Re-organisation of the Dioceses of Kilfenora, Kilmacduagh, Galway and Killaloe, 1852-1883

IGNATIUS MURPHY

In 1750 the two very small Catholic dioceses of Kilmacduagh (province of Tuam) and Kilfenora (province of Cashel) were united. In 1852 Archbishop Paul Cullen suggested that something should be done to correct the anomalous situation by which the bishop of these dioceses was subject to two different archbishops. Various proposals were made and initiatives taken over the following thirty years until a satisfactory solution was arrived at in 1883; by then the problems had changed and the anomaly which Cullen had sought to remove still remained, though in a different form.

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In the present arrangement of Irish Catholic dioceses the Bishop of Galway and Kilmacduagh is apostolic administrator of Kilfenora. The reason for this unusual situation is that Kilfenora, in north-west Clare, is part of Cashel province, while Galway and Kilmacduagh belong to the western province of Tuam. As a result the Bishop of Galway attends meetings of the bishops of both provinces. Nowadays this arrangement causes little comment and inconvenience. In the 19th century, before Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora were united with Galway, their bishop also had a foot in both provinces. In the middle of the century, when many of the anomalies which had arisen during the Penal Period were being removed, this unusual situation gave rise to considerable discussion among the bishops of both provinces and in the Congregation de Propaganda Fide (which had charge of Irish affairs in Rome). This article will deal with the various solutions suggested and steps taken until the present arrangement was finally arrived at in 1883. Although it was not involved in the eventual final arrangement, the diocese of Killaloe also featured prominently in much of the discussion from 1852 to 1883.

In the 17th century Kilfenora and Kilmacduagh were independent dioceses, while Galway was outside the normal diocesan structures, because of the existence of the Wardenship of Galway. A document of the Propaganda Archives dated 1673 commented on the tiny size of Kilfenora diocese and the fact that it had only nine priests. It accepted that the Bishop of Kilfenora could not get a living in the diocese—as a result of which he had been residing in France and working under the Archbishop of Paris. The document went on to suggest that it seemed opportune to unite Kilfenora with one of the adjoining dioceses, Kilmacduagh or Killaloe. In the previous year Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh, had also suggested the union of Kilfenora and Killaloe. However, nothing was done until 1750 when the dioceses of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora were formally united and Peter Killikelly, O.P., was appointed Bishop of Kilmacduagh and Apostolic Administrator of Kilfenora. His successor was to be Bishop of Kilfenora and Administrator of Kilmacduagh and the succession was to continue with similar alterations. This created the very unusual

1 Propaganda Fide Archives, Acta, 43(1673), 30v.
situation of a suffragan bishop who had two metropolitans, the Archbishops of Cashel and Tuam.

In 1830, when Propaganda had decided to bring the Wardenship of Galway into the normal diocesan structures, one of the options discussed was to unite it with Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. However, this option was dismissed because of opposition within Galway. So the decision was taken to create a new diocese of Galway and its first bishop was appointed in 1831.

Archbishop Cullen Intervenes, 1852

Not surprisingly, the suggestion to regularise the situation of Kilfenora and Kilmacduagh came from Archbishop Paul Cullen, at a time when he was trying hard to bring the general discipline of the Irish Church into line with the norms of the universal Church and, in the process, remove anomalies which had arisen during the Penal Period. In 1852, when a new appointment for Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora was being considered in Rome, Cullen wrote to Propaganda making suggestions which, if implemented, would regularise the situation in these dioceses. Cullen’s suggestions involved the eventual union of Kilmacduagh with Galway (both in Tuam province) and territorial adjustments between Kilfenora and Killaloe (both in Cashel province). Cullen believed that a decision to unite Kilmacduagh with Galway had been taken when the first Bishop of Galway was being appointed in 1831 and that this possibility had been referred to in the briefs of appointment. However, when the Propaganda officials searched through their records nothing was found to confirm Cullen’s belief. As already mentioned, this had been considered as a possible option but had been decisively rejected.

Before making his suggestion in 1852, Cullen consulted Archbishop Slattery of Cashel and received a positive response. As yet his relations with Archbishop MacHale had not yet become very strained (as was to happen shortly). Nevertheless, he did not consult MacHale but suspected that he would cause some difficulty as he would be losing a suffragan bishop. In fact Cullen’s intuition was fully correct and the loss of a suffragan bishop was to be a very sensitive point where MacHale was concerned.

Despite his obvious concern to end an anomalous situation Cullen was not in favour of an immediate union of Kilmacduagh with Galway. This was because Bishop O’Donnell of Galway was a supporter of the Queen’s Colleges (of which there was one in Galway) and it would, therefore, in Cullen’s view, be inopportune to enlarge his diocese. In any event he felt that O’Donnell was not coping very well with his existing duties. Furthermore, a union of Killaloe and Kilfenora would enlarge an already extensive diocese. So Cullen’s immediate suggestion was to appoint a Bishop of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora, reserving the right in the brief of appointment to make territorial adjustments if and when the Holy See saw fit. The adjustments he had in mind were the union of Kilmacduagh with Galway and the enlargement of Kilfenora by joining with it some parishes from the diocese of Killaloe.

At the General Congregation of Propaganda on 29 November 1852 Cullen’s advice was followed exactly. The decision was taken to recommend to Pope Pius IX that an appointment be made to Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora while reserving the right to make territorial adjustments at a later date. This was confirmed by the Pope, and Patrick Fallon was nominated as bishop. His brief of appointment contained the recommended reservations.

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3Propaganda Fide Archives, Acta, 193(1830), 337, 557v.
4Ibid., 214(1852), 501r-511r.
Looking at the dioceses involved in the suggested realignments, Killaloe was by far the largest. At the present time it has a population of average size, 112,000 Catholics, making it about 50% bigger than the united dioceses of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora which have 76,000. In the mid-19th century the disparity was much greater, as can be seen from the following figures, taken from the Catholic Directory for 1852:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diocese</th>
<th>Parishes</th>
<th>Priests</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kilmacduagh</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilfenora</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killaloe</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In 1834 Killaloe had a Catholic population of 359,585—making it the fifth largest diocese in the country, only marginally smaller than the diocese of Dublin. Kilfenora and Kilmacduagh had 81,642 Catholics, while Galway had a Catholic population of 56,503.⁶ Although the Great Famine and subsequent emigration had caused a steep decline by 1852, the figures readily illustrate why Cullen proposed the division of Killaloe diocese if it was united with Kilfenora.

A Vacancy in Galway, 1855-1856

In June 1855 Laurence O’Donnell, Bishop of Galway, died. The three candidates proposed by the parish priests were not endorsed by the bishops of the province and this led to some delay, giving Cullen an opportunity to draw attention once again to what he described as the “anomalous situation” of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora.⁷ In a letter to Propaganda on 5 October 1855 he mentioned how he had met Bishop Fallon a short time previously at the consecration of the Bishop of Waterford. Fallon was complaining about being called to meetings both in Cashel and Tuam and the expense which these involved. Cullen felt that he would not mind seeing Kilmacduagh united with Galway and leaving Kilfenora to Killaloe. In a letter a few months later to Archbishop Slattery, Bishop Fallon said that he had no opinion to offer on the proposed changes: “I place myself unreservedly at the disposal of the Holy See.”⁸

In his letter of 5 October Cullen again brought up the point that provision had been made for a possible future union with Kilmacduagh when the first Bishop of Galway was appointed in 1831. This was Nicholas Foran, who had refused the appointment and later became Bishop of Waterford. Foran had told him that in his document of appointment a clause was inserted making provision for the union of Galway and Kilmacduagh. However, as mentioned already, the Propaganda officials could not find any mention of this clause when they made a search through the documentation in 1852.

Cullen’s letter next touched on another possibility which, he said, could be further investigated by Propaganda. Not far from Galway was the ancient Abbacy of Cong, formerly under the Canons of the Lateran, consisting of seven or eight parishes. He had been told by a religious that this abbacy had continued to exist until 1830, when the present parish priest of Cong had been nominated by the last abbot. It now formed part of the Archdiocese of Tuam but, according to his informant, the union had not taken place according to due process of law. Cullen himself was not sure whether this information was correct, but inquiries could be made. Clearly he envisaged the possibility of uniting the abbacy of Cong with Galway.

⁶Donal A. Kerr, Peel, Priests and Politics: Sir Robert Peel’s Administration and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, 1841-1846, Oxford 1982, p. 33
⁷Propaganda Fide Archives, Acta, 220(1856), 772r-793. This contains all the material pertaining to the Galway appointment.
⁸Cashel Diocesan Archives, Slattery Papers, 1855/50.
After it had received Cullen's letter Propaganda wrote to Archbishop Slattery of Cashel and Archbishop MacHale of Tuam, asking for their views about the union of Kilmacduagh with Galway and Kilfenora with Killaloe. Slattery, in a brief reply, stated that he had consulted with the bishops of the province and that they were unanimous in recommending that the existing anomalous situation should be ended as suggested. However, the Cashel Archives show that his consultation of the bishops produced a few interesting comments. A letter from Dr. Cussen of Bruff, on behalf of the aging Bishop Ryan of Limerick, agreed with the proposal but suggested that the new very large Killaloe diocese might hand over to Limerick one or two parishes adjacent to the city. And Bishop Moriarty, Coadjutor of Kerry, thought that Cashel might take some parishes from Killaloe, a proposal that was immediately rejected by Archbishop Slattery. Bishop Vaughan of Killaloe, who was being consulted on the same level as the others despite being one of the principals involved, was completely in agreement with the union of Galway and Kilmacduagh. His letter went on to say:

In the event of Kilfenora being united to Killaloe, I should find it necessary to consult your Grace as to what I ought to do in such a case; of course, if found or considered useful in the way of promoting religion, I would not offer (even if I could) any opposition.

However, up to this point there had been no official mention of a possible division of Killaloe, simply its union with Kilfenora.

The reply to Propaganda from John MacHale was in a rather different vein from that of Slattery. In a long letter he argued vehemently against any change, brushing aside suggestions of inconveniences or difficulties in the existing situation. If the division took place as suggested Killaloe, already a large diocese, would be enlarged by eight more parishes. However, he had also heard rumours about a possible division of Killaloe, uniting part of it with Kilfenora. Was a new diocese to be erected in Cashel province, while another was in effect to be wiped out in Tuam? This, in fact, seems to have been the nub of the matter where MacHale was concerned. It was a matter of personal pride for him to hold on to the traditional number of suffragan bishops in Tuam province and he clearly saw the hand of Cullen in the whole matter. In a letter to Archbishop Slattery on 2 January 1856 he put the blame on Cullen, though not mentioning him by name:

But at all events it is too bad to suffer a Prelate who has plenty to do at home to be making excursions for selfish purposes on the provinces of others and sowing the seed of lashing discord.

By now the affair had become part of the broader Cullen-MacHale dispute, so that any agreement by MacHale to proposals which he believed emanated from Cullen was extremely unlikely. One wonders what his reaction might have been if he became aware of Cullen’s suggestion to take the seven or eight parishes of the abbacy of Cong from his own diocese.

On 7 January 1856 the clergy of Galway wrote to Propaganda objecting to a union with Kilmacduagh and pointing out that when the wardenship was made into a diocese it was on condition that it should remain unchanged and independent. A similar letter was received from a group of laity. Both groups maintained that if the union took place Protestants and enemies of the Catholic faith would say the Church was losing its power and influence through the reduction in the number of dioceses. This was probably a veiled comparison with the large-scale reduction in the number of Protestant bishops in Ireland in 1833.

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9Ibid., 1855/56.
10Ibid., 1855/62.
11Ibid., 1855/52.
12Ibid., 1856/1.
In mid-January 1856 Cullen again wrote to Propaganda, giving information he had received from a priest of Kilmacduagh, Fr. Michael O’Fay. Fr. O’Fay had written that he was in Rome in 1824 when the bishopric of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora became vacant. At the time he was consulted by Propaganda and, after he had pointed out the financial problems of any bishop of the dioceses who did not have private means, the Congregation had accepted the principle of uniting the Wardenship of Galway with these dioceses. As a result the Warden of Galway, Edmund French, was appointed Bishop of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora, while retaining the wardenship of Galway. It seems strange that Cullen kept referring to and attached so much importance to hearsay evidence of possible decisions taken many years previously, as if the whole affair should be guided by these. Again there is nothing in the Acta which deal with Bishop French’s appointment to back up the claim that a decision was taken about a future union. Edmund French was proposed by the Archbishop of Tuam and given backing by the Bishops of Killaloe and Limerick in an appointment that was utterly straightforward.\(^{13}\)

Eventually in August 1856 Propaganda wrote to the bishops of Tuam Province asking them to suggest names for the bishopric of Galway, outside the terms already proposed by the priests. When the replies had been received, at a General Congregation of Propaganda on 9 December it was decided to take no action for the moment on the question of boundary adjustments but the matter was to be kept in review. John MacEvilly was then appointed Bishop of Galway. MacHale’s strong negative reaction was clearly the deciding factor in blocking any initiative.

The new Bishop of Galway was a priest of Tuam diocese who had been MacHale’s theological adviser at the Synod of Thurles in 1850 and was president of the diocesan seminary, St. Jarlath’s College, Tuam. After MacEvilly’s appointment to Galway the two men rarely agreed on any major issue. At the same time he became friendly with and a close supporter of Paul Cullen. In a recent article on MacHale and MacEvilly, Liam Bane has written: “MacEvilly hitched his star well and truly to the Cullen waggon, and this found him favour at Rome and made him the lifelong enemy of John MacHale.”\(^{14}\)

**Proposed Revival of the Diocese of Roscrea**

In 1857 Patrick Leahy became Archbishop of Cashel. A former vice-rector of the Catholic University, he was a strong supporter of Paul Cullen and has been described as one of the few members of the hierarchy “who approximated to receiving his full confidence”.\(^{15}\) Shortly after Leahy’s appointment to Cashel, Bishop Vaughan of Killaloe applied for a coadjutor and Leahy played a decisive and unusual role in the selection of Michael Flannery.\(^{16}\) Writing to Propaganda on 31 March 1858 he added a postscript in which he advocated the division of the very large diocese of Killaloe. Two possibilities were mentioned—

(i) The best option was the revival of the ancient diocese of Roscrea, with the addition of a few parishes from Killaloe.

(ii) The diocese of Roscrea could be united with Cashel as both were in the same county of Tipperary.

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\(^{13}\)Propaganda Fide Archives, Acta, 187(1824), 411r-411v; 424v—425v.


\(^{16}\)Ignatius Murphy, “The appointment of Bishop Michael Flannery and proposed revival of Roscrea Diocese, 1858”, Eile, Journal of the Roscrea Heritage Society, No. 2, pp. 87-96.
The second suggestion above was in marked contrast to Archbishop Slttery's rejection two years earlier of any territorial additions from Killaloe. In order to calm the very likely opposition in Killaloe, Leahy went on to suggest that this diocese should be compensated by the addition of Kilfenora. At the same time Kilmacduagh would be united with Galway, thus solving the problem of a bishop whose united dioceses were in two provinces.

Cullen was asked to comment on Leahy's letter and was in general agreement. He also backed Leahy's proposal that options on the matter could be kept open by including in the bull of the coadjutor's appointment a clause reserving the right to divide the diocese on some future occasion. This suggestion was accepted and implemented by Propaganda when Michael Flannery was being appointed.

In the following year (1859) Bishop Vaughan died and was succeeded by Bishop Flannery. So at this point the Bishop of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora (Fallon) and the Bishop of Killaloe (Flannery) were both men who had been appointed with the reservation that their dioceses might in some way be re-structured. There were no longer any legal obstacles in the way but there were other more significant ones, particularly in the opposition of John MacHale.

An Administrator of Kilfenora & Kilmacduagh

In presenting his diocesan report (Relatio Status) to Rome in 1862, John MacEvilly emphasised the small size of Galway diocese (only 22 priests) and the grossly inadequate income available to the bishop. His solution was the union of Galway with Kilfenora and Kilmacduagh when an opportunity would present itself.\(^{17}\) In letters to Monsignor Kirby, Rector of the Irish College, Rome, on 4 September and 7 October 1864, Archbishop Cullen asked him to make representations to have Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora united with Galway.\(^{18}\) On 7 October he wrote:

Dr. Fallon has scarcely enough to live on. Dr. MacEvilly is also poor. Their predecessors got on badly enough—but now the times are worse than ever. I think they ought to unite them. If they consult Dr. McH. or Dr. Leahy, they will meet opposition but if they do it at once there will be no more about it.

It is obvious that Cullen and MacEvilly were working together closely on this matter. In a letter to Propaganda on 24 December 1864 and in another to Kirby two days later\(^ {19}\) MacEvilly repeated the suggestion he had made in 1862 and which had also come from Cullen a few months earlier. By this time it was clear that Fallon had a chronic drink problem and that a coadjutor would have to be appointed shortly or an alternative arrangement made. MacEvilly proposed that he himself should take over the administration of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. He expected there would be strong opposition from the Archbishop of Tuam as he did not wish to have the number of his suffragans decreased. This had been the real reason for his opposition in 1856, in MacEvilly's view. Two other points were raised by the Bishop of Galway in his letter to Propaganda—

(1) The possibility of unifying Kilfenora with Killaloe and the subsequent division of the enlarged diocese into two.

(2) The parishes of the abbacy of Cong could be united with Galway, a point first raised by Cullen in 1855. MacEvilly pointed out that as the abbacy no longer existed its parishes reverted to the authority of the Holy See and could be given to any bishop the Holy See chose. However, he acknowledged the practical difficulty of doing this during the lifetime of John MacHale.

\(^{17}\)Propaganda Fide Archives, Scritture riferite nei Congressi (Irlanda), vol. 34, 1386r-1387r.

\(^{18}\)Archives of Irish College, Rome, Kirby Papers, 1864/161, 1864/191.

\(^{19}\)Cean, "Patrick Fallon", p. 31; Propaganda Fide Archives, Scritture riferite nei Congressi (Irlanda), vol. 34, 1386r-1387r.
Eventually in the spring of 1866 preparations were being made for the appointment of a coadjutor to Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora and the parish priests expressed their preferences in the usual way. Shortly afterwards, in a letter to Propaganda on 20 April 1866, Cullen endorsed the proposals previously made by MacEvilly. The population of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora was so decimated by emigration and the people were so poor, that the best solution was to entrust their administration to the Bishop of Galway.²⁰

Later that summer when Cullen was in Rome to receive his cardinal’s hat he was asked by Propaganda to make a report on the appointment to Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. His conclusions were predictable.²¹ He pointed to the small population and inadequate revenues both of these two dioceses and of Galway. The population figures (for 1861) which he gives are interesting to compare with the figures for 1834 already given in this article—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kilmacduagh</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilfenora</td>
<td>22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>24,000-26,000</td>
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He went on to remark that because of heavy emigration in the previous five years the combined population was now not much more than 60,000. The Bishop of Galway was extremely poor and if he was given Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora his situation would be improved, even though he would still be poor.

Cullen was aware that MacHale could not be expected to agree with the union of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora with Galway. Apart from his desire not to lose a suffragan and his antipathy to any proposal backed by Cullen, there was also his antagonism towards MacEvilly to be reckoned with. The latter in his letter to Kirby in December 1864 remarked that although he had been a great favourite of MacHale’s during the seventeen years he had been in charge of his seminary in Tuam, there had been a sudden change of attitude immediately on his appointment to Galway.²² To by-pass MacHale’s opposition, Cullen suggested that the question of a definitive union could be left open and that the Holy See could give the administration of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora to MacEvilly, apparently without consultation of the archbishops of Cashel and Tuam. Not unexpectedly Propaganda followed Cullen’s advice in a decision taken at a General Congregation on 30 July 1866. A month later Cullen wrote from Ireland saying that as nothing could be done with MacHale it would be best to make public the decision without delay. “Monsignor MacHale will not say a word when the matter will have been already settled . . . . The only way of dealing with him is not to consult him at all.”²³

Reactions to Rome’s Decision

Before official news of Propaganda’s decision was released, the priests of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora became aware of what was going on and met together in Gort on 3 September 1866. A petition was formulated, protesting to Rome at what they regarded as the annexation of their dioceses by Galway, resulting in the destruction of a twelve hundred year old tradition.²⁴ Only one priest refused to sign and three others were unavoidably absent. Cullen and MacEvilly were aware of what was going on and both were convinced, on good grounds, that MacHale was behind the protest. However, when MacEvilly met the priests

²⁰Propaganda Fide Archives, Scritture riferite nei Congressi (Irlanda), vol. 35, 652r-653r.
²²Coen, “Patrick Fallon”, p. 31.
²³Propaganda Fide Archives, Scritture riferite nei Congressi (Irlanda), vol. 35, 812r. The original is in Italian.
²⁴Ibid., vol. 35, 820.
a month later with his documents of appointment he was delighted with the welcome he received and there were no further protests. On 23 December Cullen wrote to Propaganda saying that everybody—Bishop Fallon, priests and people—were happy with the new situation and that the utmost harmony prevailed.

On 14 September MacHale replied to a letter from Propaganda informing him of MacEvilly’s appointment. There was little he could do at this stage and he knew well that he had been outmanoeuvred by Cullen and MacEvilly. He confined himself to repeating his opposition to the change and pointed out that his position had in no way changed since he first wrote to Propaganda on the matter in 1855.

As Kilfenora was in Cashel province Archbishop Leahy of Cashel was informed at the same time as MacHale. His reply was unexpectedly abrasive and, clearly tongue in cheek, he acknowledged the Holy See’s right to do what it thought best, even though it consulted none of those who would normally expect to be contacted and even though it acted contrary to its own usual procedures:

The Holy See instructed that, in the usual manner, the clergy of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora and the bishops of the two provinces of Cashel and Tuam should name three suitable candidates so that the Holy Father might give a coadjutor to Bishop Fallon. If, after this had been done in accordance with the norms of the rescript of 1829, the Holy See judged and judges that the good of religion demands that everything which has been done should be disregarded, and that the Bishop of Galway should become Apostolic Administrator of the dioceses of Kilfenora and Kilmacduagh, without consulting either the metropolitans or their suffragans—then neither the metropolitans nor their suffragans nor the clergy of Kilfenora and Kilmacduagh have any grounds for legitimate protest since the Holy See is exercising its plenary right, although it may be said that the exercise of this right is not in accordance with the Holy See’s usual procedures.

Having made his protest at the manner in which the appointment had been made, Leahy went on to say that MacEvilly’s administratorship of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora was a term solution to the immediate problem. However, after the death of Bishop Fallon a long-term solution would have to be devised. His suggestion for this, which he was now again putting forward, were to be found in his letter to Propaganda on the occasion of Bishop Flannery’s appointment as coadjutor in Killaloe, viz. the union of Kilmacduagh with Galway and Kilfenora with Killaloe, followed by the re-establishment of the old diocese of Roscrea or the union of this with Cashel.

It is clear that the lack of consultation with him as metropolitan of Kilfenora continued to be a sore point with Leahy. There is no indication whether or not he was aware that he had been ignored because Propaganda did not want MacHale to know what was going on and in the process ignored both metropolitans. In his *Relatio Status* of 10 June 1867 Leahy referred to the matter again and this time drew a sharp rebuke from the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Barnabo. Barnabo felt that Leahy’s remarks did not show proper respect to the supreme authority of the Holy Father and were out of keeping with his well-known attitude to the Holy See. In his reply Leahy showed obvious shock at this interpretation of what he had written and pledged complete fidelity to the Pope and to his decisions.

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25Coen, “Patrick Fallon”, p. 33; Liam Bane, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
26*Propaganda Fide* Archives, *Scritture riferite nei Congressi Italani*, vol. 35, 902r.
27Ibid., vol. 35, 823.
28Ibid., vol. 35, 827r-828r. My translation of the original Latin. The passage translated is all in one Latin sentence beginning with *si* (if) and it is impossible to convey fully its power in English translation.
29Ibid., vol. 36, 144r-145r.
A Final Solution

In December 1875 John MacEvilly submitted his Relatio Status for Galway diocese to Rome and in it commented on his administration of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. He suggested that all three dioceses should be united and that all bishops in Cashel and Tuam provinces, with the exception of John MacHale, were in favour of this union. Following a request for clarification from Propaganda he later pointed out that he was not looking for immediate action, only when there was a vacancy in one or other of the dioceses concerned. In the meantime Bishop Fallon had entered the Passionist house at Mount Argus, Dublin, and lived there happily until his death in May 1879.

By this time MacEvilly was in the unusual situation that while remaining Bishop of Galway he had also been appointed coadjutor to John MacHale. But this appointment had been completely rejected by MacHale who refused even to meet him. Following Fallon's death, MacEvilly was requested by Propaganda to continue his administration of the dioceses of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. In the meantime Patrick Moran, Bishop of Ossory, was visiting Rome and was asked for his views on what should be done in the long-term. Moran's suggestion was the same as one made after Fallon's death by MacEvilly, that Galway and Kilmacduagh should be united and that a new diocese should be formed by joining Kilfenora with part of Killaloe. However, Propaganda was aware that while John MacHale was alive there would be opposition to any change and it decided that MacEvilly had enough trouble already in trying to cope with the problems of Tuam diocese. So nothing was done for the moment.

When MacHale died in November 1881 MacEvilly immediately succeeded as Archbishop of Tuam, still retaining the administration of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. For a short period this brought about what must have been a unique situation in canon law in that the Archbishop of Tuam, in his role as administrator of Kilfenora in Cashel province, was canonically subject to the Archbishop of Cashel, Thomas Croke. The bishopric of Galway was now also vacant and it was clear that the whole question of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora would have to be solved before any new bishop could be appointed.

On Propaganda's request MacEvilly discussed the matter with the bishops of Tuam province and Archbishop Croke of Cashel. Croke in turn consulted the bishops of Cashel province. All were agreed on one point, that Kilmacduagh and Galway should be united. Apart from Killaloe, all the bishops of both provinces were also agreed that when the diocese of Killaloe became vacant, part of it should be joined to Kilfenora to form a new diocese (more or less co-terminous with County Clare). The only division of opinion was on a minor point, whether the boundaries of the new diocese should be decided on straightaway or whether this decision should be left until the vacancy occurred. Rather surprisingly, nobody in Rome or Ireland seemed to be aware that, in appointing Bishop Michael Flannery, Rome had reserved the right to make territorial adjustments to Killaloe during his episcopate.

If there had been agreement from Killaloe undoubtedly the proposal for a new arrangement of dioceses in North Munster would have been implemented by Propaganda. But from the beginning there was very strong opposition from Bishop Flannery and his coadjutor, James Ryan. Ryan was under the impression that this was a "plot" by Croke to take over the part of Killaloe east of the Shannon on Flannery's death. In a letter to Flannery he wrote: "Dr. McEvilly had a different scheme but, manipulated by Cashel,
he adopts the present If we do not bestir ourselves we will be caught asleep.’” At a bishops’ meeting on 10 January 1882 Ryan questioned individual bishops on their attitude to the plan and clearly embarrassed the bishops of Tuam by the imputation of interference in another province. For an elderly man in his mid-seventies he showed extraordinary energy and tenacity in fighting his corner.

Meanwhile Flannery and Ryan had prepared a joint submission to Propaganda, the purpose of which, in Ryan’s words, was to “knock intrigue on the head”. In their submission they strongly opposed any change in the boundaries of their diocese, stressing that this would be very unacceptable to priests and people. They also pointed to the antiquity of the diocese, the heavy expense involved in building a new diocesan college (St. Flannán’s College, opened in 1881), the number of religious houses founded in the diocese in recent years and the fact that the population of the diocese had greatly decreased. (In 1881 the Catholic population was 174,167—roughly half of what it had been fifty years previously.)

Initially MacEvilly seems to have seriously underestimated the possible strength of opposition in Killaloe to his proposals. But his encounter with Bishop Ryan on the occasion of the bishops’ meeting in January 1882 left him under no illusions. In a letter on 13 January to Flannery, MacEvilly wrote: “Dr. Ryan, whom I met lately in Dublin, seems in a terrible pout about the matter, and would insinuate that I was the ‘fons et origo malorum’.” On becoming aware of the bishops’ views and the violent reaction in Killaloe diocese to the rumours that were in circulation, MacEvilly changed his mind. In a letter to Tobias Kirby, Rector of the Irish College, Rome, in September 1882 he now proposed the complete union of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. In his view, the fact that the bishop would be subject to two metropolitans would not cause any real inconvenience and would even have some advantages, as he himself had found. And distance was no longer a problem. “In these days of steam and electricity, a bishop could go from Galway to Cashel in four or five hours, and to Tuam in one hour.” Shortly afterwards, on his ad limina visit to Rome, he repeated this proposal and pointed out why his earlier suggestion involving Killaloe should be dropped.

By now it was clear that, as far as Propaganda was concerned, the only question to be answered was a minor one—whether Kilfenora should be fully united with Galway and Kilmacduagh, so that the bishop would have the title of Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora; or whether the new bishop should be Bishop of Galway and Kilmacduagh and Apostolic Administrator of Kilfenora. This is the obvious implication of a request made to MacEvilly after his return to Ireland in December 1882 when he was asked by Propaganda to assemble the parish priests of all three dioceses (Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora) to vote in the usual way and propose three candidates for the vacant bishopric. This meeting took place in January 1883 and Thomas Carr, Vice-President of Maynooth, received twelve of the twenty votes cast. At a General Congregation of Propaganda on 2 April it was decided to unite Kilmacduagh with Galway and to give the permanent administration of Kilfenora to the new bishop and his successors. This arrangement was confirmed by Pope Pius IX on 8 April 1883. Six weeks later Thomas Carr was chosen as first Bishop of Galway and Kilmacduagh and Apostolic Administrator of Kilfenora. The diocese of Killaloe was left untouched by the new arrangement. The anomaly of a bishop subject to two metropolitans, which Archbishop Cullen had sought to remove, remained, although in a different form.

33Killaloe Diocesan Archives, transcript of correspondence on this topic.
34Ibid.