

Chapter 21

James Connolly

By 1940, James Connolly had been in Valladolid as vice-rector for over twenty years and was fifty years old. Born in the mining village of Lumphinnans in Fife on 22nd December 1889, he had worked as a miner for a short while before going to the Scots College, Rome, to study for the priesthood. He was ordained in the Lateran Basilica on All Saints' Day, 1914, and gained a doctorate in theology before returning to the Archdiocese of St. Andrews and Edinburgh in 1915. He spent four years in the archdiocese, serving as curate in Inverkeithing and then as priest in charge of the joint mission of Kelso and Jedburgh. As vice-rector in Valladolid, he had been regarded by the students with affection and a considerable amount of sympathy, since Mgr. Humble did not always conceal a certain disdain for his "book-worm" of a vice-rector.

Dr. Connolly, now rector (or, perhaps, since there were no students, better described as administrator), cared for Mgr. Humble in his declining years even to the extent of sharing the diet that the old man had to observe; in return he had, of course, the benefit of his experience and advice in dealing with the problems that arose. The end of the Spanish war may have made life easier in some senses for the two men in the Valladolid college, but it also made it more complicated and trying in others.

In the same month as Connolly officially became rector, the Banco Hipotecario began an action in Madrid against the college, citing a new law that, because of the low value of the peseta in republican-held areas of Spain in the latter part of the war, repayments of debts made during the "*dominio marxista*" in those areas were to be reckoned at only a fraction of their face value. Between April 1938 and February 1939, the college administrator had made three repayments totalling 250,000 ptas. and, in court, judgment was given in favour of the bank that the sum was to be taken as worth only 31,250 ptas.¹ The lawyer who defended the college was D. Emilio Liasera Díaz, a friend and tenant of the administrator. Although the college lost the case, Sr. Llasera later managed to persuade the bank to reduce its claim by 24,000 ptas.² and Connolly was so impressed by his competence that, when Muñoz died in June 1941, he insisted on his succeeding him, refusing to listen to protestation that he had no experience of property administration. Thus began an association of twenty-seven years between the college and a devoted administrator who, years earlier and before changes in the regime had forced him to abandon a career full of promise in public life, had been civil governor of the provinces of Segovia and Pontevedra.

It was in 1941 that a change was made in the ownership of the country house and lands at Boecillo. Ever since the time of Bishop Cameron a century and a half previously, these had been the personal property of succeeding rectors, passed on from one to the next in their wills. Although all the produce of the lands was always made over freely to the college and no rent charged for the community's use of the house during vacations, the system of personal ownership had been continued, to avoid any danger of expropriation under the various laws and decrees of the nineteenth century against the property of ecclesiastical institutions. But now a new situation had arisen. A tax of 18¾% of its value had had to be paid when Humble inherited the property since there was no kinship

between him and the previous owner, David McDonald; ³ moreover, according to Connolly, the very practice was now illegal as far as foreigners were concerned.⁴

In these circumstances, a legal document of sale⁵ was drawn up by which Humble, on 10th May 1941, made over the Boecillo property (the house, the wine cellar and nineteen vineyards) to the college which, from that time, has been the owner, in law as well as in fact.

The Canterac mansion house, to which Humble had hoped to transfer the college, was offered to the army authorities at the start of the civil war. The offer had been taken up and, from March 1937 until May 1943 (four years after the end of the war), the house was occupied by various military detachments. When they finally left, Connolly made a start on repairs. Nearly five hundred yards of the estate boundary wall had been badly damaged by the bombs in 1938 and another two hundred yards were blown down by a hurricane in 1941. These stretches were repaired in 1943 and 1944; the gates and pillars of the main entrance, which had been knocked down by military vehicles entering and leaving the estate, were also renewed. But the house itself, due to neglect and ill-treatment, was in such a dilapidated, unhealthy and dangerous condition, that its repair was considered an impossibility. The building was demolished in 1946 and, since in area it had covered 994 square metres, Dr. Connolly made a claim for 99,400 ptas. in compensation. This was about £2,500 at the time but, when the claim was fully met in 1953, the sum was worth less than £1,000.

There was more misfortune at Canterac in 1941 when Dr. Connolly, believing that refusal would bring about a compulsory purchase order at even worse terms, sold about seventeen acres of the estate to the army at the ridiculously low price of 1.15 ptas. (then about sevenpence) per square metre.⁶

During these long years when the college lay empty of students, there were various suggestions from different sources that it should be permanently closed down. Such moves were by no means the first in the history of the college, but the danger was greater now given the circumstance that the college had not functioned since 1937. Already in 1939, a letter had been received from Abbot Aloysius Smith C.R.L., to the effect that he had been appointed to look into the feasibility of establishing one inter-diocesan seminary in Scot land, much desired by the Holy See, and that the Scottish hierarchy was anxious, *inter alia*, to find out if the funds and property of the Spanish college might be devoted, wholly or in part, to the project.⁷ Humble's reply had been that the college was part of the *patrimonio* real and so, without authorisation from the Spanish crown, the Scottish hierarchy had no power over its temporalities. This was clear from the deed of foundation and from the charter of 1778, and from the fact that, when the sale of the college building was contemplated in 1928, the hierarchy's representatives had recognised the necessity of getting the king's authorisation; it was also clear that such authorisation would not be forthcoming, if it were to be a case of removing the assets from Spain.⁸

In his hopes of acquiring the building where the Ven. Bernardo de Hoyos had told of receiving apparitions of the Sacred Heart, Archbishop Gandásegui had arranged the meeting in 1928 between Alfonso XIII and the two Scottish bishops which led, the following year, to the royal order authorising the transfer to Canterac. But time had passed and the Scots were still where they had been. Mgr. Gandásegui died in 1937 and was succeeded by Archbishop García y García who, from soon after his arrival in Valladolid, showed himself ambitious of making the city the focal point of Spanish and Spanish- American devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In 1941, the church adjoining the college

which, since 1775 had been the parish church of San Esteban, became instead the “Santuario Nacional de la Gran Promesa.”⁹

A few months later, the archbishop announced that, to allow the Santuario Nacional to fulfil the plans which divine providence had for it, expansion was necessary; this would take the form of “a group of buildings which together would constitute a grandiose Monument of the Hispanic World to the most sacred Heart of the Divine King and the most pure maternal Heart of the blessed Virgin.”¹⁰ The scheme involved the acquisition of the whole block of buildings of which the Scots College forms a part, the preservation of the college church and reliquary, and the demolition of the rest. The project was begun in 1945 when the area adjoining the Scots College on the west was bought by the archdiocese.¹¹ On 27th June 1948, there took place the formal ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone of the project (often given the name of *El Alcázar cte Cristo Rey*—The Citadel of Christ the King).

Dr. Connolly was much in favour of the college’s moving to Canterac, but only as a long-term scheme. Humble’s original idea of converting the mansion house was now an impossibility of course, so Connolly, perhaps to try to keep the Archbishop of Valladolid at bay, had plans drawn for a new building; an architect’s estimate of the total cost was also made.¹² But a letter from the archbishop, on behalf, he said, of the nuncio, requesting details of the college, its status, income etc., received short shrift. “I received your letter with considerable surprise... It seems that neither the Nuncio nor you understand that I cannot furnish you with details regarding the College except by approval of the Real Patronato . . .”¹³

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Not that the bishops of Scotland found Dr. Connolly much more tractable. The college in Rome had been reopened in the autumn of 1946, little more than a year after the end of the second world war. But the bishops were in the dark about the possibilities of a restart in Valladolid. The only information that they had was the rector’s reports, short, cryptic and discouraging. Even attempts to get him to go to Scotland to discuss matters were not particularly successful. “Cost of living and scarcity here still make the reopening of the College impossible. Regret that exchange has proved impossible so my trip to Scotland is postponed ‘*sine die*’¹⁴ However, he thought that, although things were so unsettled in Spain, it might be possible to reopen in a small way in 1948; but “safety first is the slogan.”¹⁵

The bishops were determined not to send students to Spain until, after personal discussion with the rector, they knew more about conditions in the country and the college. But, in answer to requests to present himself at a hierarchy meeting, Dr. Connolly usually had a ready excuse. Early in 1948, for example, he said that he would not be able to b at the May meeting because he was too busy with arrangements for the reopening in September.¹⁶

The bishops decided that there was nothing for it but that the mountain would have to go to Mohammed. Bishops Grant and Black paid a visit to Valladolid in the summer of 1948, shortly after Mgr. Humble’s death. Dr. Connolly was finally persuaded to be present at the bishops’ meeting in May 1949. That summer, Archbishop Campbell, who, throughout the frustration, had shown himself most anxious to have the college reopen, went to Valladolid, accompanied by Mgr. James Ward and

Fr. Alexander Hamilton. "We carried with us," he wrote on his return to Scotland, "the conviction that the air of 'defeatism' surrounding the Colegio must be dissipated as far as in us lies."¹⁷

With the reappearance of students not far off, the rector embarked on some fairly costly improvements at Boecillo. Tiled flooring was laid throughout most of the house, the roof was repaired, a new kitchen stove installed, the rooms distempered and the pelota court rebuilt.¹⁸ The money for this came from Madrid, where the debts with the Banco Hipotecario had been completely extinguished the previous year.¹⁹ Dr. Connolly did no more than a few minor repairs and patching up in Valladolid since he was convinced that the move to Canterac was only a matter of time.

The question of an assistant had also to be met. As far back as 1945 he had asked for Fr. Thomas Taylor as his vice-rector but, of course, nothing was done at the time. When it seemed as if the reopening would not be long delayed, Fr. William Hart was asked to go to Valladolid as the rector's "temporary assistant." He arrived on 16th November 1948²⁰ but, when it became clear that the college would not be reopening in the autumn of 1949, he returned to Scotland at the end of May.

Dr. Connolly was in Scotland again in May 1950 and returned to Valladolid, under the impression that at least another year would elapse before the reopening. However, when the bishops met again at Blairs early in July, they decided that the time to restart had come at last. Dr. Connolly was notified later that month that a group of students would be going to Valladolid in September. Fr. Daniel P. Boyle, at the time a professor in Blairs, was appointed spiritual director and arrived on 7th September. Three days later, a party of eleven students, under the guidance of Fr. William McGoldrick, reached the college, thirteen years and three months after the departure of their immediate predecessors.

Dr. Connolly was truly a man of great kindness but, perhaps due to his many years of isolation, unfitted to direct the new community. It was simply not good enough to assume that things could resume in the college in the same way as they had left off in 1937; to think that no improvements in material comforts and conveniences were called for, that students could be placed under the same restrictive regime, that they came with the same attitudes and outlook as those of twenty years previously—this would not do. The new community was mystified and disillusioned rather than rebellious; one could hardly bear real resentment towards such a gentle and old-world character.

"The students are all well, seem happy and work well," he reported to the bishops in March 1951; "the number should be increased to twelve in Sptb., all Blairentians, including an organist and a student for Argyll, because these lads have a native Scots Culture."²¹ By that time, four of the original eleven had gone and another two left in the summer (which, since the work at Boecillo was still unfinished, Fr. Boyle and the five remaining students spent on the north coast, at San Sebastián and Comillas). Until the arrival of the students in 1950, a monthly remittance of 5,000 ptas. had been sent from Madrid; thereafter, this sum was doubled²² and, in addition, the bishops paid a grant of £100 per student per annum.²³

Before the college reopened its doors, the bishops cannot have felt over-optimistic about Dr. Connolly's competence for the position of rector and their confidence in him was not increased by events. Another five students were sent in September 1951 but, that same month, Dr. Connolly announced that he felt that he could dispense with the services of a spiritual director²⁴ and that he

would not be at the hierarchy's October meeting. So, after that meeting, the inevitable happened. It was Archbishop Campbell who wrote.

"It is no exaggeration to say that, had it not been for my determined advocacy, the Colegio would not have been reopened... I feel, however, that my success in this respect cannot be complete unless I put it to you as a friend that you should seriously consider my suggestion that you should put yourself entirely at the disposal of your Archbishop . . . I feel sure that such a gesture on your part would bring a blessing from God and would remove every conceivable objection to the full development of the Colegio."²⁵

Connolly was deeply hurt at what he considered an injustice, but he accepted the situation with humility.²⁶ Always a stickler for correct procedure in accordance with the college's royal charter, he told Archbishop Campbell that he could not be removed by any Scottish bishop but that he would submit his resignation to his own archbishop on 31st December, to take effect on 30th June; during those six months, the hierarchy would be able to set in motion the machinery which would lead to the head of state appointing a successor.

He duly wrote to Archbishop Gray ²⁷ on 31st December:

"His [Archbishop Campbell's] suggestion that I should put myself at your disposal had the disadvantage of being illegal so, on the 24th Oct., I replied suggesting that the Royal Charter should be observed, i.e., legal procedure. In a very kind letter of the 29th Oct., His Grace accepted my suggestion and so, *Deo Gratias*, I can leave the College *ad normam iuris* and there will be no fuss and no trouble. In July 1952 I shall put myself at your disposal."²⁸

In February 1952, the bishops nominated Mgr. Philip Flanagan, vice-rector of the Scots College in Rome, as the new rector; due to a postal delay, he did not receive the news until near the end of March. Less than a month later, on 19th April, he arrived in Valladolid to learn as much as he could about the college and its administration while Dr. Connolly was still there.²⁹

The old rector left Valladolid on 22nd July and spent the remaining seven years of his life, very quietly, as parish priest at Rosewell, Midlothian.

There is something tragic about his long association with the college—twenty years of unassuming service as vice-rector, ten years as rector without a student, and then, at last, a community to lead—and two years during which his inadequacy for the task was painfully obvious. He was a very nervous person, highly strung, unable to relax, ascetic, spiritual, hard on himself; probably with little talent for teaching or administration; unable to tackle the problems that had to be faced if the college were to be put on its feet again. In some ways, he went to any lengths to avoid trouble yet, when he got an idea or theory into his head, nothing would dislodge it. Such obstinacy, of course, did not always ingratiate him with others. For example, his insistence that the college was still under the royal patronage ³⁰ led to a coolness with Mgr. Henson, the rector of the English College, and eventually to their estrangement, a sad state of affairs in any circumstances but especially so when life was of necessity already very lonely and isolated.

One cannot help feeling a sympathy for James Connolly; and yet as true and reasonable a verdict as any has been passed on him by one of those who knew him well for many years.

“A wasted life? Who would dare to say? Providence marked him out for one thing at least—that by his patience and endurance, by simply being there, he should keep the *Colegio* intact and open wide its doors again to a new generation.”

Notes for Chapter 21

1. College archives 56/6/18.

2. Ibid., 56/7/16.

3. Ibid., 48/4.

4. Ibid., 48/35.

5. Ibid., 26/2.

6. Ibid., 48/35 and 50/22.

The army declared that the land was necessary for a new barracks but, in 1957, with no barracks having been built, it sold the land by auction for 20 ptas. per square metre and rejected the college's protests and claims for indemnification.

7. To Mgr. Humble, 4th April 1939. (Ibid., 30/48.)

8. 20th April 1939. (Ibid., 30/48.)

From the correspondence between Bishop Toner and Dr. Connolly it seems as if, around 1940, there was talk in Rome of permanently closing the college—perhaps the same scheme as that with which Abbot Smith was associated. (Cf., e. g., *ibid.*, 65/4/1.)

9. The “Great Promise” which Bernardo de Hoyos reported he had received from our Lord: “I shall rule in Spain and with greater veneration than elsewhere”.

10. *El Santuario Nacional de la Gran Promesa*, p. 44.

11. The building on this ground had been part of the Jesuit college of San Ambrosio (in fact, the “new part” originally assigned to the Scots in 1771) and was a barracks until destroyed by fire in 1927. The city had acquired the ground in 1935 with the idea of establishing the municipal police and fire services there.

12. College archives 50/26. The estimate was for four million pesetas, but the designs have been criticised as being for a building that would not have been practical.

13. 9th December 1948. (Ibid., 68/1.)

The nuncio, Archbishop Gaetano Cicognani, wrote to the Secretary of State some months later to say that he had thought a proposal to move the Scots College to Salamanca a good one, especially in view of the Santuario Nacional project, but that it would be useful to find out the views of the Scottish bishops. He added that it seemed time for the college to reopen but, from the answer that the rector had sent to the Archbishop of Valladolid's letter and from other indications, it seemed that he was a rather strange and unapproachable person.

14. Draft of letter to Bishop Toner, autumn 1946. (Ibid., 65/4/21.)

15. Report of 1946. (Ibid., 48/35.)

Conditions were indeed very bad in Spain around that time.

16. To Bishop Mellon, 9th March 1948. (Ibid., 65/4/46.)

In fact, it was fortunate that he did not go on that occasion since Mgr. Humble died early in June.

17. To Connolly, 9th August 1949. (Ibid., 65/4/33.)

18. Ibid., 29/53.

19. Ibid., 32/29.

20. Just after this, at the beginning of December, Da. Cesárea Román, the present cook and housekeeper, took up her duties in the college.

21. Ibid., 48/35.

22. 10,000 ptas. were now worth only £100.

23. Until this time, the bishops had paid no fees for their students in Spain. From 1926, they had paid their fares to Valladolid, an expense previously charged to Blairs College. (Bishop Bennett to Mgr. Humble, 1st January 1926. Ibid., 30/43.)

24. Fr. Boyle returned to Scotland at the end of January 1952.

25. Archbishop Campbell to Connolly, 15th October 1951. (Ibid., 65/4/41.)

26. Connolly was in his last year in Rome and was already a priest when the future Archbishop Campbell arrived from Blairs to enter first year philosophy.

27. Archbishop McDonald O.S.B. had died in May 1950, just before the decision to reopen the college.

28. Ibid., 65/4/75. Enclosed was a short formal letter of resignation (ibid., 65/4/76).

29. "The status and financial position of the College appear to be somewhat complicated things," Bishop Black had remarked in the letter informing Mgr. Flanagan of his nomination, 14th February 1952. (Ibid., 67/34.)

30. A view supported by documentary evidence; e.g., Subsecretary, Ministry of External Affairs (Cultural Relations), to Connolly, 12th January 1943:

"por estar ese Centro docente bajo el Patronato de la Corona, ostentado en la actualidad por S. E. el Jefe del Estado y ejercido por este Departamento . . ." (Ibid., 50/19.)