

The Impact of Vatican II on Women Religious

The Impact of Vatican II on Women Religious:
Case Study of the Union
of Irish Presentation Sisters

By

Louise O'Reilly

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P U B L I S H I N G

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------------|--|
| ADA | Armagh Diocesan Archives |
| APSR | Archives of the Presentation Sisters, Rahan. |
| APST | Archives of the Presentation Sisters, Tuam. |
| APSM | Archives of the Presentation Sisters, Matlock. |
| APSNZ | Archives of the Presentation Sisters, New Zealand. |
| APPNP | Archives of the Presentation Provincialate Northern Province. |
| ASCRSI | Archives of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Rome |
| C.C.C. | Central Co-ordinating Committee |
| CRDA | Cork and Ross Diocesan Archives |
| DDA | Dublin Diocesan Archives |
| GHAD | Georges Hill Archives Dublin |
| KDA | Kerry Diocesan Archives |
| KLDA | Kildare and Leighlin Diocesan Archives |
| MBW | Movement for a better world |
| ODA | Ossory Diocesan Archives. |
| PBVM | Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary |
| PCA | Presentation Congregational Archives |
| SCR | Sacred Congregation for Religious |
| SCRSI | Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes |
| WDA | Waterford Diocesan Archives |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For centuries women religious lived their lives by structures that were inherited from their foundation. Structures involved internal and external issues; they determined how the Sisters lived their religious life, what was expected from them within the convent and the limitations it set on the work they carried out externally. The Rule and Constitution was central in creating these structures and were central to all religious congregations from their beginnings. In the case of the Presentation Sisters, a religious order founded in Cork in 1775 by Nano Nagle, the Order underwent profound transformation in the twentieth century. This included a reconfiguration of the governance of the congregation: moving from autonomous houses and dioceses to a trans-national structure known today as the "Union of Presentation Sisters". The theme of governance or "union," the central focus of this study, relates to all religious congregations and involves leadership structures at all levels. It was a key element in the "refounding" of the Irish Presentation congregation following on Vatican II.

Central to the changes experienced by the Presentation Sisters, was legislation introduced by Rome during the twentieth century. James R. Cain suggests that how women religious, to use the modern term, lived out their religious life was subject to "the juridical norms that helped to produce it".¹ The Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRSI) the official administrative body of the Holy See, was responsible for administering legislation regarding religious, both male and female. This administrative body founded in 1586 by Pope Sixtus V, under the name of the *Congregation for Consultation of Regulars* was changed in 1908 to the *Sacred Congregation of Religious*.² In 1967, Paul VI changed

¹ James R. Cain, "Cloister and the apostolate of religious women," in *Review for Religious*, 27 (1968), pp 243-80. Hereafter Cain, "Cloister and the apostolate".

² "The Congregation for institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life"

its title again to the *Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes*, which is the title referred to in this study.³ The role played by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes was key to the implementation of the directives of the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965.

The Second Vatican Council was the catalyst for change within the Catholic Church worldwide. The Council was called to address some of the profound changes of the twentieth century. Sixteen documents were produced, relating to various aspects of the Church and religious life. In particular the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* "The up-date-renewal of religious" was to have a major impact of how religious lived their lives. Following the Council women religious became "the new thing in the modern church" and " suddenly the whole of this great army of Apostolic religious [was] being freed to do the job that so many institutes were founded to do."⁴

The aim of this book is to trace the changes introduced by the Council's decrees on religious, in particular, women religious such as the Irish Presentation Sisters. On the basis of its large numbers, international expansion, long history and its progress towards new governance structures, this congregation provides a compelling case study of the impact of Vatican II on women religious. To understand the transformation experienced by the Congregation, it is necessary to understand the early religious life of the Sisters, what structures were in place and the changes introduced by Church legislation prior to Vatican II.

Early structures of the Presentation Order

To establish a religious congregation as an official religious institute it was necessary to agree to a rule and constitution. These are fundamental to religious life; they outline the status of the institute, its purpose and how the institute should be governed. In the case of the Presentation Congregation, Bishop Francis Moylan, a close friend of the foundress, Nano Nagle, made his first application to Rome for official approval of the Sisters of Charitable Instruction, the original name of the Congregation, as a religious institute in 1778. In reply to his request the Sacred

www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_profile_en.html (13 Aug. 2009).

³Ibid.

⁴ James Walsh, General question time, "A seminar on the spirit of Nano Nagle", Greenhills Presentation Convent, Drogheda, Co. Louth, 21-5 July, 197 (MS collection of seminar talks, p. 72).

Congregation for Religious, Rome, stated, "it is not usual to approve institutes unless the rule they propose is clearly laid down".⁵ The status of the institute depended on whether the institute was one with simple or solemn vows, and was the first question to be determined by Bishop Moylan.

The type of vows, whether simple or solemn, taken by a religious institute played an important role in how that institute was regarded by Rome and society. According to canon law, religious institutes "are distinguished from one another in regard to the vows taken."⁶ The first type, simple vows, was taken by many congregations of sisters involved in an active apostolate and who did not follow a strict rule of enclosure. This type of congregation, although approved as a religious institute, was not usually under the direct authority of Rome, but the authority of the local bishop, also known as the local ordinary. The second, solemn vows, were taken by religious orders of nuns, who followed a strict rule of enclosure and were not involved in an active apostolate. There was much more status attached to the latter. "A *solemn* vow differs from a *simple* vow, inasmuch as a *solemn* vow adds and includes something which a *simple* vow does not include".⁷ According to William Humphrey, S.J., a contemporary writer, a simple vow "does not have attached to it that peculiar solemnity which a solemn vow adds, over and above the essential idea of a vow".⁸ A solemn vow was perceived as carrying much more weight than a simple vow. Religious congregations with simple vows, such as the Mercy Sisters, were actively involved in the parish and were not restricted by a strict rule of enclosure. In contrast those Orders of nuns who took solemn vows were recognised as "real religious" because "the proper conception of the solemnity of vows is the intervention of ecclesiastical authority, and confirmation of the vows by that authority, in the making of the vows".⁹ Members of religious institutes that took solemn vows were regarded as "real religious" and under the special care of Rome. The idea of "real religious" also determined other issues in regard to the terms used to describe the religious institute. Institutes with simple vows were known as a

⁵ Sacred Congregation, Rome to Bishop Moylan, 12 July 1788 in Pius O'Farrell, *Breaking of morn, a book of documents* (Cork, 2001), p. 116. Hereafter O'Farrell, *Documents*.

⁶ Fintan Geser, O.S.B., *The canon law governing communities of sisters* (St. Louis, 1939), p. 31.

⁷ William Humphrey, S.J., *Elements of religious life* (New York, 1895), p. 30. Hereafter Humphrey, *Elements of religious life*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

"congregation" and its members as "sisters", while those, which took solemn vows were known as an "order" and its members as "nuns". In this study, the Presentation Institute will be referred to as a Congregation and its members as Sisters, except for the period when the Congregation took solemn vows in 1805 until their status was clarified in the early twentieth century, when they will be referred to as an Order and its members as nuns.

It was exactly this that Bishop Moylan wanted for the congregation: recognition as "real religious." The "approval by the Holy See would enhance the prestige and membership of Nano Nagle's sisterhood."¹⁰ However, he hoped that the Sisters of Charitable Instruction would be approved as an institute with solemn vows without observing the associated strict rule of enclosure, which allowed them to continue in an active apostolate. Moylan was "aware, of course that such a concession would establish a canonical precedent at variance with the discipline enjoined by the Council of Trent".¹¹ He applied to Rome outlining his proposal of a rule and constitution for the Sister of Charitable Instruction, pointing, "it is objected that enclosure is not to be observed. Though this may seem to be a matter full of apprehension yet if their Eminences had an intimate knowledge of the conditions of this country they would not see so much difficulty."¹² As he emphasised in his application, for the past century Ireland had been "groaning under the burden of the Penal Laws".¹³

The penal laws restricted any type of catholic movement including religious life and education. The Sisters of Charitable Instruction practised both. According to the act of William III, 1695, which was not repealed until the Relief Act of 1791, "no person of the popish religion shall publicly teach school or instruct youth, or in private houses teach youth, except only the children of the master or mistress of the private house, upon pain of twenty pounds, and prison for three months for every such offence".¹⁴ Under this penal law, Catholic education could only be carried out with as little publicity as possible. Bishop Moylan's concern was that an enclosed religious teaching order would attract attention and his hope was the order if inconspicuous might be tolerated. In 1769, Nano Nagle was of the same opinion and admitted that "I think religious discipline

¹⁰ "The Holy Rule of the Presentation Sisters", undated (APSNZ, MS p. 3).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹² Moylan to Cardinal Antonelli, 27 Mar. 1789 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 122.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁴ An act to restrain foreign education, 1695 (7 Will. III, c. 4 [Ire.]).

[enclosure] would be too strict in this country, and own I should not rejoice to see it kept up".¹⁵

The restrictions attached to the rule of enclosure also played an important role in Bishop Moylan's argument. He felt that it would damage the work that Nano Nagle had undertaken. In his request to Rome regarding the rule of enclosure he stated "it was the opinion not only of the pious foundress and myself... that it would be in the interest of religion that they should not be bound by enclosure" as "the poor girls would suffer greatly, for they would have to come from a great distance ... and would be discouraged from frequenting the schools".¹⁶ Ideally, and in line with what Nagle herself wanted, Bishop Moylan hoped that the congregation could be approved as an official religious order, one that would take solemn vows but continue with its active apostolate. Without official approval from Rome, that is "stable" or "apostolic sanction" that "the sisters are not considered religious, they are deterred, to the loss of religion."¹⁷ Rome withheld permission, "since, however, the members feel they should be permitted to go outside the confines of the convent it does not seem feasible to permit them to make profession of solemn vows".¹⁸ Although, it was obvious that the sisters' apostolic work would suffer, the Sacred Congregation insisted that the issue of solemn vows and strict enclosure was bound by law as "when there is a question of religious women and solemn vows, the Holy See never gives approval unless there is an inviolable law of enclosure in accordance with the Council of Trent".¹⁹ It was therefore with regret that it could not "offer approval from Our Holy Father with apostolic authority to this pious Institute with the formulae and solemnity of other institutes".²⁰

The law of enclosure had its roots in the decree *Periculoso*, which was promulgated by Pope Boniface VIII in 1298. Its sole objective was to officially enforce the rule of enclosure on nuns in the thirteenth century. "For the first time in the history of the Church, the cloister was imposed as

¹⁵ Nano Nagle to Miss Fitzsimons, 17 July 1769, in "Letters of Nano Nagle" (Printed copy, GHAD).

¹⁶ Moylan to Cardinal Antonelli, 27 Mar. 1789 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 122.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Sacred Congregation, Rome to Bishop Moylan, 12 July 1788 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 116.

¹⁹ Sacred Congregation, Rome, to Moylan, Cork, 5 Sept. 1789 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 130.

²⁰ Cardinal Carrara, SCR, 20 Sept. 1790 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 154.

a universal obligation by the Holy See".²¹ It was meant "to provide for the dangerous and abominable situation of certain nuns".²² For their safety they "were to remain perpetually cloistered in their monasteries, so that none of them...have permission hereafter to leave their monasteries." This applied to all nuns from 1298 "in whatever part of the world they may be".²³ Permission was given in certain circumstances to the "abbess or prioress of any monastery" if she needs "to present herself to do homage or swear fealty".²⁴ This exception, which allowed the prioress or abbess to have access to the outside world, enhanced the prestige and power of the superior. In addition to designating power within a religious institute, the law of enclosure also gave power, externally, to the local ordinary of the diocese. The decree provides for "someone designated" to enforce the laws relating to enclosure.²⁵ It states that "patriarchs, primates, archbishops and all bishopsdiligently enforce enclosure in those monasteries in which it is not observed".²⁶ This gave authority over monasteries of nuns to the bishops "within their city or diocese subject to them by law as ordinaries."²⁷

The Council of Trent 1545-1565 promulgated the decree on "regulars and nuns" in which it stated that it was "renewing the constitution of Pope Boniface VIII, which begins *Periculoso*".²⁸ It again enforced the law of enclosure on nuns and "enjoins on all bishops" to "make it their especial carethat the enclosure of nuns be carefully restored".²⁹ However, the Council of Trent did make some amendments to *Periculoso* in relation to access to the outside world: "any legitimate cause approved by the bishop was sufficient to allow egress".³⁰ As with Pope Boniface VIII's decree, the Council of Trent's document was created, as the title of chapter V of the document states, to provide for the "safety of nuns".³¹ Pius V in his decree *Circa Pastoralis*, 29 May 1566, in addition to "observance of the constitution

²¹ James R. Cain, "Cloister and the apostolate" in *Review for Religious*, 27 (1968), p. 267. Hereafter Cain, "Cloister and the apostolate".

²² Boniface VIII, *Periculoso*, reprinted and translated in Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon law and cloistered women, Periculoso and its commentators, 1298- 1545* (Washington, 1997), p. 135. Hereafter Boniface VIII, *Periculoso*.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, p136.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 135

²⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁸ N. P. Tanner, *Decrees of the ecumenical councils* (2 vols, London, 1990), ii, p .777. Hereafter Tanner, *Decrees*.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Cain, "Cloister and the apostolate", p. 271.

³¹ Tanner, *Decrees*, p. 777.

of Boniface VIII and the decree of the Council of Trent... compelled tertiaries [religious congregations of women] to accept the obligation of solemn vows with the pontifical enclosure".³²

The enforcement of a strict rule of enclosure limited the contact of women religious with the outside world. It was this restriction of contact with the outside world that would diminish the freedom of the Sisters of Charitable Instruction, limiting them to the confines of their enclosure and affecting their work within the community. "Hence, it was impossible for religious to undertake works of charity incompatible with the enclosure".³³ This was the deciding factor for Bishop Moylan: the rule of enclosure was incompatible with the work of the sisters. He conceded, instead choosing the status of simple vows, which allowed the sisters to continue the work envisaged by Nano Nagle. He stated that "I [would] rather leave them under simple vows and resolutions, as heretofore, than prevent them from attending, by their enclosure, the schools for the poor".³⁴ With the status of the institute now decided, the next step was to decide on a suitable rule and constitution to adopt.

In 1775, the founding days of the Sisters of Charitable Instruction, Nano Nagle invested much thought into what rule and constitution would be best suited to her congregation. She had rejected the rule of the Ursulines as their rule of enclosure did not suit her apostolate. In her early correspondence, the first rule that Nano refers to is the rule of the Sisters of the Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She expressed great joy that "you [Miss Teresa Mulally] and Miss Corballis were so taken with the rule" and hoped that they "would begin it [themselves]...in the metropolis".³⁵ Later correspondence refers to other religious institutes and their rule. One such institute was *Les Soeurs Grises*, the French Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, referred to as the "Grey Sisters" by Nagle. She expressed an interest in this institute, stating "As to the rule I was so desirous to get, which was that of the Grey Sisters, I believe it is not what I have got".³⁶ Nagle was concerned that the rule

³² Arthur Vermeersch, "Nuns, origins and history", translation by Michael T. Barrett in *Catholic Encyclopaedia* (www.newadvent.org/cathen/111164a) (16 November 2007). Hereafter Vermeersch, "Nuns, origins and history".

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Bishop Francis Moylan to Archbishop Troy, 7 Nov. 1788 in O'Farrell *documents*, p. 118.

³⁵ Nano Nagle to Miss Mulally, 21 Aug. 1777, in "Letters of Nano Nagle" (Printed copy, GHAD)

³⁶ Nano Nagle to Miss Mulally 30 Oct. 1779 in "Letters of Nano Nagle" (Printed copy, GHAD).

would conflict with the work of her congregation. She believed that the rule of the "Grey Sisters" had "such a number of other prayers that I should imagine they could have little time to attend to the sick".³⁷ Bishop Moylan had also informed Nano of another rule observed by an order called the Hospitallers; she discussed this as a possible rule for her sisters. She explained the different works that the order were involved in, which included "care of old men and women", instruction of orphans and "daughters of citizens and young ladies of distinction". She stated, "we are obliged to most of these charities, only we must prefer the schools to all others, and we make no vows for life".³⁸

In 1790 Bishop Moylan sent a draft of the constitution to Rome for approval, stating that he had "tried to follow the spirit, though not the letter of the constitutions of the Ursuline sisters".³⁹ These in turn were based on the rule of St. Augustine, which was the foundation of many religious rules, which put "emphasis on the perfection of common life" and did not impose "an absolute cloister".⁴⁰ However, there were different types of Ursuline foundations. As discussed earlier, Nagle had rejected the constitution of the Ursulines, whose strict rule of enclosure would inhibit her work. It was suggested by Rome that the constitution Bishop Moylan hoped for was more in line with another form of the Ursuline order, who "live a common life" and "leave their house for the purpose of educating young people."⁴¹ This form of the order did not take solemn vows and so, "there should be nothing in the new rules that would suggest solemn vows or imply a society of a regular institute in the proper sense".⁴²

In his consultations with the Sacred Congregation prior to approval of the constitution of the Sisters of Charitable Instruction, Bishop Moylan outlined rules that the sisters were obliged to adhere to. Although "strict" enclosure was not practised, enclosure was in effect applied to the sisters' lives. They were allowed to go outside, but only with "the assent of the bishop" and in the company of another "appointed by the Mother Superior".⁴³ In practice the same tight restrictions were imposed on

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Bishop Francis Moylan to the Sacred Congregation, 27 Mar. 1790, in O'Farrell *Documents*, p. 133.

⁴⁰ Cain, "Cloister and the apostolate", pp 243-80.

⁴¹ Sacred Congregation, Rome to Bishop Francis Moylan, 6 Aug. 1791 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 159.

⁴² Ibid., p. 160.

⁴³ Bishop Francis Moylan, "Rules and constitutions of the religious Congregation of the Charitable

religious institutes of both solemn and simple vows. Bishop Moylan pointed out in the constitution that the sisters should be "mindful that, in consecrating themselves to God in the religious state, they have entirely renounced the world and therefore, should hold as little communication with it as possible".⁴⁴ The Sacred Congregation, in its study of the constitution, confirmed this as an important rule to be observed stating "since the aforesaid women will not be subject to the discipline of enclosure, the eminent Fathers strongly recommend that you draft laws and procedures for granting of permission when they leave the convent".⁴⁵ This request did not affect the sisters' apostolate as they still continued in their external work of teaching poor girls and visiting the sick.

The 1790 constitution also outlined the internal and external government of each house. Externally, It was recommended that external authority should be given to the local bishop and only those priests appointed by him. He had full authority and jurisdiction over the congregation "and the sisters were obliged to pay all obedience to him, as their first superior".⁴⁶ Internally, the government of each house was also outlined in the Constitution. Firstly a mother superior was to be elected. Once elected, the role of mother superior was considered central within a religious institute. It was her responsibility to ensure "that the rule and constitutions are kept unbroken" and she had sole charge over the internal government of the institute.⁴⁷ To assist her in this duty, there were three other sisters elected to the positions of assistant, mistress of novices and bursar. They were responsible for the administration, decision-making and the future of the members of the institute. The first of these positions was that of assistant. The 1790 constitution stated that "the assistant holds the first place after that of the mother superior", and acts on her behalf when she is absent.⁴⁸ The bursar was given the financial responsibility within the house, to "receive and hold all money belonging to the convent".⁴⁹ The last key position was that of the mistress of novices whose responsibility was for new members and their religious training. "Since the advancement of the institute depends to the utmost on the pious and holy education of

Instruction" c.1790 (GHAD, MS C/5, pp 9-10). Hereafter Moylan, Rules and constitutions.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁵ Sacred Congregation, Rome to Bishop Francis Moylan, 6 Aug. 1791 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 160.

⁴⁶ Moylan, "Rules and constitutions", pp 26-7.

⁴⁷ Rules and constitutions of the Sisters of Charitable Instruction, p. 149.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

novices, a sister should be designated for this duty of such great importance".⁵⁰ Each sister was assigned a specific role within the institute but in addition they formed what was known as the "discreets"

In addition to identifying the authority of the congregation, both in internal and external capacities, the 1790 constitution also stated that the convent in South Presentation, Cork was "the primary seminary of this institute, and is the general novitiate for the whole Kingdom".⁵¹ Bishop Moylan felt it was necessary that "a link be preserved between all the members of this body, in order that the purpose of the institute be promoted better: the superior and mother superior of the convent at Cork are to be the superiors general".⁵² Bishop Moylan believed regular contact between any newly-formed foundations was of utmost importance to the work and future of the congregation. Each new foundation would have its own internal government consisting of a mother superior, assistant, bursar and mistress of novices. However, the pre-eminence would be given to Cork as the founding house, preserving the roots of the institute. The position of superior general at the mother house in Cork would provide a point of contact for all new foundations. It was suggested that if necessary the superiors have authority to "send sisters ... to other convents, or recall them, or destine them, as it shall seem to them conducive for the good of religion".⁵³ The idea of having a mother house or headquarters would be of great benefit to the institute as a whole. It would enable all houses within the institute to transfer sisters from one house to another and act as a central novitiate for training new members. The Sacred Congregation stated that "the eminent Fathers agree that this convent be considered the head of the institute and that the probation for young aspirants who wish to join should be in this convent [Cork]".⁵⁴ With Cork recognised as the mother-house "the religious being sent to establish other convents, whether in the diocese or anywhere else in the Kingdom, should be chosen from this convent".⁵⁵ The proposals of Bishop Moylan and the recommendations made by Rome focused not only on the existing members of the institute but also on future ones.

On 3 September 1791 the decree of praise *Decretum Laudis*, approving the Institute of the Sisters of Charitable Instruction, declared it a religious

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 150.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Sacred Congregation, Rome to Bishop Francis Moylan, document accompanying the brief, 6 Aug. 1791 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 162.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

institute that "shall make simple vows; that is vows of obedience, chastity and poverty" allowing them to continue as an active congregation with its mother house in Cork.⁵⁶ Although the institute was now approved, a revised draft of the constitution had yet to be submitted to Rome with "the principal points that [the] Sacred Congregation make on the system of rules sent by [Bishop Moylan]", in which he had to "give due consideration to the views of the Sacred Congregation".⁵⁷ In 1791, Bishop Moylan appointed Father Laurence Callanan of the Franciscan friary to draw up the new rule and constitution. He had not commenced his task when the sisters "begged that he would designate a new titular".⁵⁸ He chose the title "The Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary". This name was chosen by Father Callanan as "he had ever known, Nano Nagle, the venerable foundress, to have a particular and marked devotion to the festival of the Presentation of Our Blessed Lady".⁵⁹ By 1793 Callanan had completed a draft of the new revised rule and constitution. These were then submitted by Bishop Moylan to the archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Troy and Dr. Teahan, bishop of Kerry for examination, who both expressed their satisfaction.⁶⁰ However, it seems that this draft of the constitutions was never submitted to Rome for approval, as the status of the institute again came under review, this time by the sisters themselves.

From 1793, the institute of the Sisters of Charitable Instruction expanded to other counties within Ireland. By 1800, there were six foundations including the mother house in South Presentation convent, Cork, as outlined in table 1.1. Although the expansion signified the success of the institute, it also brought problems. Each of these new convents needed sisters from Cork to carry out the active apostolate of the institute. The mother house in Cork, the central novitiate, reluctantly had to refuse requests for sisters for new foundations. In a reply to Miss Mullaly of George's Hill foundation, Father Callanan wrote: "the community has not increased since I had the pleasure of seeing you last;

⁵⁶ "The apostolic brief of Pope Pius VI", 3 Sept. 1791 in *Rules and regulations of the Institute of the Religious Sisterhood of the Presentation of the Ever Blessed Virgin Mary* (Cork, 1809) preface, [v] (GHAD/C/7(1)).

⁵⁷ Sacred Congregation, Rome to Bishop Francis Moylan, document accompanying brief, 6 Aug. 1791 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 163.

⁵⁸ "The Holy Rule of the Presentation Sisters", undated (APSNZ, MS p. 6).

⁵⁹ T. J. Walsh, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters* (Dublin, 1959), p. 139. Hereafter Walsh, *Nano Nagle*.

⁶⁰ "The Holy Rule of the Presentation Sisters", undated (APSNZ, MS, p. 6).

... they could not spare another for any establishment whatsoever".⁶¹ Three years later, in 1794, Mulally still lacked resources, although her foundation had officially opened. She had sent candidates to Cork for training and also hoped to gain a professed sister but this was also refused by Bishop Moylan. Wishing Miss Mulally all success in her new establishment he regretted that, "be assured it would be the highest satisfaction to me to send with them an experienced sister.....but circumstanced as our house is at present, I don't see it possible".⁶²

Table 1.1 Early Presentation foundations in Ireland, 1775-1800

| Foundation | Year founded |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| South Presentation, Cork | 1775 |
| Killarney | 1793 |
| George's Hill, Dublin | 1794 |
| Waterford | 1798 |
| North Presentation, Cork | 1799 |
| Kilkenny | 1800 |

Source: T.J. Walsh, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters* (Dublin, 1959).

The mother house in Cork was under great stress in the early nineteenth century because of the expansion of the congregation. The lack of candidates was one problem, another was keeping candidates. In a letter to the superior, Sister Joseph McLoughlin, of the newly-founded convent in Kilkenny, dated 18 May 1802, Sister Francis Tobin, superior general, Cork, advised her on the government of the convent. In particular she warned "of securing yourself from contracting too great an attachment to your opinion and will - a temptation superiors easily fall into if not very cautious".⁶³ As superior general of the congregation, Tobin advised the Kilkenny superior on how to handle new members in her convent. In particular one newly-professed sister, who had trained as a novice with Tobin in Cork, gave cause for concern in Kilkenny. Tobin advised the Kilkenny superior "while your professed consist of those two, you should consider and treat them rather as your equals and assistants than

⁶¹ Laurence Callanan to Miss Mulally, 1 Oct. 1791 in "Letters of Nano Nagle" (Printed copy, GHAD).

⁶² Bishop Francis Moylan to Miss Mulally, 26 June in "Letters of Nano Nagle" (Printed copy, GHAD).

⁶³ Sr. Francis Tobin, Cork to Sr. Joseph McLoughlin, Kilkenny, 18 May 1802 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 233.

subjects".⁶⁴ As all members of the congregation had entered and trained as novices in the mother house in Cork, Tobin knew each before they were moved to a new convent. In particular she was aware that as a senior and experienced member of the congregation Sister Joseph McLoughlin was acting unwisely towards a member and pointed this out to her. "Neither Fr. Collins nor I approve of your making any experiment on your professed sister's virtue....You saw no example of it here and you may do more harm than good by such things".⁶⁵ She continued, warning "Mary...may be tempted to regret her engagements - which would be much worse than all her imperfections".⁶⁶ The institute could not afford to lose members as there was such a shortage, but Tobin seemed to think that the problem lay more with the bad judgement of the superior. She corrected Sister Joseph McLaughlin's management of her members stating "I could tell you from experience that this great zeal for the perfection of others is also a temptation attendant on the best-disposed superiors, particularly at the commencement of their government, and if not curbed is often productive of much evil and seldom of much good."⁶⁷ The role of Cork in the lives of all the members of the congregation was not merely an honorary one, as in this example where the superior general restrained the unwise zeal of a new superior. Cork not only provided training for new members but also was very much involved in the newly-established foundations. The continuous contact provided a source of advice and help in the problems that the institute was experiencing.

Limited resources created difficulties within the institute. Sister Tobin as superior general had to address this problem also, she stated, "the number of school hours observed in your house, together with the other duties of the rules are in our opinion impossible to persevere in and at the same time maintain health".⁶⁸ She wrote to Miss Mulally, George's Hill: "be assured no person will join our institute, for the sake of teaching poor children, if they don't see even great exactness and regularity to spiritual duties".⁶⁹ The duty of teaching was the central but not the sole purpose of the institute; as Tobin pointed out, the sisters were also bound to religious life. Miss Mulally was not a sister and Tobin stated "you could never propose ... to get religious, who would be content to devote themselves

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Sr. Francis Tobin to Miss Mulally, 28 Feb. 1795 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 193.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

entirely to the instruction of others and neglect their own perfection".⁷⁰ The perfection of their religious life was an important factor for the sisters but it could be overtaken by the demands of the apostolate.

The difficulties experienced by the congregation in its early years led to reviewing the topic of the status of the institute. It was felt that if the sisters were recognised as "real religious" it would attract new candidates and secure the future of the institute. "We form at present but merely a religious society making annual vows - one which may in time under existing circumstances fall to the ground".⁷¹ It was also pointed out that the present status of the institute provided "little security for those who join us, that it has long been considered absolutely necessary to establish it on a more steady foundation".⁷² The sisters wanted to establish "a steady foundation", which they felt could only be achieved "by forming it into a regular confirmed Order and consequently by our strict observance of enclosure".⁷³ Bishop Moylan was informed of the sisters' decision to take solemn vows. He had hoped to re-open his appeal to Rome for solemn vows without a strict rule of enclosure. In 1802, Bishop Moylan submitted the revised rule and constitution to Rome requesting that "they may be permitted to make three solemn vows of religion, adding to that a fourth of instruction of poor girls according to the rule of Augustine".⁷⁴ This request radically changed the structure of the institute, as a strict rule of enclosure was applied, confining its apostolic work to within the boundaries of this enclosure. In 1805, these changed constitutions were approved by Rome and adhered to by the institute until the twentieth century.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Presentation order became one of the largest teaching orders in Ireland. Its rapid spread in nineteenth-century Ireland had led to new foundations in many parts of the world. The structure of the order had completely changed from its founding days and consisted of autonomous houses throughout Ireland and abroad. However, this period also saw the order experiencing problems with the inherited structure of autonomy. The 1805 rule and constitution had achieved the idea of "separate monasteries" and, according to the directory, the mother house in Cork, the first foundation of the Congregation, had also lost any authority or connection with the convents it had founded. The result was throughout the nineteenth century the

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, p. 173.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Bishop Francis Moylan to Cardinal Antonelli, 2 Sept. 1802 in O'Farrell, *Documents*, p. 238.

structure of the Presentation order developed into independent houses, each an enclave in itself. Any new member who wished to join the order entered into a particular house. Each house had its own governing body, which had sole authority within that house. The governing body consisted of the mother superior and her assistants; the role of superior was central. These structures both internal and external were to remain in place until new legislation was introduced by Rome in 1900.

Early legislation 1900-

The introduction of new legislation from Rome in 1900 relating to religious institutes of women marked the beginning of change. The first of these papal documents, *Conditae a Christo*, promulgated by Leo XIII on 8 December 1900, was said to be "one of the key documents relating to congregations of simple vows".⁷⁵ This constitution defined the two types of religious institutes with simple vows: those which were diocesan and those of pontifical right. The aim of this clarification was to ensure "the authority of the superiors of congregations and the authority of the bishops should be of complete accord".⁷⁶ It was followed shortly after by the papal document, *Perpensis*, 3 May 1902. This document renewed Leo XIII's earlier decree, but it also "indicated that the vows of the Presentation were simple".⁷⁷

In effect, congregations of simple vows were recognised as "real religious" and the ordinary was entrusted with the care of enclosure. This recognition marks a major change from the perception in the early eighteenth century that only religious women with solemn vows were "real religious".⁷⁸ The papal documents issued by Leo XIII related to institutes of women religious who had taken simple vows. In the case of the Presentation sisters they continued "to regard themselves as making profession of solemn vows but did not seem to regard themselves as bound by papal enclosure."⁷⁹ The whole question of solemn vows and papal enclosure for nuns was a matter of discussion in Rome at the end of the nineteenth century, with reports that it had "been raised at Propaganda a

⁷⁵ Gaston Courtois, *The states of perfection according to the teaching of the church, papal documents from Leo XIII to Pius XII* (Dublin, 1961), p. 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Document concerning the "Holy rule of the Presentation Sisters", undated (APSNZ, MS).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Michael Oreille, OMI, consultant SCRSI, document "Irish Presentation Sisters...Cork and union", undated (ASCRSI, MS C91A).

few times."⁸⁰ Evidence suggests that it was the status of the Presentation sisters, whether they were religious with simple or solemn vows, which had generated this debate. The question was confronted in the papal document *Perpensis* 3 May 1902, which intimated that the Presentation order was one with simple vows.⁸¹ The debate continued and in 1910, "in response to a query by Cardinal Logue the Sacred Congregation of Religious replied on 23 August 1910 that the vows of the Presentation Sisters of Ireland were not solemn but simple".⁸² This ruling was based on "the fact that the Sisters did not observe papal enclosure ...their vows were only simple".⁸³ The code of canon law in 1918 clarified the exact status of the Presentation sisters: "the enclosure [was] "*clausura communis*"; responsibility for its observance and dispensation devolves on the ordinary" and "the sisters [were] "*sorores* and form a "*congregatio juris pontificii*...."⁸⁴

This clarification of the juridical status of the Presentation sisters meant that legislation introduced from 1900-1918 was relevant to the congregation, whose status had now become one of pontifical right with simple vows. However, the Presentation sisters did not seem to recognise this change and continued as a religious institute with solemn vows, observing the rule of enclosure, "for a few years after Vatican II".⁸⁵ It was the bishops who initiated change within the Presentation congregation in the form of diocesan amalgamation. It became a topic of discussion at the plenary synods held in Maynooth in 1900 and 1927.

The application of the new Roman legislation in Ireland was discussed at the plenary synods in Maynooth in 1900 and 1927. "These councils and synods asked religious to implement the teachings of the Apostolic Constitution, *Conditae a Christo*, the subsequent *Normae* and of course, the 1917 Code of Canon Law."⁸⁶ In addition, high on the agenda for

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Document concerning the "Holy rule of the Presentation Sisters", undated (APSNZ, MS p. 11).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Document concerning the "Holy Rule of the Presentation Sisters", Undated, (APSNZ, MS p.11). From this point on the Presentation Sisters will be referred to as a "Congregation" rather than an "Order". According to canon 488, no. 7, those religious institutes that take solemn vows are known as "Orders". Those that take simple vows are known as "Congregations".

⁸⁵ Interview Sister PBVM, St. Brigid's Presentation Convent, Kildare, 15 May 2006.

⁸⁶ Mary Lyons, *Governance structures of the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, becoming one* (New York, 2005), p. 56. Hereafter Lyons, *Governance structures*.