

A detailed historical map of the Atlantic Ocean, showing the British Isles, Scandinavia, and the Iberian Peninsula. The map features a grid of latitude and longitude lines, several compass roses, and various geographical labels in Latin and other languages. A white rectangular box is superimposed over the upper central part of the map, containing the title and authors' names. The map includes illustrations of a sailing ship and a fish.

Irlanda y el Atlántico Ibérico

Movilidad, participación e intercambio cultural

IGOR PÉREZ TOSTADO
ENRIQUE GARCÍA HERNÁN
(Editores)

MARIS OCEANI
HIBERICVM

Mare Septentrionale
NOORT ZEE

SPAENSCH
ZEE

GALISSEN BISCAYEN

HISPA
NIA

POR
TYGALLA

ANDALVZIA

FEW, UNCOOPERATIVE, AND ENDANGERED:
THE ACTIVITY OF THE IRISH CATHOLIC PRIESTS IN THE
WEST INDIES OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, 1638-1668

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THE activity of the Irish Catholic priests in the West Indies during the seventeenth century has largely been neglected by the scholars of the Atlantic world. Until the mid-1980s the available literature relied on works written by the Jesuit Aubrey Gwynn, who pioneered the early studies on the Irish Catholics in the West Indies¹. However his analysis presents a dated perspective that portrays the Irish priests as martyrs of the faith².

In 1997, Donald Harman Akenson, in his case-study of the Montserrat settlement, simply dismissed the experience of the Irish Catholic priests as unimpressive because "the church authorities had a good deal more on their minds than a few Irish colonists on the far edge of the earth"³. The Italian historian Giovanni Pizzorusso has challenged this perspective and demonstrated how the Irish priests contributed to shaping the missionary strategy of the Holy See towards the West Indies, and more broadly, towards Catholic emigration within the Atlantic World⁴. This paper will evaluate both these opinions and try to add further evidence to support the importance of the role of the Irish priests within the West Indies.

¹ Aubrey Gwynn, SJ, "The first Irish Priests in the New World," in *Studies. An Irish Quarterly Review of letters, philosophy & science* [hereafter shortened in *Studies*], vol. XXI (June 1932), pp. 213-228. Gwynn, "Documents relating to the Irish in the West Indies," in *Analecta Hibernica*, vol. IV (1932), pp. 139-286. See also "Early Irish Emigration to the West Indies (1612-1643)," pp. 377-393; 648-663; "Indentured servants and negro slaves in Barbados (1642-1650)," in *Studies*, vol. XIX (1930), pp. 279-294; "Cromwell's policy of transportation," in *Studies*, vol. XIX (1930), pp. 607-623; "Cromwell's policy of transportation - Part II," in *Studies*, vol. XX (1931), pp. 291-305.

² Donald Harman Akenson, *If the Irish ran the world. Montserrat, 1630-1730* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p. 42.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁴ Giovanni Pizzorusso, "Catholic missions in the West Indian colonies: John Grace, an Irish missionary of *Propaganda Fide*, 1666-1668," in *Storia Nordamericana*, vol. II (1985), nr. 2, pp. 74-93; Pizzorusso, *Roma nei Caraibi. L'organizzazione delle missioni cattoliche nelle Antille e in Guyana (1635-1675)* (Roma: École Française de Rome, 1995), pp. 64-79; Pizzorusso, "Una minoranza cattolica nelle colonie "eretiche"," in Pizzorusso and Matteo Sanfilippo eds., *Dagli indiani agli emigranti. L'attenzione della Chiesa Romana al Nuovo Mondo, 1492-1908, Quaderni Storici* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2007), pp. 129-146.

Any investigation on the role of Irish Catholic priests in the West Indies must be set against the background of the process of European expansion and formation of a colonial society. From the mid of the 1620s, the interest of the North-European powers, England, France, and Dutch, focused on the Lesser Antilles, a chain of islands that stretches from today's Puerto Rico to the island of Trinidad. Within this area, the English colonization began in the Leeward Islands, a geographical definition that, although not officially used until 1671, included the islands of St. Christopher, Nevis, Antigua, and Montserrat. In 1624 St. Christopher was the first island settled by the English, who subsequently established colonies in Barbados, in 1627, at Nevis, in 1628, and Antigua in 1632. In 1627 also the French began settling on St. Christopher, which was partitioned into one central part, under English control, and two exterior French parts, renamed Saint-Christophe. The French settlement began in 1635, when colonies in Martinica and Guadeloupe were implanted. The Dutch simply took control of St. Eustatius, in 1632, Curaçao, in 1634, and Tobago, favoured by their naval superiority and the foundation of the West India Company, in 1621⁵.

The islands under English control became primary locations for a successful economy, based on the production of tobacco and cotton⁶. The English Caribbean received a growing flux of white settlers, whose rough number, before 1660, was estimated to be around 190,000⁷. This emigration pattern was largely dictated by the absence of a large native population that could be used as labour force, and consequently, it needed included indentured servants⁸. A considerable number of these indentured servants were Irish, who, in the 1630s, began to be recruited to work in the English West Indies⁹. In most the cases they were from the Munster province, home of the oldest and largest English plantation¹⁰, who decided to freely engage themselves to improve their economical and social conditions¹¹.

A small number of Irishmen were also planters and landowners such as Anthony Briskett, a Protestant from county Wexford. Between the late 1620s and the beginning of 1630s, James Hay, first earl of Carlisle, appointed him governor of

⁵ Jean-Baptiste du Tertre, *OP, Histoire générale des Antilles*, vol. I (Paris: Jolly, 1667-1671), pp. 99-101; Kenneth Gordon Davies, *The North Atlantic World in the seventeenth century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), pp. 39-47; Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and slaves: the rise of the planter class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 16-20; Akenson, *If the Irish*, pp. 20-22.

⁶ Hilary McD. Beckles, "The 'Hub of Empire': the Caribbean and Britain in the seventeenth century," in Nicholas Canny ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. I, *The origins of empire. British overseas enterprise to the close of the seventeenth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 222.

⁷ Nicholas Canny, "English migration into and across the Atlantic during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries," in Canny ed., *Europeans on the move: studies on European migration, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 39-75;

⁸ Beckles, "The Caribbean and Britain," p. 223.

⁹ Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No peace beyond the line. The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 14.

¹⁰ Michael MacCarthy-Morrogh, *The Munster Plantation: English migration to southern Ireland, 1583-1641* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 244-284; Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 308-309.

¹¹ Akenson, *If the Irish ran*, pp. 51-52.

Montserrat, where, in 1632, he brought a group of Irish planters and indentured servants, who formed the backbone of the colony¹². From the point of view of religion, Montserrat initially enjoyed stability, because Briskett tolerated the Catholic practices¹³.

The religious tolerance granted to the Irish Catholics in Montserrat was not associated with the presence of any priests. In the early stage of European expansion, the Catholic missionaries limited themselves to operating in the Windward Islands, Martinica, Guadalupa, and St. Christophe, because they were under the control of France, the only Catholic nation in that area. Both Louis XIII (1601-1643) and Armand Jean Duplessis, cardinal de Richelieu (1585-1642), backed the scheme that envisaged colonial expansion and evangelization. In 1635, they founded the *Compagnie des Iles de l'Amérique*, whose associates had "to do their best to convert the natives of St-Christopher and other islands. In every settlement the associates had to support at least two or three ecclesiastics to preach the word of God¹⁴."

The French monarchy found a crucial ally in the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide." Founded in 1622, Propaganda was charged with the direction of missionary activity in Protestant and non-Christian countries. This task had to be pursued by coordinating a worldwide missionary activity¹⁵. In the society of the West Indies, where individual profits were a priority, where inter colonial migration did not follow national lines, and where some religious minorities lived, such as the French Huguenots or Dutch Jews, the policy of the Roman ministry had to adapt to a complex world. Beyond the natives and later the African slaves, Propaganda's interest focused on the Catholic settlers who, as the Irish, lived close or within Protestant colonies, where they could be exposed to 'heretical' influences¹⁶.

In 1638 the first missionary enterprise for the Irish Catholics of the West Indies was organized through a network designed to connect Ireland and Rome with the Atlantic world. In the early spring of that year Malachias O'Queely,

¹² We have no exact date for the first settlement of Montserrat and neither there are documents on Carlisle's first concession to Briskett, who, likely in 1636, petitioned Charles I to have a new commission. See Anthony Briskett, governor of Montserrat, to Charles I, Montserrat, [1636?], Public Record Office [hereafter shortened in PRO], C.O.1, vol. IX, no. 23; Gwynn, "Documents relating to the Irish," pp. 183-185; "Early Irish Emigration to the West Indies," pp. 651-653; Akenson, *If the Irish ran*, pp. 30-35.

¹³ Pizzorusso, "Catholic missions in the West Indian colonies," p. 79.

¹⁴ Du Tertre, *Histoire générale*, vol. I, pp. 47-48;

¹⁵ Propaganda was officially founded on the 22nd of June 1622, however the first general congregation of the cardinals was held on the 6th of January 1622. See Archives of the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide" [hereafter shortened in APF], Acta, vol. 3, fol. 1rv, General Congregation, Rome, 6 January 1622; APF, Miscellanea diverse, fol. 1rv-4rv, Gregorio XV, *Inscrutabili divinae providentiae*, Roma, 22 June 1622. Niccolò Del Re, *La Curia romana. Lineamenti storico-giuridici* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1970), p. 190.

¹⁶ Guillaume de Vaumas, *L'éveil missionnaire de la France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1959), pp. 35-36; Davies, *The North Atlantic World*, pp. 63-140; Pizzorusso, "Catholic missions in the West Indian colonies," pp. 76-77; Pizzorusso, "Politica, etnia e religione nei Caraibi: un'agenda per la Congregazione 'de Propaganda Fide' e gli ordini missionari," in *Dagli indiani agli emigranti*, pp. 97-107.

archbishop of Tuam (1630-1645), wrote to Propaganda to request missionary faculties, and financial support for two priests of his diocese who were going to St. Christopher, where "a great number of Irish lives mixed with Scots and English¹⁷." Surprised by the news, Propaganda demanded fuller information to the Roman agent of O'Queely, whose identity remained anonymous. At the end of April the agent replied, stating that in March two priests, Ferdinand Fareissy and David O'Neill had accompanied "a group of six hundred Irish emigrants directed to St. Christopher, where there would be great perspectives of success for that mission, because of the scarce presence of Protestant ministers¹⁸."

The mission met with the enthusiasm of Francesco Ingoli, first secretary of Propaganda (1578-1649), who considered it necessary in order to prevent "the island being made heretical by the English Protestants¹⁹." His initial eagerness soon declined. In December 1639 O'Queely reported to Propaganda that "three thousand Irish Catholics lived in St. Christopher and the neighbouring islands under the English control." The worst danger was again represented by incoming Protestant ministers who were beginning to visit the islands. The archbishop laconically added that "the two missionaries were dead victims of the climate and of the wounds provoked by the English²⁰." In the spring of 1640, Propaganda tried to renew the mission by offering one-hundred seventy crowns in aid. However, in October of that year, O'Queely frankly declared "the money insufficient to send more priests," and cut off any chances to promote further missionary plans²¹.

Despite its outcome, the mission promoted by O'Queely served to inform Propaganda on various problems that dealt with Catholic immigration, Protestant danger, and geographical details on an area almost unknown by the Papal Curia. The report on St. Christopher fitted into an information network, of maps, relations, and admonitions that, since 1625, had began to shape Propaganda's knowledge and perception of the American continent²². However, the Irish mission on St. Christopher stood as an isolated experience. It was the first and last missionary enterprise directly mooted by an Irish bishop, during a period of progress within the Irish Counter-Reformation witnessed by the steady increase of regular

¹⁷ Malachias O'Queely, archbishop of Tuam, to PF, [Tuam ?], [1638], APF, SOCG, vol. 399, fol. 84rv.

¹⁸ The agent in Rome of O'Queely to PF, [Rome], [20 April 1638], APF, SOCG, vol. 399, fol. 258rv, 269rv.

¹⁹ General congregation, Rome, 20 April 1638, APF, Acta, vol. 13, fol. 83v-84r.

²⁰ O'Queely to PF, [Galway ?], [before December 1639 ?], APF, SOCG, vol. 400, fol. 185rv.

²¹ General congregation, Rome, 23 April 1640, APF, Acta, vol. 14, fol. 84rv; [PF], to O'Queely, [Rome], 12 May 1640, APF, Lettere, vol. 9, fol. 122v-123r; O'Queely to [PF], [Galway], 6 October 1640, APF, SOCG, vol. 295, fol. 116rv, 123rv.

²² Luca Codignola, "The Holy See and the Conversion of the Indians in French and in British North America, 1486-1760," in Karen Ordahl Kupperman ed., *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 204-207; Codignola, *The Coldest Harbour of the Land. Simon Stock and Lord Baltimore's Colony in Newfoundland, 1621-1649*, Anita Weston trans. (Kingston and Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), pp. 55-56.

and secular clergy²³. From that moment, all the future missions would be developed by Irish priests outside of Ireland.

The outbreak of the Irish Rebellion in 1641, and then the beginning, in 1642, of the Civil War in England had crucial repercussions on the English colonies in the Atlantic World. The onslaught of the Ulster Protestants boosted an increasing aversion toward the Irish Catholics²⁴. Religious tension coalesced with the political tension which engulfed the Leeward Islands, where, since 1643, old governors and settlers kept a royalist position and refused to accept the new Parliamentary governors²⁵. Within this unsettled milieu, the Irish Catholics enjoyed some form of religious assistance. At St. Christopher, they were visited by groups of French Capuchins, a branch of the Franciscan order²⁶, active on the French part of the island since 1636²⁷. However, their zeal deemed insufficient vis-à-vis the needs of the Irish population of St. Christopher, who, according to an unrealistic Capuchin estimate, counted about twenty thousand settlers. This "flock" required native speaking priests, who could instil a religious discipline within a restless society²⁸.

In 1643 the Irishmen of St. Christopher, backed by Philippe Longvilliers de Poincy, Lieutenant General of the French Caribbean Islands and governor of Saint-Christophe, petitioned the French Jesuits²⁹ to send some missionaries. The request found in the Jesuit Matthew O'Hartegan (?-1666), agent of the Irish Confederate Catholics, an eager volunteer. On 30 March 1643 he wrote to Muzio Vitelleschi (1563-1645), the Jesuit General, and demanded that "two or more Irishmen of our Society should be appointed to go, and to guide those who are deprived of their pastors and to strengthen them with the Christian sacraments." The Jesuit declared to be ready to leave because he was "more than usually well acquainted with three languages, French, English and Irish, all of which are used freely in that part of the world³⁰." The organization of this mission did not pass unnoticed as it was per-

²³ Patrick Corish, *The Catholic Community in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Dublin: Helicon, 1981), pp. 28-29; Tadhg Ó hAnracháin, *Catholic reformation in Ireland: the mission of Rinuccini, 1645-1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 57-58.

²⁴ David Beers Quinn, *Ireland and America. Their Early Associations, 1500-1640* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), pp. 46-47.

²⁵ Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 25-29.

²⁶ The Capuchins were a branch of the Franciscan order. They were officially approved by Pope Clement VII (Giulio de' Medici, 1523-1534) through the bull *Religionis Zelus*, dated 3 July 1528. See Cuthbert of Brighton, OFM Cap. *The Capuchins. A Contribution to the History of the Counter Reformation*, 2nd edition (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1971), pp. 50, 54.

²⁷ Du Tertre, *Histoire générale*, I, p. 73.

²⁸ Bridenbaugh, *No peace beyond the line*, pp. 14, 20; Pizzorusso, "Catholic missions in the West Indian Colonies," p. 82.

²⁹ The Jesuits were founded in 1534 by Ignatius de Loyola (1491-1556) and officially approved by Pope Paul III (1534-1549) in 1540. See John O'Malley, SJ, "The Society of Jesus," in Richard L. DeMolen ed., *Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation In Honour of John C. Olin on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), pp. 138-163.

³⁰ All the letter is fully reprinted in Patrick F. Moran, *Spicilegium Ossoriense being a collection of original letters and papers illustrative of the History of the Irish Church from the reformation to the year 1800*, vol. I (Dublin: W.B. Kelly, 1874), p. 286; Gwynn, "Documents relating to the Irish in the West Indies," pp. 192-193.

ceived as occasion to show the strength of the Irish Catholic Church through the diplomatic networks set by the Confederate Catholics. At mid-August 1643 Geoffrey Baron, another agent of the Confederate in Paris, wrote to his uncle the Franciscan Luke Wadding (1588-1657), one of the most influential figures of the Irish Counter-Reformation, stressing that "there is in the Island of St. Christopher, in the West Indies, a considerable number of Irish, who give themselves out for twenty-thousand." Sending an Irish priest was an "advantage, and could weaken their enemy, by the opportunity of that place and number of the Irish there³¹." This mission saw no practical outcome, because at time of the petition, the missionary jurisdiction over St. Christophe was disputed between the Jesuits and Capuchins³². These latter, sustained by Propaganda, maintained the authority on the French part of the island, and showed how the various religious orders were often at loggerhead³³.

The proposals of O'Queely and O'Hartegan had as a common denominator the need to bring religious assistance to a distant community. No emphasis was placed on the need to catechise the "innumerable and docile" native peoples "well disposed to receive our faith." The Irish priests displayed no enthusiasm or will about promoting evangelical enterprises "never attempted" as did, instead, the French missionaries in the first half of the seventeenth century³⁴. What probably linked the first missionary experiences of the Irish priests to the French evangelism was the wishful thinking that emerged along the frontier territories close to the Protestants³⁵. As the French missionaries did with the number of the natives, the Irish priests overstated the figures of the Irish Catholics in the West Indies in order to draw attention and financial support. The twenty thousand Irishmen that O'Hartegan reported to live in St. Christopher was an exaggeration, considering that this number was six times the estimate of the total Leeward population³⁶.

³¹ Geoffrey Baron to Luke Wadding, OFM, Paris, 14 August 1643, Franciscan Library Killiney [hereafter shortened to FLK], MS D IV, fol. 135, reprinted in Historical Manuscripts Commission ed., *Report on Franciscan manuscripts preserved at the Convent, Merchant's Quay, Dublin* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1906), p. 243.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 243; Du Tertre, *Histoire générale*, III, p. 300; Thomas Morrissey, SJ, "The Strange Letter of Matthew O'Hartegan S.J. (1644-1645)," in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, vol. XXXVIII (1970), pp. 159-172; Pizzorusso, *Roma nei Caraibi*, p. 68.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 68; Codignola, "Pacifique de Provins and the Capuchin network in the French Colonies in Africa and America," in Patricia Galloway and Philip P. Boucher eds., *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society: Martinique and Guadeloupe, May 1989/ Actes du Quinzième Colloque de la Société Coloniale Française. Martinique et Guadeloupe Mai 1989* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992), pp. 57-58.

³⁴ Pacifique de Provins, OFM Cap, to Francesco Ingoli, Paris, 9 March 1644, APF, SOCG, vol. 199, fol. 399rv, 406rv; Pacifique de Provins to Ingoli, Paris, 17 October 1641, APF, vol. 141, fol. 108rv, 113rv; Pacifique de Provins to Ingoli, Paris, 9 March 1644, APF, SOCG, vol. 259, fol. 205rv-206rv; Codignola, "A World yet to be Conquered. Pacifique de Provins and the Atlantic World, 1629-1648," in Luca Codignola e Raimondo Luraghi eds., *Canada ieri e oggi. Atti del 6° Convegno Internazionale di Studi Canadesi. Selva di Fasano, 27-31 marzo 1985, III: Sezione Storica* (Fasano: Schena, 1986), pp. 70-73.

³⁵ Codignola, "The Holy See," p. 206.

³⁶ According to the population figures elaborated by Carla Gardina Pestana, in the 1640s the Leeward islands had 10,000 European settlers. See Pestana, *The English Atlantic*, Appendix I, pp. 229-234; Akenson, *If the Irish ran*, footnote nr. 127, p. 216.

The beginning of the Cromwellian campaign in 1649 had a devastating impact on the activities of Catholic clergy in Ireland³⁷. The episcopal hierarchy was swept away. Of the twenty-seven bishops resident in Ireland in 1648, only one was still in his diocese in 1653³⁸. Within this context, there were inexistent resources to promote missionary initiatives. However, in 1650 the Irish Jesuit John Strich of Limerick (1616-1681) was sent to St. Christophe to join his French confreres, who, in 1647, replaced the Capuchins expelled by De Poincy in 1646³⁹.

The presence of Strich corresponded to a precise strategy elaborated by the French Jesuit authorities, who aimed to provide an Irish missionary for his fellow countrymen residing in the English part of the island. To remark, Strich was the first Irish missionary to have pursued his education in the Irish College of Bordeaux, one of the many seminaries, imbued of an anti-Protestant-spirit, that, since the last two decades of the sixteenth century, were founded throughout the Catholic countries of Continental Europe⁴⁰.

Part of Strich's mission is documented through the first hand relation of Pierre Pelleprat, a Jesuit active on St. Christophe when the Irish priest arrived on the island. Strich established a small chapel at Point-de-Sable, close to the English border, where most of the Irish lived. Their reception of the Jesuit was so enthusiastic that "ignoring the danger to which they exposed themselves, the Irish came in great number, and without hiding, to salute a man that God sent to their succour." During his three months residence at Point-de-Sable, Strich administered the sacraments, confessed, and baptised the children. Soon Point-de-Sable counted "three thousand Irishmen." Using St. Christophe as a base, the Jesuit also extended his missionary range and visited Montserrat where, disguised as a wood merchant, he secretly set up an altar, and celebrated mass in the tropical forest. Due to the progressive English persecutions on his fellow countrymen, the Jesuit contacted Charles Houel, French governor of Guadalupa, where, in 1653, he accompanied a certain number of Irishmen forced to leave St. Christopher. Until 1662, year of return to Ireland⁴¹, the Irish priest continued to visit Montser-

³⁷ Corish, *The Catholic Community*, p. 47.

³⁸ Donald F. Cregan, "The Social and Cultural Background of a Counter-Reformation Episcopate, 1618-60," in Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartneys eds., *Studies in Irish History Presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin: Leinster Leader, 1979), pp. 85-87.

³⁹ Strich entered the Jesuit order on 22 July 1640, by entering the province of Bordeaux. See Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome [hereafter shortened in ARSI], Francia, vol. 13, fol. 245v; ARSI, Aquitania, vol. 3, fol. 137; Pierre Pelleprat, SJ, *Relation des Missions des Pp. de la Compagnie de Jésus dans les isles et dans la Terre ferme de l'Amérique Meridionale* (Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy, 1655). This Relation has been reprinted in M.F. De Montezon SJ, ed., *Voyages et Traveux des Missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus, publiés par des Pères de la même Compagnie pour servir de complément aux Lettres Edifiantes*, vol. I, *Mission de Cayenne et de la Guifane française* (Paris: Julien, Lanier, Cosnard, 1857), p. 34.

⁴⁰ ARSI, Francia, vol. 13, fol. 245v; John Silke, "The Irish abroad, 1534-1691 in the age of the Counter-Reformation," in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin, F.J. Byrne eds., *A New History of Ireland*, vol. III, *Early Modern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 625-626; Timothy J. Walsh, *The Irish Continental College Movement. The colleges at Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Lille* (Dublin, Cork: Golden Eagle Books, 1973).

⁴¹ ARSI, Francia, vol. 7/1, fol. 33rv-34rv; Gallia, vol. 39, fol. 182rv, 190rv-191rv, 204v-205r; Gallia, vol. 103/II, fol. 266rv-267rv; Gallia, vol. 121, *sub voce*; Anglia, vol. 4-a, fol. 114v; vol. 16, fol. 53rv; Aquitania, vol. 7, fol. 108r-109v, 119v.

rat, but centred his work at St. Christopher. Strich's mission seemed so successful that, according to Pelleprat, his confrere had converted "more than four hundred English and Irish Protestants"⁴².

The outcomes of Strich's mission seemed too outstanding for one single man. Moreover his secret meetings with the Irish Catholics of Montserrat were not so secret at all. In 1654, a set of depositions made by three witnesses to the Earl of Mulgrave revealed that Roger Osborne, successor of Briskett, permitted "a preist in said island, called Father John, to have said masse. He might stay there as long as he would, as to any restraint putt upon him by said Governor"⁴³. The fact that Strich could say mass and administer the sacraments in the woods was a form of compromise that anticipated what would unfold during the Penal Era⁴⁴. The numerical consistency of Strich's mission was easily praised by a partial perspective that attracted criticisms. The inflated number of Irish Catholics visiting Strich at Point-de-Sable had to be reduced to one thousand five-hundred, according to the Dominican⁴⁵ Jean-Baptiste du Tertre. He also claimed that, before the Jesuit's arrival, the Irishmen of St. Kitts had enjoyed the spiritual assistance of Capuchins, a few Dominicans, and several Irish priests, although this latter point is very improbable⁴⁶. Even within the Jesuit order, the triumphant figures of Pelleprat were debated. In 1661, André Castillon, Jesuit superior of the Paris province, informed Propaganda that Strich had converted "thirty men, half Irish and half English," ten times less the number indicated by Pelleprat⁴⁷.

The delay with which the Roman ministry was informed of Strich's mission must not surprise. Since its foundation, Propaganda had a turbulent relationship with the Society of Jesus that wanted to maintain absolute autonomy over its missionary enterprises⁴⁸. Despite the Jesuits' intentional uncooperativeness, Propaganda tried to remain informed of the condition of Irish Catholics in the West Indies by relying on the initiatives promoted by the secular clergy. In 1657 the Roman ministry was informed that Peter Purcelle and John Maddon, this latter sent by Peter Taaffe, superior of the Irish College of Paris, arrived at Guadalupa. According to a later memorial, dated 1664, Maddon stayed on the island "seven years and dedicated to his fellow countrymen, but also converted some Protestants and natives"⁴⁹.

This was the only sketchy information that Propaganda could collect. The memorial of 1664 briefly summarized what Maddon did but not how he did, especially vis-à-vis the Protestants and natives. There was no description of the is-

⁴² Pelleprat, *Relation des Missions des PP*, pp. 36-36.

⁴³ PRO, C.O.I, vol. XII, no. 31.II; Gwynn, "Documents relating to the Irish," pp. 224-228.

⁴⁴ Akenson, *If the Irish*, p. 45.

⁴⁵ The Dominicans were founded by St. Dominic (1170-1221). The order was officially recognized by the Pope in 1216. See John J. Delaney and James Edward Tobin eds., *Dictionary of Catholic Biography* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1962), p. 336.

⁴⁶ Du Tertre, *Histoire générale*, III, pp. 298-301.

⁴⁷ André Castillon, SJ, to PF, Paris, 13 December 1661, APF, Scrittura Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali [hereafter shortened in SOCG], vol. 202, fol. 87rv-88rv.

⁴⁸ Codignola, "The Holy See," p. 203.

⁴⁹ François Pallu, to PF, Paris, May 1659, APF, SOCG, vol. 227, fol. 160rv-162rv; APF, Fondo Vienna, vol. 13, fol. 199rv-200rv.

land or of the natives, and no mention of the settlers' conditions in the Caribbean⁵⁰. This dearth of specific descriptions clashed with the French missionary literature which, throughout the years 1640-1655, promoted, by ample and detailed relations, the idea that evangelical success was the key to colonial development⁵¹.

If the Leeward Islands were the obvious nucleus of the Irish missionary activity, in the 1650s the Barbados received some Irish priests. They were amongst those who, after the battle of Drogheda in 1649, began to be expelled from Ireland and shipped to the West Indies⁵². In 1652, with the completion of the military conquest of Ireland, Oliver Cromwell (1600-1658) set the agenda for a government policy that aimed to transport to Barbados, surrendered to the Commonwealth in the same year, two categories of the Irish population: those dangerous to the state and the poor as well as vagabonds⁵³. Clearly the Catholic priests fitted well within the first category, by virtue of the edict of 6 January 1653 that banned from the country within twenty days all "Jesuits, seminary priests and persons in Popish orders." The decree hit the Catholic clergy that, between 1650 and 1654, was forced to exile on Continental Europe⁵⁴. The imprisoned priests had little choice and those refusing the voluntary exile should "bee put aboard such Ship or other vessel as shall (with the first opportunity) set sail from thence to ye Barbado-Isles⁵⁵." However, between 1654 and 1657, only nine priests were ordered to leave for Barbados, a minority compared to the thirty who were brought to Continental Europe in 1654⁵⁶. Initially, to the eyes of the Cromwellian officers, the priests sentenced to Barbados were to be treated like indentured servants. According to the letter that, in 1655, the Dublin Castle administration sent to Daniel Searle, governor of Barbados, the priests "may be so employed as they may not be at liberty to return again into this Nation⁵⁷."

What was sought in theory, did not unfold in practice. Four priests who arrived in Barbados in 1656 were given a hostile reception by the colonial authorities. On 21 May 1656 the Council of Barbados ordered the expulsion of the priests declaring that "they have 15 days liberty to seeke passage for their depar-

⁵⁰ Pizzorusso, *Roma nei Carabi*, p. 71.

⁵¹ Philip B. Boucher, "The Caribbean and the Caribs in the Thought of Seventeenth-Century French Colonial Propagandists: The Missionaries," in A.A. Heggoy and J.J. Cooke eds., *Proceedings of the Fourth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society. April 6-8, 1978* (Lanham: University of America Press, 1979), pp. 22-24.

⁵² Gwynn, "Cromwell's Policy of Transportation-Part I," p. 611.

⁵³ Corish "The Cromwellian conquest, 1649-53," Chapter XIII in *A New History of Ireland*, III, pp. 363-364; Raymond Gillespie, *Seventeenth Century Ireland: Making Ireland Modern* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 2006), p. 182; Pestana, *The English Atlantic*, pp. 107-108.

⁵⁴ Canny, *From Reformation to Restoration: Ireland 1534-1660* (Dublin: Helicon, 1987), pp. 222-223; Benignus Millet, OFM Cap, *Survival and Reorganization 1650-95*, vol. VII, in Corish ed., *A History of Irish Catholicism* (Dublin: MacGill & Son Limited, 1968), pp. 5-7.

⁵⁵ James MacCaffrey, "Commonwealth Records," in *Archivum Hibernicum* [hereafter shortened in *Arch. Hib.*], vol. VI (1917), pp. 179-181.

⁵⁶ The nine priests were John Stafford, Thomas FitzNicholas, Rowland Comyn, James Tuit, Morrish Celere, Robert Eagan, John Toby (also spelled as Tobin), Richard Shelton, Richmond Moore. See, "Commonwealth Records," in *Arch. Hib.*, vol. VI, pp. 189-190, 195, 197-198; vol. VII (1918-1922), pp. 20-24, 29-30, 37, 39.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

ture from this Island to any place without ye Dominions of ye Commonwealth of England⁵⁸." The harsh reaction against the priests was the natural reflection of the political measures taken by the Barbados governors to restrict the entry of further Irish Catholics. By mid-seventeenth century they represented the largest block of servants, who were being replaced by the black slaves⁵⁹. The Irish were put under a progressive military control that aimed to repress possible rebellions. All this well explained the expulsion of the priests, who could act as elements of cohesion within the Irish Catholic community⁶⁰.

Propaganda was unaware of the forced transportation of the Irish priests. Its knowledge on it limited to a petition of James Fallon, vicar apostolic of Achonry, who, in 1656, demanded special faculties to face the massive presence of Protestants in Ireland, faculties that needed to be extended to suitable priests, even those in "America," who required consecrating chalices and portable altars in places where there were no churches⁶¹. In 1657 Propaganda agreed the faculties to Fallon, but to no purpose, because the priests had already managed to return to Europe⁶². This stressed the distance between the decisions taken by officials who lived in Rome and the faraway places they administered. Granting or denying faculties was the only way through which Propaganda could keep a link with correspondents with whom it would rarely meet⁶³.

The last Irish mission in the West Indies was promoted by Dermott Hederman, an Irish priest in exile, who, around 1660, founded the St. Barbara College's in Paris that provided for the education of twenty students. The first step was made in May 1666 through the support of William Burgat, procurator of the Irish clergy in Paris. He requested that Propaganda grant to the St. Barbara's College the faculties that, in 1626, Urban VIII (1568-1644) gave to the directors of the Irish Colleges to ordain the students and dispatch them as missionaries in Ireland⁶⁴. In his letter, Burgat underlined that John Grace, from the diocese of Cashel, required the apostolic faculties to leave for St. Christopher where "many thousands of Irishmen" lived⁶⁵.

As in previous cases the distance between correspondents, missionaries and Rome manifested. Indeed, when, in December 1666, Propaganda appointed

⁵⁸ The four priests were James Tuit, Robert Kegan, Richard Shelton, and Richmond Moore. See Extracts from the Minutes of the Council of Barbados, 21 May 1656, reprinted in Gwynn, "Documents relating to the Irish," p. 235.

⁵⁹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Beckeles, "'A Riotous and Unruly Lot': Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644-1713," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, vol. XLVII, no. 4 (October 1990), pp. 508-513; Corish, "The Cromwellian regime, 1650-60," chapter XIV, in *A New History of Ireland*, pp. 383-384.

⁶¹ Petition of James Fallon, vicar apostolic of Achonry, to Pope Alexander VII, no place [1656-1657?], APF, Fondo di Vienna, vol. 13, fol. 260rv-262rv.

⁶² General congregation, 11 June 1657, Rome, APF, Acta, vol. 26, fol. 97v-98r; Gwynn, "Cromwell's Policy of Transportation - Part II," p. 298.

⁶³ Codignola, "The Holy Sec," p. 207.

⁶⁴ Silke, "The Irish Abroad," pp. 625-626; "Irish scholarship and the Renaissance, 1580-1673," in *Studies in the Renaissance*, vol. 20 (1973), p. 189.

⁶⁵ General congregation, 19 July 1666, Rome, APF, Acta, vol. 35, fol. 201rv; General congregation, 20 December 1666, Rome, APF, Acta, vol. 35, fol. 331v-332r.

Grace as "missionary in America for his nation," the priest had already left, at least six months before⁶⁶. Furthermore the geographical range of Grace's mission was largely unknown in Rome⁶⁷. Proof of it unfolded in February 1667, when Burgat demanded financial help and to extend the faculties of the priest to other islands that were not specified⁶⁸. In March of the same year Burgat clarified that Grace's faculties had to be extended to Guadalupe, Montserrat, Bermudas and Barbados⁶⁹. Propaganda gave its assent with a subsidy of fifty crowns with the belief that the mission was giving satisfactory results⁷⁰. However this was an illusion that collided with the risky context of the Leeward Islands, engulfed, in the years 1665-1667, by the second Anglo-Dutch War. When Grace arrived at St. Christopher, he found the entire island under the control of the French, who, allied of the Dutch, had defeated the English in the battle of Pointe-Sable. As condition of peace, the French tolerated the Protestant religion, if it was privately practised⁷¹. Although this shift in the island's control had no benefit to the Irishmen, who, according to Grace's report of 1667, were treated by the French with the same hardness of the English. Grace also visited the Irish living in Martinica, Guadalupe and Antigua, where he confessed more than three hundred Irishmen, fifty of them on the point of death. The priest laconically concluded that he could no longer carry on his task without the arrival of more missionaries and financial aid⁷².

The fact of being an isolated priest with no assistance from a religious order or from the lay authorities left little choice to Grace, who could not pursue elaborated strategies⁷³. Gloomy warnings and pessimistic reports became the simple methods to stress the slim human and material resources. In 1668, when he demanded to have a portable altar to celebrate Mass, Grace again demanded more missionaries to avoid "a sure massacre of souls."⁷⁴ The same alarming tone repeated in 1669, when Burgat reported that Grace was back in France, but ready to return to "ten thousand Irish Catholics so oppressed by the English heretics"⁷⁵.

In the summer of that year Grace wrote his only letter to Propaganda, through which he presented an overview of the situation of the Irish Catholics in the West Indies that was discouraging. According to the priest, "Catholic religion was under constant threat in the English islands, where the priests were often expelled by local authorities, so that no one risked his own life to start a mission or to bring religious assistance to the Catholic population." Grace briefly described the status of

⁶⁶ Carlo Vittori Roberti, archbishop of Tarsus, nuncio in Paris, to PF, 15 October 1666, Paris, APF, SOCG, vol. 371, fol. 20rv-22rv; general congregation, 20 December 1666, Rome, APF, Acta, vol. 35, fol. 331v-332r.

⁶⁷ General congregation, 8 February 1667, Rome, APF, Acta, vol. 36, fol. 30rv.

⁶⁸ Burgat to PF, [before 8 February 1667], [Paris], APF, SOCG, vol. 257, fol. 87rv-88rv.

⁶⁹ Burgat to PF, [before March 1, 1667], [Paris], APF, SOCG, vol. 257, fol. 91rv-92rv.

⁷⁰ General congregation, 1 March 1667, Rome, APF, Acta, vol. 36, fol. 52rv.

⁷¹ Du Tertre, *Histoire générale*, vol. IV, pp. 25-44; Nellis M. Crouse, *The French Struggle for the West Indies* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 2nd edition, pp. 22-34.

⁷² John Grace to Burgat, St. Christopher, 11 March 1667, APF, SOCG, vol. 257, fol. 112rv.

⁷³ Pizzorusso, "Catholic Missions in the West Indian," p. 90.

⁷⁴ Burgat to PF, [before 7 May 1668], [Paris], APF, SOCG, vol. 257, fol. 114rv-115rv.

⁷⁵ Burgat to PF, 21 and 29 June 1669, Paris, APF, Congressi Irlanda, vol. II, fol. 236rv.

the Irishmen for each of the English islands. According to his estimates, the Irish community in Martinica counted of two-hundred people, who, despite the language's difficulties, were assisted by the French missionaries. In Barbados the Irishmen were eight-thousand out of total population of forty-thousand. Guadalupe had eight-hundred Irish Catholics, who lived in the most inhospitable part of the island, rarely visited by the French missionaries. Antigua had two-hundred Irishmen, while two-thousand resided at Montserrat, a safe island for the Catholic priests thanks to the tolerance of the Irish governor William Stapleton. Other six hundred Irish Catholics lived scattered between Nevis and St. Christopher, where they underwent the Protestant persecutions. The situation worsened at Tobago, Sint Eustatius, Saint-Martin and Sainte-Croix, where the Irish lived "mixed with the heretics"⁷⁶. Grace's report thus gave Propaganda an exhaustive picture of the Irish Catholics, who, however, had no religious benefits from the priest's mission⁷⁷. Furthermore the chance to renew the mission faded away because of Grace's mysterious disappearance⁷⁸. Propaganda tried to maintain a close contact with Burgat, but his death in 1675 definitively brought to an end the possibility to promote further missionary initiatives⁷⁹.

The mission of Grace had a double importance: first, it remained a solitary initiative by a priest with no resources. Second, his short experience informed Propaganda on the status of the Irish Catholics in the West Indies as a victimised minority that clung to its Catholic identity⁸⁰. As his predecessors, Grace continued to overstate the figures of the Irish settlers who were described as all oppressed, with no distinction between the free immigrants and the exiled. Furthermore he categorized the Irish as all Catholics and impinged them in a distinct confessional identity opposed to the Protestants⁸¹.

In conclusion it would be logic to assess, as Akenson, the experience of the Irish priests within the Atlantic world as marginal⁸². Their numerical inconsistency, ten priests through three decades, hampered the development of a missionary agenda that, like the French missionaries, embraced evangelization and colonization. This impeded the Irish priests to create that missionary-colonial literature through which, instead, the French missionaries funnelled a deal of information on slavery, trade, natives and more generally on life in the Caribbean area⁸³. However, this was the attitude of the Irish priests who intentionally forwarded negative descriptions of the West Indies and of the Irish settlers to polarize the attention of the Roman authorities⁸⁴. Debatable or not, their way of acting was modelled by the militant ideology of the Irish clergy formed during the Counter-

⁷⁶ Grace to PF, 5 July 1669, Paris, APF, SOCG, vol. 421, fol. 112rv-113rv, 115rv.

⁷⁷ Pizzorusso, "Una minoranza cattolica," p. 140.

⁷⁸ Pizzorusso, "Catholic missions in the West Indian," p. 90.

⁷⁹ General congregation, 30 July 1675, Rome, APF, Acta, vol. 45, fol. 176v-177r; Pizzorusso, "Catholic missions in the West Indian," p. 90.

⁸⁰ Pizzorusso, "Una minoranza cattolica," pp. 140-142.

⁸¹ Akenson, *If the Irish*, pp. 8, 46, 216.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁸³ Boucher, "The Caribbean and the Caribs," pp. 23-24.

⁸⁴ Pizzorusso, "Una minoranza cattolica," p. 142.

Reformation, which considered Ireland as a martyr-country persecuted for its Catholic faith and its loyalty to the Church of Rome⁸⁵. To a lesser extent, their schematic letters transferred a flow of data that fitted into those religious transterritorial networks, that, as argued by Bernard Bailyn, maintained ties, such as the Jesuits did in Canada, between the American continent and Europe⁸⁶.

⁸⁵ Robert Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 88-93.

⁸⁶ Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History. Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 96-100.