plaque which Carrick UDC will erect.

Together we walked the ground in Carrickbeg, looking at the options for the plaque's location. With the agreement of Fr. Patrick Fitzgerald, PP, we eventually recommended to the local authority that the proposed limestone plaque should be fixed to the "Famine Wall" in central Carrickbeg. This is a high stone wall built in a famine relief project in 1846, bounding the parish church. Though at the physical and historical heart of Carrickbeg, the plaque remembering Mary Rice will be in a "neutral" location between the three neighbouring graveyards.

On the day, later in the summer when the plaque is formally unveiled, I'm certain that there will be no happier man in Carrick than Brother Nolan, who has pursued this matter for over half a century.

## **Blessed Edmund Rice Prayer**

O God, we thank you  
for the life of Blessed Edmund Rice.  
He opened his heart to Christ  
present in those oppressed by poverty and injustice.  
May we follow his example of faith and generosity.  
Grant us the courage and compassion  
of Blessed Edmund  
as we seek to live lives of love and service.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



49.

### ***Br. Rice of Pim Street***

“I would give the world to Brother Rice if I had it: He was so good to the children.”

(Mrs. Annie Mc Donagh, who knew Br. Rice and who died, aged 103, in 1912, in the workhouse in Dublin)

Some years ago, in Belfast, Brother Lynch brought me to visit the Brothers' school in Pim Street. It was a joy to find that the school was dedicated to Brother Rice. It was a further joy to realise that this was not an empty dedication. Though there were few Brothers on the staff, the love for and the understanding of Edmund Rice among the teachers and the pupils of the school was a revelation and a lovely gift that I took with me from Belfast.

It is only in recent times that we are discovering the size and the might of the great man of God, Edmund Rice, and the depth and the breadth of his vision for the intellectual liberation of his people. Times were somewhat similar to what they are today in Ireland. Strong ideas were coming in from across the seas. Religion was at a low. The Catholic clergy were silent or disorganised. The French Revolution had promised the world liberty, equality and fraternity. The Age of Reason had envisaged a completely happy secularised society where God and the things of God would be outdated. Then God raised up new prophets, men and women. Giant Christian people like Nano Nagle, Catherine McAuley, Mary Aikenhead, Teresa Ball, Edmund Rice and Bishop Delaney gave their all to bring help and hope and trust in God to our downtrodden people and later to oppressed and broken people throughout the world. Catherine McAuley's Sisters of Mercy eventually became one of, if not the largest, Orders of Nuns in the Church. Edmund Rice founded two of the new congregations and one of them, the Christian Brothers, became the third largest Brotherhood in the Catholic Church.

But to return to Blessed Edmund Rice. When he came to Dublin, for example, in 1812, to Hanover Street, among “the appalling lanes and streets east of Townsend Street, he brought help and hope and a future to the brave but desperately poor and oppressed people of this and other parts of our capital city. As a founder, he had not given up all to follow Christ. He had kept his lands and house property and government bonds and stocks and shares. He had no other way to finance his work for God's poor. All day, he and his early Brothers taught poor boys in the schools; apprentices in the evening and often parents at night. To build schools and too furnish them, even simply, to buy books and to feed and clothe some of the poor families, took thousands and thousands of pounds. And the classes had between a hundred and one hundred and fifty boys in each. This was to reach as many as possible poor boys who, until then had no hope and no opportunity for advancement from utter poverty.

Brother Rice was beatified in 1996. The Church seemed to realise that this giant of a Christian man of God, if beatified, could give hope and consolation and compassionate understanding to so many people whose lives parallel his own: to men who have lost their wives; to women who have lost their husbands; to parents of retarded children; to businessmen; to the sick and the sore and the weary; above all to teachers and to all who help the young. Blessed Edmund was a most compassionate and loving man. This is well illustrated in a sentence in one of his letters: “Were we to know the merit and the



value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we should prize it more than gold or silver.”

Blessed Edmund Rice lies in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in Waterford. Thousands of people from all over the world ask for and receive favours from God through his intercession each year. How proud he must be of Pim Street School and of so many Brother Rice Schools, like Pim Street, throughout the world. How concerned he must be about all the teachers and pupils and parents of such dedicated and helpful schools? How much must he love you all and be so willing to help if you ask? God bless Blessed Edmund’s school in Pim Street and in all the Pim Streets of the world where Christianity and the kindness and love of God are taught and practiced in the spirit of Blessed Edmund Rice, God’s Merchant Prince.

#### Prayer for a favour

O God, you inspired Blessed Edmund Rice  
to follow your son  
in a life of consecrated service of the poor  
and of all in need of a truly Christian education.  
Grant through his intercession  
the petition I now make.....  
I ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.





## 50. *Brother Rice and some school difficulties*

An ancient book has recently come to light on one of the higher shelves of the Mount Sion House Library. The book is a biography of Mother Mary Aikenhead, Foundress of the Irish Sisters of Charity. The book is entitled: *Mary Aikenhead: her Life, her work and her Friends*. The book was published in 1879, by M. H. Gill, Dublin. The author of the book, strangely, is given as S. A.

It is a big volume and is quite detailed. Among other things it gives valuable information about the enormous difficulties that existed for the new Congregations trying to open schools for young Catholic boys or girls. Nine of these Congregations came into existence during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. All of these new Congregations of Nuns and Brothers, among other ministries, set up Christian schools for poor Catholic boys and girls. God, in his goodness, inspired the rise of these new Congregations of men and women, to rescue Catholic children and their parents from the appalling effects of the Penal Laws of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These savage laws were the work of a frightened minority of Colonist Protestants who feared the rapid growth of the poor Irish Catholics. Between 1697 and 1746 these penal laws were constantly being increased. Catholics were barred from schooling and from teaching school. But there were plenty of Protestant schools, financed by the English government. All power and privilege was denied the Catholics. Worse still, proselytism was rife in an attempt to increase the number of Protestants. These laws were a deliberate attempt by a minority to subjugate a whole people. Not even one of these terrible laws was repealed until 1771.

The opening by the Irish Sisters of Charity, of their first school for poor Catholic girls is described in this biography of Mother Mary Aikenhead. One of the Sisters, Mary Xavier Hennessey, was asked to visit all the female poor schools in the city to discover, if possible, a well-organised system which might be adapted by them for their school. The school which seemed to come the nearest to her requirements was one in Meath Street in the Liberties, containing 400 pupils and kept by a member of the Society of Friends. When the nuns' school was opened on the feast of St. Brigid, 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1830, the Meath St. system got a fair trial. But it turned out to have only two points that could be suitable. Some of the things that were part of the system were of no help. For instance, while the teacher was teaching the 400 children, four adults spent the whole day walking from corner to corner of the room. This marching chore was supposed to maintain order and to see that the children were kept quiet. The task of keeping things in order turned out more laborious than the management of the school itself.

There were other difficulties for the Sisters. Owing to the want of Catholic schools many of the very poor Catholic children had been in the habit of attending sectarian schools where a free breakfast was provided. The poor parents of the poor Catholic children told their children to take the breakfast but not to listen to the religious instruction. This produced in the children a feeling of contempt for their teachers, which they made known by their bad conduct. When the Sisters started, they could not handle the girls. Kind Providence came to their help.

Mother Aikenhead and her Sisters used to visit the women's ward in Jervis Street Hospital every Sunday evening. Br. Rice and his Brothers used to visit the men's ward at the same time. Sister Hennessey determined on accosting Brother Rice and begging him to help the Sisters of Charity in their difficulty. She did so on two occasions but each time he turned



from her appearing to suppose she was jesting. At last, seeing she was in sober earnest, he listened to her story of the school troubles.

“Well,” said he in reply, “I’ll send you Br. Duggan.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Sister Hennessy, “is it that little boy?”

“Little boy!” rejoined Mr. Rice : “I wish I had fifty such little boys.”

Br. Duggan was teaching his own school all the week. He asked the Sisters to bring the girls to school on Saturdays. The first Saturday, Br. Duggan appeared in the midst of a crowded room of unruly children. He had to whistle and shout to command silence. He came each Saturday. By degrees he forbore assuming any authority before the Sisters, so as to leave the children entirely dependent on them. In the course of a few months perfect order reigned in the schools. Besides making these Saturday visits, Br. Duggan came in the evenings to teach arithmetic to the Sisters.

Within a year or so the Sisters were able to publish a “School Government Book” compiled by Sister Xavier Hennessy. It was based mainly on a “Government Book” already published by the Christian Brothers. Sister Xavier’s book was much used by other Congregations in Ireland and England. “Experience proves our system good” said Sister Hennessy “as the children are induced to love their lessons from the attractive manner in which they are given, and religion being the basic part of their education, the mind is formed to piety which stands to them in after life.”



## 51. *Early Tributes to Edmund Rice*

The life of Blessed Edmund Rice and the amazing work done by him and his Brothers has been noted and highly praised from a very early period in the history of his Congregations.

In 1818 a two volume history of the City of Dublin was written by three authors. One of these was a Protestant clergyman. Edmund Rice had sent some of his Brothers to Dublin in 1812. They opened their first school in that city in a very poor area near the docks on the River Liffey. In 1818, just six years later, they were mentioned in this new general history of the city: Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh, History of Dublin, Dublin 1818, Vol. 1, p. 66.

The Presentation Order for the education of the poor commenced in Ireland in 1804, by a humble individual named Rice, under the auspices of Dr. Hussey, titular Bishop of Waterford. From that early period, schools on the same plan, or rather branches from the original one, have extended their beneficial effects to Cork, Carrick-on-Suir, Dungarvan, Thurles, Cappoquin and Dublin. The gentlemen of the Order, after a probation of two years, make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. But their principal vow is the gratuitous instruction of youth, to which they devote their whole time and attention. In the school of Lime Street (Dublin) are six Brothers who live in seclusion and community. Some of them are very young and all of them gentlemen of independent circumstances. They voluntarily left the world, without entering into Holy Orders, at a time when others begin to enjoy it, and feel more pleasure in the society of the other poor children they instruct, than in any other source of social enjoyment.

Three years later, in 1821, the national Catholic Directory gave a detailed account of this same school in Lime Street (or Hanover Street), Dublin:

A Presentation Monastery, Hanover Street East; Mr. Patrick Francis Hanrahan, Superior; one professed religious and two novices. They govern a very extensive Day School where 500 boys are educated on the Lancastrian Plan (a system of education for dealing with very large numbers of pupils, which is now universally adopted in all Charity Schools in this Archdiocese.

The names of the trustees of the school are given, including Most Rev. Dr. Murray, later Archbishop of Dublin. A Charity Sermon for the Brothers in the school was noted for the third Sunday before Septuagesima.

The same Catholic Directory of 1821 also gave a brief summary of the details for all of Br. Rice's schools for the year 1821:

This Presentation Institute for educating poor children was commenced about 20 years ago in Waterford; its progress through Ireland since that period is as follows:-

In Waterford, one house, 6 religious, 600 children educated.

In Dublin, 2 houses, 3 schools, 10 religious, 1200 children.

In Cork, one house, 4 subjects, 650 children.

In Thurles, one house, 3 subjects and 300 children.

In Dungarvan, one house, 2 subjects and 250 children.

In Carrick-on-Suir, one house, 4 subjects and 350 children.

In Cappoquin, one house, 3 subjects, 200 children.



**TOTAL:**

9 houses, 37 religious, and 4,250 children are educated in learning, virtue and morality.

What dedication! No wonder that 9 out of the 17 Brothers buried with Br. Rice in the cemetery at Mount Sion, died under 40 years of age. They seemed to want to raise all the Catholic boys of Ireland, or at least as many as they could, to the advantages of educational opportunities.

Finally, the late Br. David Fitzpatrick in his research came upon a marvellous tribute to Blessed Edmund in a report of Rev. Fr. Donnellan, Catholic Inspector of the Kildare Place Society, given before the House of Lords in England in 1825:

In the town of Waterford there is one who has devoted his time in a most praiseworthy manner to the benevolent purpose of educating the ignorant and destitute part of his countrymen. I inspected that school by his permission, and feel great pleasure in being able to add that everything was admirably conducted. I never saw more order, more regularity or greater system than in that school under the superintendence of a Mr. Rice.<sup>480</sup>



## 52. *Edmund Rice and North Richmond Street*

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1838, an old man, Edmund Rice sat in his room in North Richmond Street, Dublin, writing his Last Will and Testament.

In the Name of God Amen. I, Edmund Rice of North Richmond Street in the County of Dublin, Gentleman, being weak of body but of sound mind and memory and understanding, thanks be to God, DO make and publish this my last Will and Testament in writing, hereby revoking and annulling all and every Will or Wills by me heretofore made and declaring this only to be my last Will and Testament – WHEREAS I have for many years past laboured for the advancement of Education amongst the poorer classes and other works of charity to which I have devoted my life and devises and Donation from time to time of property, Now bequeath my estate and property of every nature and kind whatsoever including all property so from time to time devised or granted to me unto ..... to be applied towards the support of the schools now instituted by me and my Brothers in said undertaking for Education of the poor both in Ireland and England and in and towards the establishing and supporting such other schools of like nature as hereafter the Trustees..... and the Brothers in such undertaking also may from time to time hereafter aid and assist in the advancement thereof..... IN testimony whereof I have hereto affixed my seal and subscribed my name, this 26<sup>th</sup> day of February in the year of Our Lord 1838.<sup>481</sup>

A handwritten signature of Edmund Rice in blue ink, matching the logo above.

The old man signed the document carefully. Two of his Brothers were on hand to act as witnesses as also was George Lindsay of 54 Capel Street, Dublin, Barrister-at-Law. When the work was done and the others had withdrawn, Edmund Rice sat alone in his second-storey front corner bedroom. Tomorrow he would say good-bye to North Richmond Street, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Generalate or headquarters of his growing Congregation. Tomorrow, broken, weary and old, he undertook the long journey to Waterford where he had lived before and where he was eventually to be buried. But now work needed to be done in the capital city. There was a big job of work to be done for the Church in this old, depressed and destitute city. The North Richmond Street house and school were the crowning glory of many years' work and its existence was a triumph for the good Archbishop who dreamed, among other things for his archdiocese, of a large model training school for Brothers and Catholic lay teachers that would be staffed by Mr. Rice and his Brothers. The Founder must have had many memories that last evening of all that had happened in the ten years.

He would have remembered that he was already an old man of 66 in 1828 when Archbishop Murray sent for him and told him that he wanted now what could have been more easily done in 1816 (?). Was it not Archbishop Murray who had encouraged and helped Edmund Rice in the difficult period of transition from an enclosed diocesan order of solemn vows to a Papal Congregation with the eleventh century Papal privilege of exemption and a Superior General elected from among the Brothers? And now the Archbishop was mustering his forces to meet the challenge of the times. Dublin since 1815 was a depressed city. The silk-weaving industry, which had employed thousands in the city, had perished completely and several other industries had met with a like fate.<sup>482</sup> In the Liberties only 100 looms were weaving



woollen cloth where there had been 700.<sup>483</sup> There were filth and squalor, poverty, disease and wretchedness side by side with spacious town-house lavishness. The poor quarters of the city were extremely extensive and “the filth, the uninhabitableness of the houses and the neglect of the streets”<sup>484</sup> surpassed all description. Coupled with all this poverty and misery was the threat to the Faith of the people. Proselytism was in full swing. The zeal engendered by John Wesley’s visits to Ireland towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was now bearing fruit. The New Reformation Society had been founded in Dublin in 1824 and vast preaching campaigns were being organised all over Ireland.<sup>485</sup> The Protestant Archbishop of Dublin had declared in the House of Lords that he was convinced that in a short time the whole of Ireland would be converted to the Established Church.<sup>486</sup> In Dublin a big effort was being made to make converts to the Protestant Faith. And there were plenty of Protestant schools.

Edmund Rice’s men were already at work in the city since 1812. He would have remembered the opening of the first house away down beyond the lanes and courts east of Townsend Street Chapel. It was in that same Chapel, the following year, 1813, that his friend Father Matthew – later to become famous as the Apostle of Temperance – was ordained. He would have remembered the Herculean work these Brothers in Hanover Street had done and the flourishing of vocations that seemed to follow their lives of poverty and Gospel simplicity, so much so that they were able within a short time to open several schools in the Liberties. He would have been proud that these Dublin Brothers had merited within six years a generous mention in Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh’s large new History of Dublin City.<sup>487</sup> He would have remembered the transfer of headquarters and of the novitiate from Waterford to Hanover Street on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1828, and the encouragement these Dublin Brothers received from his presence among them.

And then there had been the great venture north of the Liffey. Archbishop Murray had been much occupied between 1815 and 1825 in collecting for and building the new Pro-Cathedral in Marlborough Street. This task was now completed and the next plan was that something be done for Catholic education in the sorely tried Parish of St. Mary’s. In 1827, a year before Edmund Rice came to reside in Hanover Street, a branch school had been opened in no. 42 Jervis Street and already it was filled with boys. It had been staffed at first by two Brothers from Hanover Street, who went there daily. Shortly afterwards it had been necessary to send a third Brother. And there was Jervis Street Hospital where Edmund Rice and his Brothers used to attend on Sundays to give instruction to the men and boys in the wards.

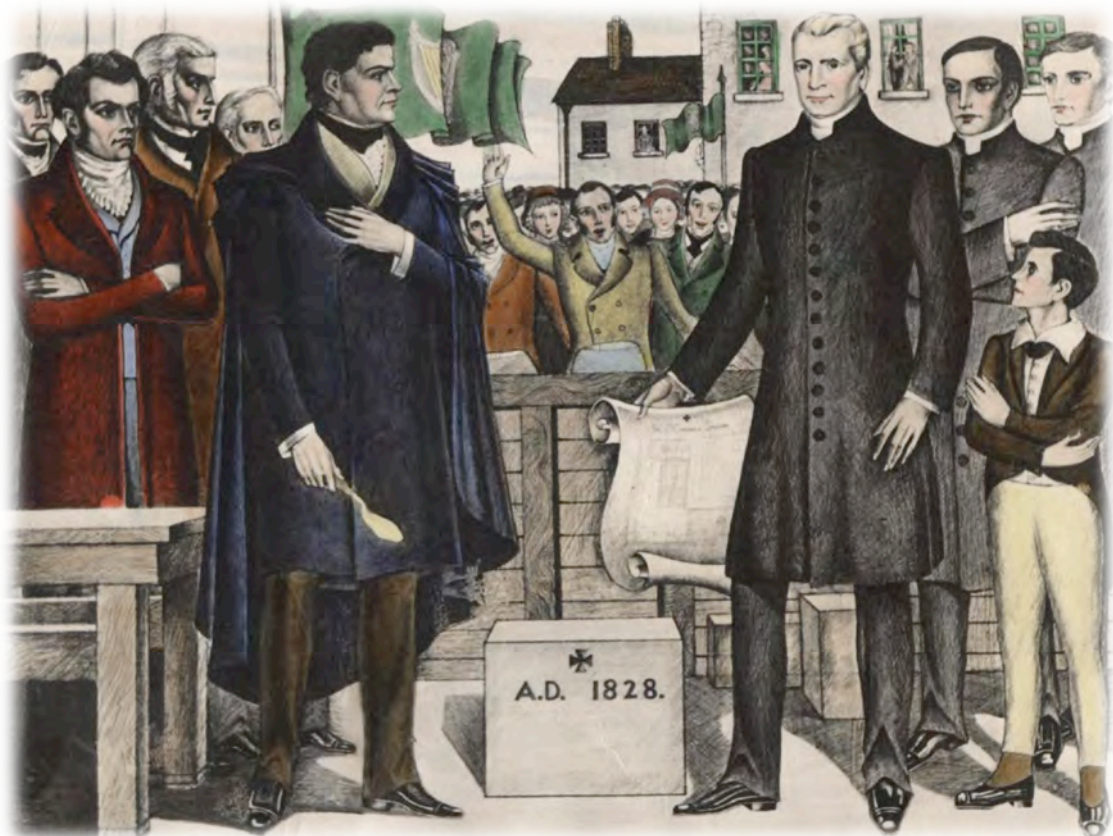
But the Jervis Street School had been but a prelude to a bigger and more enduring work in the Archbishop’s parish. The Catholic Association had been founded in 1823 and by 1828 it was at the height of its power. Daniel O’Connell had brought the Catholic question out of the darkness of the “inner circle where power resided.” He had exposed the proselytising practices of the Kildare Place Society and high on his Association’s list of priorities was a concern for Catholic education. They had voted £1,500 towards the Archbishop’s plan for a large training and model school which would benefit and encourage the Catholics of the Archdiocese. But first, a site must be found.

Edmund Rice’s memories of the search for that site could not but have recalled his dear old friend, Bryan Bolger. Mr. Bolger was a measurer or architect by profession and was employed by the Dublin Corporation. He was a wealthy man and was one of the leading Catholic laymen in Dublin. His niece had entered Mother Mary Aikenhead’s Sisters of Charity and he himself had helped Catherine McAuley to build her first house in Baggot Street.<sup>488</sup> He resided at No. 1 Little Longford Street, just around the corner from the house in

Aungier Street where Tom Moore, the poet, was born. The Archbishop had asked Mr. Bolger to search for a site for the great school to be located north of the Liffey. Edmund Rice would have remembered all the prayers that he and his Brothers had said for the success of the venture, especially during their annual retreat. Great care and caution had been required and the Brothers had been asked to practice great reserve in speaking of it except to trusted friends, in order to elude the bigotry of a certain class. And then the joy as Mr. Bolger announced in the spring of 1828 that he had succeeded in obtaining a suitable site: “a vacant lot at North Richmond Street on the Circular Road.”

Bryan Bolger had acquired the site. He had also drawn up plans for the building and had resigned the lease on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1828 to Brothers Edmund Rice, Patrick Ellis and Austin Dunphy. Brother Ellis later recorded that Mr. Bolger “had no benefit or interest but acted as Trustee for the Brothers who paid all the rents and the fine of £200.”

Edmund Rice would have remembered all the joys and sorrows that crowded into his life with the acquiring of this site. He would have recalled all the vicissitudes that he and his friend, Bryan Bolger, had shared before the North Richmond Street house and schools became a reality.



**Figure 1. Daniel O'Connell lays the foundation stone at Richmond Street.**

There had been the laying of the foundation stone. That had been on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, Feast of St. Columba, 1828. Archbishop Murray had asked that Daniel O'Connell should be requested to lay the foundation stone. The Catholic Association had been delighted and had decided on a public show of strength for the occasion. All “Roman Catholic clergy and gentlemen were



requested to attend at the Catholic Rooms on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> at one half after three o'clock to proceed in a body to Richmond Street." Over 100,000 people attended.

At Richmond Street, Edmund Rice would have remembered, he and his Brothers had greeted O'Connell, as the people called loudly for a speech from the Liberator. With great ceremony the first stone had been laid and then O'Connell had addressed his words of hope and faith in the project in hands, to the thousands of people crowding all the approaches to the site.

Edmund Rice would have remembered another happy day at North Richmond Street. It was the 11<sup>th</sup> of August that same year, 1828, when Archbishop Murray laid the foundation stone of the new monastery which was to house the General Council of the Congregation, the novices and the community of Brothers who would staff the model school. And then had followed years of hunger, trial, sorrow and difficulty. For three years little could be done on account of the lack of funds. Promised sources of revenue had not materialised and at one stage Edmund Rice had witnessed the sad sight of a half-finished building lying exposed to the winter rains with not a stone placed on a stone for months.

Many of the hardships, however, must have been forgotten on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1831 when the founder and his two Assistants together with the Novice Master, Brother Bernard Duggan, and four novices, took possession of the new dwelling house. Next day, the Feast of St. John the Baptist, Archbishop Murray said Mass in the monastery chapel and blessed the whole building. He took breakfast with the community and a large gathering of the Dublin Brothers and their friends was present.

Edmund Rice, as has been said, lived for seven years in North Richmond Street house and he presided at two General Chapters or Assemblies of his Congregation in that house. Both had been rather difficult experiences for him. At the first of these Chapters, in 1832, when he was 70 years of age, his Brethren had required of him by a large majority that he continue to lead them as Superior General, and they had assured by a rescript from Rome that he would do so for life. At the other General Chapter, in 1836, Brother Austin Dunphy, his old friend and his Assistant since 1822, had resigned his office and was replaced by a Brother from Cork who naturally would not be accustomed to his ways. Both General chapters dealt with the new National Board of Education. In the Chapter of 1832 there had been some discussion as to the merits of this system and as to whether the Brothers should place their schools under the Board. Archbishop Murray had advised the Brothers to give the system a trial. Edmund Rice had applied for the admission of six schools: two in Dublin; two in Co. Waterford and Mount Sion and Ennistymon. Richmond Street had been one of the Dublin schools chosen. Four years later, the General Chapter of 1836 had decided that it was not possible for the Brothers to continue in connection with the National Board as such a connection would "ultimately prove fatal to the religious as well as to the professed object of the institute." There had been the advantage of a small capitation grant for each boy (2/- a year), a free supply of textbooks, writing materials and furniture. But the Brothers felt they could not compromise on religious instruction or on the religious atmosphere in the schools. It was to Edmund Rice that the unpleasant duty fell of telling the Archbishop of the Congregation's decision. There was now for him also the added burden of looking for some alternative source of income to support the house and school that were desperately poor, "Nobody knows or can know" wrote Brother Bernard Duggan years later "the privations endured during our first years in Richmond Street. It was poverty indeed."

In 1834, between the two General Chapters Bryan Bolger died. Edmund Rice took charge of the funeral arrangements. The bill, dated 15 December 1834, is still extant. It seems to have





been an impressive funeral as it moved off from Little Longford Street through the narrow lanes on its short journey to Clarendon Street Chapel. There was a suite of coffins. There were attendants wearing bands and scarves. Seventeen pairs of gloves had been ordered for the occasion. Mr. P. Farrell of 5 Cook Street and 7&8 High Street was the undertaker. The bill came to £30 14s 4d.<sup>489</sup> One of the letters found among Bryan Bolger's papers was one he had received twenty-four years previously from Edmund Rice.<sup>490</sup> In it was the following sentence: "Were we to know the merit and value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we should prize it more than gold and silver."

It had been seven years of joys and sorrows for Edmund Rice. He was about to leave a house that held such deep as well as such small and gentle memories for him. There were the people in the firms with which he had done business.

There was the firm of Todd Burns and Co., at the corner of Jervis Street and Mary Street, hosiers and haberdashers.<sup>491</sup>

There was Peter Carroll, Plumber and Copper Layer of 18 Aston's Quay, who regularly attended to the plumbing of the house and school and in one of whose bills charged "to plumber and helper, one quarter of a day soldering = 2/-"<sup>492</sup>

There was Michael, and then John, Devoy, victualler of Summerhill, who supplied mutton for 5d a lb., beef for 4d and pork for 4d a lb.<sup>493</sup>

There was the Soap and Candle Manufactory, 1 Lower Dorset Street who regularly supplied 22 lb. Boxes of candles at 7d a lb.<sup>494</sup>

There was the firm of M. Leonard, Grocer and Coal Merchant, of 51 Lower Dorset Street, who kept "the Best Kendle Coal" and charged for it 21/- a ton in March; 19/- in April and 18/- in July, August and September.<sup>495</sup>

There was the firm of Charles Toole, Mackey and Furlong, Nursery Seedmen and Florists, of 41 Westmoreland Street, who supplied gooseberry bushes at 3d each ; blackcurrant bushes at 5d each; apple trees at 1/- ; as well as seeds for savoy, broccoli, leeks, parsnips and carrots for the garden.<sup>496</sup>

There was the firm of C. Elliot, Double Tin Copper and Iron Manufactory of 17 Mary's Abbey, who sold tin kettles at 3/6 each and repaired the same kettles for 4d.<sup>497</sup>

There was the firm of B. Murphy, Son and Butler's, Hardware and Ironmongery, of 30 Kennedy's Lane & 5, Christ Church Place, from whom he purchased strong locks at 2/- each, catches at 1d each and brass hinges for 7d a dozen.<sup>498</sup>

And there were so many others. How many kindly people had he met in his shopping expeditions for house and school? It is recorded that Brother Francis Phelan, afterwards a saintly and famous Brother in England, had first met Edmund Rice when he, Francis Phelan, was working as a shop boy in Dublin.

And then there were the boys in the school. There had been so many of them. They had been such a consolation to him and his Brothers. They had grown into such good Christians and they had given such a good account of themselves when the schools had been inspected by an official of the National Board: "The inspector does not know whether to admire most the

military precision with which the children are regulated and controlled, or the amazing proficiency manifested in all those branches of knowledge in which they are so ably and so benevolently instructed...<sup>499</sup>

And how many poor parents had there been who had come into contact with him and whom he hoped had felt his loving concern and compassion for them and their boys? Years and years later in 1913, one of these, an old woman in the South Dublin Union, was to give her memories of him to Brother Mark Hill:

I am at least, as well as I can recollect, not less than 100 years of age, and I well remember that good man, Edmund Rice, in the O'Connell Schools long, long ago. My eldest boy was under the instruction of Brother Rice. He was stopping from school one time and I brought him to Brother Rice and asked him to punish the lad. Brother Rice said that it was against the rules of the school for him to punish the boy and that I should do the punishing myself. 'Wait until I catch him home and won't I punish him' said I. Brother Rice laughed heartily at my boasting and he took the boy from me. Brother Rice told me not to be hard on the boy, who got on well afterwards. My nephews, too, went to school to Brother Rice in Richmond Street. They became two priests and were the Fathers McSwiggan. Brother Rice was kindness to the boys and he was one of the mildest of men. He was mild in manner and mild in appearance. He made so good an impression on me that I remember him now distinctly after the ages. The people loved him and thought him a saint, he did such wonders for the children of his time. Nothing would vex or disturb Brother Rice. He told me not to be vexed when he would not punish the boys for me. Brother Rice, too, was very good natured. It was in his face. Daniel O'Connell was another great man of his time. I remember both of them. I'd give the world to Brother Rice if I had it; he was so good to the children.<sup>500</sup>

And then there were the novices and postulants who had come to this house to start their lives as Christian Brothers. Amongst them was Brother Stephen Carroll, whom he himself, Edmund Rice, had recruited at the Presentation Convent in Drogheda in 1835. Brother Stephen was to write a memoir in 1888 of his early days in the Brothers and he speaks of how kindly he was received by the Founder in Richmond Street. As a novice he had charge of Brother Rice's bedroom (still in use in North Richmond Street) and he tells us; "I was up immediately after 5 to light his candle, for I must say he was remarkable for his early rising and strict attention to all his religious duties. He always had his meals with the community and always fared no better than the others. After breakfast each morning he had hot water left him by me to whom he always spoke with much kindness, and when this morning duty was past his room was made up and this finished matters this way for the day."<sup>501</sup>



Finally, there were the poor to whom he had given his life and love. Again Brother Stephen Carroll was to write: "The day I had the happiness to enter the novitiate, a Dublin lady that lived near Gardiner Street Church told me: 'Mr Rice is



the great landmark. When he stands up all the monks stand up; when he kneels down all kneel; and when he retires all do the same'. And though Richmond Street was not, to say, very far from the Jesuits' church, for an old man like him it was no small distance. Still, he was very seldom to be seen absent, though very heavy on his feet at the same time. And as for the number of poor people he relieved on his way to and from Mass but few can tell...<sup>502</sup>

And so the old man of 76 sat in his room on his last day in North Richmond Street at the table where for all those years he had read his bible daily. Tomorrow he would go on what he believed to be his last journey, south to Waterford. He had given the last ten years of his hard life to God in the service of God's poor and he had answered a call that had brought him to Dublin; that had brought him into contact with famous people like Archbishop Murray, Daniel O'Connell, Mary Aikenhead, Catherine McAuley; that had deepened his love and friendship for old friends like Bryan Bolger, that had enriched his life as he touched the lives of a multitude of kindly people - boys, parents, workers and poor beggars.

Little did he know that God would require of him six more years in Waterford of poverty, suffering, misunderstanding and disappointment. He would have many occasions to repeat the prayer that Brother Stephen so often heard on his lips; "Pray, Brother, that God's Will may be fulfilled in me."

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### 53. *Edmund Rice and the City of Dublin*<sup>503</sup>

Jacques Maritain was asked on one occasion whether he thought that history was linear or cyclic. He declared that he thought it was both. One of the functions of history is to remember, to recall, to break the straight line of passing time and to refresh the present time with forgotten greatness.

Two years ago, on the First of April 1992, after High Mass in St. Andrew's, Westland Row, a plaque to the memory of Edmund Rice was unveiled on the wall of a building in Lime Street / Hanover Street near the gasometer on the Liffey in Dublin. The plaque commemorates a good man, a compassionate man, a giant of a Christian man; Edmund Rice, who came down what was described to Catherine McAuley as "the appalling lanes and streets east of Townsend Street" in the year 1812, bringing help and hope and a future to the brave but desperately poor and oppressed Catholic people of this and all other parts of our capital city.

But who was this man, Edmund Rice? He was a Kilkenny man, born in Westcourt, Callan, in 1762. His people had kept the Faith. And, in spite of the Penal Laws, they had prospered. Where the average Catholic of the time lived on from one to fifteen acres of land, the Rices farmed 90 acres of rented farmland. This made them the third largest in the Callan district. The father, Robert Rice, had seven sons and two daughters. He and his sons grew wealthy on farming and buying and selling cattle. No Catholic could be a member of parliament at the time. No Catholic could become a member of a Corporation. No Catholic could enter a trade or profession. But the Penal Laws could not stop Catholics from buying and selling. And so many Catholics became merchants or businessmen.

Edmund Rice, being the fourth of seven sons, was educated beyond the ordinary. His uncle, Michael Rice, was a merchant in the port of Waterford. Edmund was apprenticed to his uncle and served his apprenticeship driving large herds of cattle down the roads of Munster and Leinster to the fields around Waterford City in preparation for slaughter and export.

Edmund Rice was intelligent, loved life; was over six feet tall, athletic; fond of rowing and dancing and was a fine singer. He was a very human person. At the age of 23 years he was chosen from among the seven sons as executor of his father's will. At 25 he was on top of the world. At that particular time business was booming for the merchants of Waterford where 5,000 people passed through each year for seasonal work in the Newfoundland fisheries. There was also the North Atlantic trade, the French and Spanish trade and the regular calls of the ships of the British Navy. Edmund and his uncle moved into shops' suppliers as well as cattle. And they seem to have had government contracts.

Catholic businessmen were becoming a force in Irish society. Many of them were moving steadily towards great wealth. Eventually, Edmund Rice took over his uncle's business.

In 1787, aged 25, he married. We think his wife's name was Mary Elliot. Two years later his wife was seriously injured in a horse-riding accident. Before she died she gave premature birth to their only child, Mary. The little girl was retarded.

The whole life of this man was shattered. God was preparing his servant. Edmund Rice's own father had seven strong sons to help him in his business. Edmund Rice had no son and



but one daughter. And she was retarded. God led him through eleven long years of sorrow and doubt and pain, while his business grew and grew.

In 1791 Edmund Rice subscribed to a new Catholic Bible. We still have his copy of that large table Bible and inside the flyleaf, his name, the date 1791, and a list of 14 texts which he noted under the title of "Texts against Usury". I believe that these texts give the key to this man's new life in Christ, to the great vision that God sparked off in his soul. The 14 texts Edmund Rice noted in that Bible are all concerned with the Covenant and all that it involved for a really honest man. What was this Covenant? God's Covenant in the Old Testament was a bond, a merchant bargain, that Yahweh made with all the poor, all the dispossessed and all the broken in the world for all time. They would be his people and He would be their God. Edmund Rice, from his position as a successful businessman, understood such a bargain. Henceforth, he would use all his great wealth, all his great intelligence and expertise and his great strength to make God's promise come true wherever there were poor or dispossessed or oppressed in his own country and beyond it. This was his vision. It would be a gigantic task. He would give all to make Yahweh's (God's) promise come true. He would sacrifice all, even his little retarded daughter. He would leave her in the care of his own sister and move to wherever he could best serve God in oppressed people.

"Everything was adverse when he started," says a contemporary lawyer friend of his, "everywhere the task was difficult." There were recurring famines and famine fever, dysentery, nakedness, destitution and it was growing by the day, especially in the cities where the poor Catholics, fleeing from the land, were crowding in looking for work.

He started in Waterford. He spent what in today's money would be equal to more than £150,000 out of his own pocket on a monastery and a school for several hundred poor children. The British Government at the time in Ireland gave money for Protestant schools but gave nothing for Catholic schools. Any Catholic that wanted education had the option of going to Protestant schools or paying fees to illegal hedge-school teachers. The poor could not afford to pay anything. They crowded into Edmund Rice's school. He found that the poorest children were without clothes and could not come. He built a tailor shop and bought bales of cloth and employed tailors to make suits for them. He found they were hungry. He employed bakers and bought flour and bread was baked for them. In the meantime he kept his stocks and shares and lands and houses and investments and worked on them in his spare time to finance his work. Then men came to him. They had caught something. There was a new power abroad in the land. A great wave of spiritual uplift and dedication ran through the country. It happens at different times in the history of the Church. It could happen again. God raised up spiritual leaders like Edmund Rice, men and women. Ten new congregations: five of women and five of men, came into being in Ireland between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Young farmers joined Edmund Rice bringing in their patrimonies to help the work. Merchants and businessmen sold their businesses and followed his example. The brilliant entrepreneur, Edmund Rice, who formerly dined with his own engraved solid silver cutlery, led his men to a simplicity of life; two simple meals a day, one in the morning at 8 a.m. and the other at 3 p.m., in solidarity with God's poor and oppressed. The Brothers had to send away hundreds from the schools for want of room. At one stage in Waterford the local newspapers appealed to the citizens, Protestant and Catholic, to help. There were 400 children in the school and another 200 being educated in the open air. They appealed for help to put a roof over the 200 against the coming winter.



Edmund Rice came to Lime Street/Hanover Street, Dublin in 1812. His congregation was only ten years old and it was his fifth foundation. The Bishop of Waterford was not too happy with the idea of the new Congregation of Christian Brothers expanding beyond the founding diocese of Waterford. But Edmund Rice felt called by God to send some men to wherever there was the greatest need. It is unbelievable the poverty and depression of Dublin city in 1812. The Act of Union of the Irish and British Parliaments in 1800 had left the city impoverished. Hundreds of Parliamentary families had move out of Dublin when the Irish Parliament was transferred to Westminster in London. This led to great unemployment: coach-builders, coachmen, grooms, farriers, cooks, maids and shopkeepers. The Dublin town houses of the former Irish members of Parliament were sold and snapped up by speculators who rented them, room by room, at exorbitant rents to impoverished families. Sometimes two or more families would live in different corners of the same room and share the rent. Before this, the Industrial Revolution had caused the closure of 600 out of 700 small weaving businesses in the Liberties. In 1793 there were 6,093 unemployed men in the area without help from anyone (there was no dole) and their children naked or semi-naked. Swift, in his history of Dublin bakers, tells us that hunger was so prevalent throughout the poorer parts of Dublin in 1817 that mobs of people attacked and looted the bread shops and soldiers with fixed bayonets stood on guard in the meat markets. It is estimated that there were 5,000 beggars in the city in 1818, wandering about and spreading all kinds of disease and infection.

As I said, Br. Rice sent two Brothers to open a school in Dublin in 1812. The school premises were in Hanover Street East, a narrow crooked lane at the time, at its junction with Lime Street in the dockland area on the south bank of the Liffey. Enrolment was initially 150 boys from the nearby riverside district and as could be expected discipline was a big problem for a long time. An account of conditions in the district provides some idea of the difficulties facing the two Brothers in Hanover Street : “The lanes and streets are filled with filth; there are no sewers; no attention is paid to the ventilation of the houses, and the poor are obliged to buy even the water they drink...The sufferings of the poor children cannot be described; many perish and those who survive are, in many instances, so debilitated by want as to become sickly and infirm at an early period in life.”

Patrick Cunningham, in the Westland Row Centenary Record 1964, gives a wonderful description of the Brothers and their school in Hanover Street. He quotes Fr. Henry Young’s *Catholic Directory* for 1821, that in that year, 500 boys were being educated there by Br. Patrick Hanrahan, one professed religious and two novices i.e. 4 Brothers teaching 500 children. The Commission of Inquiry into Irish Education of the Poor visited the Brothers School in Hanover Street in 1824, and reported that the children were learning reading, arithmetic, English Grammar, book-keeping, navigation, algebra and geometry. They said that some of the boys were 18 years of age and over and that there were a few sailors, still older, learning navigation.

The community in Hanover Street followed closely the pattern of apostolic service started by Edmund Rice in Waterford. Apart from their daily work with the boys, the Brothers conducted Sunday school for adults. The same thing happened in Hanover Street that happened elsewhere. Grown men were attracted by the power and the vision of Edmund Rice. Again, merchants or businessmen joined the work bringing in their monies. There was a silk merchant who later died and was buried in the little plot in Hanover Street property. A wealthy Dublin wine merchant, Joseph Watson, became a Catholic and joined the Brothers. A former captain in the Wicklow Yeomen, Benjamin Francis Manifold, 6’ 6” tall, also



became a Catholic and joined Brother Rice. He became an excellent Brother and had a reputation for sanctity. He died of famine fever in Ennis in 1840.

Gradually, the number of Brothers grew in Dublin. Within ten years, they had, besides Hanover Street, four houses in the Liberties, where there was great poverty among the people. They opened schools in Mill Street, James's Street, in Meath Street and in Francis Street.

The school in Mill Street was established from Hanover Street in 1818 at the request of the Vicar General, Dr. Hamill, the Parish Priest of the district. There were ten Brothers in Hanover Street at this time and four were sent to open the house and school in Mill Street. The Brothers took up residence in what had been the city house of the Earl of Meath. The family had ceased to live there since 1800 and the place had fallen into decay. The house was in a very dilapidated condition but it remained the community monastery during the life of the establishment. The Brothers depended for support on an annual charity sermon. Br. Edmund Rice visited Mill Street in 1822. He found four large classrooms with 500 boys on the roll. The total "fees" received from those who could afford to pay a little to help the work amounted to £36, an indication of the extreme poverty of the district. Here also the Brothers had a Sunday school for adults with a usual attendance of 50 persons.

In 1837 a National School Inspector, a Protestant Rector, visited Mill Street Schools and wrote in his report: "I would say the most perfect schools I have ever been in, in my life, were the schools in Mill Street, Dublin..." The same clergyman had visited the Brothers' schools in Waterford, Ennis and Dungarvan and expressed himself amazed at the large numbers in the classes. This was, he thought, because "the peculiar reputation and sanctity of the schools attracted pupils from ten to fifteen miles distance. Many of these pupils boarded in houses near the schools and paid their lodgings by doing occasional work and even by begging.

The Brothers' house and schools in James's St. was opened in 1820. The first superior was Br. Francis Manifold, the convert and ex-yeoman. This foundation was an offshoot from Mill Street. Arrangements for a residence for the two Brothers of the community had been made by the Parish Priest. He promised to give £120 a year, of which the Brothers would pay £40 for the rent of the premises, occupied by them in house and school. In the school the two Brothers taught 200 poor, poor boys, so poor that about 60 had to be decently clothed, and breakfast had to be provided every morning for many of the neediest. The Brothers also conducted an evening school with an "unlimited attendance" and a Sunday school at which 100 regularly were present. One might ask the question: How did those early Brothers do all that work? Most of them had joined in their 30s or 40s. They were in the prime of life. Many of them had been in situations of responsibility and administration before they joined. They were mature adults who understood the depth of the inspiration of Edmund Rice and who had felt the fire of his dedication. They must also have shared his great compassion for the brokenness of their own people.

Eventually the Brothers had to leave James's Street; they could not pay the rent. For a while the Brothers moved back to Mill Street to live and they walked to James's Street every day. Then the day came when they had to close the school in James's Street also. It is nice to be able to say that the Brothers are back in James's Street again today. And now they are also back at the work that the early Brothers did for the parents. There are classes in James's

Street today for the pupils and also for the parents in the local flats. The young mothers learn cooking, sewing, knitting, housekeeping and management. And there are classes in D. I. Y. for the dads.

And there are adult Leaving and Junior Cert. classes for those who did not have the opportunity to finish their schooling when they were young. And many dedicated lay people are helping the Brothers in this work. As I said, history is cyclic as well as linear. Francis Street School was opened in 1820 and Meath Street School was a branch school from Francis Street. This whole area was crowded with poor children and the numbers were forever increasing. The population of Ireland was growing and growing. There were 4.7 million people in Ireland in 1791; 6.8 million people in 1821; and nearly 9 million in 1845. There were early marriages and big families and infant mortality was very high. There were also recurring famines; in 1817, 1819, 1822, 1836 and the terrible famine of 1845-48 when a million people died of starvation and a million emigrated. These famines were almost always accompanied by small-pox and famine fever. We were a broken and subject people. The British Government at the time gave grants to Protestant schools. There was no help for Catholic schools. There were fee-paying private schools for wealthy Catholics. There was



nothing for poor Catholics except what foundresses and founders like Edmund Rice, Nano Nagle, Catherine McAuley, Mary Aikenhead, Theresa Ball and others tried their best to provide. When Br. Patrick O'Flaherty was appointed Superior of Mill Street house, he wrote:

I found things in a most deplorable condition. The first thing I learned was that there was not the price of a pound of tea in the house and the premises were just out of lease. We were £30 in debt and there was no charity sermon until the following January.

Sometimes the very poverty of the Brothers and the conditions under which they worked brought unexpected donations. Two gentlemen heard that the charity sermon for Francis Street School had not been a success. They called to the school and found two Brothers with between 300 and

360 junior boys on the ground floor in one room. "The room was so suffocatingly full that it was with difficulty the visitors could make their way along the side passages." Their sympathy was practical. Before they left one gave a donation of £100 and the other £50." (Synge Street Annals). For economy sake the Brothers in James's Street and Francis Street all moved back into the monastery in Mill Street. Eventually Mill Street house itself was closed. Many years later a house was opened in Synge Street. It is still there and, thank God, Brothers still go down to Francis Street to keep the torch of learning burning in that hallowed and historic school. Incidentally one of the holiest men in the history of the Christian Brothers -- Br Joseph O'Brien --, who died in 1927, gave most of his life in Francis Street. All those streets around the Liberties were hallowed by the footsteps of Brother Rice who slept in the Brothers' houses there and engaged his Brothers in their work of uplifting and helping the brave and wonderful poor people who suffered injustice and poverty for their Faith.





Edmund Rice transferred headquarters from Waterford to Hanover Street Dublin in 1828. Here he lived for three years until he moved to the new Generalate at North Richmond Street. He shared in the poverty of the people, in their sorrows, and even in their sicknesses. A little note to a friend at this time says: “On Saturday morning last I was taken ill, heard Mass on Sunday in my bed nor was I able to go out since, except to walk as far as the Canal docks of Ringsend on yesterday.”

While he was living at Hanover Street, Archbishop Murray asked Edmund Rice to do something for the poor boys of St. Mary’s Parish, north of the Liffey. The Archbishop said he would not give much financial aid as he was then engaged in building the Pro-Cathedral. Most of his energy and money went into this project. The Pro-Cathedral in Marlborough Street was completed at a cost of £80,000 and consecrated on the feast of St. Laurence O’Toole, 14 November 1825. Now the Archbishop was free to devote more attention to the growing necessity for the education of the Catholic poor of his own parish. Since 1811 the Kildare Place Society had been given annual grants of Government money to be used for the education of the poor in Ireland. The Society, because of its proselytising activities, had aroused antagonism. In some of its schools no religion, no moral or salutary principles of conduct were taught; in others the religion of Catholic children was seriously undermined. Of the 3,000 Catholic school-age children in St. Mary’s Pro-Cathedral Parish, 1,000 attended Protestant schools and 2,000 received no education whatever. In the three city centre parishes of St. Mary’s, St. Thomas and St. George, there was only one free school for the Catholic poor; this was a small school in Liffey Street. In St. Mary’s Parish alone, there were many Protestant free-schools. In the spring of 1827 a house was leased in Jervis Street in which two classrooms were furnished to receive pupils. The school was opened on 19 June 1827. Two Brothers walked over from Hanover Street every day to teach the 400 poor boys who had turned up on the first day. In order to help finance the school a half-penny a week was requested but only from those who could pay. An indication of the poverty of the district is given by the fact that the total of the fees received for the first year was £30. By that time the number of pupils had increased to 600 and an extra schoolroom and an extra Brother had to be provided. One great consolation for the Brothers in this very difficult mission was the very high attendance at the religious instructions given in the school every Sunday morning. The Brothers, including Brother Rice, also gave instructions on Sunday evenings in the male wards of the nearby Jervis Street Hospital.

In 1828 Archbishop Murray of Dublin was endeavouring to restore and refresh the spiritual life of his vast archdiocese. Dublin was a depressed and broken city. The Catholic Committee was active at the time struggling for Catholic Emancipation, that is, equal rights for Catholics and Protestants alike. In 1825 the House of Commons in Westminster passed a Bill for Catholic Emancipation for Ireland and England. The House of Lords rejected the Bill and it was thrown out. Archbishop Murray was asked to get someone who would pioneer in Dublin a Catholic Training College for teachers, a Catholic model school and a new series of textbooks for Catholic schools. These projects were to be financed by the fees paid for graves in the new Catholic cemeteries of Glasnevin and Golden Bridge. The Archbishop asked Edmund Rice. Edmund Rice was 66 years of age, but when Archbishop Murray asked him to come to Dublin to spearhead this important work, Edmund Rice left Waterford and move headquarters to Dublin. Immediately he got to work. Daniel O’Connell, head of the struggle for Emancipation, laid the foundation stone of the great new Model School in North Richmond Street. The school is still called O’Connell Schools. One hundred thousand people are said to have marched in public procession. Daniel O’Connell, in his speech spoke of Brother Rice as “Patriarch of the Monks of the West.” The following year, 1829, Catholic



Emancipation was granted in Ireland and England. The Catholic Committee voted itself out of existence; O'Connell said it was no longer needed. But the Glasnevin Cemetery Committee, which had been founded by the Catholic committee, stayed in existence and said that it was not bound by arrangements made by the Catholic Committee. It said that it needed all its profits for its own work. This meant that Edmund Rice was left with a half-built Training College and a school and a monastery that was to be the Congregation's headquarters. What did Edmund Rice do? First, he had 2,373 Masses said for the completion of the work. This was a tremendous act of faith. Then he canvassed all the high-ranking people that he knew, including Sir John Newport, M. P. for Waterford. These people got him many letters of introduction to titled Catholics in the North of England. Then Br. Rice sent one of his brightest men to collect in England. The wealthy Catholics of England knew how important the work was and they subscribed generously. Br. Rice was able to finish the work. Imagine in that time of financial crisis he also sent £20 (£1,000 today) as an anonymous gift to the Mendicity Institute for destitute families in Waterford. How like Mother Teresa today!

The schools of the Brothers spread all over Dublin. At present, though greatly decreased in numbers, the Brothers are still connected with about 35 schools in the city, north and south of the Liffey, as well as with many schools throughout the country. Here we must pay a well-deserved tribute to our lay teachers who have taken over from us in many schools. They have been so faithful to the spirit of Edmund Rice and they want the schools to be still, as do you the parents, centres of a wide rich education based on Christian values.

Your own beautiful and spacious schools, primary and secondary, were opened here on 38 acres of land in 1954, forty years ago. It was, at the time, "one of the most ambitious projects the Brothers had undertaken for a long, long time." It is interesting to note that one of your two schools was named in honour of Edmund Rice. It is also interesting to note that your school is situated in one of the most historical sites in Ireland, around a castle that is held by scholars to be the oldest inhabited building in Ireland. I believe it has been continuously occupied since the early thirteenth century. And the Green Hills, nearby, are believed by some to be the burial place of the Parthalonians, one of the earliest pre-Christian invaders of Ireland, who died of a plague and are recorded to have been placed in burial mounds near Tallaght.

In 1838, Edmund Rice, aged 76 years and broken in health, left Dublin to return to Waterford. Here he died at Mount Sion on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1844. With him in the original cemetery at Mount Sion were buried 17 of his Brothers. Nine of them died under 40 years of age. Edmund Rice was 82 when he died. A journalist writing in the Irish Times, 3 June 1902, during the centenary of the founding of the Christian Brothers in Waterford wrote: "Edmund Rice was pained at the moral and intellectual stagnation he saw around him. He opened a small school and became its first master. On that day a work as great as that of Frederick Ozanam in France was begun..."

As early as 1825 a Government report on Education of the Poor in Ireland, said of Edmund Rice and his Brothers:

Christian Brothers: numbers: 30. 24 schoolrooms in 12 different town and cities were instructing gratis 5,500 poor boys. It is not known how many of these they were feeding and clothing as well.



On 2 April 1993, Brother Edmund Ignatius Rice was honoured by the Catholic Church. He was publicly and universally declared to have lived a life of heroic sanctity and was given the title of Venerable as a first step to possible sainthood. All over the world Christian Brother schools are commemorating the 150th anniversary of his death this year. Many, many people are praying to God for favours through the intercession of this great and compassionate Irishman. The miracle tested, examined and accepted as genuine by two Church Commissions last year concerns a boy who was dying of cancer of the stomach over twenty years ago and was restored to health through the intercession of Edmund Rice. He is a school teacher in Newry today.

Several modern Irish historians pay tribute to Edmund Rice's contribution to the history of Ireland in his time. R. B. McDowell would place Edmund Rice among the four outstanding figures for vigour and vitality in Irish Church history in the nineteenth century. Donal Kerr states: "The period witnessed the activities of several charismatic leaders whose social and educational work was to endure. Chief among these must be reckoned Edmund Rice."

Finally, if given a choice for his epitaph I think Brother Rice would have liked best the tribute paid to him by Mrs. Annie McDonnell, aged 103 and living in the South Dublin Union in 1912: she had known Edmund Rice back in the 1830's when he taught her boys. She was a young widow at the time. She had two growing boys who were giving trouble at home. "You punish them, Annie, and I'll look after them" he said. And then she sighed and said: "I'd give the world to Brother Rice if I had it; he was so good to the children."



## **54. *Edmund Rice and the Great Famine of 1845-1848***

Edmund Rice died in 1844, one year before the Great Famine. And yet the spirit lived on in the two Congregations he founded. In 1832 when the cholera was rampant in Ireland and people were dying in their thousands, Edmund Rice had advised his Brothers to put first things first in the service of God's afflicted people. This they did again during the Great Famine.

The Famine came early in Cork. A benefactor spoke of its progress through the North Monastery schools: "thinning classes, frequent and fatal gaps in the childish ranks, the wan faces, the dim eyes, the failing strength, the reeling brain..." The Superior spoke to the Brothers: "God, up to this, required education for His poor at your hands. I feel He now requires something more. We must feed them and to do this let us make some sacrifices for their sake." A large cauldron was bought and strong appetising soup and several baskets of large white biscuits were distributed each morning to 300 children. Benefactors in the city enabled the Brothers to continue feeding a large number of poor boys for five years after the Famine.

The Famine came late to Limerick. By February 1846 it seemed to be coming to an end. To encourage the people in the city, the Brothers in Sexton Street organised a Sunday School for adults to enable them to improve their position in life. Five hundred men registered the first Sunday, mostly fathers of the pupils. There was great hope. Two years later the Famine struck. Fever spread all over the city. Many died and others moved away. The Sunday School closed.

In Francis Street in the Liberties of Dublin the Brothers had opened a new school in 1846. It was a three-storied building. The Brothers lived in the top storey and each of the lower storeys was a long single classroom. The Famine coincided with the opening of the school. Crowds of servant boys and small farmers and their families fled from the land into the city. The lanes and little streets around Francis Street were filled with hungry and destitute families. The new school in Francis Street became grossly overcrowded. In the lower schoolroom two Brothers taught about 360 boys between them and the balance of over 700 boys were being taught by two other Brothers in the long classroom overhead. The Brothers themselves were very poor. They could not afford a cook. They themselves took turns in the kitchen. The pupils could not afford pens or copybooks. The Brothers tried to comfort and console the starving fever-ridden families. The appalling conditions of unemployment, hunger, death and lack of hope hung in the air until well into the year 1850. Those, who could in any way, left for America or for the cities in England nearest to the ports.

Already the Brothers had houses and schools in England. In Liverpool in 1846 there were 14 Brothers teaching 1400 pupils, many of them sons of Irish emigrants. The Parish Priest and a Br. Joseph Meagher, aged 40, died of the fever which the poor Irish had brought with them and which was spreading all over the city. In Liverpool, St. Patrick's Church had to close for want of priests.

In Manchester, Br. John Norris tells us that thousands of famine victims brought typhus to the city. Priests were very vulnerable. Five priests from one parish alone died within the space of five months. Eventually there was not a priest left in the city to anoint the dying. The



Brothers seemed to escape. The Brothers in Manchester managed to buy beef at a low price and made strong broth which they distributed to hundreds every day.

The famine victims came to Salford also, which was a very Irish town. The Brothers there took their boys into the school. The English people of the locality and the parents of the Salford pupils collected and distributed clothes and food for the starving Irish. Thousands of famine victims died in Salford.

In Leeds the Brothers had a house and school since 1843. Hundreds of famine victims came to the town. The Brothers did all in their power to help them. Typhus spread like a plague throughout the city. Among the victims was the Parish Priest.

In Bolton, again the starving Irish came in great numbers. The Brothers helped all they could. Fr. Dowdall, the Parish Priest, was an Irishman and a good friend of the Brothers. He too worked very hard every day, feeding and serving hundreds of victims. Eventually he caught the fever and died within fifteen days.

The spirit which Edmund Rice had inspired in his Brothers in the Cholera period in 1832 came alive again, even at a deeper level during the Famine. His great option for the poor and the distressed was still burning in his Brothers. The needs and necessities of these poor emigrants called to them. Like Edmund Rice, with God's help and the cooperation of friendly English neighbours, heroic deeds were accomplished.



## 55. *Edmund Rice and the Lofty Wall*

Brother Dominic Burke, who joined the Christian Brothers in 1852, was always interested in Edmund Rice. There were many old Brothers, contemporaries of Brother Rice, still alive when he joined. It was only eight years since the death of the Founder. Brother Burke listened to these old men talking about the early days and the magnitude of the challenge and the great initiative of Edmund Rice. Later in life Brother Dominic wrote a history of the early days. In his *History of the Institute*<sup>504</sup> he had this to say about the first monastery and school in Barrack Street Waterford:

The situation was a good one ---- retired and in the centre of a district of the city, occupied chiefly by the working classes. The lease was for a period of nearly 900 years at a fair yearly rent. The purchase-money was of course from his own (Edmund Rice's) money.

And then he continues, "The new site was enclosed by a lofty wall." It is interesting that the oldest document, in the Archives in Rome refers also to this wall:<sup>505</sup> "It is proper to remark here that the house, old schools and the walls of the enclosure were built at the sole expense of Mr. Rice." It then tells us that "the whole building, including the walls which enclose the garden cost about £3,000."<sup>506</sup>

That amount, according to a well-known historian, would amount to £180,000 in today's money. What a man was Edmund Rice! Certainly, no ordinary rich businessman ever put so much money into so uncertain an investment.

But this 'lofty wall'? What was its significance? We are fortunate that the reports of a great and important meeting that took place in the City Hall in Waterford in the year 1864 still exist. The year 1864 was but twenty years after the death of Edmund Rice. One of the speakers mentioned that many of those present knew Brother Rice personally. The meeting was called to discuss the state of the old house at Mount Sion, with 14 Brothers living and sleeping in a house built originally for six. There was also a great necessity to expand the school which had a roll of 1,400 poor boys and a waiting list of 300 to 400 clamouring for admittance. Bishop O'Brien was present and Mayor Lawlor and "a numerous attendance of the Catholic Clergy and Laity of Waterford and its vicinity." The many speeches paid tribute to what had been achieved and a number of those who spoke referred to the early days of Brother Rice and they throw new light on the heroic venture that was born behind the 'lofty' wall.

One of those who spoke was Rev. Dr. J. V. Cleary, President of St. John's Seminary and later first Archbishop of Kingston, Ontario, Canada. He said,

Like all great institutes" he said "that had their origin in penal times, its beginning was in lowliness. The wise and benevolent man, who laid its foundation, knew well the spirit of the age he lived in. Those were the days when your sole charter of existence was the toleration of your enemies. Your fathers were disinherited in their birth; they were debarred education in their growth; they dared not assert the rights of freedom in their manhood. They were content to retire behind the thoroughfares and establish their foundations of piety in the unfrequented byways of our populous cities, unknown and unnoticed, except by those for whose spiritual and temporal necessities their charity provided relief.



This is why the ever-venerable Edmund Rice, who deserves to be named with honour among the greatest benefactors of our race, in founding (his first monastery) made choice of a retired spot at the rear of Barrack Street, where the gaze of haughty fashion might not care to penetrate, whilst he and his companions were engaged in the education of the child of poverty, shedding light upon his intellect and moulding his tender mind to the God-like form of Christian virtue.

John A. Blake, Esq., also spoke at the meeting:

When Edmund Rice began his labours, the mass of the population were in a deplorable state. Indeed, as regards secular education, the task undertaken by the Founder was enough to appal the stoutest. But we have in him a glorious example, what any man with the God-like instincts of charity can accomplish...

Very Rev. Dr. Flynn said that the “distinguished Founder was known to many of us present” and he “deemed it unnecessary to pass any eulogium on that great man. I shall only say” he continued “that he devoted his time, his talents, his property and his great zeal towards the carrying out of the important work which, under Divine Providence, he inaugurated amongst us.

Bishop O’Brien, after describing the dreadful state of the old monastery which he had visited, described the work of Mount Sion:

The Christian Brothers impart to a daily average of 1,200 boys a religious, literary and scientific education, fully qualifying them for the stations they are destined to fill. And though 1,400 boys receive annually the invaluable benefits of their instruction, yet hundreds of poor children in the city and its vicinity are still without education, owing to the absolute want of proper schools.

Thomas Meagher, father of the famous Thomas Francis Meagher and former Mayor of Waterford, was also one of the speakers:

It is one of the most imperative duties of a Christian people to provide a Christian education for its youth. This, happily, has been done for us to a great extent; and to the Founder of the Brothers, we are largely indebted for the great boon.

Continuing, he paid tribute to Mount Sion and its 14 Brothers working in the spirit of Edmund Rice:

In sixty years, from that one house, upwards of 60,000 youths, with strong arms, it may be, better still, with bright improved intellects, best of all, with religious training, sent forth to fight the battle of life, and doubtless in many instances to achieve a great success, are results which may well excite feelings of high exaltation. Yet this is not all. Not to the youth alone is their teaching confined. When work for the day is over for the man of toil, it is not so with the Christian Brother. He is then ready to receive as many of the working classes as come, and to give them such instruction as they can receive and most require.



But to return to the ‘lofty’ wall. Edmund Rice was not just establishing a school. He was founding a monastery. *Origins*, our earliest document states:<sup>507</sup>

About this time, (1802) he was joined by two other young men, who intended to devote their lives to the gratuitous education of poor boys.

Then the document tells us why they were doing this:

Their motives, in thus associating together, were, in the first place to withdraw from the dangers of a sinful world; and in the next place to sanctify themselves by frequenting the Holy Sacraments, by prayer, pious reading, retirement and works of mercy, especially that of instructing poor ignorant boys in the principles of Religion and Christian piety.

Edmund Rice was a brave man. A few years before (1791) a law was passed which concerned Catholics intending to open a school. Among the provisions of the Act he would have read:

Provided also be it further enacted that nothing in this Act contained shall make it lawful to found, endow or establish any religious order or society of persons bound by monastic or religious vows.<sup>508</sup>

Edmund Rice founded his monastery and a school for 200 pauper boys in Mount Sion. He was breaking the Law in one sense. But wisely, he took no vows. This he did not do until some few years later when things had quietened. He had to be careful. And yet, being the man he was, he took risks. Across the street from the ‘lofty’ wall was a military barracks. It was a Government outpost and he had to be careful. But the poor private soldiers there, destitute Irishmen enrolled in an army of occupation and despised by many Irish people on that account, were trying to rear families too. Brother Burke<sup>509</sup> and another source both tell us that the sons of these soldiers were among the first boys into his new school.

From the privacy behind that ‘lofty’ wall a seed was planted and a tree grew that spread its branches above and beyond and out into the world. In that same year, 1864, it was reported that Edmund Rice’s Christian Brothers were imparting a religious and secular education to about 30,000 children and adults in Ireland and England.





## 56. *Edmund Rice Mass for Students*<sup>510</sup>

There is a graveyard in Chicago in which there is a 10 ft. high monument to Edmund Rice. All over the graveyard, in different areas are these huge monuments to Irish saints who are patrons to many Chicago parishes: St. Brigid; St. Brendan; St. Patrick etc. But beyond these patron saints a handful of famous and holy Irish men and women are commemorated. Edmund Rice is among them.

This year (1994) is the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of Edmund Rice. All over Ireland and over the world, wherever there are Christian Brother or Presentation Brother Schools, things are happening in memory of this man, Edmund Rice. Hundreds of thousands of pupils, in the United States, Canada, India, Australia, New Zealand, South America, Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Islands and in eleven of the emerging new African countries today are celebrating Edmund Rice's birthday. To them he is only a name – a name that they have come to know and to bless for generosity beyond all bounds; for compassion to the poor and the oppressed; for a life of labour and sacrifice transforming the lives of thousands of pauper families into families with hope in life.

To those boys, he is the wonderful and holy man who lived across the seas in a place called Ireland. To us he is more, much more. To us he is one of ourselves. We have his very body in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in Mount Sion. Any day, going to or coming from school, we can see the Bake House which he built with his own money, to bake bread for the hungry boys of the time and where he employed tailors to turn the huge bales of cloth he bought, into suits for boys so poor, that they could not appear in public for want of any kind of clothes. In one year, as some of you already know, this great and holy man bought 1196 yards of cloth out of his own money, for clothes for these boys. In one day he bought over 80 pairs of shoes for barefoot boys. In one half year alone, in 1823, this wonderfully kind and generous man, Edmund Rice, helped the Waterford Mendicity Institute for Destitute Families by supplying:

- 252 yards of linen;
- coats for poor men;
- coats for little girls;
- cash to teachers for teaching the poor children prayers and catechism;
- a load of timber;
- 53 yards of red flannel;
- money for releasing clothes from the pawn;
- a quarter of beef;
- coats and shoes;
- money for plastering the Mendicity Institute;
- cash for the mendicants (on many occasions);
- money for sick children;
- money for prayer books;
- 100 coal tickets;
- 40 pairs of trousers for mendicant boys;
- blankets and sheets;
- 119 yards of linen;
- money to various poor families; etc., etc..



Those terrible days of poverty are almost gone forever; those days of savage injustice, wicked discrimination; deliberate debasement of our Catholic people. Our country is now our own. We are free people. None of us is as hungry as were many boys in his time. None of us in rags as were many boys in his time. Thank God for all this. Thank God, too, for our fathers and mothers and for the lovely houses we have instead of the terrible hovels the poor boys of Br. Rice's day lived in. Thank God, I said. And thank Edmund Rice, Nano Nagle, Catherine McAuley, Margaret Aylward, Mary Aikenhead, who sacrificed all their wealth, all their time and talent, to lift our people, to educate them so that leaders could rise among them, leaders that would lead us all and our families and the coming generations to health and prosperity and to opportunities for advancement in life at home and abroad. There are thousands who bless the name of this great man, Venerable Edmund Rice, and who give thanks to God for favours received through his intercession, in times of sickness and trouble and hardship. Every day in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, there are fathers and mothers praying for their children. There are people from all over the city and often from other towns and cities and even from abroad coming to thank God and to ask for help in their sickness and troubles through the intercession of Edmund Rice.

Today then we are part of a world-wide celebration of the birthday of Edmund Rice. This morning we are assisting at The Holy Mass in this church; the same church where Edmund Rice himself assisted at Mass. This church was here in his time; it was built in 1807. He was a member of this parish and used to bring boys to confession from the school to this church. Outside in Ballybricken was where he lived as a young business man and where he bought and sold cattle. Somewhere in a house on Ballybricken Square his wife died in 1789. When Br. Rice decided to start his school in Barrack Street, he built and paid for his monastery, and school for 200 poor boys, out of his own money. That cost him what in today's money would be £150,000. We do not know how much he donated to this church when it was being built in 1807. We know that he helped to build the Cathedral. Monsignor Olden tells us in his recent book about the building of the Cathedral in 1793, that Mr. Rice's name was on the list of the committee that asked for and got permission from the Protestant Corporation of Waterford to build the present Cathedral.

Br. Rice had great compassion and pity for the poor boys of his schools. That's why he gave all his lands and houses and stocks and shares and money in the bank to help them. There was no money from the British Government who were in charge at the time. There was no Lotto. There was only himself and his Christian Brothers and what they brought with them into the Order.

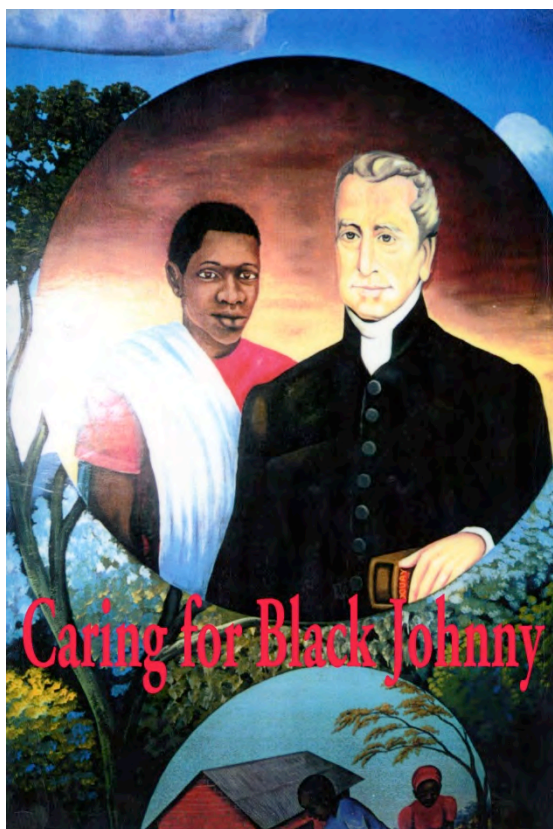
And why had he such pity for the boys of his time? Listen to how people who knew them described them:

Herds of poor boys running wild through the streets and lanes ignorant alike of human and divine knowledge; rude and rough and savage in their conduct; cursing and swearing and fighting; not one of them able to read or write; not one of them ever having a chance of a decent job; many of them orphans with no home to sleep in at night.

There are many stories of Edmund Rice's kindness towards poor boys. A friend met Br. Rice one day in the city. Br. Rice had three boys with him and a fourth boy in his arms. The boy was probably too weak to walk.

“Where are you going with the boys?” asked his friend.

“I am taking them to Mount Sion” said Br. Rice “to feed and clothe them and to have them go to school”



**Caring for Black Johnny,  
(Arusha, Tanzania)**

And another little story: Br. Rice was one day down the quay. There were a lot of ships in the river. Br. Rice saw a little black boy, a slave, who had to work for no pay. If he didn't work he was whipped. This little black boy looked very sad. Br. Rice went on the ship and bought the little slave from the captain. Br. Rice brought the boy home to Mount Sion and fed, clothed and educated him. Later, he set him up in business. John Thomas was the boy's name. Brother Rice was a really wealthy man. He could have spent all the money on himself. But he loved people so much, especially his own people, the poor Catholics of Ireland.

Today, then, is a very special day. It is the birthday of a great and holy man of God – Edmund Rice, founder of your school. He loved his first school, Mount Sion, and he still loves it. He is as interested in each and every one of you boys here today as he was in the boys of his own time. Pray to God through Edmund Rice in all

your troubles. And today being his birthday, wouldn't it be nice that each of you on the way home after Mass should call in to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and thank God for giving us

Brother Rice. And then kneel at the coffin and pray for your Mam and Dad, your brothers and sisters and for your priests, Brothers and teachers. And then thank Brother Rice on behalf of all the boys from other schools who cannot come to Ireland to visit the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. And finally say; “Thank you, Brother Rice, and a happy birthday.”

**57. *Edmund Rice – the man from Callan*<sup>511</sup>**

The Gospel in tonight's Mass is from the fifteenth chapter of St. John, part of Our Lord's loving last discourse to his disciples. It speaks of God as a man of the soil, a farmer tending his vines like an Irish farmer would tend his fruit trees. "I am the true vine" says Jesus, "and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." Here is the story of the man who was born in this sacred spot, Westcourt. Edmund Rice's life teaches us that God is most powerfully present and creative in the brokenness of our lives. Indeed, like a golden thread, the vocation of this holy man was woven into the tragedy of his own personal life and into the terrible sorrows and sufferings of the poor Catholics of Ireland of his time.

To us here tonight much of the story of this fruitful branch of God's vine is already known. However, it is no harm to recall the beginnings of God's work, God's pruning so that much fruit for so many would grow from the seeds planted in this soil.



**Westcourt, Callan. Birthplace of Edmund Rice.**

Edmund Rice, as you know, was born here in Westcourt in 1762. His father was Robert Rice and his mother Margaret Tierney. There were seven boys and two girls in the family. According to the historian, Louis Cullen, the family farmed 90 statute acres of rented land. Times were very hard for Catholics in Ireland when Edmund Rice was young. The Penal Laws were still in vogue. Land was life at the time. There were about four million Catholics and a few hundred thousand Protestants in Ireland then. And yet the Protestants held 95% of the land and Catholics 5%. The population of Ireland was increasing all the time. The country was full of young people. The vast majority of these were Catholics, young Catholics



who had little or no hope in life, and for whom their parents could do very little. Imagine, no Catholic was allowed by law to go to school or to teach in school. No Catholic could attend a University or be admitted to a profession or a trade. No Catholic could be elected to parliament or to the corporation of a town or city. We were a conquered and broken race. The Good Lord was pruning his people.

The only way a Catholic with brains or initiative could do well was by buying and selling. In the city of Kilkenny were held great cattle and wool fairs. The prices at Kilkenny helped to regulate prices throughout Ireland. Robert Rice had seven sons and a big farm. He took to buying and selling. He and his sons travelled the roads all over Munster and parts of Leinster and bought cattle. We know from his account books, for example, that Edmund Rice and his brothers bought, among I am sure many other places, at the Fair of Bawn, the Fair of Fethard, Waterford Fair, the Fair of Ballingarry, the Fair of Portlaw. The cattle they bought they later sold and they were shipped through the port of Waterford, which was Ireland's second port at the time.

Edmund Rice's parents did the best they could for him and for his brothers and sisters. Edmund was probably educated in a hedge school and at home and then – an unusual thing at the time – he was sent to a second level school in Kilkenny. At the age of seventeen he was sent down to Waterford to his uncle, Michael Rice, who was a merchant and victualler or ships' provisioner. Waterford was a very busy port on the North Atlantic route. With sailing ships it took, sometimes, three months to cross the Atlantic. These ships had to be stocked with flour and meat and potatoes and vegetables. To give you some idea of the size of the trade done by the Waterford merchants we know that between 3,000 and 5,000 men alone left the port each year for fishing in Newfoundland.

At twenty five years of age Edmund Rice married. He was probably hoping, like his father, for some daughters and seven strong sons to expand and develop his business. After just two years of marriage his wife, we are told, was badly hurt in a fall from a horse. She had been expecting their first child. She gave premature birth to a little girl, Mary, called it is believed after her mother, Mary Elliot. The child was retarded. The mother died.

This must have been a tremendous shock for the young merchant and father. For ten years Edmund Rice threw himself into his work. I suppose he was trying to cope with his sorrow. The Lord was truly pruning a fruit-bearing branch that it might bear more and more fruit among the broken people around him. Like the people who went through the Great Famine or those who went through the terrible cruelty of the Yoes in 1798, Edmund Rice never spoke of those ten years. He worked so hard that he amassed a huge fortune. But he was not happy. He could have married again but he did not. Finally, he was thinking of giving up everything and burying himself in a monastery on the Continent. A chance remark by a woman friend of his on their seeing a horde of wild, broken, fighting, starving children awoke him to what God was asking of him. "Mr. Rice", said she, "there is your new family!"

He kept his business going and opened a school in a livery stable in Waterford. This was something new – a school where the children had to pay nothing. Absolutely free. Crowds of poor, ragged children came, all ages, all sizes. Mr. Rice employed two teachers and paid them out of his own money. He worked all day at his business and taught parents at night.



After a while the teachers left him – the work was too hard. He knew God wanted him to go full-time. He said goodbye to his little daughter. Her aunt came down from Callan to mind her. It must have broken his heart to say goodbye to her. The Lord was pruning for a further harvest among the destitute families. He moved out to where these desperately poor people lived. Others joined him. He built a school for two hundred poor boys. This cost him what today would be about £180,000. The streets and lanes around had hundreds and hundreds of poor Catholic children. If they had given up their Faith they could have had food, clothes and better conditions.

But they and their parents would not give up their Faith. Brother Rice asked the mothers in the lanes to send in their boys to his new school. “We can’t,” they said, “they have no clothes.” So, he built a little tailor shop and bought cloth – one hundred yards, more than half a mile of cloth. He employed a tailor and sometimes a couple of tailors and paid everything out of his own money. He must have loved those poor children. There was no help from the Government. The boys came. He found they could not learn; they were hungry. He bought flour and employed bakers and gave them bread. On one occasion he bought ninety pairs of new shoes for the poor boys. He became a whole Department of Education financing everything with his own money and the money of the other Brothers. The numbers grew from two hundred to three hundred to four hundred. In 1816 he put a notice in the local newspapers in Waterford saying that he had four hundred boys in the school and two hundred more in the open air. He asked for help to put a roof over the two hundred with winter coming on. The people of Waterford, Protestant and Catholic alike helped him.

Other businessmen followed the example of this great Kilkenny businessman. A wine merchant in Waterford, aged sixty years, sold his business, joined Edmund Rice and financed the opening of his second house and school in Carrick-on-Suir. A professor of mathematics in St. John’s College, Waterford, John Mulcahy, joined Edmund Rice and opened a third house and school in Dungarvan.

In 1812 Brother Rice sent two of his best men to open schools in one of the poorest parts of Dublin. Things were so bad in Dublin in 1817 that crowds looted the bread shops and soldiers with fixed bayonets were on duty in the meat markets. Here again, businessmen joined him. A silk merchant sold out and brought himself and his money to help the work.

A wealthy Protestant wine merchant visited Brother Rice, spoke to him, and then sold his business, became a Catholic and joined the Brothers. Within a few years the Brothers had four schools in the poorest parts of Dublin city with hundreds and hundreds of poor boys attending. Each Brother had between one hundred and one hundred and fifty boys to look after. A Protestant captain in the Wicklow Yeomen, 6’ 6” in height became a Catholic at the age of thirty six and joined Brother Rice. A Callan shoemaker, Thomas John Baptist Cahill, who had been half hanged in 1798 recovered and joined Brother Rice and his schools. The whole thing had its origin in pure charity; in the extraordinary compassion and love that an inspired broken-hearted businessman had for his poor Catholic neighbours.

Brother Rice had a wonderful system of education to help the poor boys of his schools. He knew that buying and selling were the best way at that time for his boys. Waterford was a very busy port and had large numbers of merchants, Protestant and Catholic, importing and exporting. They all needed efficient clerks. Brother Rice supplied them from the schools. Within a few years these boys had their own businesses and were employing other boys from the schools.



A Government Blue Book on the Education of the poor in Ireland in 1825 stated that Brother Rice had thirty Christian Brothers working in twelve different towns and cities and that the thirty Brothers between them were educating (gratis) 5,500 poor boys. It is not known how many of these were being fed and clothed as well.

When we speak of this man, Edmund Rice, we are speaking of Edmund Rice, parent: at first the father of a powerless little daughter for whom he could really do little but love her. Through the purification of terrible loss and sorrow in his married life he was destined by Providence to be the father of thousands of poor boys and a help to their parents. He loved them all, knew them all, fed and clothed most of them and faced insurmountable obstacles through a long life to provide jobs and opportunities for them.

Two years ago the Church declared Edmund Rice Venerable and said that he led a life of heroic sanctity. Next year, please God, Edmund Rice will be declared Blessed by the Holy Father. From time to time the Church picks out men and women who have led lives of exceptional holiness and examines their lives and their actions with a view to Beatification. Of the billion Catholics in the world today about 1,000 of about 150 causes are proceeding. Edmund Rice is one of these. It is taken for granted that every one of the 1,000 lead a life of extraordinary sanctity. With the 150 the Church recognises that beyond their sanctity, these people have a special patronage which they can give to the people of God today. For example, Edmund Rice was a married man. Therefore, he could be the patron of married people. He was a widower of only two years of marriage. Therefore, he would understand the sorrow and loneliness of widows and widowers. He could be their patron. He had a retarded daughter. Therefore, he could feel for and love all parents who had retarded children and be their patron. He was a businessman and could be the patron of businessmen. He bought and sold cattle. He could be the patron of farmers. He was a very original educator. He could be a patron for teachers, especially of teachers in difficult situations.

Christ is the stem of the Vine that the Father has planted in his Garden. We are the branches. The branches are attached to the stem. The Gospel tells us that the branches must be pruned that there may be fruit. Like the stem, Christ, who was pruned for us all in the Garden of Gethsemane, Edmund Rice suffered in his garden of sorrow and loss. Let us pray that this great man of God, born in this place where we celebrate the Holy Mass this evening may intercede for us all and for our families in the pains and sorrows we may be called on to endure in our lesser pruning for the growth of ourselves in grace and for the spread of God's Kingdom on earth. Amen.



## 58. *God's Gift to Blessed Edmund Rice*<sup>512</sup>

God gives a special gift to someone determined to found a religious congregation. This gift is called a “charism”. Probably the best definition of “charism” is that from Pope Paul VI’s document *Mutuae Relationes* (1979). In that document, the Pope explains the word “charism” as “an experience of the Spirit...involving a particular style of sanctification and a particular apostolate.”

In other words the charism or special gift given to Blessed Edmund Rice was an “experience of the Spirit” present in the soul and mind of Blessed Edmund together with a “particular spirituality” and a “particular apostolate.” What was the outcome of this powerful “experience of the Spirit” present in the soul of Edmund Rice? To me it seems to have been a compassionate movement within him from knowledge to realisation that all around him and all around his country were millions of fellow-Christians who were suffering great injustice and great deprivation in their lives. He now realised that he himself could empower these poor people, could be present to them in their misery with the great God who was present to himself. Then they would see that the God they believed in and the God to whom they had been faithful had not abandoned them, but was present through Edmund Rice. It reminds me of what a poor man in India told one of our Brothers: “I know there must be a God when I see Mother Teresa.”

With Edmund Rice’s great gifts and his large fortune, he could transform the lives of these poor broken people from destitution to some human comfort and to hope for their children. Recently in my studies, I have established that in his early curriculum in the schools around Waterford, Blessed Edmund prepared his pauper students for entry into white-collar positions as clerks in “offices and counting-houses.” This was human transformation that empowered these boys to take their parents and family out of squalor and despair into circumstances which would make it easier for them all to live a decent and a Christian life at a higher level.

I believe that out of his great experience of God, refined through the ten-year Gethsemane of loss and brokenness that must have been his life after the early death of his wife, was born in Edmund and for us, his two congregations, a spirituality of presence and a vision of Christ suffering in the lives of these poor people that led to a full-time apostolate of transformation or empowering of their children to help transform the lives of their parents. That “spirituality of presence” seems to me to have been nourished by the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament in all our houses from the very beginning and by Blessed Edmund’s devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It is on record that he made all his big decisions and wrote his most important letters in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>513</sup>

The “apostolate of transformation” or empowering in the lives of his pupils came from his inspired system of education for the boys; from evening classes for their parents; Sunday school for the boys and men in the Mendicity Institute for poor people; attendance with his Brothers in the wards of Jervis Street Hospital for sick poor men and boys; attendance at jails for the uplift of poor prisoners; attendance in charity houses to comfort and support old and destitute men and women. The *Waterford Mirror*, (29 June 1816), in a leading article, highlights this element of transformation from the Mount Sion Schools:

We would enquire confidently of any person who knows Waterford and its suburbs now, and who knew the place, thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago, whether there be

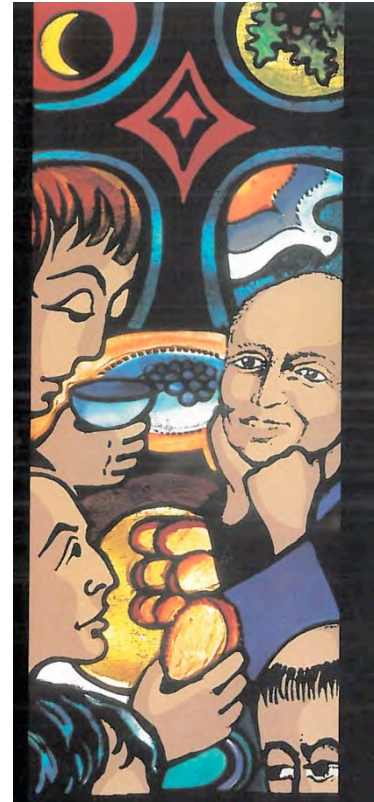


not a palpable improvement in the morals and in the behaviour of the body of the people... Whatever co-operation may have taken place, we may safely assume, that this blessing has been conferred chiefly through the extension of education, and that the school in Barrack Street (Mount Sion), has been beyond comparison, the principal contributor to this valuable fund of local and national amelioration.

The spirit of those early days in the school life of Blessed Edmund is summed up beautifully in the closing paragraph of our oldest Congregational manuscript, *The Origin, Rise and Progress of the Institute*. It describes the last morning of the General Chapter of 1822:

Early next morning they (the Brothers) took leave of each other in the most brotherly and affectionate manner, and departed for their respective houses, where they resumed their labours among the poor children with increased zeal and fervour. May God grant us all the grace of perseverance in his holy service; and may our endeavours to diffuse and establish the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in the hearts of his little ones be attended with success to his divine honour and glory, and the salvation of their and our immortal souls. Amen.

**The Community break bread.**





## 59. *Edmund Rice, God's Merchant Prince*<sup>514</sup>

We have just experienced, and, I suppose, are still experiencing, the beatification of Edmund Rice. Many of us were present in the Square at St. Peter's in Rome when the Pope announced to the whole world and especially to the billion Catholics who are now in the world, that Edmund Rice was now Blessed Edmund Rice, a Beatus of the Church Universal.

The Beatification, in one sense, was the culmination of over 80 years of investigation, of research, of disappointment, of partial failure, of prayer, of new attempts and of final success. But beatification, of course, has also a deeper meaning.

Beatification awakens the *why* and the *wherefore* of a saintly person. It brings a man of heroic sanctity and his motives alive again. Beatification recalls and highlights in order to inspire anew and to encourage the People of God in our time.

This is the first meeting of the Edmund Rice School. And congratulations! A school is for learning. This school is, I suppose, for continuing to study and learn about Edmund Rice --- what he stood for and what he still stands for today. New sources and new information are coming up all the time. With the impact of the Beatification they will continue to come up. There are two elements in this man's life that will come more and more into focus:

- (1) Edmund Rice's place in history
- (2) The spirit and spirituality of this extraordinary Christian layman.

During the past year a new and valuable source came to light. Brother Linus Walker, a Patrician Brother, who is archivist for the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, discovered this letter. It is a letter written on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1816 by Edmund Rice to a priest, a member of the staff of St. Patrick's Seminary in Carlow. Very finally, Brother Linus sent a copy to Brother Francis Keane here in Mount Sion, who generously shared the prize with me. I have been working on this extraordinary letter for some time.

The letter is as follows:

Dear Rev. Sir,

I called at the Bank this morning and was obliged to pledge myself that you came by the acct (account) honestly as they had an entry of it in their books to the cr. (credit) of Furlong. They have allowed int. (interest) on it at 4p/c which amts. (amounts) to £7-3-9d which I send you by the bear. (bearer) Mr. Swain, who is the young man I was speaking to you about. The Principal £250 I have sent to Mr Kenney according to your directions – Anything you can do for to serve the bear. (bearer) will much oblige me.

You'll be pleased to give my best respects to Mrs. Meighan and Community.

And remain, dear Rev. Sir,

Yours Very Sincerely,

Edmund I. Rice.

Waterford, 5 Sept. 1816.

(On the back of the letter there is an inscription in a different handwriting: "Edmund I. Rice to Rev. J. W. Doyle, OSA, Carlow College.")



The letter is short, but it is an intriguing letter. It opens possibilities for further research and insight into the character and achievements of Blessed Edmund Rice. There is no doubt but that he was an amazing man. The Mrs. Meighan referred to in the letter is Mother Catherine Meighan, Superioress of the new Presentation Convent in Carlow, which had just been established five years previously in 1811. The person addressed in the letter is Rev. J. W. Doyle, who was a professor at Carlow College at the time and was afterwards the great JKL Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin.

As I say, it is an extraordinary letter. In the first place, Carlow is 50 miles from Waterford. That is no distance nowadays. But at that time it was 6 to 7 hours away by the only means of travel at the time, the stagecoach. How Edmund Rice in Waterford could know personally the Reverend Mother of a convent so far away and so recently established.<sup>515</sup> Mother. Catherine, of course, was the daughter of a Kilkenny merchant and maybe Edmund Rice knew the family.

The person to whom the letter was sent, as I said, was Rev. James Doyle. Dr. Doyle was born in New Ross in 1786. He came from a family of farmers. His mother, Anne Warren, was a Catholic but descended from a Quaker family. He attended a school in which Catholics and Protestants were educated together, and this influenced in the formation of his opinions on education later. He had experienced the Rising of 1798 in Wexford. He entered the Augustinians in New Ross and was sent to study at Coimbra in Portugal. He returned to Ireland in 1808. He taught in the Augustinian School in New Ross. In 1813 he was appointed to a professorship in Carlow College, which was the first established in Ireland for the education of Catholic youth since the revolution of 1688. In 1819 he was elected Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. As a bishop he set about correcting abuses caused by long persecutions and entered into politics heart and soul.<sup>516</sup> Dr. Doyle actively identified himself with the social struggles of the oppressed Catholics. He gave support to Daniel O'Connell in his struggle for Catholic Emancipation and he was a member of the Catholic Association.<sup>517</sup> Dr. Doyle was an intimate friend of Edmund Rice and he was a friend of Bishop Murray of Dublin.

The Mr. Kenney mentioned in the letter was most likely Fr. Peter Kenney SJ, recently elected Provincial of the restored Jesuit Order in Ireland. This Fr. Kenney was Spiritual Director to Br. Rice's new Congregation and was a prominent figure in the emergence of the nine new congregations that sprang up in Ireland in the first thirty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Peter Kenney was born in Dublin in 1779. He studied at Fr. Betagh's famous school in Dublin and at Carlow College. He joined the Jesuits in 1804. He studied at Palermo in Sicily. After a brilliant scholastic course he came back to Ireland in 1811 and was appointed by Archbishop Murray to the Vice-Presidency of Maynooth College. Three years later the Society of Jesus was restored to Ireland after its long unfortunate suppression. Father Kenney immediately set about having the lands of Clongowes Wood acquired for a boarding school for wealthy Catholic boys. Ever since the Reformation the Jesuits sought to educate clever students and pupils from good homes in order to provide good Catholic leaders in society. This custom goes right back to the Counter-Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Fr. Kenney was a personal friend of Edmund Rice and he employed Edmund Rice, brilliant merchant, to purchase Clongowes Wood (privately) for the Jesuits.<sup>518</sup> Incidentally there is a strong tradition that Edmund Rice had been in charge of the finances of the suppressed Jesuits. The fact that the money for Fr. Kenney was in a Waterford Bank would give some support to that tradition.

An English Protestant Member of Parliament, Sir John Hippisley, a bitter opponent of all religious orders, heard of the purchase and denounced the new foundation in North Kildare.



Edmund Rice, in alarm for his friend, Fr. Kenney, wrote through a third party to Sir John Newport, MP for Waterford. Sir John's answer to the third party gives an insight into the difficulties experienced by those working towards the education and the liberation of the Catholics in Ireland at the time. Incidentally, Sir John in his letter pays a beautiful tribute to Edmund Rice and shows his great respect for him. Here is his letter:<sup>519</sup>

Sir,

I have just received your letter with Mr. Rice's inquiries as to Rev. Mr. Kenney's purchase of Castle Browne (Clongowes Wood). I think he may set his mind at rest as to the possibility of impeding Mr. Kenney's purchase. With respect to Sir John Hippisley's ulterior objections I cannot conjecture what they are. The Jesuits are the phantom which haunts him night and day, and there is nothing so absurd as to be incredible to him. I wish I could give Mr. Rice more full information. His efforts to serve the rising generation deserve every attention from every friend in Ireland.

Yours Truly,

J. Newport.

Incidentally the £250 Principal, mentioned in the letter of Edmund Rice to Dr. Doyle and which had been sent to Mr. Kenny from Waterford, is very interesting. A very reputable historian tells me that for an equivalent in today's money we should multiply by at least 60. Thus the £250 sent to Mr. Kenney becomes today £15,000.

This letter of Edmund Rice to Dr. Doyle in 1816 is also interesting in that it was written when Edmund Rice's congregation was already established in Waterford, Carrick-on-Suir, Dungarvan, Cork, Dublin and was in the process of starting in Limerick. So Mr. Rice was a very busy man at the time. It is amazing to see Edmund Rice so involved and even more amazing to feel the standing that Edmund Rice had with the Waterford Bank. On his pledge the money and the interest were transferred from a person called Furlong and placed in the account of Fr. Doyle.

It is evident from the letter that Edmund Rice was associated with these very eminent men - Dr. Doyle, Fr. Peter Kenney and later Archbishop Murray. We know that he was also a personal friend of Daniel O'Connell. A very human story is told in Dominic Burke's *History of the Institute* concerning Daniel O'Connell and Edmund Rice. It happened in 1834 when the first railway line from Westland Row in Dublin to Dún Laoghaire was opened. Br. Rice had some Brothers on an outing on the new and revolutionary method of travel. Towards evening Br. Rice and his Brothers were waiting at the railway station in Dún Laoghaire for the return train. Along came the Liberator himself, Daniel O'Connell. He immediately approached Br. Rice and began chatting with him. When the time had come for the train to return to Dublin, O'Connell, who had a first class ticket, boarded the second class carriage with the Brothers. They talked freely on the condition of the country, the hope for the redress of grievances, and the working of the National Education System.<sup>520</sup> Six years before, in 1828, Daniel O'Connell had been present at the laying of the foundation stone of Br. Rice's great Model School in North Richmond Street, Dublin. On that occasion, in the presence of 100,000 people, O'Connell paid tribute to the work of the Brothers for the poor and underprivileged and referred to Br. Rice himself as the "Patriarch of the Monks of the West."<sup>521</sup>

But to return to the original letter of Edmund Rice to Dr. Doyle in 1816, that letter was written at a time when Edmund Rice was much engaged in working towards a radical



development of his Congregation. He was negotiating a change from being a diocesan foundation to becoming a Papal Congregation. A Papal Congregation is inter-diocesan. It works at the service of the Church Universal, that is at the service of the Church wherever it is at its weakest. The 1816 letter to Dr. Doyle points to a very important element in all this. When Edmund Rice started his great movement for the uplifting and liberation by education of a whole people he was still, and as this letter shows, continued to be a businessman and a very competent financier. Most founders give up all to follow Christ. Edmund Rice knew that he was being called to something much bigger than one school for poor Catholic children or even a few schools in one city or in one diocese. He knew that what was being envisaged, through God's inspiration, was something for the whole Church in Ireland and even beyond. Being a businessman he knew that to become, as he did, a one-man Department of Education, without any help from any government, and no possibility of any financial help from his poor pupils, would take money, any amount of money; and a steady and worthwhile flow of money. Therefore Edmund Rice, businessman, kept everything, his lands, his bonds, his investments, his house property. Like St. Paul, struck from a horse, blinded called by God for a great work, Edmund Rice came through great sorrow and loss to meet God's call. He brought his immense talents, his strengths, his capacities to the service of the new life and the new work he was commencing at 40 years of age. And a very important one of those talents was his remarkable business and financial acumen.

Most of the men who joined him brought in some money. Quite a number of them were, like himself, merchants – people who bought and sold. These were an up and coming body of Catholic people who saw the flaw in the Penal Laws. They knew that all these laws were aimed at keeping the Catholics poor and deprived of opportunity, so that they would be no threat to those in power. But some Catholics saw about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that nothing could stop them from buying and selling. And so the Catholic merchant class arose and became wealthy and were increasing in power. Edmund Rice's movement attracted many of this class. In one sense it was generally a movement of merchants. Some sold their business and brought themselves and their money into this great Gospel venture.

Michael Green was in the silk business and entered in 1817 at the age of 28. Thomas Brien joined in 1805, aged 62. He had been a successful wine merchant in Waterford. He too sold his business and built and founded the second house of the congregation at Carrick-on-Suir in 1806. Laurence Watson was also a wine merchant and he was very wealthy. He was from Dublin and entered in 1817 aged 33 years. He was a Protestant. He was so impressed by the work of the early Brothers in Hanover Street down the quays in Dublin that he sought an interview with the Founder of this movement that so impressed him. He came to Waterford and talked to Edmund Rice for three hours. He went back to Dublin, sold his business and became a Catholic. He came back down to Waterford, joined Brother Rice and taught most of his life in St. Patrick's branch school in Waterford.<sup>522</sup>

All the monies of these men and the dowries of the Waterford Presentation Sisters, Edmund Rice invested, mainly in land. We know that he had an agent, John Dunphy of Callan, who collected the rents from the various farms on his lands. These investments and the continuous buying and selling and trading were needed to keep Edmund Rice's congregation and the local Presentation convent and schools going. The Presentation Sisters received a generous 8% on their dowries. All this trading may seem strange. But the men of Edmund Rice's brotherhood had to live, to pay their bills, had to feed and clothe a number of their pupils. They had to build or buy and furnish new schools. It is interesting that a derogatory report to Rome in 1820 complained of them going to fairs and markets.<sup>523</sup> It was Edmund Rice



himself, evidently, who organised all the buying and selling and trading to keep things going. He seemed to spare his men although he certainly did not spare himself.

These men were just feeling their way moving towards something unknown in Ireland before; a lay male Gospel community living in common and working in common for the education and uplifting of a whole nation. When they started the only approved Rule available was the Presentation Sisters' Rule approved in 1805 for enclosed nuns. It is interesting how Edmund Rice kept strictly to the basic elements of this rule while adjusting some of the external regulations, like the rule of enclosure. The change he made here gives some inkling into the background and social habits of these early full-grown men some of whom had been merchants and men of substance in the world. He admitted that enclosure was important. "Yet," he said, "as tolerably good health is essentially necessary to discharge the duties of this state, and as strict enclosure might tend considerably to injure many constitutions, Superiors are hereby enjoined to permit their subjects to ride (horses were as important to merchants then as cars today), to walk abroad, take change of air, or any lawful means that they, with the advice of physicians may judge necessary to restore or preserve health."<sup>524</sup>

A random look at some of the Founder's account books, now kept in the Christian Brothers' Archives in the Generalate in Rome throws much light on the methods of financing and constantly expanding the work of the schools, even years after starting. Not all the men who joined were assigned to or capable of school work. Grown men joined, it seemed, who wanted to be part of this Gospel community and help in whatever way they could in its apostolate. The average age was something between 25 and 30. There were Brothers who cooked. Edward Francis Grace, who joined aged 27 in 1809, was a carpenter. He travelled from school to school building and repairing furniture. He was sent from Limerick in 1824 to superintend the building of the monastery in Ennistymon. It is still standing.<sup>525</sup>

From the Founder's Account Books, it seems that Br. Rice must have employed laymen outside the monastery. An entry for May 12, 1824 tells us:

Paid for 5 cows bought by Edmund Drulan at the Fair of Harvey	£33 17s 0d
Paid boys for droving	3s 9d
	£34 0s 9d

(in today's money valued £2,040).

Between 10<sup>th</sup> September and 21<sup>st</sup> November 1822 11 cows were sold to different people (named), netting £86 14s 0d.

In the same period the hide and tallow of 8 cows was sold for £26 10s 0d and the beef of 7 ½ cows sold to Carroll & Co. for £ 37 13s 6d .

That meant, in today's money, an income of £10, 609 for 3 months' trading.

The Mendicity Institute for destitute families who came to Waterford, the victims of the Famine of 1822/3, was set up by the Protestants in the city, the Protestant Mayor, Protestant Bishop, to help these people. Br. Rice and his Brothers were soon part of the work. Over the years Edmund Rice bought clothing, linen, food, boots, coats for the families, paid to redeem clothes out of the pawn, had the building plastered and went down every Sunday and Holiday with his Brothers to instruct the men and boys. Edmund Rice eventually became Chairman. All this cost money.

Again from the Account books, Edmund Rice had to keep the



monies earned in banks. In 1822 there was a slump in business and eleven banks in Munster failed. One of these banks was Newport's Waterford Bank, where Edmund Rice kept his money. In his account book for 1822 there is an entry August 1822:

Rec. from the assign. of Newport for amount Bank notes:

£293 9s 8¼d / £122 5s 5d.

In today's money for his £17,640 he had in the bank, he received £7,320.

His money was more than halved.

Another man might have curtailed the work for the poor or even closed up. The History of the Institute tells us what he did. He put nine men full-time on the road buying and selling cattle. I used to think that these were Brothers not in the schools. But it seems that they were hired cattle dealers.

In the year 1824 over 50 head of cattle were bought and sold. We also find him selling wheat to a merchant in Liverpool to the value of £20,000 in today's money. He certainly must have had quite a number of lay people in his employment, buying and selling and evidently cultivating farms.

An entry for 1825 tells that he bought between 80 and 90 pairs of new shoes for barefoot boys. All these cost money. It is interesting to note that in 1826 he sold oats to Bianconi to the value of £480 in today's money. He also bought cloth in Dublin to the value of £1,920 (today's money) also cord and linen for boys £1,080 and books from the Catholic Book Society £360. And Waterford people will be interested in an entry for 1827. Sold barley to Cherry's (Brewery) £1,260 worth.

Besides organising and teaching schools he kept all the accounts of these monetary transactions. Again, until 1829 the Catholic Church, being non-existent in law, could not receive legacies left by wealthy Catholics for the Church. These legacies were usually left to named lay Catholics whom the benefactor could trust. Edmund Rice, being a brilliant businessman and financier found himself administrator of a goodly number of these legacies. One of them, the Mary Power Charity, involved over a half million pounds in today's money. Most of the legacies were for the benefit of destitute old men and old women and for the clothing and education of poor Catholic boys and girls. It must be added that the enormous burden of work imposed by this administration of the charity funds was undertaken gratis by Edmund Rice as he stated in an affidavit to the Commission of Charitable Bequests: "I have never received nor desired any remuneration whatever for acting as Trustee of this Charity."<sup>526</sup>

And, of course, there was another way of supporting these schools.  
Newspaper Cutting - - probably from *The Freeman's Journal*.

#### Mill Street Schools

On Sunday next, the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1837 At Two o'clock

The annual Sermon will be preached in the new Roman Catholic Church of St. Nicholas Without, Francis Street, by the Very Rev. Dr. Burke, VG, Clonmel, in support of The Free Schools of that Parish, held in Mills Street, in which 650 Male Children, under the superintendence of the Religious Brothers of the Christian Schools, are educated. Fifty of the most deserving are annually clothed.



An additional School for 200 Boys has been erected since the last sermon; the Institution is thereby increased one half, and it is confidently hoped the contributions of an enlightened and generous people will be in proportion.

Donations from those who cannot attend will be thankfully received by His Grace ... and by the following Gentlemen:-

Daniel O'Connell, Esq. M. P.

Henry Grattan, Esq. M. P.

G. Evans, Esq. M. P.

J. Power, Esq. M. P.

O'Connell is mentioned in many subscription lists.

But, sometimes, it was raining and the crowds did not come.

To return to the letter of Edmund Rice to Dr. Doyle in 1816, that letter ties Edmund Rice to Fr. Kenney SJ and to Dr. Doyle. There is a third person, not mentioned in that letter, Archbishop Murray of Dublin, to whom Edmund Rice was close. All four of them: Archbishop Murray, Bishop Doyle, Fr. Kenney and Edmund Rice were powerful prophetic figures in the 20 years leading to Catholic Emancipation. The population of Ireland since 1691 – the Fall of Limerick – was multiplying. The population of 1 million in 1691 had reached 2 ½ million by 1767, had risen to over 4 million by 1781 and was about 5 million in 1800.<sup>527</sup> In the closing years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century early marriages and large families were common. The country was full of young people, the majority of them desperately poor. There had been famines in 1728, in 1741 (when ½ million died), 1756, 1817, 1819, 1822, 1836, and the terrible disaster of The Great Famine of 1845-48.

Archbishop Murray and Bishop Doyle (JKL) stood out from their fellow-bishops. Many bishops kept quiet and just hoped for concessions from time to time from the Government. Bishops Murray and Doyle sided with O'Connell in his non-violent organized pressure on the government for recognition of the Catholic Church and for recognition of Catholics as full citizens. Edmund Rice was a friend of O'Connell and supported his Catholic Rent campaign through the schools.

It was Archbishop Murray who in 1816 first introduced Edmund Rice to the idea of a Papal Congregation that could move to where the needs of the Church were greatest. Coming back from a meeting in Rome about the Veto Question – the British Government were trying to get from the Pope, the right to “Veto” or block the appointment of any new Catholic bishop in Ireland who was in any way opposed to them -- Bishop Murray on the way home stopped in Paris and met the De La Salle Brothers, who were a Papal Congregation. The Bishop was so impressed that he brought back a copy of their Rule to show to Edmund Rice.

Br. Rice had schools in Archbishop Murray's diocese of Dublin as early as 1812, just ten years after starting in Waterford. Dublin at the time was a city of appalling poverty and brokenness. Within six years the Brothers had five schools in the most depressed part of the city.

Wealthy Catholics had pay schools and boarding schools like Clongowes Wood. In Ireland during the early days of the Presentation Brothers and the Christian Brothers, there were hundreds of thousands of pauper Catholic boys who could not afford to pay for education. The Government were financing a number of schools such as the Kildare Place Society





Schools. These government schools were suspect for many Catholics. Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic Lord Kenmare withdrew from the Board of the Kildare Place Society Schools because they said that they were proselytising. This was always a danger with government-helped schools for the poor, especially in Ireland, a country where those being governed outnumbered enormously those governing. And the Catholics were growing in numbers all the time. The Kildare Place Society Schools were very attractive especially for families with intelligent sons or daughters. The schools had a college for training the teachers. They had a model school and they had their own special textbooks. O'Connell's Catholic Association tried to match piece by piece all the advantages of the government-helped schools. It is interesting that Archbishop Murray approached Br. Rice and asked him to transfer his headquarters from Mount Sion to Dublin and to open a training college, a model school, and to publish their own textbooks. It is quite likely that O'Connell and The Catholic Association asked for this. Br. Rice agreed to come to Dublin in 1828 to spearhead this project. He was 66 years of age. Funding for this huge venture was to come from another project that emanated from The Catholic Association. Since the Reformation the graveyards in Ireland were the property of the State Church. Catholics often had to pay very high rates for graves. O'Connell proposed to open two new graveyards for the Catholics of Dublin, at Glasnevin and Golden Bridge. Part of the money from the Glasnevin cemetery was to go to finance the Catholic Model School and training college and the special textbooks. Br. Rice started to build. Catholic Emancipation came one year later in 1829. The Catholic Association felt that they had achieved their objective and voted themselves out of existence. The Glasnevin Cemetery Committee went out on its own and felt that they were not bound by the decisions made by the now defunct Catholic Association. Br. Rice was left with a half-built mighty establishment and no funding to finish it. And his response? One might expect him to withdraw from the project. But no. His real response was a firm indication of the basic *why* and *wherefore* of his whole involvement in education. He used what money he had to hand to have 2,703 Masses said for the completion of the O'Connell Schools. Then he had the boys of the school and the Brothers pray very specially. Finally he approached his influential friends in high places. Sir John Newport, MP for Waterford obtained for him permission from Lord Melbourne for a Brother to collect in England among the Catholic gentry for the completion of the work. The Model School was finished and opened. It was still called by the title Model School even by Government inspectors long after the Brothers had severed connections with the State National Board. There was a training college too where Brothers were trained for teaching. And in the Report on the Powis Commission (1868) Brother Austin Grace in sworn evidence said that for a while some Catholic lay teachers were also trained there. Question; would this be the first Catholic Training College for Primary teachers in Ireland?

Br. Rice, as I said, was a friend of Archbishop Murray. The Government, when it set up the National Board for Primary Education in 1831, asked Archbishop Murray to accept a place on the team of commissioners. Archbishop Murray, unlike other bishops, accepted. Many bishops would have nothing to do with the National Board and they had reason to be doubtful about it. They feared proselytism in the system, just like there had been in other schemes. Archbishop Murray's idea was that if he became a commissioner he could act as a watchdog and could block any attempts to use the system for proselytism.

Archbishop Murray asked some of the new Congregations to place their schools under the National Board. There would be payment from the government. Although the payment was low it would have been welcome at the time. Brother Rice placed six of his schools under the Board as an experiment. That was in 1831. Five years later, in 1836, there was a General



Chapter of the Brothers and it was decided to withdraw their schools from the Board. They said that they could not run their schools in the manner that they wished ---- to teach all subjects, to teach them well and to impregnate them with the Christian message. Br. Rice got the unpleasant task of telling Archbishop Murray. The Archbishop was very displeased.

Br. Rice's original Congregation, in God's providence, split in 1822. Some wished to remain diocesan and to be subject to the local bishop. They continued to live under the Presentation Rule. The others, who became the *Christian Brothers*, opted for Edmund Rice's new Papal Congregation. They followed a new Rule. Edmund Rice was elected first Superior General. It is a mighty tribute to this great and saintly Irishman that, in God's design, he had the honour of founding two congregations instead of one. Both congregations have done heroic work for God and for the poor for almost two hundred years.

Both congregations followed Edmund Rice's programme of quality teaching that would strengthen the Faith of huge numbers of poor Catholic boys, boys who would not have had a chance in life but for the education they got *gratis* in his schools. His curricula were geared towards self-development, self-esteem and opportunity for worthwhile employment. In a reply to Rome in 1824 against an anonymous and vicious attack, among other things Edmund Rice was able to say:-

As to the other part of the charge that it would have been better if we had never been founded, your memorialist could appeal to the countless number of poor boys, who after having received a religious and literary education in their schools have been sent forth to trades, to shop keeping, to merchants' counting houses, some of whom are, at the present moment, coping in commerce and in the accumulation of wealth, with the first merchants of the city.

Like St. Paul, Edmund Rice used his all for Christ. He and his men dealt with vast numbers. A Government Report on the Education of the Poor in Ireland, 1825, states about the Christian Brothers that Edmund Rice and his 30 Brothers, on their own in their 24 schools in 12 town or cities "accounted for about 5,500 poor boys."<sup>528</sup> And that meant teaching and clothing them too. And that was an average of 183 boys per Brother.

Edmund Rice and his Brothers educated the boys by day and often their parents by night. In one of the industrial cities of England, where there large numbers of Irish emigrants, the Brothers taught the boys in the daytime, the parents from 7 p.m. and the factory workers from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. There was a lending library in each school. Boys were advised to read (with prudence) for their parents on the weekends. About ten years ago we discovered that Edmund Rice also had a pre-school for very small children in Mount Sion from the beginning.

Many tributes were paid to Edmund Rice and his Brothers throughout his life. An extraordinary one appeared in a British literary magazine, *The Monthly Magazine*, in 1829. The editor of the magazine, which was favourable to Ireland, was Thomas Campbell, the poet, author of "Lord Ullin's Daughter". Describing Edmund Rice and his work and the more than 4,000 boys being educated gratuitously in the schools, the article went on to say:<sup>529</sup>

This single individual has done more to promote education than the whole Kildare Place Society put together; and it appears to me to be a great misapplication of public money to confide its allocation to that demi-religious and demi-political corporation ...instead of selecting such a society as the means of distribution.



Probably the most insightful summing up of Brother Rice's motives and achievements was given shortly after Br. Rice's death by his life-long friend, the lawyer Stephen Curtis:

Am I wrong in supposing that the body of the Catholics could not have been struck off, and have been changed from being trodden upon, and elevated to the position that they at present occupy were it not for him?...I do not want to diminish anything from the fame of the Emancipator of the Catholics...his title to that is indisputable; but this I say, that although the victory of 1829 (Catholic Emancipation) could not have been won without O'Connell, next to him, no man did more to achieve it than Edmund Rice. One schooled the people for the guidance of the other; one smoothed the way over which the other led the people to the possession of their liberty...

And as regards the motives of Edmund he had this to say:

But for my part, it was not the vindication of our liberties alone, and the promotion of the social condition of the Irish People that called forth his assistance. These motives influenced him not a little in his purpose. But there was another motive and that was the inculcation of great religious principles...

And if he were not persuaded that more than temporal blessings would follow in the train of education to the Irish, I am convinced that he would not have spent a single day in its advancement.<sup>530</sup>

Thus from a single short letter of Edmund Rice written to a priest in Carlow in 1816 so much has come and so much light thrown on this extraordinary and holy man, Edmund Rice. The Church in Ireland was in a desperate state when he started, struck with scandals, violence, injustice, robbery of the old, murders, cruelty. The Catholic Church itself was disorganised.

Some bishops were not resident, some in hiding. The priests were scarce, some were uneducated or with strange ideas from Revolutionary France. Churches were scarce; no parochial house nor reservation of the Blessed Sacrament; no Mass on weekdays except in private houses.

### **THE IRISH PEOPLE IN 1835**

De Tocqueville, the French traveller who had visited Ireland in July/August 1835 tells us that three basic themes had taken root in his mind:

- (1) the extraordinary poverty of the Irish People
- (2) their enduring and implacable hatred for the Irish aristocracy
- (3) their deep and touching attachment to the Church of their Fathers.

And the other side of the coin there was, he said, the aristocracy's scathing contempt for the people. At this point it is interesting to note how an outside witness saw the situation among the Catholics of Ireland for whom people like Edmund Rice worked.

In all this chaos at the time, God raised up prophetic leaders, man and women, who between them brought into existence nine new Congregations into the Church, five of men and four of women and all this within the first thirty years of the new 19<sup>th</sup> century and all in Ireland.

Edmund Rice was privileged to be the founder of two of these Congregations, the Presentation Brothers and the Christian Brothers. Eight of these nine Irish Congregations and



the Presentation Sisters, founded by Nano Nagle in the previous century, are still in existence. All of the nine are spread worldwide spreading the Gospel and working in many places for the poor and the dispossessed especially in the Third World.

Edmund Rice started with two men. At the time of his death, 158 Brothers were teaching in Ireland in 19 houses, in England in 12 houses, in Australia, one house and in America in one house. Over 30 Brothers had gone to their reward. Over 140 had tried their vocation and left.<sup>531</sup>

We have been to school this evening, the first day of the annual Edmund Rice annual school. Congratulations to all concerned with its birth. May this school continue and flourish and may it bring new knowledge and inspiration and above all, hope in our time to our people, just as Edmund Rice brought hope to the confused and broken and bewildered people of Ireland in his time.



## 60. *Letter from Edmund Rice to his brother, John*<sup>532</sup>

Richmond St.  
Dublin  
December 10<sup>th</sup>

My dear Father John,

You have at the other page of this long letter of Mrs. McAuley about her Institute craving your exertions on its behalf which indeed it deserves for already it has cost her a sea of trouble to bring it to what it is at present. I know not whether or not you have been acquainted with the history of her life. I shall give it to you as well as I know it. Her parents died while she & a brother & sister of hers were left young in care of a Gentleman of fortune in this city. They were all Protestants, & Mrs. McAuley was grown up [sic] she was converted and practised her religion a good many years without the Knowledge of her Patron, but when he came to knowledge of it such was his regard for her that he, it seems, never opened his eyes to her about [it?] and gave directions to her brother and sister never to speak to him on the subject. Thus she lived for a good many years & when this old Gent was dying instead of leaving his Property to the other two who continued Protestants he left the whole of it to her save a small share. Thus she was left at the head of a large property with carriage horses & a great deal of it she gave amongst the poor & for other pious objects whilst she was deliberating on raising some pious foundation. She was at length advised to something like her present plan by a good man Rev. Mr. Armstrong whom you know, and in all appearance they hit my sight [? sic] for to my knowledge they have done an immense deal of Good since their commencement. The Monastery, if it can be so called, before it gets the Sanction of the Holy See, has cost her several thousands of pounds, & when I told her [on] Saturday last that you may be able to do something for her in Rome, her heart jumped for joy at the prospect of anything from the Holy See. Now it seems to me, that this document of hers is rather a loose thing & should I be right in this conjecture, perhaps you may be able to have the matter referred back to Dr. Murray which in my mind would be the best way of doing it. However, you must be the best judge but at all events I hope you will do what you can for the poor Creatures who are sighing for it.

I wrote to you about the 27<sup>th</sup> of last month & enclosed you a Bill of Sylvester Young on his brother in London for £11. 0. 0 for to say Masses @ 2/6 each. We are very low in cash, with 10 or 11 of us living together in this house. The repeal question every day is getting new strength at a hint for a libel against the Pilot Newspaper. O'Connell made a speech for 4 hours in the Court of King's Bench, & flung back the speeches which were made by two of the judges before whom he was pleading, the Chief Justice & Judge Jebb [?], at the time of Union in themselves. Never were men so disappointed as the Gov't were for this prosecution in making the court of King's Bench an arena for the question they thought to stifle. The Press (?) in Ireland & in England also are teeming [?] with eulogiums on O'Connell. Shiel is sticking close to him & a most powerful auxiliary he is. Is it likely you will be successful in Jn [?] Healy's business? I had a letter from him the day he rec'd yours. If it be contrary to our Vow to appropriate a penny a week for our rent [?], I hope you [sic] get us a dispensation for it, for we are rather in a distressed way. This country is growing worse and worse every day, people absolutely starving in the midst of plenty. Corn and Pigs a perfect [??] drug. Pork abt [= about?] 21s [or d?] per cwt. & wheat at abt 21 or 23s [?] per barrel. I was glad to find that you had not abandoned the Idea of returning home. My health is, thank God, pretty good, with the exception of pains in my limbs.

I remain,

My Dr Fr. John

Yours mo: affectionately

E. Rice [signature]



## 61. *The Families of Blessed Edmund Rice*

Two years ago Pope John Paul II convened a Synod on the role of consecrated life in the Church today. There had previously been a Synod on the priesthood and a Synod on the laity. And now it was to be a Synod on the religious life.

In his introduction to the Apostolic Exhortation which he published after the Synod, the Pope said that religious life is a gift from God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. The Pope then went on to say that, in some parts of the world, institutes of religious life are experiencing a period of difficulty, while in other parts they are prospering with great vitality. In Ireland, religious congregations and the congregations of Edmund Rice among them, are certainly in trouble. We, Christian Brothers, have but very few if any novices. But God works in strange ways. Most congregations of women and men in Ireland today are in similar situations. This does not mean that God wants these congregations to die. At a time of great difficulty for the Church in Ireland, it seems that the Holy Spirit is pointing towards an opening of these inspired groups to lay members of the Church, both men and women.

Each Founder/Foundress of a congregation is specifically called and given a wonderful gift or charism by the Holy Spirit at a particular time for the good of the Church. This very special gift to the foundress/founder always includes a particular or unique spirituality and particular apostolate. This particular spirituality and a particular apostolate are at the very heart of the unique way to God given to the Founder/Foundress. They were the seeds that grew into Christian communities, worshipping and serving God in special ways. They were for all the members of the particular Congregations. And now they are open to women and men of all stations of life who feel that they are called to be associate members of a particular congregation. They and the members of that congregation are both called to live the Gospel as the founding person of the congregation lived it. And they are called to serve God and the neighbour as that person did.

With regard to Blessed Edmund Rice I hold that his particular spirituality was a spirituality of PRESENCE. To him God was present in everything and in everyone, especially in the poor and in those on the margins. The Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist was *THE* Presence: the source of all presence in self and in others. Edmund Rice and his Brothers lived together in Gospel harmony. They prayed together. They heard Mass together and received the Blessed Eucharist. They brought Christ and the constant awareness of His Presence in their lives to meet the Christ present in others. Enriched by the pupils in their schools and by contact with the parents, they brought the Christ present in these people back into the life of the monastery. Every time that Edmund Rice entered his bedroom he knelt for the space of a Hail Mary to recall God's Presence with him in the room. He never left the monastery without first visiting Christ present in the Eucharist. On returning he also visited the Blessed Sacrament. It was one of his special ways of going to God.

I believe Edmund Rice's special mission or apostolate was a mission of TRANSFORMATION. Education at the time he commenced his work, was the most effective way of raising poor and deprived Catholics out of their poverty. Edmund Rice used education to transform and to enrich the lives of the desperate and the broken and to help them grow as Christians with an awareness of Christ present in their lives and in the lives of others. The means or methods of evangelising may be changed or may change. The mission



to grow personally and to help others to grow in Christ may call for new methods in order to meet the new needs of today.

So Blessed Edmund Rice's two congregations are encouraging the growth of new Edmund Rice Families. They believe that this is God's wish and the wish of the Church. In these families the local community and the People of God, men and women, will share the spirituality and the mission of Blessed Edmund in their lives. For the Brothers, the presence of good men and women living the Blessed Edmund way to God in their ordinary lives in the world should be a great support and a new pride in their God-given vocation and even a hope for vocations for the future. For the good men and women, many of them parents, the call to a special and enriching living of the Christian life must be a blessed and enriching gift to their Faith.

When Edmund Rice and the nine founders/foundresses of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century started their inspired work, the Catholic laity of Ireland had already gone through a century and more of persecution with very few priests to help them and almost no religious. They kept the Faith and passed it on to their children. Then God raised the new Congregations of Sisters and Brothers as a gift to help them and their families in worsening times. Today God is calling on the laity to help the religious men and women to meet an even more difficult situation and to join with them to grow together in Christ and to spread the Kingdom anew.

There is a new and positive spirit beginning to grow in the Church in Ireland today. The seeds sown over thirty years ago at the Vatican Council are slowly stirring into life. There has been upset and doubt and unbelief and unhappiness among a number of our people. Many now feel a new need for "the medicine of God's mercy" and a hidden hunger for the saving message of Christ. The harvest will be great. Thank God for the new Families of Blessed Edmund Rice, who, please God, will be among the harvesters.



## 62. *The Mind of Blessed Edmund Rice from his letters*

1. But, let us do ever so little for God, we will be sure He will never forget it, nor let it pass unrewarded.<sup>533</sup>
2. Were we to know the merit and value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we should prize it more than Gold or Silver.<sup>534</sup>
3. One thing you may be sure of, that whilst you work for God, whether you succeed or not, He will amply reward you.<sup>535</sup>
4. The will of God be done in this and in everything we undertake.<sup>536</sup>
5. The world and everything in it is continually changing which proves to us that there is nothing permanent under the sun and that perfect happiness is not to be expected but in another world.<sup>537</sup>
6. ....tell them that for the last few days I was a good deal occupied, and what was worse, that my spirits were, for the most part, as low as ditch water.<sup>538</sup>
7. If you only acquire this virtue (humility) it will always guide you safely let your paths be ever so cross or difficult.<sup>539</sup>
8. Never allow vain notions of your own sense, abilities, or other natural or acquired qualifications to take root in your mind, but always beseech God to make known to you, your sins and imperfections.<sup>540</sup>
9. You being yet young in religion and placed over a senior Brother will require great watchfulness over yourself to perform well the task which is assigned to you, and you should beg frequently of God light and grace to effect it. Above all beg of Him to give you the virtue of humility which is so necessary for religious in every station, but particularly for those who have care or direction of others.<sup>541</sup>





63.

## *The Rice Family*<sup>542</sup>

In the light of what you have seen and what you have said, I would like tonight to look at some of the thinking by the theologians and historians of the Church in recent times. I would then examine where we of the Blessed Edmund Rice Family fit into or could fit into what is happening in the Church today.

Fr. Gabriel Daly, OSA, an Augustinian theologian, wrote recently: “Religious Orders and Congregations are human responses (under the Holy Spirit) to perceived needs in the Church and in the world at any given time.”

Times change and the needs change. From what we have seen in the video, Edmund Rice’s congregations are starting (actually have started) their second life. Human responses have a history and history is about change. God is the God of History. And He is in the middle of all that is happening. And we have to trust Him. Cardinal Newman once said: “To live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often.” Mount Sion, now more than ever, is a place where Br. Rice’s Brothers and the People of God - women and men - who wish to be associated with Br. Rice, come to work and to pray for the Church and for the needs of the Church and the world in these troubled times.

With a goodly number of religious congregations old needs have been met and new needs are about to be met. And they will be met by religious, not by fleeing from the world, but by religious reaching out to the world, to the People of God, both together, working for the Church, each as best as she or he can, in the parish, in the home, the city, the school, the workplace. And all under the patronage of a foundress or founder like Blessed Edmund Rice.

Church historians today are finding old and important roots for religious life that go way back in history. Most religious orders or congregations have indirect connection with religious life as it was lived in the Egyptian desert in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century. But some historians have been talking about another tradition of religious life, much older, that was lived in Syria (just north of the Holy Land) as far back as 280 AD, a little more than 200 years after Christ. They are calling this the “bedrock tradition” of religious life. And I find that Blessed Edmund Rice seems to fit in a special way into this “bedrock tradition”. The “bedrock tradition” flourished, as I said, in a very early age in the history of the Church. It found its best organised expression in St. Basil, a wonderful bishop, who was born in 330 AD. It is interesting that for Basil (as for Edmund Rice) the basic ingredients of religious life were:

1. Simplicity of life-style,
2. Brotherly and sisterly love,
3. Compassion for the poor and the sick, the old and the orphaned,
4. A deep love for humanity, and
5. Reading and studying the Scriptures.

Arthur Voobus, a Cistercian historian, writing about the “bedrock tradition” says that it was a way of living the Gospel that grew among the people themselves. It was a lay movement. It originated among groups called “Sons and Daughters of the Covenant”. These were Christian men and women who pledged themselves to a life of prayer and service. Initially they lived in their own homes and some of them later in groups. Later the great St. Basil incorporated the simplicity and vitality of this tradition into his form of consecrated life. The whole tradition was based on the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes. The Sons and



Daughters of the Covenant! Let me explain. A covenant is a solemn pact or agreement between two parties. The Covenant in the Scriptures is the Covenant, described in the Book of Deuteronomy, between Moses and God on Mount Sinai. On top of Mount Sinai God spoke to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments. Moses promised God that his people, the Jews, would keep and honour these commandments forever. This was part of the Covenant or agreement. And God promised Moses something wonderful in return. God said: *“You shall be my people and I shall be your God.”* Thus the great pact or Covenant between Moses and God was sealed.

And now Edmund Rice and the Covenant! In the year 1791, while still a layman, Edmund Rice bought a new Bible. On the very first page of that Bible, Edmund Rice made a list of 12 texts which he called “Texts against Usury” (or money-lending). The late Fr. Dermot Cox O.F.M. (RIP), postulator of the Cause of Edmund Rice once did an examination of these texts. Fr. Dermot was Professor of Scripture in the famous Gregorian University in Rome, at the time. He found the texts most interesting. Of the very first text (Ez. 22:25) “If you lend money to any of my people that is poor...thou shalt not be hard upon them as an extortioner, nor oppress them with usuries”. Fr. Cox wrote: Here we are at “bedrock” – he uses the word - “this text is the very nucleus of the Covenant,” he says. It is called in fact “The Book of the Covenant.” Man has accepted partnership with God and the implications of that partnership are specified in this text. And of the two last texts chosen by Edmund Rice, Mt 5:42 and Lk 6:35 (The Beatitudes) Fr. Cox wrote: “Here we have the higher ethic of the New Covenant, the Christian dispensation.” Finally, Fr. Cox pointed out that all twelve texts chosen by the layman Edmund Rice from the Old and New Testament, all of them deal with the community of people, not merely the protection of the community but the active building up of the Christian Community, both rich and poor.

And a little bit about Mount Sion itself and the Covenant! The Ark of the Covenant was a sacred container made by Moses and his people to house the two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. For 40 years the Jews wandered through the desert seeking the Promised Land. Wherever they moved, the Ark of the Covenant was always carried in front. To them it represented the Presence of God with them and among them. For centuries the Ark was the centre of their life and their Faith. Incidentally, in the Litany of Loretto, Our Lady is given the title “Ark of the Covenant” because she bore Christ, the Word of God. Whenever the Jews were unfaithful to God, and they were at times, they lost the Ark to their enemies. Finally, King David rescued the Ark and brought it in triumph to Jerusalem where on a little hill in the city he built a sanctuary for the Ark of the Covenant, the sign of God present permanently among his people. The little sanctuary on the hill he called Mount Sion.

Br. Rice and Covenant! Here, I believe, we can have new life for Blessed Edmund’s congregations and for yourselves together into one Covenantal Family, ready to start, each in his or her own way, on the building up again of the Christian community in our lives, in our parishes, in our city, in our homes and workplaces.

Let us make of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel on the hill of Mount Sion the true home of our Edmund Rice Family. Let as many as possible of us, women and men and boys and girls come here daily (we need more men between 7.30 and 9 pm) to this Chapel to tell God and Blessed Edmund of our successes and failures, our hopes and our joys, our griefs and anxieties of the day.



## 64. *What Edmund Rice Means To Me*<sup>543</sup>

I have been working on Edmund Rice almost 50 years and I find that there are things about him I have still to learn. The power of the man comes from the great love he had for God and for people, especially for the poor and deprived.

People came to join him in his appallingly difficult work of trying to lift a whole nation out of chronic injustice and utter poverty. For many years past, we, the Brothers of Blessed Edmund Rice, had men on the road seeking postulants to continue his work in the schools. These postulants were usually young teenagers. In Edmund Rice's time it was grown men who came to share his work. Many of them were merchants like himself. Some of these sold their business and brought the money to open more schools to continue to educate more and more young boys so that they could get good employment and so help themselves and their parents and families to improve the standards of their lives, in housing, in basic comforts and in some security. These grown men were attracted by the power and the marvellous generosity of a man of 40 years of age with no training as a teacher and, like him, they were willing to live in poverty and teach classes of between 100 and 150 pupils per teacher.

A young tea-merchant, a Protestant, named Laurence Watson, saw the Herculean work that Edmund Rice and his Brothers were doing in Hanover Street on the quays of Dublin in a desperately poor area. Mr. Watson came down to Waterford to see Edmund Rice. They talked for three hours. The young prosperous businessman was so impressed that he went back to Dublin and sold his flourishing business, became a Catholic, and came down to Waterford to join the community of Mount Sion. He spent the rest of his life in Waterford teaching in the poorest of Mr. Rice's schools, St. Patrick's. Brother Laurence Watson died in Waterford and is buried, like Edmund himself, in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in Mount Sion.

A wine-merchant of Waterford, aged 60, saw what Edmund Rice was doing, sold his very prosperous business and with the money joined Br. Rice and opened and built a new school in Carrick-on-Suir. The house is still there. The poor children who came in crowds to the school were so tough and wild that it is said that a young local priest had to come with a horsewhip to "soften them up". Poor Mr. Brien didn't last very long. The new school was killing him. He left the Brothers and asked for his money back. There was continuous demand for clothes and food for many of the pupils and money was getting scarce. Some of the other Brothers suggested that they take Tom Brien to law. Mr. Rice said "No, we can't put him to the test." Mr. Rice stayed friendly with Tom and they made some arrangement. Tom is buried in the Brothers little graveyard behind the house in Carrick. A few years ago I found in our archives a document by Tom Brien and it was signed X his mark! No wonder the poor man found it hard to teach. Tom was an example of the appalling lack of education for Catholics at the time. Like Blessed Edmund, Tom had built up his fortune as a merchant – the only avenue open to Catholics then.

Francis Manifold, a member of a wealthy Protestant family from Arklow, had been a captain in the Wicklow Militia. He, too, heard of Edmund Rice and saw the extraordinary work he was doing to raise the poor Catholics of Ireland. Francis Manifold became a Catholic, joined Edmund Rice, and became the first superior of the new school and house in Ennistymon, Co. Clare in 1824. He is still remembered for the sanctity of his life. He eventually died of



famine fever in Ennis Hospital. At his funeral the people of Ennistymon went seven miles out the road to meet the corpse coming home. It was a dark night and many people left on record that there was a shining light over the coffin for the seven miles into Ennistymon.

A Callan man, William Baptist Cahill, was hanged at the Cross of Callan as a United Irishman. When the crowd had moved away somewhat, a Protestant clergyman saw that there was still some life in the body. He and some friends of William Cahill stole the body and hid it. Sometime later William Cahill turned up in Thurles. He was a boot maker by profession. After some years he and some other boot makers got the idea to open a school for the poor Catholics of Thurles. They came to live together, worked at their trade during the day and taught boys at night. The Archbishop of Cashel took an interest in them and wrote to Br. Rice in Waterford asking him for some advice for these good men as to how best to run a school. Br. Rice replied and in two valuable letters he outlined his methods and how the school at Mount Sion was run. An interesting sentence in one of the letters reads: "The half-hour's explanation of the Catechism I hold to be the most salutary part. It's the most laborious to the teachers ; however, if it was ten times what it is, I must own that we are amply paid in seeing such a Reformation in the children..." The Thurles group with their leader, William, eventually joined Br. Rice.

In 1832 the Asiatic cholera devastated the East, then came across Europe and finally reached Ireland. Dublin was the first place attacked. Soon it spread death and terror all over the country. There was a grave shortage of hospitals and hospital beds. The newly founded Sisters of Charity and Sisters of Mercy did heroic work helping in hospitals in Dublin and Cork. All the schools were closed. Br. Rice turned the schools in Dungarvan, Thurles and Limerick into hospitals and the Brothers helped in caring for the sick people. In other places the Brothers gave up their dwelling houses as temporary hospitals.

Two years ago a new source of important information about Edmund Rice was found in the archives of the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin. It was in the form of a letter sent by Edmund Rice to Father James Doyle, later the famous JKL, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. From the letter it is evident that Blessed Edmund was friendly with quite a number of distinguished people associated with the fight for Catholic Emancipation: Archbishop Murray of Dublin, Bishop Doyle, Daniel O'Connell and members of the Catholic Association, like Richard Lalor Shiel, son of another wealthy Waterford merchant. Blessed Edmund and the poor pupils of his many schools subscribed regularly to the "Catholic Rent," a continuing collection from all the Catholics of Ireland towards the work of Emancipation.

Catholic Emancipation in 1829 was a wonderful thing for Catholics in Ireland and England. But to allay the fears of some extreme Protestants in England, the male Religious Orders were banned in Ireland. However, Daniel O'Connell, being a very clever lawyer was able to save the Orders. A severe drive for proselytism was made by the Kildare Place Society. Model Schools with training colleges for teachers attached were opened and textbooks printed specially for the conversion of Catholic children. Archbishop Murray was asked by the Catholic Association to help meet this great new challenge. Archbishop Murray asked Blessed Edmund Rice to come to Dublin to open a model school and training college and to publish school books to oppose the effects of the Protestant school books. At 66 years of age Edmund Rice left Waterford and came to Dublin to answer the call. One hundred-thousand Catholics paraded from the Catholic Rooms on Burgh Quay in Dublin, up what is now O'Connell Street, Parnell Street and on to North Richmond Street where the new school was to be started. Members of the Catholic Association, clergy and Daniel O'Connell himself



were part of the procession. O'Connell travelled in his coach. The people took out the horses and pulled the coach themselves. At North Richmond Street O'Connell turned the first sod of the mighty new venture. In his speech O'Connell said: "Today is a day of great and proud triumph to the Cause of Liberty." He adverted to the transfer of Catholic foundlings by the Kildare Place Society from the North of Ireland to the South of Ireland and South to North as an unchristian means of upholding Protestantism. He freely referred to his dear and old friend, Br. Edmund Ignatius Rice, the Patriarch of the Monks of the West, as he styled him, and thanked Edmund Rice and his disciples on the part of Ireland for the noble work they were accomplishing and which would start anew from this auspicious day." A Mr. O'Keefe, author of a life of Daniel O'Connell, speaking of the event said:

In June 1828 a great ceremony took place at which a hundred thousand persons were present. This was the foundation in North Richmond Street of the Christian Brothers' Schools. The object of the foundation was of the most meritorious character. It was to enable a teaching Order, recently established in Ireland, to give gratuitous instruction to the children of the Roman Catholic people who had withdrawn their offspring from the Kildare Place Society Schools.<sup>544</sup>

Again the *History of the Institute*,<sup>545</sup> tells an interesting story about a Franciscan friar, a friend of Br. Rice. Fr. Fleming had been a Franciscan friar in Carrick-on-Suir. He had such a love for Br. Rice and for the work of the Brothers that he left his Order intending to join the Institute, but found on presenting himself that he could not be received, as according to the tenor of the Brief of foundation ecclesiastics were not admissible. Fr. Fleming subsequently became a famous Bishop of St. John's in Newfoundland and retained always his affection for the institute of Br. Rice.

A little story, again from the *History of the Institute*, highlights the warm humanity of Blessed Edmund: "Towards the end of the year 1834, the line of railway from Westland Row to Kingstown (now Dún Laoghaire) was open to the public. In the spring of 1835, Blessed Edmund decided to take some Dublin Brothers for a trip on this new mode of conveyance. They travelled from Dublin to Dún Laoghaire and spent the day by the sea. In the afternoon they came back to the railway station to return to Dublin. Who was on the platform but Daniel O'Connell. The meeting of the two old friends was warm indeed. Notice of starting was given by the guard. O'Connell had a first class ticket. "We travel second class" said Brother Rice, "and you, Dan, had better get in at once to your first class carriage." "No, indeed," replied the Liberator; "I will travel second class with the Patriarch of the Irish Monks." They all got into the second class carriage and O'Connell talked with the Brothers about education for the poor all the way to Dublin.

A question is often asked: What does Blessed Edmund mean to the many people who come to visit Mt. Sion and pray at his tomb? He certainly seems to be a big figure in their lives. A small group of elderly people, men and woman, have for the past 16 years been saying the Rosary in the Blessed Sacrament chapel every week morning for his canonization. The prayer for petitions is said many times each day by visitors to the Chapel. A first class relic of Blessed Edmund is in almost constant request for sick people in Waterford and beyond. The annual Edmund Rice Retreat is crowded in Mount Sion for the two sessions held every day of the five days of the Retreat. A similar annual Edmund Rice Retreat is held in Callan and is likewise crowded. Many people, especially women, mention each year how lonely things are on the week after the Retreat.



It is interesting to see how Blessed Edmund meets the rules for beatification or canonization. The Church asks that candidates for beatification or canonization be not only people who have led holy lives, but also how qualified they are to provide help and patronage for the People of God. In the case of Blessed Edmund his life offers patronage to so many kinds of people:

- (1) He was a lay person. So all lay persons, women or men, can pray to someone who will understand.
- (2) He was a married man. Married people can pray to him in their difficulties.
- (3) He was widowed after a few years of marriage. There are many widows and widowers who pray to him.
- (4) He was a father. Fathers can pray to him for their children and the family.
- (5) He was the father of a retarded child, and so would understand the sorrow and difficulties of parents with retarded sons or daughters.
- (6) He was a very successful businessman and would understand the difficulties of businessmen. Incidentally in Melbourne, Australia, there is an annual reward called The Edmund Rice Award for Integrity in Business.
- (7) Above all Blessed Edmund Rice can be a new patron for *teachers*:
  - (a) For teachers dealing with difficult children
  - (b) For young teachers starting out and finding things discouraging in the beginning. He certainly went through very difficult times himself, handling hordes of wild, undisciplined children and getting them to take interest in their work.
  - (c) He can be an inspiration for helping young teachers to realize the important potential in their work of being second parents to disturbed or deprived children from weak homes.
  - (d) He can help you to realize how noble and how fulfilling a profession teaching can be; how a teacher who always calls a pupil by his or her Christian name can help the growth of self-worth in dysfunctional children from dysfunctional homes.
  - (e) He can teach you how to love all your pupils and to be concerned about their future.
  - (f) He can help you to be patient with them and with their parents.
  - (g) Finally, he can be with us all in the difficult or anxious times in our lives. He certainly would understand.

A few incidents in my own life come to mind. I recall giving a talk about Blessed Edmund at Mass in a church in Kilkenny. There was a man in one of the front benches with a little girl beside him. When I mentioned that Blessed Edmund had a retarded daughter, the man in the front bench put his arm around his little daughter and gave her a loving hug. She too was retarded. It reminded me that such a loving person as Edmund Rice, must have really loved his only and retarded child. I often think that the greatest cross that the great Lord asked of him, in giving his all for the uplifting of thousands of broken children, must have been to part with his own child. He certainly provided for her in life and made provisions for the time when he himself would die.

Another incident I would like to mention happened at an Edmund Rice Retreat in Mount Sion two years ago. At the morning session the chapel was well filled. Among those standing at the back was a very well-dressed businessman. At the evening session on that same day the



same man was standing at the back of the Chapel. When the Mass was finished and all the people were going out, this man came looking for a Brother to speak to. “You might have noticed” he said “that I was here at the morning session and maybe wondered why I came back again this evening. I am a businessman and come from a business family. Some years ago our firm met with a difficulty with another local firm. This difficulty has damaged both our firms in many ways for many years. I had heard that Edmund Rice had been a businessman and came here this morning to pray through his intercession for this long and difficult entanglement to be healed. I am back here this evening to make it known to whoever is in charge here that during the day a phone call to my office from the head of the rival firm asked that we’d meet to solve this particular problem. And I want to say a great thank you to this extraordinary patron, Edmund Rice, and I hope to do something in his memory that would imitate him and make him happy.

Here we are in a Training College called after Our Lady, a college preparing young men and women for the most noble of all professions in Ireland, teaching. Edmund Rice was one of those extraordinary founders of the nine religious congregations that came into being in the first thirty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These congregations worked in hospital work, in homecare and in teaching, and it was these who laid the foundations for a new Ireland. Edmund Rice was a friend of many of these founders and foundresses. A few years ago we found a letter he wrote to Rome supporting Catherine McAuley. When Mother Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the Sisters of Charity decided to go into teaching to help the poor girls whose parents were sick and poor, her Sisters had great difficulty in managing the girls. She called on Br. Rice and he sent one of his best teaching Brothers to help them. He did so well that one of the Sisters later published a manual for successful teaching that was used by many congregations for years after.

Two little messages come from the pens of two different writers, one of whom was a personal friend of Blessed Edmund and the other who was the author of a wonderful biography of Nano Nagle. The first writer was a lawyer called Stephen Curtis. He had known and admired Blessed Edmund for years. Here is what he said about Edmund:

This great man looked beyond the world. He counselled others to do so. And if he were not persuaded that more than temporal blessings would follow in the train of education to the Irish, I am convinced that he would not spend a single day in its advancement.<sup>546</sup>

The second tribute is from a writer, T. J. Walsh, biographer of Nano Nagle<sup>547</sup>:

Nano Nagle and Edmund Rice and the 19<sup>th</sup> century founders and foundresses were lonely figures in the battle for the spiritual birthright of the Irish child. For them the real purpose of education was the formation of the true and perfect Christian. They proclaimed the truth of the moral and social order that the education of youth belongs to the Family and the Church.

- <sup>1</sup> *Educational Record*, 1972
- <sup>2</sup> Carrigan, *History of the Diocese of Ossory*, p. 404
- <sup>3</sup> Fitzpatrick, J. D., *Edmund Rice*, p. 42, M. H. Gill, (Dublin, 1926); *Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers*, p. 42, M. H. Gill, (Dublin, 1926); Very Rev. Michael Canon Walsh, PP, St. Agatha's, Dublin (Archives) and Registry of Deeds.
- <sup>4</sup> Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 43-5
- <sup>5</sup> *Waterford Herald*, April, 1872
- <sup>6</sup> *The Biographical Register*, 1845
- <sup>7</sup> Obituary notices in the newspapers
- <sup>8</sup> Mark Hill, Depositions (circa 1912), Mrs. O'Reilly of Carrick
- <sup>9</sup> Power, Canon Patrick, *History of the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore*
- <sup>10</sup> Hill, Depositions, ibid
- <sup>11</sup> Fitzpatrick, op. cit., pp. 77-9. His Bible, purchased in 1791, is in the Generalate Archives in Rome
- <sup>12</sup> Fitzpatrick, op. cit., pp. 79-80. His copy, purchased in 1793, is at Marino
- <sup>13</sup> His copy, autographed by him in 1800, is in the Generalate Archives, Rome
- <sup>14</sup> Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 83
- <sup>15</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Mrs. Carey, 6 Shea Charity, Waterford
- <sup>16</sup> Statement of Br. A. Hoare to the Royal Commission, 1868
- <sup>17</sup> *The Rise and Progress of the Institute*
- <sup>18</sup> *Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers*, as above, p. 73
- <sup>19</sup> Statement of Br. Bernard Dunphy, Royal Commission, 1825
- <sup>20</sup> Curtis, C. Stephen, Barrister, address in 1845
- <sup>21</sup> Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 128
- <sup>22</sup> Cullen, Berchmans, Depositions (circa 1949), Canon Patrick Power
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., Henry D Keane
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., Seamus Upton
- <sup>25</sup> Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 143
- <sup>26</sup> Cleary, Reverend J. V., DD, at a public meeting in Waterford, 1864
- <sup>27</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Michael Donnelly
- <sup>28</sup> Cullen, op. cit., Mr. Patrick Buggy, Solicitor, Waterford
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> 10 George IV, c. 7
- <sup>31</sup> Circular Letter of Edmund Rice, 1829
- <sup>32</sup> *Pastoral addressed to clergy and laity of Waterford*, 1797 (Royal Irish Academy)
- <sup>33</sup> Words addressed to the Chapter of 1836 by Edmund Rice
- <sup>34</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Br. Alphonsus Collins as heard from Br. Austin Grace
- <sup>35</sup> Letter of Edmund Rice to Br. Patrick Corbett, 1835
- <sup>36</sup> *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers*, Joseph Blundell, Nelson Lane, (Dublin, 1832), henceforth, Rule
- <sup>37</sup> Br. P. Stephen Carroll, Clonmel, 28 August, 1888
- <sup>38</sup> Rule XIV, 2
- <sup>39</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Miss Ellen de Courcy, Shea Charity, Waterford
- <sup>40</sup> Hill, Depositions, ibid., Br. S. O'Farrell through his Novice Master
- <sup>41</sup> Hill, Depositions, ibid., Br. Joseph Norris, Wexford
- <sup>42</sup> Br. P. S. Carroll, Clonmel, 28 August, 1888
- <sup>43</sup> Letter of Edmund Rice to the De La Salle Superior General, October, 1829
- <sup>44</sup> Public Address by Reverend J. V. Cleary, DD, Waterford, 1864
- <sup>45</sup> *The Dublin Review*, 1840, pp. 335- 351
- <sup>46</sup> Address of Stephen Curtis, Barrister, Waterford, 1845
- <sup>47</sup> Letter of Edmund Rice to Dr. Bray of Cashel, May, 1810
- <sup>48</sup> Bicheno, J. E., *Ireland and its Economy*, 1829, pp. 280 et seq.
- <sup>49</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Mrs. J. McDonagh (100 years old), South Dublin Union, 1911
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., Brother Pius Cuskelly
- <sup>51</sup> Hall, Mr. and Mrs., *Ireland, its scenery and Character*, 1842 (referring to Mount Sion)
- <sup>52</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Brother Alphonsus Collins; Register of the Congregation
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid
- <sup>54</sup> Written evidence of Br. Austin Moloney
- <sup>55</sup> Letter of Br. John Norris, *Educational Record*, 1901, p. 519
- <sup>56</sup> Burke, J. D., *Educational Record*, 1901, p. 526
- <sup>57</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Br. M. V. Jones, Gibraltar, 1912
- <sup>58</sup> Letter of Edmund Rice to Br. Patrick Corbett, 7 March, 1831



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- <sup>59</sup> Letter of Edmund Rice, March, 1831
- <sup>60</sup> Letter of Edmund Rice to Br. Joseph Murphy, 22 January, 1838
- <sup>61</sup> Letter of Edmund Rice to Dr. Murray, 1813
- <sup>62</sup> Letter of Dr. Power to Dr. Murray, 1815
- <sup>63</sup> Extracts from the Mendicity Institute annual Report to Sir. John Newport, 1830
- <sup>64</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Mr. George Briscoe
- <sup>65</sup> Br. P. S. Carroll, 1888, a contemporary of the Founder
- <sup>66</sup> James 3:2
- <sup>67</sup> Letter of Br. M. I. Kelly, 1846
- <sup>68</sup> Quoted in *Educational Record*, 1901, p. 527
- <sup>69</sup> Rule, II, 13
- <sup>70</sup> Rule, II, 4
- <sup>71</sup> Rule, XXI, 2
- <sup>72</sup> Rule, III, 1
- <sup>73</sup> To Br. Austin Grace, 1826
- <sup>74</sup> *Circular, 1831*
- <sup>75</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Br. Regis Hughes, Queensland, 1911
- <sup>76</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit. Xavier Weston, 1913
- <sup>77</sup> Rule, XXIX, 3
- <sup>78</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Mrs. Carey, Shea Charity, Waterford, referring to her grandfather
- <sup>79</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Br. Laurence Kiely, Kilkenny, 1912
- <sup>80</sup> Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 140
- <sup>81</sup> Letter of Br. Bernard Dunphy to Dr. Murray, 1841
- <sup>82</sup> Letter of Br. Laurence Knowd, January 1832, to the Holy See answered by Dr. Murray (APF vol. 25)
- <sup>83</sup> Letter to the Holy See, 1824. (APF vol. 24)
- <sup>84</sup> Letters to the De La Salle Superior General; also letters to Father Leahy, OP, Lisbon
- <sup>85</sup> Letter to the De La Salle Superior General, 1829
- <sup>86</sup> Letter of Br. E. A. Dunphy to Br. Patrick Corbett, 22 July, 1829
- <sup>87</sup> Letter of Br. Joseph Leonard to Father Leahy, OP, Lisbon, 1830
- <sup>88</sup> *Cause of the Founder*, Vol. 2, p. 374
- <sup>89</sup> Letter of Fr. Colgan, 5 September, 1840
- <sup>90</sup> Minutes of the General Chapter, 1841
- <sup>91</sup> Manuscript notes on the 1841 Chapter of 1841 (by Br. Austin Dunphy?)
- <sup>92</sup> Hanover Street house account book, Generalate Archives, Rome
- <sup>93</sup> Hill, Depositions, op. cit., Br. Joseph Norris, Wexford
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid., Mr. Brown, 1912 (at Mount Sion school 1828-1837)
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., Mrs. Dunphy, 1912
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., Mr. Michael Lawlor, Waterford, 1912
- <sup>98</sup> Br. John E. Carroll read this article at the annual conference of the Brothers of the English Province at Manchester in 1972. It appears in the *Educational Record* of 1973
- <sup>99</sup> James R. Cain, "Cloister and the Apostolate of Religious Women", *Review for Religious* 27 (Sept. 1968), 918
- <sup>100</sup> Bernard Beserat S. O. Cist., "Principles of Renewal", *Religious Orders in the Modern World: A Symposium* (London, 1966), p. 114
- <sup>101</sup> Paul Molinari, SJ, "Renewal of Religious Life according to the Founder's Spirit", *Review for Religious* 27 (Sept. 1968), 800
- <sup>102</sup> Rise and Progress of the Institute (MS in Generalate archives, Via della Maglianell, Rome; undated but from internal evidence written between 1818 and 1844, portion of it probably as early as 1822)
- <sup>103</sup> "Report of Public Meeting on behalf of the Christian Brothers, Mount Sion, Waterford", (Waterford, 1864), p. 10
- <sup>104</sup> Unsigned MS in Bro. Mark Hill Collection, 1911-13 (Generalate archives)
- <sup>105</sup> Bro. Mark McCarthy: *Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers* (Dublin, 1926), pp. 92-3.
- <sup>106</sup> *History of the Institute*, 3 vols (compiled from *Educational Record*, 1891-1929), 1: 24
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid. 1:289
- <sup>108</sup> Memoirs of Bro. P. S. Carroll, 28 Aug. 1888, Clonmel (MS in archives of St. Mary's Marino).
- <sup>109</sup> Evidence of Bro. Austin Moloney (Hill Collection)
- <sup>110</sup> De La Salle archives, Rome, EN 655-1, Doss. 8, no. 1
- <sup>111</sup> *History of the Institute* 2:355
- <sup>112</sup> Murphy to Rev. Tobias Kirby, Irish College, Rome, 10 Mar. 1843 (Kirby Correspondence, no. 173)
- <sup>113</sup> Bro. Aubert CFX, *March On: God Will Provide* (Boston, 1961), p. 119

- <sup>114</sup> William A. Hinnebusch OP, "Origins and Development of Religious Orders," *Review for Religious*, 29 (Jan. 1970) 77
- <sup>115</sup> *On the Renewal of the Religious Life according to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council* (Vatican Polyglot Press, 1971) art. 51
- <sup>116</sup> 21 Jan 1841 (Generalate archives, copy of unnumbered MS, private collection)
- <sup>117</sup> Evidence of Bro. Xavier Weston, 1913 (Hill Collection)
- <sup>118</sup> 9 May, 1810 (Marino, L. R. 1)
- <sup>119</sup> To Peter Kenney SJ, Clongowes Wood College, Co. Kildare, 11 May 1814 (Marino, L.R. 8)
- <sup>120</sup> *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Ireland)*, vol. 3: Minutes of evidence taken before the Commissioners from 12 Mar. to 30 Oct. 1868 (06-11), H. C. 1870, 28, pt 3. 10 June 1868, evidence of Bro. J. A. Grace, p. 375
- <sup>121</sup> Appendix to Report from Commissioners on Education in Ireland, 1825, 12 Jan. 1825, p. 752
- <sup>122</sup> *Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers*, p. 165
- <sup>123</sup> Published report of the Endowed Schools Commission, 1854; evidence of Dr. McBlain quoted in pamphlet *Testimonies in favour of the Christian Brothers* (Dublin, 1877), p. 42
- <sup>124</sup> Evidence of Rev. Fr. Donnellan, Catholic Inspector of the Kildare Place Society schools, before the House of Lords, 1825; quoted in *Cause of E. I. Rice* (unpublished), 1: 247
- <sup>125</sup> Extract from Appendix to 2<sup>nd</sup> Report published by Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1824
- <sup>126</sup> Bro. E. A. Dunphy to Superior General of Brothers of the Christian Schools in Paris, 8 May 1826 (De La Salle archives, Rome, Corr. with Christian Brothers in Ireland, EN 655-1, 1826, no 1)
- <sup>127</sup> Rice to Holy See, 6 Apr. 1824 (Marino. L.R. Collection, L.R. 33; cf. also L.R. 38)
- <sup>128</sup> Rice to Bro. Joseph Murphy, 22 Jan. 1838 (Marino. L.R. Collection, L.R. 102)
- <sup>129</sup> *History of the Institute*, 1: 303
- <sup>130</sup> humanism: probably meaning humanity (M. F. Ó C)
- <sup>131</sup> Colman T. Barry OSB, ed., *Readings in Church History* (Westminster, Maryland, 1960) 1. 170
- <sup>132</sup> Opinion of handwriting expert in Rome after having seen many samples of Founder's handwriting in letters written at different periods of his life<sup>34</sup>. *Waterford Freeman*, 22 Apr. 1846, account of speech by Bro. Joseph Murphy at temperance meeting, Mount Sion
- <sup>133</sup> Evidence Evidence of Bro. John Norris, 25 Mar. 1912 (Hill Collection)
- <sup>134</sup> Bro. Joseph Murphy to Rev. Tobias Kirby in Rome, 25 Dec. 1846 (Rome, The Irish College, Kirby Collection, no. 511).
- <sup>135</sup> Pedro Arrupe SJ, "Religious Congregations at the Service of Today's Educational World," *Tomorrow Began Yesterday: Educational Seminar for Superiors General* (Rome, 1970), p.8
- <sup>136</sup> This is the text of an address given to an international seminar held at Mount Sion, Waterford, October 1975. It appeared in the Educational Record of 1977
- <sup>137</sup> Dublin, 1970
- <sup>138</sup> "Pope John's Opening Speech to the Council" in Walter M. Abbott SJ, ed., *The documents of Vatican II* (London, 1967), p. 712
- <sup>139</sup> Thomas Barrosse CSC, "How to approach the Bible", *Basilian Teacher*, 5F (1961), pp. 171-180
- <sup>140</sup> John Carroll Futrell SJ, "Charismatic Renewal in Historical Perspective," *Review for Religious* 34 (Jan. 1975), 80
- <sup>141</sup> Raymond Hostie, *Vie et mort des orders religieux* (Paris, 1972), p. 344
- <sup>142</sup> James A. Mohler SJ, *The heresy of Monasticism* (New York, 1971), p. xviii
- <sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii
- <sup>144</sup> Jean Canu, *The Religious Orders of Men* (London, 1960), p. 75
- <sup>145</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis* in Abbot, p. 479
- <sup>146</sup> 1 Cor. 12:11 and Eph. 4:7
- <sup>147</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* in Abbot, p. 199
- <sup>148</sup> Robert Faricy SJ, "Changes in the Apostolic Life", *Review for Religious* 34 (May, 1975), 411
- <sup>149</sup> Sr. Mary Edna CSA, *The Religious Life* (London, 1968), p. 41
- <sup>150</sup> William A. Hinnebusch OP, "Origins and Development of Religious Orders," *Review for Religious* 28 (Oct 1969), 920-1
- <sup>151</sup> Justin McCann, ed., *The Rule of St. Benedict*, in Latin and English (London 1951), p. 97
- <sup>152</sup> Hinnebusch, pp. 920-1
- <sup>153</sup> [Henri] Daniel-Rops, ed., *The Miracle of Ireland* (Dublin 1959), p. 13
- <sup>154</sup> William A. Hinnebusch OP, "Origins and Development of Religious Orders," *Review for Religious* 29 (Jan 1970), 62
- <sup>155</sup> Canu, p. 62
- <sup>156</sup> Hinnebusch, p. 68

- <sup>157</sup> Hinnebusch, p. 68
- <sup>158</sup> J. Carroll Futrell SJ, “The Founder’s Charism,” *The Way: Supplement 14*, Autumn 1971, p. 66
- <sup>159</sup> Pope John XXIII, apostolic constitution, *Humanae Salutis*, in Abbot, p. 703
- <sup>160</sup> Hinnebusch, p. 71
- <sup>161</sup> Edward Cashin, *Your Calling as Brother* (New York, 1960), p. 40
- <sup>162</sup> Thomas Wall, *The Sign of Doctor Hay’s Head* (Dublin, 1958), p. 13
- <sup>163</sup> D. S. Piatt, *Mhaireadar san Árdchathair* (Dublin, 1975), p. 59 et seq.
- <sup>164</sup> Louis Alonso Schökel, *Understanding Biblical Research* (New York, 1963), pp. 14-15
- <sup>165</sup> Dermot Cox OFM, Gregorian University, Rome
- <sup>166</sup> Paul Molinari SJ, “The Mission of Women Religious,” *The Way: Supplement 19*, Summer 1973, p. 43
- <sup>167</sup> Cf. Hussey – Hearn letters, Waterford diocesan archives
- <sup>168</sup> R. B. McDowell, ed., *Social Life in Ireland, 1800 – 1845* (Dublin, 1957), p. 24
- <sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77
- <sup>170</sup> Br. Austin Dunphy to Br. Austin Grace, 21 June, 1946; L. M. 26, Generalate archives, Rome
- <sup>171</sup> Br. Patrick Corbett (contemporary of Edmund Rice), Annals of Carrick-on-Suir house
- <sup>172</sup> T. P. O’Neill, “Rural Life” in McDowell, ed., *Social Life*, p. 45
- <sup>173</sup> Report of annual general meeting of mendacity Institute, Waterford, *Waterford Chronicle*, 1831
- <sup>174</sup> Edmund Rice to Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests, 18 May, 1818; L. R. 21, Generalate archives
- <sup>175</sup> Quoted in J. D. Fitzpatrick, “The virtue of Justice as Practised by our Revered Founder,” *Christian Brothers’ Educational Record*, 1955, p. 48
- <sup>176</sup> Edmund Rice to Mother M. Kushen, n.d.; L. R. 92, Generalate archives
- <sup>177</sup> 10 August 1810; L. R. 3, Generalate archives
- <sup>178</sup> William Magee, *Evidence of His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the State of Ireland* (Dublin, 1825), p. 9
- <sup>179</sup> Thomas D’Arcy M’Gee, *A History of the Attempts to Establish the Protestant Reformation in Ireland* (Boston, 1853), p. 335
- <sup>180</sup> Brian McNamee OMI, “The Second Reformation in Ireland,” *The Irish Theological Quarter*, Jan. 1966, p. 51
- <sup>181</sup> Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment* (London, 1970) p. 33
- <sup>182</sup> McNamee, p. 51
- <sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49
- <sup>184</sup> M’Gee, p. 325
- <sup>185</sup> Pádraig Ó h Éalaí, “Filíocht na Mumhan san Naoú Céad Déag,” in *Léachtaí Cholm Cille* (Maynooth, 1972), p. 42
- <sup>186</sup> Desmond Bowen, *Souperism: Myth or Reality?* (Cork, 1970), p. 85
- <sup>187</sup> Sermon for the Waterford brother Rice Centenary Celebrations, 1944, *Centenary Souvenir of the Death of Edmund Ignatius Rice*, p. 154
- <sup>188</sup> This paper appeared in *The Educational Record*, 1978
- <sup>189</sup> Sean Kelleher C.S.S.R. *A Biblical Approach to Religious Life* (Bangalore, 1976), p. 118
- <sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119
- <sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120
- <sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121
- <sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122
- <sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*,
- <sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123
- <sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124
- <sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126
- <sup>198</sup> Kelleher, p. 126
- <sup>199</sup> James Walsh SJ, “Introduction,” *The Way: Supplement 9* (Spring 1970), p. 4
- <sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6
- <sup>201</sup> Jean Bayer SJ, “Poverty and Church Law,” *The Way: Supplement 9* (Spring 1970), p.34
- <sup>202</sup> David Knowles OSB, “Religious Poverty: Traditional Approaches”, *The Way: Supplement 9* (Spring 1970), p.17
- <sup>203</sup> Ladislav M. Orsy SJ, “Poverty: The Modern Problem,” *The Way: Supplement 9* (Spring 1970), p.10
- <sup>204</sup> Orsy, p.14
- <sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 11
- <sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12
- <sup>208</sup> ascesis: the exercise of self discipline
- <sup>209</sup> Knowles, p. 19

- <sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 23
- <sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 25
- <sup>212</sup> Beyer, p. 41
- <sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 43
- <sup>214</sup> Anselm W. Romb OFM CONV., *Franciscan Charism in the Church* (Paterson, NJ, 1969), p. 9
- <sup>215</sup> The Franciscan charism is not linked to a particular apostolate. See Romb, p. 51
- <sup>216</sup> Maureen Wall, "Catholics in economic Life," in *The Formation of the Irish Economy*, ed., L. M. Cullen (Cork, 1969), p. 45
- <sup>217</sup> Dermot Cox OFM, "The Texts of Edmund Rice," unpublished article
- <sup>218</sup> Cf. Adrian van Kaam CSSp., *On Being Involved* (Dimension Books, Denville, NJ, 1970)
- <sup>219</sup> Thomas Clarke SJ, *New Pentecost or New Passion* (New York, 1973) p. 94
- <sup>220</sup> Pedro Arrupe SJ, "Simplicity of Life," *Sursum Corda*, October 1974, p. 212
- <sup>221</sup> Quoted in Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 23
- <sup>222</sup> Walsh, p. 4
- <sup>223</sup> Based on the text of a homily delivered to the members of the Twenty-fifth General Chapter in the Generalate chapel, Via della Maglianella, Rome, on 2 February 1978 in Educational Record, 1979
- <sup>224</sup> "Perfectae Caritatis" in Austin Flannery OP, ed., *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Dublin, 1975), p. 612
- <sup>225</sup> "Evangelica Testificatio" in Flannery, p. 685
- <sup>226</sup> Mary Milligan, *That They May Have Life*, (Rome, 1975), p 2
- <sup>227</sup> Robert Faricy SJ, "The Eucharist and Consecrated Celibacy," *Review for Religious* 36 (March 1977), 254-5  
Cf. Robert Kaiser, *Inside the Council* (London, 1963), pp. 3, 4
- <sup>228</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, par. 5
- <sup>229</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (Rome 1977), par. 32
- <sup>230</sup> *Dei Verbum*, par. 1; *Lumen Gentium*, par. 1
- <sup>231</sup> Statement of Pope Pius XII to a group of sisters in 1950
- <sup>232</sup> George H. Tavard, *The Church Tomorrow* (New York, 1965), pp 25 et seq.
- <sup>233</sup> This article appears in the Educational Record, 1979
- <sup>234</sup> "Perfectae Caritatis" in Austin Flannery OP, ed., *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Dublin, 1975), p. 612
- <sup>235</sup> "Evangelica Testificatio" in Flannery, p. 685
- <sup>236</sup> Mary Milligan, *That They May Have Life* (Rome, 1975), p. 21
- <sup>237</sup> Milligan, p.11
- <sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 27
- <sup>239</sup> "Gaudium et Spes", in Flannery, p. 903
- <sup>240</sup> Milligan, p. 27
- <sup>241</sup> Ibid
- <sup>242</sup> Ibid., pp 28-9
- <sup>243</sup> Hans Kung, quoted in Milligan, p. 17
- <sup>244</sup> Milligan, p. 17
- <sup>245</sup> J. M. R. Tillard, OP, *A Gospel Path* (Brussels, 1975), p. 162
- <sup>246</sup> Milligan, p. 29
- <sup>247</sup> Ibid
- <sup>248</sup> Perfectae Caritatis in Walter M. Abbott SJ, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 467
- <sup>249</sup> Milligan, p. 19
- <sup>250</sup> J. Carroll Futrell SJ, "Discovering the Founder's Charism", *The Way, Supplement 14*, Autumn 1971, p. 64
- <sup>251</sup> This article appeared in the Educational Record of 1980. It is a talk given in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, Mount Sion, Waterford on 26 August, 1979
- <sup>252</sup> Testimony of Brother Xavier Weston, 1912
- <sup>253</sup> Text of a reflection given to the Tertians in Rome, 29 August, 1981
- <sup>254</sup> This article appears in the Educational Record of 1985
- <sup>255</sup> This paper appeared in the Educational Record, 1986
- <sup>256</sup> This is an address given to the Past Pupils of Mount Sion, Waterford in February, 1988. It appears in the Educational Record, 1988.
- <sup>257</sup> nd
- <sup>258</sup> This paper appeared in *Wellsprings*, Christmas 1999
- <sup>259</sup> Hubert Richards, *ABC of the Bible*, London 1967, p. 171
- <sup>260</sup> Our Sunday Visitor's *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Huntington, Indiana 1991, p. 270
- <sup>261</sup> *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, p. 270

- <sup>262</sup> This article appears in *Wellsprings*, Autumn 2000. It is the text of a talk given to the staff and teachers from the Christian Brothers' Grammar school, Newry, on the occasion of their visit to Callan and Mount Sion, 16 June, 2000
- <sup>263</sup> A vague reference is given for this, possibly in Coolahan, John, *The Daring First Decade of the Board of National Education, 1831-1841*, *Irish Journal of Education* 17 (1), 1981, p. 9
- <sup>264</sup> Coolahan, John, *ibid.*, p. 8
- <sup>265</sup> An Act for the Union of Great Britain and Ireland received the Royal Assent on 1 August, 1800, and came into effect on 1 January, 1801.
- <sup>266</sup> O'Toole, A. L., CFC, *A Spiritual Profile of Edmund Rice (2Vols)*, vol. 1. 1, Burleigh Press, Bristol, 1984
- <sup>267</sup> Popular name for the Society for the Education of the Poor of Ireland. A Protestant organisation, it aimed to provide a system of undenominational education in which the Bible could be read by all Christian denominations without comment or notes. By the early 1830s it was instructing some 137,639 pupils in 1,621 schools. Because of a suspicion of proselytism it became unpalatable to the Catholic Church.
- <sup>268</sup> Burke, C.F.C., Dominic, *History of the Institute*, (3 volumes), 1. 143, Edit. J. B. Doyle, CFC, (Private Publication, 1958-1961), Dublin.
- <sup>269</sup> Normoyle, M. C., *Memories of Edmund Rice*, (Dublin, 1979), pp. 363, 364
- <sup>270</sup> This article appears in *Wellsprings*, Spring (2002)
- <sup>271</sup> Corish, Patrick, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 131, Gill and Macmillan, (Dublin, 1985)
- <sup>272</sup> *Memories*, 40
- <sup>273</sup> *Rule of 1832*, Rule 26
- <sup>274</sup> *Memories*, 63
- <sup>275</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 146
- <sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 329
- <sup>278</sup> Burke, J. D., *History of the Institute*, (3 vols.), Vol. 1, 392, Christian Brothers, Dublin
- <sup>279</sup> McCarthy, W. M., *Edmund Rice and the Christian Brothers*, p. 416, Gill & Son, (Dublin, 1926)
- <sup>280</sup> Fitzpatrick, J. D., *Edmund Rice*, p. 290-291, Gill & Sons, (Dublin, 1945)
- <sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 389
- <sup>282</sup> The tradition regarding the lighting of fires appears to have been known in other houses also. I seem to remember that the same understanding held in regard to the Brothers' residence in Wexford in the 1950s (*John Barry*)
- <sup>283</sup> *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers*, Rule 29, Christian Brothers, (Dublin, 1832)
- <sup>284</sup> Scupoli, Lorenzo (c. 1530-1610). Born in Italy, entered Theatines in 1569, when almost 40 years of age. Little is known of his life in the preceding years. Made his novitiate under the direction of St Andrew of Avellino. Took solemn vows in 1571, and was ordained in 1577. In the following years he was "missioned" to Milan, Genoa, Venice, and Padua (where he appears to have met the young university student, Francis de Sales). For reasons never fully explained, the Theatine General Chapter of 1585 reduced him to the lay state. He passed the remaining 25 years of his life in retirement in various Theatine houses. *Spiritual Combat* was first published anonymously in 1585. The first edition to bear his name was published in 1610. It has since been translated into most modern languages.
- <sup>285</sup> O'Toole, A. L., *A Spiritual Profile of Edmund Ignatius Rice*, Vol. 1, 87, (2 Vols.), Burleigh Press, Bristol, 1985
- <sup>286</sup> O'Toole, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 87
- <sup>287</sup> O'Toole, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 88
- <sup>288</sup> The earliest rule of the Carmelites, that written by St Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, between 1206 and 1214, portrayed the Order as monks living an eremitical life, and practising perpetual abstinence, fasts, and silence. In the midst of the cells stood an oratory where the religious assisted at Mass "when this can conveniently be done." The rule was approved in 1226 by Pope Honorius III, and in 1229 Pope Gregory IX imposed the absolute poverty of the mendicant orders. In 1247 the rule was mitigated to permit foundations in cities, and the Carmelites began to engage in the apostolate after the manner of the mendicant orders. Cf. O'Toole, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, p. 271
- <sup>289</sup> Ó Fearghail, Fergus, *The Catholic Church in Co. Kilkenny*, (Nolan, W. And Whelan, K), 1600-1800 in *Kilkenny: History and Society*, Geography Publications, (Dublin, 1990), p. 212
- <sup>290</sup> O'Toole, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 272
- <sup>291</sup> O'Toole, A. L., *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 272
- <sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 165
- <sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 172
- <sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 53
- <sup>295</sup> Normoyle, M. C., *Companion to the Tree is Planted*, No. 7, Christian Brothers, (Dublin, 1979)

- <sup>296</sup> Welch, John, OC, *Spiritual Pilgrims*, p. 1, Paulist Press, (New York, 1982)
- <sup>297</sup> Nevard, John, OCD, *The Interior Castle xii* (St. Teresa of Avila), E. J. Dwyer, (Sydney, 1989)
- <sup>298</sup> *Spiritual Test* 65.9, in Rodriguez, Otilio, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, 2 Vols., ICS Publications, (Washington, 1980), trans. Kavanaugh, Kieran
- <sup>299</sup> Edmund Rice to Bryan Bolger, 21 December, 1813
- <sup>300</sup> Nevard, John, as above, *The Life*, 3. 5
- <sup>301</sup> Edmund Rice to Mother Knowd, 2 November, 1813
- <sup>302</sup> Nevard, John, op. cit. (Life), 12.7
- <sup>303</sup> Edward Rice to Mother Wall, 20 February, 1839
- <sup>304</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 28. 4 in Rodriguez, Otilio, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, as above
- <sup>305</sup> *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers*, 2. 3, Christian Brothers, (Dublin, 1832)
- <sup>306</sup> Nevard, John, op. cit., 10. 1
- <sup>307</sup> *Rules and Constitutions*, 3. 5, as above
- <sup>308</sup> Nevard, John, 9. 5, op. cit.
- <sup>309</sup> Burke, J. D., op. cit., Vol. 1. 392
- <sup>310</sup> Nevard, John, 5. 8, op. cit.
- <sup>311</sup> Edmund Rice to P. Corbett, 3 July, 1835
- <sup>312</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies*, 37 in Rodriguez, Otilio, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, supra
- <sup>313</sup> Burke, J. D., op. cit., 1. 393
- <sup>314</sup> *Interior Castle*, 1.10 in Rodriguez, Otilio, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, supra
- <sup>315</sup> Edmund Rice to Bryan Bolger, 10 August, 1810
- <sup>316</sup> Nevard, John, 18. 14
- <sup>317</sup> *Rules and Constitutions*, 11.2, as above
- <sup>318</sup> *The Way of Perfection*, 7. 5, in Rodriguez as above
- <sup>319</sup> Edmund Rice to Mother Biggar, 20 December, 1813
- <sup>320</sup> Myles Kelly to Edmund Rice, 2 April, 1841
- <sup>321</sup> This article appears in *Wellsprings*, Winter, 2002
- <sup>322</sup> O'Toole, CFC, A. L., *A Spiritual Profile of Edmund Rice (2Vols)*, 1. 71, Burleigh Press, Bristol, 1984
- <sup>323</sup> Fitzpatrick, CFC, John D., *Edmund Rice*, p. 87, M. H. Gill, Dublin, 1945
- <sup>324</sup> O'Toole, op. cit. 1.1
- <sup>325</sup> Hachey, Thomas E. and McCaffrey, J., eds., *Perspectives in Irish Nationalism*, p. 2, Kentucky U. P., Lexington, Kentucky, 1989
- <sup>326</sup> Brown, Malcolm, *The Politics of Irish Literature*, p 4, UWP, Seattle, 1972
- <sup>327</sup> Kung, Hans, *The Church*, p. 247, Image Books, New York, 1976
- <sup>328</sup> Boff, Leonard, *Church, Charism and Power*, p. 85, Crossroads, New York, 1985
- <sup>329</sup> Normoyle, CFC, M. C., *A Companion to 'The Tree is Planted'*, p 17, Christian Brother, Dublin, 1977
- <sup>330</sup> Leddy, Mary Jo, *Reweaving Religious Life*, p. 64, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, Conn., 1990
- <sup>331</sup> Normoyle, op. cit. p. 494
- <sup>332</sup> Corish, Patrick, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 137, Gill & McMillan, Dublin, 1985
- <sup>333</sup> dePaor, Liam, *The People of Ireland*, p. 178, Notre Dame UP, Notre Dame, Indiana
- <sup>334</sup> Foster, R. F., *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, p. 211, Penguin Press, London, 1988
- <sup>335</sup> Connolly, S. J., *Priests and people in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845*, p. 20, Gill & McMillan, Dublin, 1982
- <sup>336</sup> Foster, op. cit. p. 223
- <sup>337</sup> Foster, op. cit. p. 201
- <sup>338</sup> These organisations appear to have been successors to "the Defenders" , a secret society that flourished in Ireland during the period of the Penal Laws and which had as its objective the protection of priests and of those places where Mass was celebrated in secret in the valleys and mountains of the land ('Mass Rocks'). When in the eighteenth century a limited tolerance was extended to the Catholics in regard to public worship, the members of the organisation turned their attention to the agrarian problem and split into several different societies, the principal of which was known as the 'Whiteboys' or 'Levellers'. Other such groups were the Levellers of Tipperary, the *Cork Boys* of Cork, the *Right Boys*, the *Oak Boys* of Armagh, the *Steel Boys* of Donegal. There was also a Protestant society in Ulster called the *Peep -o'- Day Boys*, the genesis of the future Orange Order. The *Whiteboys* were so called because of the white shirt they wore during their nocturnal expeditions. They resisted the enclosure of common or undeveloped lands by destroying walls, fences, and hedges. Their programme included all grievances connected with the buying and selling of land, tithes, rates and evictions. On occasion they resorted to violence and assassination. Their tactics were not very dissimilar from those resorted to by the Mau-Mau in Kenya in its struggle for independence in the 1950s/60s. This latter organisation, however, was anti-English, anti-European, and anti-Christian.
- <sup>339</sup> Foster, op. cit., p. 223
- <sup>340</sup> Connolly, op. cit., p. 33

<sup>341</sup> Ireland had its own parliament from 1295 to 1800. During the Napoleonic Wars, London feared that the French would land in Ireland (an attempt was made in 1798 under General Humbert, Napoleon having declined the invitation to lead the expedition!) and use it as a base from which to attack England. By bribery (the conferring of peerages and the use of £1, 250, 000!) and threats, they succeeded in convincing the Irish Parliament to vote itself out of existence and to unite the two countries under the Act of Union which came into force, 1 January 1801. The support of the Catholic hierarchy was obtained through the construction of a national seminary at Maynooth and the promise of Catholic Emancipation. (Initially the opposition of the English House of Lords and of King George III prevented the granting of Emancipation. However, a reluctant Duke of Wellington was forced to concede it in 1829.) This Union came to an end when the Irish Provisional Government took over the country in January 1922.

<sup>342</sup> Edwards, Ruth Dudley, *An Atlas of Irish History*, p. 203, Methuen, London, 1973

<sup>343</sup> Smith, Charles, *Ancient and Present State of the County and City of Waterford*, p. 88, Dublin, 1774

<sup>344</sup> Foster, op. cit. p. 102

<sup>345</sup> Foster, op. cit. p. 205

<sup>346</sup> Probably the sermons of Bishop Réamann (Redmond) O'Gallagher (c. 1521-1601), a member of a noble family in Donegal. Little is known of his early years or when he was ordained to the priesthood. He was appointed administrator of the diocese of Killala at the very early age of 24, and consecrated bishop of that diocese three years later (1548). In 1556, with the bishops of Elphin and Achonry, he presided at a provincial synod in Tuam to promulgate the decisions of the yet to be completed Council of Trent. At some later date he was forced to leave the diocese. Apparently he went to Portugal for some years and then on to Rome. In 1569 he was appointed bishop of Derry. In this capacity he was much involved in the application of the final decisions of the Council of Trent, in upholding the faith of his flock..... and encouraging the O'Neills and the O'Donnells in their resistance to the forces of Queen Elizabeth. In the turbulent year of 1601 (the year of the decisive battle of Kinsale) in the month of March he was captured by the English forces and killed. (Jeffries/Devlin, *History of the Diocese of Derry*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, pp. 120-133, 2000; O'Doherty, *Derryiana, Essays and Occasional Verses*, pp. 120-140, Gill and Son, Dublin, 1902). Bishop O'Doherty writes of him, His was an eventful and fruitful episcopate. Ever battling, for the Church, rebuking when necessary the vices of the great, even, as we have seen, at the risk of defamation and the loss of liberty; supporting the weak, strengthening the wavering, bringing hope and consolation to the sick and dying, urging the chieftains to fight strenuously against the inroads of heresy, he was truly another St Paul to the persecuted flock over which he ruled, and a tower of strength to the Catholics of Ulster.

<sup>347</sup> O'Toole, op. cit. 1. 100

<sup>348</sup> McDowell, op. cit., p. 667

<sup>349</sup> Burke, C.F.C., Dominic, *History of the Institute*, (3 volumes), 1. 7 Edit. J. B. Doyle, CFC, (Private Publication, 1958-1961), Dublin.

<sup>350</sup> O'Toole, op. cit. 1, 96

<sup>351</sup> MacUaid, Bernard, *Treas Ord Rialta Shain Froinsias i nDeoise Thuama*, p. 17, (Third Regular Order of St Francis, Diocese of Tuam), in Galvia 5, 1958.

<sup>352</sup> Normoyle, CFC, M. C., *'The Tree is Planted'*, p. 55, Christian Brother, Dublin, 1977

<sup>353</sup> Normoyle, *A Companion to 'The Tree is planted'*, p. 108

<sup>354</sup> Cashin, op. cit., p. 40

<sup>355</sup> Normoyle, CFC, M. C., *Memories of Edmund Rice*, p. 233, Christian Brothers, 1979

<sup>356</sup> Fitzpatrick, op. cit. p. 96

<sup>357</sup> O'Toole, op. cit. 1. 129

<sup>358</sup> Moody, T. W., Martin, F. X., Byrne, T. J., Edits., *A New History of Ireland*, (10 vols.), Vol. 3, p. 689, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982

<sup>359</sup> Normoyle, *Companion*, p. 324

<sup>360</sup> Leddy, op. cit. p. 98

<sup>361</sup> Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 13

<sup>362</sup> O'Toole, op. cit., 1. 132

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