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### **Catholic power and the Irish city: modernity, religion, and planning in Galway, 1944-49**

*That fine, out-stepping fellow on the other side? A bishop, stranger, who'll stand no nonsense. When a City Council and its architect chose a site for a new school, a site he didn't like and thought unsuitable, he soon and short told them to build it on a site of his choosing; and when the Council decided to keep to their own selection, he soon and short told them they were behaving in the Continental manner of disrespect for their priests; a gentle warning that sent them running to vote as one man, bar the architect, for the holy bishop's choice. The bishop's ring rang the bell.*

— Seán O'Casey, *Autobiographies II* (London, 1963), 639.

'Imagine,' bellowed the Unionist politician Walter Topping at a rally in Belfast in 1949, 'the local Roman Catholic bishop being allowed to dictate the policy of the Belfast Corporation on matters which involved only traffic safety and public health.'<sup>1</sup> The dispute Topping refers to was the Galway 'school site controversy.'<sup>2</sup> For the playwright Seán O'Casey in his enigmatic *Autobiographies*, the outcome was all too predictable: 'the bishop's ring rang the bell.' Yet O'Casey's recollections are selective and fail to capture the complexity of the issues involved; his was a hackneyed view of clerical power in modern Ireland. This article uses this dispute to draw out two key arguments: first, that existing scholarship on the Catholic Church in Ireland in the mid-twentieth century overstates its hegemonic power,

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<sup>1</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 2 September 1949.

<sup>2</sup> *Galway Observer*, 20 August 1949; *Connacht Sentinel*, 23 August 1949.

particularly in urban contexts; and second, following Joks Janssen, that histories of town planning in Europe more broadly are overly focussed on state and supposedly ‘rational’ agendas at the expense of how religious entities ‘(re)shaped the urban landscape’ and forged parallel paths of urban modernity and urban governance.<sup>3</sup> It thus also adds an Irish and an urban planning dimension to existing debates within religious history about urbanisation and secularisation, showing how adaptive the Irish Catholic Church was to high modernity.<sup>4</sup> It makes use of the private papers of Bishop Michael Browne held at the Galway Diocesan Archives, to which access was granted to the author in 2016-17. Browne was an academic before he became bishop and was a leading European expert on Canon Law; his papers include extensive theological, philosophical, and historical writings on the nature of Western government in an era of ascendant liberalism, the social democratic state, totalitarianism, and communism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joks Janssen, “Religiously inspired Urbanism: Catholicism and the Planning of the Southern Dutch provincial cities Eindhoven and Roermond, c. 1900 to 1960,” *Urban History* 43, no. 1 (February 2016): 135–57, at 135, 137, 140.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh McLeod, “The Urban/Rural Dichotomy in European and North American Religious History from the Eighteenth Century to the Twentieth,” *Social Compass* 45, no. 1 (March 1998): 7–19; and Charlotte Wildman, *Urban Redevelopment and Modernity in Liverpool and Manchester, 1918–1939* (London, 2016), 143–89.

<sup>5</sup> See Michael Browne Papers, B/11/156–65, Galway Diocesan Archives, Galway (hereafter GDA).

Modern Irish urban history, in which religion has played so crucial a role, provides an avenue for exploring intellectual and cultural history questions of European modernity.<sup>6</sup> To understand the distinctive experience of Ireland in this period of high modernity is to build on an unconventional – and perhaps iconoclastic – assumption: that the power of the Irish Catholic Church was always on shaky foundations and always contested. Contra the polemical writings of Paul Blanshard – whose 1954 treatise *The Irish and Catholic power*, portrayed Ireland as one cassock short of a theocratic state – or O’Casey’s anti-clericalism, the precipitous and catastrophic collapse of the Catholic Church in Ireland since the 1980s suggests that historians need to reassess their claims of its overarching power in its supposed heyday of the 1930s-50s.<sup>7</sup> The Church’s rise and fall over the 120 years from the ‘Devotional Revolution’ of post-Famine Ireland to the emotional revulsion of clerical sexual abuse scandals appears an increasingly narrow window in the long run of Ireland’s modern history.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Erika Hanna, *Modern Dublin: Urban Change and the Irish Past, 1957–1973* (Oxford, 2013), 1–21; and Erika Hanna and Richard Butler, “Irish Urban History: an Agenda,” *Urban History* (firstview June 2018): 1–8.

<sup>7</sup> Louise Fuller, “Catholicism in Twentieth-Century Ireland: from “an Atmosphere Steeped in the Faith” to a la Carte Catholicism,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 5, no. 4 (2012): 484–513.

<sup>8</sup> John Henry Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923–1979* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1980); Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: the Catholic Church in Modern Irish society* (Dublin, 1987); Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland* (London, 1997); Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: the Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin, 2002); James S. Donnelly, Jr., “A Church in Crisis: the Irish Catholic Church today,” *History Ireland* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 12–17.

Furthermore, it is surely an unlikely narrative that stresses an institution's total dominance followed, within forty years, by its complete capitulation. We should reject simple narratives of dominance or decline; in reality the Church appears more unstable and fractured. Writing to Bishop Michael Browne of Galway in February 1939, the editor of *The Standard*, a weekly Irish Catholic newspaper, gave a frank and honest appraisal: 'being a Catholic journalist often means sadly laying aside a scoop or a trenchant leader in favour of maintaining, by silence, the façade of Catholic unity.'<sup>9</sup> By and large existing writings on the Catholic Church and how it worked in an urban context tend either to downplay contestation and disagreement or to imply absolute – almost colonial or conspiratorial – power. Neither approach gives an accurate sense of the reality of urban governance. Robert Proctor, writing about the Catholic Church in post-war Britain, presents a surprisingly congenial relationship between bishops and town planners, working in broad agreement to allocate prominent sites in new towns and housing estates for churches and schools. How the Church actually purchased or was offered sites is overlooked.<sup>10</sup> Ellen Rowley, by contrast, sees the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, as a modern prince-bishop, 'a type of medieval God-with-compass figure, carving out the former green fields of Dublin's urban/rural edge and divvying up parish lands with extraordinary ease and calculated

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<sup>9</sup> Peadar O Comhraidhe to Michael Browne (hereafter Browne), 13 February 1939, B/8/1, GDA.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Proctor, *Building the Modern Church: Roman Catholic Church Architecture in Britain, 1955 to 1975* (Farnham, 2014), 277–95. Charlotte Wildman's recent study of religion and modernity in Liverpool and Manchester breaks significant new ground, see Wildman, *Urban Redevelopment and Modernity*, 143–89.

detachment.’<sup>11</sup> The title of John Cooney’s biography, *John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland*, speaks volumes.<sup>12</sup> However, James S. Donnelly’s study of Bishop Browne’s ‘public morality’ crusade in post-war Galway shows that any absolute urban power was at best illusionary, and more citizens of Galway defied the bishop than obeyed him.<sup>13</sup> Janssen, in an important recent study of Catholic urban development in the southern Dutch cities of Eindhoven and Roermond, highlights conflicting yet parallel conceptions of urban modernity. He shows in particular how the Church in Eindhoven undermined the modernist proposals of the planner, J. M. de Casseres, in the 1930s.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ellen Rowley, “The Architect, the Planner and the Bishop: the Shapers of ‘Ordinary’ Dublin, 1940–60,” *Footprint* 17 (Autumn/Winter 2015): 69–88, at 82.

<sup>12</sup> John Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland* (Syracuse, 1999), 265. See also Clara Cullen and Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, eds., *His Grace is Displeased: Selected Correspondence of John Charles McQuaid* (Dublin, 2012). For a more nuanced perspective, see Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic Poor: Poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920–1940* (Cambridge, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> James S. Donnelly, Jr., “Bishop Michael Browne of Galway (1937–76) and the Regulation of Public Morality,” *New Hibernia Review* 17, no. 1 (2013): 16–39. See also Gerard Madden, “Bishop Michael Browne of Galway and Anti-Communism,” *Saothar* 39 (2014): 21–31.

<sup>14</sup> Janssen, “Religiously inspired Urbanism,” 147. See also Sven Sterken, “A House for God or a Home for His People? The Church-Building Activity of Domus Dei in the Belgian Archbishopric (1952–82),” *Architectural History* 56 (2013): 387–425; and Sven Sterken and Eva Weyns, “Urban Planning and Christian Revival: The Institut Supérieur d’Urbanisme Appliqué in Brussels under Gaston Bardet, 1947–1973,” in *Re-Humanizing Architecture:*

Indeed, the focus on the Catholic Church in Ireland is something of a red herring. In terms of institutions accumulating and exercising urban power in mid-twentieth-century Europe, it is not the Catholic Church or any church that comes out on top – it is the state. When historians of Ireland look at the post-war years, what is striking is not the rise and fall of the Catholic Church but the rise and rise of secular, bureaucratic authority. Town planning, too often neglected in Irish studies, is a critical nexus for understanding how the state transformed urban governance in these years. As with many national histories, the conservatism of Irish history writing is a by-product of the academy’s close relationship with the state-building project; all too often existing histories of the Irish civil service, for example, celebrate too easily and in a Whiggish fashion its ‘achievements’ and ‘rational’ development.<sup>15</sup> Studying religious groups, and in particular Catholic opposition to the growth of state power, offers an avenue for a fresh critique of modern Irish history. The hegemonic power of the state not only challenged the Catholic Church but, as this article will argue,

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*New Forms of Community, 1950–1970*, eds. Ákos Moravansky and Judith Höpfengartner (Berlin, 2016), 89–100.

<sup>15</sup> J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1985), 588–636; John M. Regan, “Southern Irish Nationalism as a Historical Problem,” *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 1 (March 2007): 197–223, at 216–17; Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore, eds., *Writing National Histories: Western Europe Since 1800* (Routledge, 1999), 3–14; and Thomas Cauvin and Ciaran O’Neill, “Negotiating Public History in the Republic of Ireland,” *Historical Research* 90, no. 250 (November 2017): 810–28, at 815–19.

forced the Church into an adversarial and defensive position.<sup>16</sup> The formative debates concerning town planning, then, are a stage for understanding both state and clerical power and Ireland's distinctive engagement with modernity.<sup>17</sup> In turn, the Irish experience enriches the existing scholarship on European town planning by firmly bringing religion back into state-led debates on 'rational' urban futures, and also into parallel debates on heritage and conservation in the city.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London, 1988), 567; see also Pancratius Beentjes, ed., *The Catholic Church and Modernity in Europe* (Vienna, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1983), 181; Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child: Maternity and Child Welfare in Dublin, 1922–60* (Manchester, 2007), 120–51; and Eamonn McKee, "Church-State Relations and the Development of Irish Health Policy: The Mother-and-Child Scheme, 1944–53," *Irish Historical Studies* 25, no. 98 (1986): 159–94, at 194.

<sup>18</sup> Janssen, "Religiously inspired Urbanism," 155–57. Religious groups feature rarely in much of the existing historiography; see for example Peter Larkham, "The Place of Urban Conservation in the UK Reconstruction Plans of 1942–1952," *Planning Perspectives* 18, no. 3 (2003): 295–324; Erika Hanna, "'Don't make Dublin a Museum': Urban Heritage and Modern Architecture in Dublin, 1957–71," *Past and Present* 226 (2015): 349–67; Andrew McClelland, "'A Ghastly Interregnum': the Struggle for Architectural Heritage Conservation in Belfast before 1972," *Urban History* 45, no. 1 (February 2018): 150–72; Mark S. Webb, "Local Responses to the Protection of Medieval Buildings and Archaeology in British post-war Town Reconstruction: Southampton and Coventry," *Urban History* 45:4 (Nov. 2018): 635–59. However, see also Bettina Hitzer and Joachim Schlor, eds., special issue, "Gods in the City: Religious Topographies in the Age of Urbanisation," *Journal of Urban History* 37

This article centres on a major Irish town planning dispute concerning the location for a new boys' primary school in Galway.<sup>19</sup> There were three key actors: the town planner, Dermot O'Toole (1910–1970); the local government manager, Clement O'Flynn (d. 1992); and the Catholic bishop, Dr Michael Browne (1895–1980). The controversy grew out of the building of Ireland's last Catholic cathedral, planned by Browne during his long tenure as bishop from 1937 to 1976. The Cathedral of Our Lady and St. Nicholas, stone-clad and with a great copper dome, was designed by the Dublin architect J. J. Robinson and opened in 1965.<sup>20</sup> It is so closely attached to Browne's legacy that it is widely known in Galway – somewhat affectionately, somewhat in jest – as 'Taj Micheál.' It had a long history: a first

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(2011); and Peter J. Larkham and Joe L. Nasr, "Decision-making under Duress: the Treatment of Churches in the City of London during and after World War II," *Urban History* 39, no. 2 (May 2012): 285–309.

<sup>19</sup> The Irish educational history sources drawn on here include D. H. Akenson, *A Mirror to Kathleen's Face: Education in Independent Ireland, 1922–1960* (Montreal, 1975), 101–07; Seán Farren, *Politics of Irish Education, 1920–65* (Belfast, 1995), 187–207; John Walsh, *The Politics of Expansion: the Transformation of Educational Policy in the Republic of Ireland, 1957–72* (Manchester, 2009); Tom Garvin, *News from a New Republic: Ireland in the 1950s* (Dublin, 2010), 155–97; and John Walsh, "Ministers, Bishops and the Changing Balance of Power in Irish Education, 1950–70," *Irish Historical Studies* 38, no. 149 (May 2012): 108–27.

<sup>20</sup> For a brief history, see Ellen Rowley, "Hidden Histories: Galway Cathedral: the Bishop as Architect," *Architecture Ireland* 298 (March/April 2018): 37–39.



bequest came in 1876, and some thirty years later the diocese acquired a site that became the stage for the 1940s controversy. This site was adjacent to O'Brien's Bridge and was occupied by the Old Shambles military barracks.<sup>21</sup> Up until around 1940, it was this plot that was earmarked for the new cathedral, and the diocese slowly expanded their holdings by acquiring nearby properties on Lombard Street and Bowling Green.<sup>22</sup> For a range of reasons, centred on local financial implications and land ownership, Browne decided to build the cathedral elsewhere. The shift came with the closure of Galway Jail in May 1939 and the opening up of this much larger site for redevelopment. Browne successfully lobbied to secure the Jail site for his new cathedral: he considered the former prison site far more attractive – with its axial vistas, island location, lack of nearby buildings, and political and cultural capital of its troubled 'colonial' history, and in particular the legacy of the 'Maamtrasna murders' case of the 1880s.<sup>23</sup>

The move to the former jail site precipitated a debate over the future of the derelict O'Brien's Bridge site. Galway County Council, under Clement O'Flynn – then secretary, later county manager – was careful to set out that if the diocese failed to build its cathedral by

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<sup>21</sup> Memo, "The new Cathedral Fund Galway: its foundation & development," undated but c. 1938, B/6/22, GDA; Memo, "Shambles Barracks," undated but c. 1950, B/11/109, GDA.

<sup>22</sup> Memo, "Cathedral Investments," 3 December 1936, B/6/1, GDA.

<sup>23</sup> See B/6/3, B/6/4, and B/6/10, GDA. See also Minutes, Galway County Council, 13 April 1940, GC1–05(d), Galway County Archives, Galway (hereafter GCA), and *Connacht Sentinel*, 16 April 1940. For Maamtrasna, see Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom* (Cambridge, 2013), 303–07.

a certain date, the former Jail site would revert to public ownership.<sup>24</sup> O’Flynn believed (and was quoted in the local papers as saying) that if the O’Brien’s Bridge site remained unused, Browne would be willing to ‘negotiate for its disposal on favourable terms to the [Galway] Corporation’ for a new Town Hall – something Browne denied in later years.<sup>25</sup> The O’Brien’s Bridge site, adjacent to the market and the medieval Protestant church of St. Nicholas, lay empty for decades after the demolition of the old barracks. Photographs from the time show it forlorn and neglected (**Fig. 1**); a local man, without Browne’s permission, used part of it to put up billboard posters for the nearby Savoy Cinema.<sup>26</sup> The bishop reluctantly allowed him to continue, though he thought the posters ‘an eye-sore and . . . in conflict with the solemn purpose for which the site was intended.’ He insisted the man should not put up any posters advertising films that the bishop considered ‘objectionable.’<sup>27</sup>

Like many Irish Catholic leaders, Browne was a strong supporter of private property rights; this was very much in step with a population that keenly remembered the colonial confiscation of land, the Great Famine, and the Land War. As bishop, Browne acquired sites for his diocese like any other landlord; his authority in the city was ecclesiastical but it was

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<sup>24</sup> Clement O’Flynn (hereafter O’Flynn) to Browne, 14 June 1940, B/6/4, GDA.

<sup>25</sup> O’Flynn to Secretary, Department of Local Government and Public Health, Dublin, 31 May 1940, File 109/38/72, Galway County Library, Galway (hereafter GCL); and *Connacht Sentinel*, 16 April 1940. For Browne’s later comments, see Browne, “Address to the Mayor [. . .] of the Galway Borough Council,” 18 February 1946, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Joyce to Browne, 4 November 1939, B/6/3, GDA.

<sup>27</sup> Browne to MacDermot & Allen Solicitors, 1 December 1939; Browne to Edward Joyce, 1 December 1939, B/6/3, GDA.

also political and economic. The diocese had a significant portfolio of tenanted properties in the city centre, many of which were leased at reduced rates to poorer (Catholic) families and pensioners.<sup>28</sup> Despite the generous offer of the Jail site for the future cathedral, Browne was ill-inclined to give up the O'Brien's Bridge site for a Town Hall or any other public use – especially as he had earmarked it for a new school. His belief in property rights were very much underpinned in the 1937 Irish Constitution, but this was threatened in these same years by the emerging discipline of town planning. Closely following British precedents, the Irish Town and Regional Planning Act of 1934 encouraged local authorities to develop plans for their urban centres. Once a council voted for such a plan, they could exercise ‘interim powers’ to prevent unauthorised building work.<sup>29</sup> While in practice private property rights had long been moderated by state needs – for example in the work of Dublin's eighteenth-century Wide Streets Commissioners or via the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act –

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<sup>28</sup> See Register of Parochial Property folder, 1945, P/18/3, GDA; Thomas F. Burke to Browne, 2 May 1943, B/6/11, GDA.

<sup>29</sup> John Miley and Frederick Charles King, *Town and Regional Planning Law in Ireland* (Dublin, 1951), viii–x, 16–17, 24–25, 31–164. Town and Regional Planning Act, 1934 (number 22 of 1934), later amended by the Town and Regional Planning (Amendment) Act, 1939 (number 11 of 1939). See also Manning Robertson, “The Town and Regional Planning Act, 1934,” *Irish Builder and Engineer* 78, no. 5 (7 March 1936): 197–98, and *ibid.* 78, no. 6 (21 March 1936): 237–38. See also Seán O’Leary, *Sense of Place: a History of Irish Planning* (Dublin, 2014), 38–77; and Fergal MacCabe, *Ambition and Achievement: the Civic Visions of Frank Gibney* (Dublin, 2018), 15–25, 30–34, 51–57.

formal national town planning was a significant new encroachment.<sup>30</sup> Dublin was the first to commit to a town plan under this legislation, and Patrick Abercrombie, Sydney Kelly and Manning Robertson – who had in the 1920s proposed a radical reshaping of Dublin – published more modest plans in 1941.<sup>31</sup> Cork and Waterford followed, each proposing a ‘thinning out’ of the central precincts, new axial streets and ring roads, widespread demolition and the reconstruction of housing.<sup>32</sup>

None of these plans was ever adopted – each faced sustained opposition from politicians and propertied interests. More importantly, central government in Ireland was at best lukewarm to the whole idea of planning – something that it thought better suited other countries with denser urban populations such as Britain. Diarmaid Ferriter has shown how De

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<sup>30</sup> Sean McDermott and Richard Woulfe, *Compulsory Purchase and Compensation: Law and Practice in Ireland* (Dublin, 1992), 1–14, 49–51. See also Peter Connell, “From Hovels to Homes: the Provision of Public Housing in Irish Provincial Towns, 1890–1945” (PhD diss., Trinity College Dublin, 2017), chapters 3–4.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Abercrombie, Sydney A. Kelly and Manning Robertson, *County Borough of Dublin and Neighbourhood: Town Planning Report: Sketch Development Plan* (Dublin, 1941), 7, 14–22. See also Liam Lanigan, *James Joyce, Urban Planning and Irish Modernism: Dublins of the Future* (London, 2014), 27–30.

<sup>32</sup> Manning Robertson, *County Borough of Cork and Neighbourhood: Town Planning Report, Sketch Development Plan* (Cork, 1941), 6, 8, 13, 22; Frank Gibney, *County Borough of Waterford: Town Planning Scheme: Preliminary Report* (Waterford, 1943), 14, 15, 20. See also John Crowley, Robert Devoy, Denis Linehan and Patrick O’Flanagan, eds., *Atlas of Cork City* (Cork, 2005), 266–68.

Valera warned Douglas Hyde, the President, that being seen to give patronage to the high aspirations of the National Planning Exhibition might bring his position into ‘ridicule.’<sup>33</sup> Perhaps more surprisingly these views were shared north of the border: Basil Brooke, the Northern Ireland prime minister, thought planning a ‘socialist menace.’<sup>34</sup> When a sceptical De Valera attended a planning exhibition in 1944, the *Irish Times* quoted him as saying that the planners’ proposals often ‘look better on paper than [they do] when you try to put them into practice’ – scant praise.<sup>35</sup> And in an important and neglected speech to architecture students at University College Dublin (UCD) in May 1946, Seán MacEntee, the Fianna Fáil Minister for Local Government – the man in charge of town planning in Ireland – set out his strident opposition to big government and to what he saw as the ‘restrictive and narrowing’ policy of town planning. With characteristically Catholic and apocalyptic imagery, he set forth his views:

‘Unfortunately, that is the trouble with most enthusiastic planners: they don’t know where to stop . . .; how regular and happy and secure all our lives would be, if only the ordinary citizen, the common man – who has no time to dream our magnificent dreams – would conform to our plan? It only remains for the planners then to strive to make man to their own image and likeness. But the image and likeness to which they

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<sup>33</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *Lovers of Liberty?: Local Government in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), 178–83, quoting Memo, Department of the Taoiseach, 26 August 1942, D/Taoiseach S13469, National Archives of Ireland (hereafter NAI).

<sup>34</sup> Terence O’Neill, *The Autobiography of Terence O’Neill* (London, 1972), 47.

<sup>35</sup> *Irish Times*, 26 April 1944. See also anon., “A Nomad’s Notebook: Mr. Seán Lemass at National Planning Minister,” *Irish Builder and Engineer* 87, no. 22 (3 November 1945): 570.

would make him is not that of his Creator, for they would make him to the pride and vain-glory of themselves; and he would perish, as the Egyptians under Pharaoh, or, as those forgotten races, the ruins of whose planned civilisations are found buried in equatorial jungles.’<sup>36</sup>

Historians of Irish town planning have tended to downplay or overlook the rich debates of these formative years; often their analyses are rooted in, rather than critically reflect upon, the myth of Ireland as an entirely rural society that had no need for urban planning policy, and a public that most of all valued property rights. This lacuna has arisen because of an undue focus in much of the existing historiography (as Frank Mort has similarly noted in British planning studies) on the physical ‘achievements’ of town planning – which were admittedly sparse in these years – at the expense of a serious analysis of the rich intellectual debates that these unexecuted schemes sparked in provincial cities and towns.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Seán MacEntee, Speech at the Architectural Society Inaugural Meeting, UCD, on “Planning and a National Policy,” 7 May 1946, P/67/574(1), Seán MacEntee Papers, University College Dublin (hereafter UCD).

<sup>37</sup> Michael Bannon, “The Changing Context of Developmental Planning,” *Administration: Journal of the Institute of Public Administration of Ireland* 31, no. 2 (1983): 112–46, at 113–14; Kevin L. Nowlan, “The Evolution of Irish Planning, 1934–1964,” in *Planning: the Irish Experience, 1920–1988*, ed. Michael Bannon (Dublin, 1989), 71–85, at 49–51; Mary E. Daly, *The Buffer State: the Historical Roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), 285; Ferriter, *Lovers of Liberty?*, 178–83; Berna Grist, “Local Authorities and the Planning Process,” in *County and Town: One Hundred Years of Local Government in Ireland*, ed.

However cautious of embracing the revolutionary world of the town planners, De Valera had no qualms about reshaping Irish local government. The most important reform here was the City and County Management System – which he had initially opposed as undemocratic when it was imposed in Cork 1929 – but which he readily adopted for other local authorities once in power in the 1930s.<sup>38</sup> The system, imported from America, took away much of the powers of the local elected councillors and vested them in an unelected county manager. The Cork solicitor John J. Horgan, a keen promoter of the system, fashioned

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Mary E. Daly (Dublin, 2001), 130–40, at 130; Joseph Brady, *Dublin 1930–1950: the Emergence of the Modern City* (Dublin, 2014), 91–96; O’Leary, *Sense of Place*, 62–66; and Frank Mort, “Fantasies of Metropolitan Life: Planning London in the 1940s,” *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. 1 (January 2004): 120–51, at 122–23, 150.

<sup>38</sup> J. J. Lee, “Centralisation and Community,” in *Ireland: Towards a Sense of Place*, ed. J. J. Lee (Cork, 1985), 84–101, at 84; Eunan O’Halpin, “The Origins of City and County Management,” in *City and County Management, 1929–1990: a Retrospective*, eds. Joseph Boland et al. (Dublin, 1991), 1–20, at 5–13; Ferriter, *Lovers of Liberty?*, 15–17, 64–65; Eunan O’Halpin, “Politics and the State, 1922–32,” in *A New History of Ireland: volume VII: Ireland, 1921–1984*, ed. J. R. Hill (Oxford, 2003), 86–126, at 111–12; Diarmaid Ferriter, “De Valera’s Ireland, 1932–58,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History*, ed. Alvin Jackson (Oxford, 2014), 670–86, at 674. Fianna Fáil initially supported but later opposed the Cork act – see Aodh Quinlivan, *Philip Monahan: a Man Apart* (Dublin, 2006), 98, 173.

it paradoxically as ‘an expert bureaucracy under democratic control.’<sup>39</sup> By contrast, one critic writing in 1945 thought it ‘a rather awesome admission of failure, an admission that [Ireland was] not, in some respects, fit for self-government.’<sup>40</sup> But Irish governments of the 1930s were perennially frustrated by local councils’ financial incompetence and perceived corruption.<sup>41</sup> They even flirted, in the mid-1930s, with the idea of abolishing local government outright.<sup>42</sup> De Valera’s compromise – the County Management Act, which took effect in 1942 – was a great bureaucratic centralisation of power, appointing a manager to every council.<sup>43</sup> The trajectory and reception of one such manager is indicative of these trends. Clement O’Flynn worked for Limerick County Council in the 1920s and came to Galway in 1931 as the county secretary. The manner of his appointment, his generous salary,

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<sup>39</sup> For the American origins of the system, see John J. Horgan, “City Management in America,” *Studies* 9 (1920): 41–56; for the quote, see John J. Horgan, “Local Government Developments at Home and Abroad,” *Studies* 15 (1926): 529–41, at 540.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Osborne, “Those county managers,” *The Bell* 9, no. 4 (January 1945): 304–14.

<sup>41</sup> Connell, “Fromhovels to Homes,” 175–77.

<sup>42</sup> Rates of Interest Charged by Local Loans Fund, 1934, FIN/F60/10/33, Department of Finance papers, NAI. See also Daly, *Buffer State*, 298–300. I am grateful to Dr. Peter Connell for this reference.

<sup>43</sup> County Management System file, 1943–44, Department of the Taoiseach papers, T6, 97/9/511, NAI; Ronan Keane, *The Law of Local Government in the Republic of Ireland* (Naas, 1982), 18–36; Desmond Roche, *Local Government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1982), 55, 106–09; Daly, *Buffer State*, 297–305; Quinlivan, *Philip Monahan*, 93–94, 173–77; Matthew Potter, *The Municipal Revolution in Ireland: a Handbook of Urban Government in Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 2011), 289–336.



and his lack of proficiency in the Irish language did little to endear him to Galway councillors and he was welcomed with a boycott.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, in 1942, he was promoted to county manager when De Valera's new system came into effect, and he remained in charge for over twenty years. In terms of urban agency, he was arguably the most powerful, if sometimes unpopular, official in the city.

For Browne, as one of leading intellectuals and most well-known bishops within the Irish Catholic Church, the prospect of O'Flynn as an unelected county manager bringing into force a town plan drawn up by an outside expert posed a significant new threat to his urban diocesan authority. In response, he penned an extensive memo criticising the new county management system and the nature of reformed Irish local government.<sup>45</sup> For the bishop, central state power was synonymous with bureaucracy, lack of local knowledge, waste of resources, and incompetence. In a more abstract sense he considered a strong state a danger to a free (and Catholic) society – views that closely aligned with anti-totalitarianism theory of many leading continental Catholic intellectuals of the 1930s.<sup>46</sup> His correspondence with the Office of Public Works (OPW) in 1940 gives, in a light-hearted way, a sense of his arch-

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<sup>44</sup> O'Halpin, "The Origins of City and County Management," 13–17, 102; Gabriel O'Connor, *A History of Galway County Council* (Galway, 1999), 154–55, 162–72; Minutes, Galway County Council, 18 July, 8 August, 10 October, 24 October 1931, GC1–04(d), GCA. See also Mary E. Daly, "Local Appointments," in Daly, *County and Town*, 45–55.

<sup>45</sup> Browne, "County Management System: Ideas and Reality," undated but c. 1945, B/12/300, GDA.

<sup>46</sup> James Chappel, "The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe," *Modern Intellectual History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 561–90, at 565, 573–74, 584.

scepticism: he ridiculed their selection of a site for a new rural school in his diocese near Gort, writing ‘Your officials did select a nice soft swamp for a school.’<sup>47</sup> However, at the same time, he chaired the government’s Commission on Vocational Organisation, which published its final report in August 1944. Its chief recommendation – a corporatist agenda for undermining central state bureaucratic authority with vocational committees – received little support from government and one member later commented that its findings were a ‘monumental essay in fatuous research.’<sup>48</sup> But as Joe Lee has pointedly remarked, ‘the

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<sup>47</sup> Browne to Hugo V. Flinn, 15 November 1940, B/12/20, GDA.

<sup>48</sup> John Swift, “Report of Commission on Vocational Organisation,” *Saothar* 1 (1975): 54–63, at 59. See also J. J. Lee, “Aspects of Corporatist Thought in Ireland: the Commission on Vocational Organisation, 1939–43,” in *Studies in Irish history: Presented to R. Dudley Edwards*, eds. Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartney (Dublin, 1979), 324–46; J. J. Lee, “On the Birth of the Modern Irish State: the Larkin Thesis,” in *Piety and Power in Ireland, 1760–1960: Essays in honour of Emmet Larkin*, eds. Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller (Belfast and Notre Dame, IN., 2000), 130–57, at 145; Don O’Leary, *Vocationalism and Social Catholicism in 20th-century Ireland: the Search for a Christian Social Order* (Dublin, 2000), 85–148, 155, 183; Bryce Evans, *Seán Lemass: Democratic Dictator* (Cork, 2011), 148–49; and Eunan O’Halpin, “The Second World War and Ireland,” in Jackson, *Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History*, 711–24, at 719. See also Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland*, 96–119; Fanning, *Independent Ireland*, 181; Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 76–77, 148. For corporatist thought beyond Ireland, see L. P. Carpenter, “Corporatism in Britain, 1930–1945,” *Contemporary History* 11 (1976): 3–25, and Pedro Ramos Pinto, “Housing and citizenship: building social rights in twentieth-century Portugal,” *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 2 (2009): 199–215.

failure of the Catholic Church in Ireland, . . . to provide a sufficiently robust body of social doctrine to challenge the power of bureaucratic centralisation, remains one of the great lost opportunities of Irish intellectual endeavour.’<sup>49</sup> This centralisation and bureaucracy – the ‘managerial revolution’ that the rural Catholic group, *Muintir na Tíre*, railed against in the 1930s and 1940s – manifested itself in the new doctrine of town planning and of county management.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the report on Vocational Organisation, in a section seemingly unnoticed by other historians, discussed the issue of town planning, inexplicably wedged between its paragraphs on the boot and bacon industries. In it we can hear Browne’s voice: the thinning out of the city centre risks leaving the poor in distant suburbs without transport, schools, and churches; the speculation and blight that came with draft planning schemes threatens the conservation of the city centre; the ‘undue delays’ in obtaining government approval for new public buildings harms builders; and the lack of accountability of planners affects the essence of property rights. Interestingly, his proposed solution – a ‘National Construction Council’ with local sub-committees – did not include any role for professional town planners.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Lee, “Centralisation and Community,” 96. See also Ferriter, “De Valera’s Ireland,” 674.

<sup>50</sup> See for example anon., “Aims and Purposes,” *Muintir na Tíre Official Handbook 1941* (Dublin, 1941), 37–40; and J. McLaughlin, “The Managerial Revolution,” *Muintir na Tíre Official Handbook 1947* (Dublin, 1947), 55–60.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Browne, et al., *Commission on Vocational Organisation: Report* (Dublin, 1944), 381–83. See also Michael Browne, *Bulwark of Freedom: Vocational Organisation, Democracy in Action* (Dublin, 1945). An earlier draft of the report had proposed an even stronger ‘Building and Construction Board’, taking more power from central government and placing it in the hands of local unions, builders, and architects – see anon., “Commission on

For those of a more secular outlook, town planning offered the promise of a more ‘efficient’ and ‘rational’ urban future. In Galway, O’Flynn was quick to align himself with this optimistic new world. An Irish branch of the British Town Planning Institute was formed in 1940 (professional bodies for architects and engineers in both jurisdictions had long maintained close connections). Manning Robertson, centrally involved, championed town planning as a common problem that would unite the north and south in Ireland in the ‘reconstructed world’ after the War.<sup>52</sup> For Patrick Tuite, a young architecture student at UCD in May 1946, the need for strong town planning was obvious. His tone was utopian, forceful, and patrician: ‘The ordinary citizen . . . is increasingly aware that much of the background of his existence is a meaningless heritage,’ and whose ‘old existence’ has been ‘uprooted’ by ‘gigantic’ forces.<sup>53</sup> In Galway an article in the *Connacht Tribune* promised all the ‘fantasies

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Vocational Organisation. Draft Report (Second Reading): Part IV: Recommendations,” n.d. [c. 1943], 77–82, B/8/33, GDA.

<sup>52</sup> Manning Robertson, foreword, 3, and Manning Robertson, “Town Planning in Eire,” in anon., *Town Planning in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1944), 5–19, at 10. Michael Scott, “The village planned,” *The Bell* 3, no. 3 (December 1941): 232–39. See also the influential Bournville Village Trust, *When we Build Again* (London, 1941).

<sup>53</sup> Patrick J. Tuite, “Planning and a National Policy,” Speech at the Architectural Society Inaugural Meeting, UCD, 7 May 1946, P/67/574(4), UCD; *Irish Press*, 8 May 1946. Tuite (b. 1923) later worked with the architectural firms Cullen & Co and Vincent Kelly, and for Dublin Corporation – see *Who’s who, what’s what and where in Ireland* (London and Dublin, 1973), 342. A similar viewpoint existed among British planners: see Peter Hall, *Cities of*

of metropolitan life’: an urban oasis of swimming pools, amusement centres, tennis courts and flower gardens, but its subtitle cautioned that a ‘Town Planning Scheme Must Come First.’<sup>54</sup> O’Flynn appointed the young Dublin planner and architect, Dermot O’Toole, as the Town Planning Consultant for Galway (**Fig. 2**) in the spring of 1944.<sup>55</sup> O’Toole came with good credentials: he had been employed as an architect by the OPW and the Department of Local Government, and at the time he was the president of the Architectural Association of Ireland.<sup>56</sup> O’Toole, speaking in 1943, shared his colleagues’ optimism, confidence, and sense of intergenerational shift:

‘All are aware that revolutionary changes in social and physical structure are to be expected on the termination of hostilities . . . . It is not sufficient, however, to extend the education of the planners, we must also extend that of the planned. There is no

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*Tomorrow: an Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (3rd ed., London, 2002), 355.

<sup>54</sup> *Connacht Tribune*, 16 October 1942. Browne kept a copy in his records – see B/12/299, GDA. Mort, “Fantasies of Metropolitan Life,” 124–25, 143–44; see also James Greenhalgh, *Reconstructing Modernity: Space, Power and Governance in mid-Twentieth Century British Cities* (Manchester, 2017), 29–76

<sup>55</sup> Secretary, Department of Local Government and Public Health, Dublin, to Dermot O’Toole (hereafter O’Toole), 14 March 1944, O’Toole Family Collection, Dublin; *Irish Times*, 5 February 1944.

<sup>56</sup> Dictionary of Irish Architects ([www.dia.ie](http://www.dia.ie)); and Gerald McNicholl, “Obituary: C. D. O’Toole,” in anon., *The Green Book, published 1972: the Journal of the Architectural Association of Ireland* (Wicklow, 1972), 40.

need to emphasise that the greatest handicap to the appreciation and practice of architecture is the deplorable lack of culture obtaining with regard to the public at large . . . . The public must be made more aware of our existence, they must be courted and harangued . . . . All that we ask is the permission to plan, the money, and the machinery to put our schemes into operation.’<sup>57</sup>

As O’Toole set about beginning his survey, relations between Browne and Galway County Council were rather benign, certainly compared with what came later. Browne arranged for the old Jail buildings to be demolished, as well as some old houses at the edges of the O’Brien’s Bridge site. Both projects, literally preparing the ground for future building work, won him public support by providing employment for local men during the war years. At O’Brien’s Bridge, he initially delayed demolition work to allow the council’s surveyor time to prepare plans to widen Bridge Street and the junction with Lombard Street. Browne gave over some land free of charge, and in return the council built a new boundary wall.<sup>58</sup> However, from May 1944 onwards, relations between Browne, the planner, and the council deteriorated rapidly. There were no fewer than six major clashes between the bishop and the manager-planner alliance of O’Flynn and O’Toole – all focused on the question of who would decide the future of the O’Brien’s Bridge site. These disputes can be read as demonstrating the shifting urban power relations between Church and state.

## II

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<sup>57</sup> Dermot O’Toole, “Inaugural Address, 1943,” in anon., *The Green Book, 1943–1944: The Journal of the Architectural Association of Ireland* (Dublin, 1944), 24–29.

<sup>58</sup> George Lee to Browne, 23 March 1944, B/6/9, GDA.

O'Toole's *Sketch Development Plan* for Galway, completed by the end of 1944, was a brief document of some twenty pages. He noted the dense medieval character of the city centre and criticised the more recent 'indiscriminate' building work, such as businesses building over their back yards and others encroaching onto the street. 'The central area,' he argued, 'is patently overbuilt.'<sup>59</sup> This free-for-all 'endangered the health and life' of Galway's people 'through lack of breathing space and intensification of fire risk.' Infant mortality, TB, and cancer were all on the increase.<sup>60</sup> O'Toole's view is backed up by the census: in 1936, 160 families still lived in one-room tenements in the city.<sup>61</sup> And Galway was undergoing its most rapid expansion since the Great Famine, with the population rising from 14,227 in 1926 to 20,370 in 1946 – an increase of almost 40%.<sup>62</sup> Much of this was migration from rural areas: the percentage of city dwellers stating their place of birth as in Ireland but not in County Galway increased over the same period by a third.<sup>63</sup> O'Toole's

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<sup>59</sup> Dermot O'Toole, *Borough of Galway Planning Scheme: Report on Sketch Development Plan prepared for the Corporation of Galway* (Galway, 1944), 10. The density of the Galway borough was 341 persons/100 acres in 1936 – see *Ireland: Census of Population, 1936: volume I* (Dublin, 1938), 27.

<sup>60</sup> O'Toole, *Galway Planning Scheme*, 6–7, 9.

<sup>61</sup> *Ireland: Census of Population, 1936: volume IV* (Dublin, 1940), 114. Families here excludes 'one-person' families as set out in the census. In Dublin, for comparison, the number stood at over 20,000.

<sup>62</sup> *Saorstát Éireann: Census of Population, 1926: volume I* (Dublin, 1928), 18; *Ireland: Census of Population, 1946: volume I* (Dublin, 1949), 17.

<sup>63</sup> *Saorstát Éireann: Census of Population, 1926: volume III* (Dublin, 1929), 176–77; *Ireland: Census of Population, 1946: volume III* (Dublin, 1952), 82.

solution, inspired by British and American theories, was to have more open spaces – what he referred to as the ‘breathing lungs’ of the city.<sup>64</sup> The population of the medieval core would have to be reduced, slums demolished, and Garden City satellite settlements built beyond a well-defined greenbelt.<sup>65</sup> Continuing the classic anatomical urban metaphor, O’Toole turned his attention to transport:

‘the heart represents Old Galway within the walls, the lines of communication the arteries and the traffic corresponding to the blood stream. The city like the human body must be well regulated if efficiency . . . is to be achieved. Galway, to say the least, is not efficient . . . [Its] road and street system [are] hopelessly inadequate to serve modern traffic requirements.’<sup>66</sup>

Foremost in O’Toole’s concerns were the three bridges across the Corrib that divide the city east-west. The Claddagh bridge was only 20 feet wide, the Salmon Weir bridge had ‘dangerous “cork-screw” approaches’ around the courthouse and former jail. Only O’Brien’s

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<sup>64</sup> O’Toole, *Galway Planning Scheme*, 12.

<sup>65</sup> O’Toole would have been familiar with the Dublin’s slums inquiry of these years – see *Report of Inquiry into the Housing of the Working Classes of the City of Dublin, 1939–43* (Dublin, 1944). See also T. W. T. Dillon, “Slum Clearance: Past and Future,” *Studies* 34, no. 133 (March 1945): 13–20.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 14; Here O’Toole borrows from Manning Robertson, *Reconstruction Pamphlet, no. 1: Town Planning . . . Published in Connection with the National Town Planning Exhibition held in Dublin, April 25th to May 5th, 1944* (Dublin, 1944), 2. See Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: the Body and the City in Western Civilization* (London, 1994), chapter 8.



Bridge was ‘suitable for modern traffic’, but its effectiveness was ‘nullified’ by both approaches: the ‘morass of narrow canal bridges’ to the west, and the medieval ‘bottle-necks’ to the east.<sup>67</sup> Forecasting a tripling of vehicle traffic after the war, O’Toole called for ‘drastic measures’ to be adopted. What he meant by this was an outer bypass road with a series of roundabouts, to cater for satellite development and through-traffic, and an inner ring-road to solve congestion in the city centre.<sup>68</sup> The building of this inner ring-road would require widespread demolition of the medieval core (**Fig. 3**), but O’Toole cited as precedent a town improvement Act from 1853. Half of the road already existed, he argued, and the ‘recent clearances in the vicinity of O’Brien’s Bridge’ – Browne’s demolition of the old barracks – made possible the completion of the scheme. Aware that his suggestion would cause friction, not least with the owner of the site (the bishop), O’Toole endorsed the Jail site for the new cathedral and argued that the O’Brien’s Bridge site was too small and would be ‘very much further reduced’ by the proposed ring-road, ‘which is essential to the relief of traffic congestion.’ Furthermore, he argued, a cathedral on this site would conflict with the scale, character and architectural style of the adjacent Protestant church.<sup>69</sup>

In seeking to counter O’Toole’s status as an ‘expert’, Browne had his own knowledge-gathering systems, operating in parallel but along parish divisions. O’Toole’s

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<sup>67</sup> O’Toole, *Galway Planning Scheme*, 14.

<sup>68</sup> Dermot O’Toole, “Borough of Galway planning scheme, sheet no. 5,” not dated but 1944, Bin 67, Roll 21, Irish Architectural Archive, Dermot O’Toole collection, Acc. 90/30, Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin (hereafter IAA).

<sup>69</sup> O’Toole, *Galway Planning Scheme*, 14, 15, 18; see also MacCabe, *Ambition and Achievement*, 56–57.

strengths – maps, statistics, plans – would be the exact means by which Browne challenged his claim to urban authority. Echoing Janssen’s comments on Catholic leaders in mid-century Holland, Browne used ‘modern weapons’ to ‘fight the modern world.’<sup>70</sup> For example, when Browne was considering the site for his future cathedral in 1938, he appointed a committee of four priests to record pedestrian and car movements across the city’s bridges over three Sundays in November. Standing with their clipboards, these men counted the movements east and west between parishes and compared these with their own census of the Catholic populations of each street and district. They submitted to the bishop a report with tables and appendices.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, in private reflections on O’Toole’s report, Browne used his street-by-street knowledge of his city to criticise the proposed location of new factories and to list the many streets that were scheduled for partial or complete demolition – including many properties owned by the diocese.<sup>72</sup> The production of such documents emphasises the extent to which multiple jurisdictions overlapped in the governance of the city.

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<sup>70</sup> Janssen, “Religiously inspired Urbanism,” 137.

<sup>71</sup> Patrick Davis, et al., “Report of committee appointed by . . . the Bishop to examine the question of the most suitable site for the New Cathedral from the point of view of the pastoral needs of the people of Galway, and in regard to securing the largest congregation,” 1 December 1938, B/6/3, GDA.

<sup>72</sup> Browne, Memo on Galway Sketch Development Plan, undated but c. 1945, B/12/31, GDA.

O'Toole's report made no mention of provision for city-centre schools, nor acknowledged that Browne might have an alternative use for the O'Brien's Bridge site.<sup>73</sup> At a public meeting between O'Toole and the Galway Corporation, councillors were concerned about the proposed 'thinning out' of the city centre and the inner ring-road; O'Flynn responded by downplaying the value of Browne's site, commenting that he understood that it had remained vacant for so many years because of a 'stench from a nearby chemical factory.'<sup>74</sup> In private correspondence with the bishop, O'Flynn adopted a more diplomatic tone in explaining his scheme for an inner ring-road: the vacant site would be 'ideal' for such a road along with a car park and a 'small planted open space.' He argued that preserving the site as a 'breathing lung' – however noxious – for the city centre would create an attractive vista to the proposed new cathedral, and 'betterment' of the area would increase the value of nearby properties owned by the Church.<sup>75</sup> In reply, Browne explained that he could not dispose of such a valuable site without approval from Rome, and he could not ask for this until he was sure that the Jail site would be adequate for his new cathedral. Bringing up the issue of schools for the first time, he commented that 'the present [city-centre] schools at Market Street are not suitable' and hinted that he might need the site for a future school.<sup>76</sup> O'Flynn sought to avoid any serious disagreement at this early date, writing to Browne that the issue could be resolved once the diocese was 'more definite' regarding its plan for school

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<sup>73</sup> 'Minor public buildings', O'Toole stated, were deliberately left out at the sketch report stage (O'Toole, *Galway Planning Scheme*, 18). There is also a fleeting mention of school provision in proposed new satellite suburbs (*ibid.*, 9).

<sup>74</sup> *Connacht Tribune*, 31 May 1944.

<sup>75</sup> O'Flynn to Browne, 31 May 1944, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>76</sup> Browne to O'Flynn, 8 June 1944, B/6/9, GDA.

building, while at the same time requesting the planner to explain to Browne the safety concerns with a school on this site and to suggest alternatives.<sup>77</sup> However, with the publication and discussion of the draft planning scheme, it was hard to contain public speculation about the site's future, and some prominent businessmen – members of the Chamber of Commerce – were quoted in the local press endorsing the site as a convenient car park and an extension for the market. These interventions troubled the bishop, who wrote privately to warn these men from getting involved in the diocese's affairs: 'I see by the local press that you wish to have me deprived of some property . . . I have not advocated the taking of your property.'<sup>78</sup> 'I am sure', he wrote in another letter, drawing on Ireland's long history of religious and land struggles and ending with a pointed threat,

'that you do not put temporal interests, such as a market, before the needs and interests of religion . . . The Church only seeks to acquire [property] for the good of the people, and in a Catholic country, where she has suffered so much spoliation, it might be expected that she would receive help rather than hindrance. This is all the more true in the fact that [Protestant] St. Nicholas' Church, of which she was deprived of violence and confiscation, stands where it does. I have not suggested that you

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<sup>77</sup> O'Flynn to Browne, 9 June and 7 July 1944, B/6/12, GDA. O'Flynn to O'Toole, 9 June 1944, O'Toole Family Collection, Dublin. O'Toole to Browne, 21 August and 4 September 1944, B/12/31, GDA. O'Toole, Plan drawing showing proposed school site, 5 September 1944, B/12/31, GDA.

<sup>78</sup> Browne to Gerard Naughton, 29 June 1944; Naughton to Browne, 30 June 1944, B/6/9, GDA.

should be deprived of any of the property which you hold in Galway or any of the grazing land which you hold, e.g. in Ballinderreen.’<sup>79</sup>

Browne was quick to instrumentalize Irish history; he was also acutely aware of his own historical importance as a religious and political leader. As well as planning a new cathedral for his diocese, and many new parish churches, he was, by the early 1940s, in the midst of a huge programme of building new primary schools.<sup>80</sup> While the city’s population increased 11% between 1936 and 1946, the number of children under the age of fourteen increased by almost 15% - the fastest rate of growth for almost a century.<sup>81</sup> Yet compared with the appalling condition of many of Galway’s rural schools – with rotten window-frames, leaking roofs, and decrepit furniture – the old city schools were by no means at the top of Browne’s priorities (they did not feature in his ‘top ten’).<sup>82</sup> His plans for the O’Brien’s Bridge school site were important in a broader, philosophical manner – the issue of control of

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<sup>79</sup> Browne to Michael O’Flaherty, 30 June 1944, B/6/9, GDA.

<sup>80</sup> Memo, “Record of Churches, Presbyteries, Convents, Schools Built 1937–1962,” undated but c. 1962, B/4/2, GDA.

<sup>81</sup> *Ireland: Census of Population, 1936: volume II* (Dublin, 1940), 125; *Ireland: Census of Population, 1946: volume II* (Dublin, 1953), 145.

<sup>82</sup> See reports on the condition of schools in each parish, c. 1939–53, B/2/41 and B/2/42, GDA; Browne to P. Ó Muircheartaigh (hereafter Ó Muircheartaigh), 10 August 1944, B/2/42, GDA. The city schools were nos. 12 (Nuns’ Island) and 20 (Monastery Schools, Lombard Street) on his 1944 priority list. See also Ellen Rowley, “Schools in the Twentieth Century,” in *Art and Architecture of Ireland: volume IV: Architecture 1600–2000*, eds. Andrew Carpenter et al. (Dublin, 2014), 217–21.

the city – and by the end of 1944, it is clear that Browne was ready for a major battle over the future of his new school.<sup>83</sup> The dispute was about much more than simply a new school – it became the stage for a more protracted conflict over the changing power of Church and state, and the nature of private property rights, in the new era of town planning.

### III

The bishop attempted to undermine the draft town plan for Galway with a clandestine pamphleteering campaign organised with the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland (CTSI), in the summer of 1945. This marked an extraordinary – and hitherto unnoticed – moment in the history of Church and state relations in Irish cities. The episode began with a talk given by the planner, O’Toole, on the merits of his Galway scheme at the AGM of the Irish branch of the Town Planning Institute in Dublin in February 1945. O’Flynn, concerned at hostility for the scheme from some local councillors, arranged for O’Toole to travel to Galway to give a public lecture at University College Galway in July 1945 to sell his vision for the city’s future.<sup>84</sup> In a counter offensive against this publicity, Browne attempted to turn local opinion against the planner’s proposals. He did this with the help of the Dublin-based CTSI, with

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<sup>83</sup> Browne’s financial advisors, however, recommended the immediate disposal of the O’Brien’s Bridge site – see Patrick Flynn to Browne, 12 October 1944, B/6/12, GDA. However, an internal committee appointed by Browne was more optimistic about its use – see memo, “Report from Committee [on] Future Primary School Accommodation in Galway City,” 12 July 1945, B/2/10, GDA.

<sup>84</sup> *Evening Herald* (Dublin), 9 February 1945; *Galway Observer*, 19 May 1945; *Connacht Tribune*, 14 July 1945.

which he had been intimately involved for many years.<sup>85</sup> The CTSI primarily distributed Catholic literature but also had a strong anti-communism agenda.<sup>86</sup> In the 1940s its secretary was a prominent Dubliner, Dr. Francis O'Reilly (d. 1957), much involved in organising the 1932 Eucharistic Congress.<sup>87</sup> Browne and O'Reilly – both members of the CTSI's Publications Committee – worked together to print a pamphlet criticising the draft town plan, which would be anonymous, and to distribute it throughout Galway city in the weeks before O'Toole arrived to give his public lecture.<sup>88</sup> The intention can only have been to discredit both the plan – as an affront to the interests of the city, and the planner – as an outsider who was unfamiliar with the nature of urban authority in Galway. The pamphlet, which survives only in the diocesan archives, is an important source for analysing Irish clerical opposition to the principles of town planning and for understanding the mechanics of urban power. In April 1945, O'Reilly wrote to Browne:

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<sup>85</sup> The CTSI had published Browne's *Elementary Points of Canon Law for Laymen* as early as 1929. See also correspondence involving the CTSI in B/1/47–50, GDA, and Browne's correspondence with Hugh P. Allen (hereafter Allen) in particular, 1938–51, in B/1/47, GDA.

<sup>86</sup> See for example Allen to Browne, 27 November 1940, including Allen's memo, "'Who's Who' in Left Movement," n.d., B/1/47, GDA. See also Madden, "Bishop Michael Browne of Galway and Anti-Communism," 24–25; and Enda Delaney, "Anti-Communism in mid-Twentieth-Century Ireland," *English Historical Review* 126, no. 521 (2011), 878–903, at 884–85.

<sup>87</sup> *Irish Independent*, 23 October 1957.

<sup>88</sup> Browne to Francis O'Reilly (hereafter O'Reilly), 14 June 1943, B/8/1, GDA.

‘I have arranged about the pamphlet. It is now being printed by The Free Press, Wexford . . . It will carry no imprint. The title will be “The Town Plan for Galway,” by A. Citizen. Eason & Sons [booksellers] will be asked to send it to the local traders in Galway, on sale or return. The negotiations . . . will be carried out by . . . a friend of mine. He does not know who wrote the article, and he does not care. He knows Galway, and he says he agrees with the pamphlet. It would be well if, quietly, some arrangements could be made to have the pamphlet sold through the streets of Galway. Once the pamphlet has appeared in the shops, some of the local people should put newsboys selling it. I have ordered 1,000 copies.’<sup>89</sup>

In further correspondence, O’Reilly arranged for the daily and provincial press to be given copies for review, remarking that, ‘from the propaganda point of view’, it ‘would be well worth while; and propaganda is, I think, what [we] are aiming at.’<sup>90</sup> Browne was uneasy with this plan, perhaps concerned that the newspapers could generate adverse publicity – or perhaps speculate on the identity of the author.<sup>91</sup> As the project developed, O’Reilly clarified that they would rely on the ‘newsboys who sell the morning papers . . . ; it is a question of getting them contacted . . . I am not sure what the arrangement is in Galway but possibly [your secretary] could find out through some of the priests.’<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> O’Reilly to Browne, 26 April 1945, B/12/31, GDA.

<sup>90</sup> O’Reilly to Browne, 2 May 1945, B/12/32, GDA.

<sup>91</sup> O’Reilly to Browne, 7 May 1945, B/12/32, GDA.

<sup>92</sup> O’Reilly to Browne, 12 May 1945, B/12/32, GDA.



The plan hit an obstacle when Easons refused to be involved unless the text carried a publisher's imprint. As O'Reilly commented,

'they quoted the law, which I know exists, but I do not think they had any reason for being so "snooty," except that they realise that there is nothing in the matter for them . . . I think the best plan would be to try an arrange for street sales in Galway, the booklet being given to the boys on sale or return. They will easily sell out the edition on one Sunday . . . It might be well worth giving the booklet free to the newsboys and telling them that they must sell it at 2d each. The youngsters will do well on the transaction; and the profit would probably get each of them clothes or some ice-cream.'<sup>93</sup>

The legal issue of a publisher's imprint was clearly not a significant obstacle. O'Reilly commented that 'the regulation about putting on an imprint is honoured as often in the breach as in the observance.' To ensure the anonymity of the pamphlet, he had, as previously noted, arranged for a friend to negotiate with Easons. He was equally careful in his distribution plans after they withdrew from the project: he proposed instead to bundle the pamphlets into different envelopes and post them discreetly to different addresses in Galway: 'there will be no name of the sender on the envelope, and I shall arrange to have them posted in various places like Dún Laoghaire, Bray, etc., so that all will not have the same

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<sup>93</sup> O'Reilly to Browne, 16 May 1945, B/12/32, GDA; Stephanie Rains, "City Streets and the City Edition: Newsboys and Newspapers in Early Twentieth-Century Ireland," *Irish Studies Review* 24, no. 2 (2016): 142–58, at 146.

postmark.<sup>94</sup> The pamphlet appeared on the streets of Galway at the end of May 1945, and around 250 copies were sold before O'Toole's lecture. Later that summer, Browne worried that the lack of an imprint might bring legal action from government, sent the unsold pamphlets – around 700 in number – for pulping.<sup>95</sup>

The printing and distribution of the pamphlet was a clever, if not very effective, method of changing public opinion coloured with a certain school-boy intrigue. The pamphlet was eight pages of polemic, easily identifiable as being in Browne's distinctive hand with its many literary allusions and staccato rhythm. An anonymous yet illuminating rejoinder in the *Galway Observer*, 'Fifth Columnist' (which says much for how dissent could be publicly aired at the time), ridiculed Browne's thinly-veiled identity as the author of the pamphlet. 'Like a shattering bomb-shell,' they said, the pamphlet, 'printed by a firm who preferred to omit even their initials, scattered like wild-fire among the less intelligent sections of our community.' Little more than an 'uninformed and harmful distortion of facts', the columnist wished that the 'unknown snake-in-the-grass who is obviously one of the few on whose horns the proposed development scheme might tread, held their horses until they have heard the other side of a long story from the mouth of one of the most reputed planners in the country.'<sup>96</sup> The reference to O'Brien's Bridge was all too obvious.

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<sup>94</sup> O'Reilly to Browne, 22 May 1945, B/12/32, GDA.

<sup>95</sup> O'Reilly to Browne, 14 August 1945; Browne to O'Reilly, 13 September 1945; O'Reilly to Browne, 15 September 1945; and O'Reilly to Browne, 25 September 1945, all B/12/32, GDA.

<sup>96</sup> *Galway Observer*, 2 June 1945.

However, this grandstanding should not detract from a serious analysis of the intellectual argument put forward in the pamphlet. ‘If the proposed Town Plan for Galway is adopted’, Browne argued, ‘every citizen will be bound by it: the property which he now regards as his own . . . can henceforth be used solely for the purpose determined by the planner.’<sup>97</sup> The most obvious threat to the social democratic citizen’s private property was the proposal for widespread demolition of houses on Eyre Street, Mary Street and Bowling Green to make way for the new inner ring-road. Echoing the Land War of the 1880s, Browne argued that ‘fixity of tenure is what the farmer fought for: the townsman needs it too, and for the same deep, human reasons.’ Highlighting the risk of planning blight, he asked ‘who will buy a house which is doomed for extinction at the will of some public official?’ Compensation for property and new roads and bridges would bankrupt rate-payers in the city, and the inner ring-road would divert shoppers from the city centre: cars would move ‘so fast that [they] will not see the view on each side.’ The remaining medieval core, after the construction of the ring-road and O’Toole’s hollowing out of densely populated areas, would, he felt, be little more than ‘a museum-piece’, without the ‘busy colourful Gaelic life and sounds’ that gave the city its character. Adopting a conservationist tone, Browne asked ‘who would keep the old buildings of the centre in repair and from falling down?’ He concluded by pleading that ‘this plan must be rejected. If adopted, all security is gone . . . [A] plan should be made with the greatest prudence, local knowledge, and sense of economic realities . . . It is . . . the people of Galway who should decide.’<sup>98</sup> Browne’s critique of the town plan, and in

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<sup>97</sup> Anon. [Michael Browne], “The Proposed Town Plan for Galway: by A Citizen,” undated but May 1945, 1, B/12/32, GDA.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 2, 4, 5, 8. For an alternative view, where planning is seen as a protector of private property rights, see Robertson, *Reconstruction Pamphlet, no. 1: Town Planning*, 9–10.

particular his use of ‘A. Citizen’ as his nom de plume, demonstrates the uneasy relationship between ideas of social democracy and of religious authority in the city – and who was defending who’s interests.

It is hard to measure the exact impact of Browne’s pamphlet. O’Toole spoke before a ‘large and thoroughly enthusiastic crowd’ at University College Galway, outlining his vision for the city’s future, but the questions that followed highlighted the resistance of some local elected officials to such an ambitious scheme.<sup>99</sup> Writing privately to Browne, a member of the Chamber of Commerce poured cold water on the plan, saying it was ‘impracticable and had no regard to the financial commitments involved.’ While calling for more ‘modest’ proposals, he was, predictably, enthusiastic about providing an ‘adequate market place’ and supported the requisitioning of the O’Brien’s Bridge site for a car park and an extension to the market.<sup>100</sup> In reply Browne again went on the attack, terming the proposed town plan a ‘new spoliation’, comparing it to Cromwell’s actions in Ireland, and objecting to ‘an attitude of mind which seems to regard purely secular objects as of greater value than [those] religious, educational or charitable.’<sup>101</sup> It must have been deeply frustrating to him that the Chamber of Commerce’s official response to the plan – deeply sceptical and in some respects openly hostile – nevertheless praised many of O’Toole’s ideas and, specifically, endorsed the idea of public ownership of the proposed school site.<sup>102</sup> For their part the local newspapers

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<sup>99</sup> *Connacht Tribune*, 14 July 1945; *Galway Observer*, 14 July 1945.

<sup>100</sup> James Slattery to Browne, 11 October 1945, B/12/31, GDA.

<sup>101</sup> Browne to Slattery, 30 October 1945, B/12/31, GDA.

<sup>102</sup> Galway Chamber of Commerce, “Recommendations on the Galway Town Planning Scheme,” 18 December 1945, 8–9, B/12/31, GDA.

supported the town plan, especially the *Connacht Tribune*, which led, in classic ‘fantasies of metropolitan life’ manner, with ‘The Galway of the Future.’<sup>103</sup>

The pamphlet failed to stop the progress of the draft town plan, which was adopted in early 1946 with some minor revisions. After this date, O’Flynn, as county manager, had ‘interim powers’ over planning decisions in the city.<sup>104</sup> Frustrated by the inefficacy of his private correspondence and the pamphleteering project, Browne adopted a new strategy to defeat what he saw as a dangerous growth of bureaucratic and unelected power. His approach was two-pronged: first, he simply ignored O’Flynn and opened up direct negotiations for obtaining a grant for a new school with the Department of Education in Dublin; and second, he launched public attacks on O’Flynn as the county manager. By the spring of 1946 relations between the two men had completely collapsed.

As the Galway Corporation prepared to meet to discuss O’Toole’s plans, O’Flynn and Browne entrenched their positions. When asked for his plans, Browne bluntly replied, ‘The answer . . . is that my intention is to build a Cathedral . . . on the Jail site and to build a Central Boys’ national school on the O’Brien’s Bridge site.’ Property was hard to acquire in

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<sup>103</sup> *Connacht Tribune*, 14 July 1945; *Connacht Sentinel*, 22 May 1945; *Galway Observer*, 14 July 1945.

<sup>104</sup> *Connacht Sentinel*, 4 September 1945; *Connacht Tribune*, 19 January 1946; *Galway Observer*, 2 February 1946; C. Clerkin (hereafter Clerkin) to Browne, 21 January 1946; O’Flynn to Clerkin, 2 February 1946, B/6/12, GDA. O’Flynn issued Prohibition Orders on building in Galway before the draft plan was formally adopted – see for example *Galway Observer*, 8 September 1945.

the city, he argued, and he simply wished to ‘be allowed to use the site which my predecessors acquired lawfully and at great cost.’ He warned, ‘If [you] deprive me and the Catholic people of Galway of this site then [you] must incur before God and the people the responsibility of such a very serious action.’ Failing to provide schools and churches would be ‘more likely to produce savages than Christian citizens’ and opposing the Church would be typical more of ‘modern Russia’ than modern Ireland. Asking for his legal rights to be protected, Browne cautioned that the Corporation must either ‘work with me in my efforts for the moral and spiritual welfare of the people or against me.’<sup>105</sup> O’Flynn intervened to highlight what he saw as the potential for an ‘ornamental car park with provision for flower beds and seating accommodation along the river bank [that] would greatly enhance the appearance of the city’, adding that it was ‘unreasonable’ to argue that the Christian welfare of Galway’s children – 98% of whom were Catholic – was ‘entirely dependent upon the school [being built at] a particular site.’<sup>106</sup>

The question of the city’s future governance, from this time onwards, was monopolised by the bishop and the duo of county manager and planner. The Church of Ireland community of the nearby St. Nicholas, for example, appears not to have intervened, and – unlike planning debates from the late 1950s onwards – there were few if any protests or

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<sup>105</sup> Browne to Clerkin, 26 January 1946, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>106</sup> O’Flynn to Clerkin, 2 February 1946, B/6/12, GDA; Minutes of Galway Borough Council, 4 February 1946, File 109/38/72, GCL. *Ireland: Census of Population, 1936: volume III* (Dublin, 1939), 10.

letters from civic society or community groups.<sup>107</sup> Instead of a truly public debate, the controversy played out in the meeting room of the Galway Corporation, where Browne made an incendiary speech in February 1946, attacking both the manager and the planner. He dismissed O’Flynn’s claim that the site was not suitable for a school, saying that this was not within the competency of the county manager and was instead ‘a matter for those in charge of education.’ O’Flynn’s alternative site would be ‘most unsuitable and would not be approved by [government].’ ‘He’, Browne continued, ‘thinks a car-park more useful and ornamental than a school . . . [An] ornamental car-park is a contraction in terms – such places become very untidy, littered with rubbish and to say the least will not conduce to the cultivation of flower-beds.’ Browne took issue with the informal promise to hand over the site that he was supposed to have made to O’Flynn in 1940: ‘That is entirely false . . . [O’Flynn] got no authority from me to bind me . . . I gave no promise.’ Furthermore, the notion that the site would provide an attractive view of the Protestant church from the river, which O’Flynn had promoted, was dismissed by Browne again with reference to Irish history:

‘This is the church which belonged to the Catholic people, was taken from them by force and in the name of the civil law, and has never been restored. It is bad enough that we must still suffer the loss of this our rightful property, but it is adding insult to

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<sup>107</sup> John Davis, “‘Simple Solutions to Complex Problems’: The Greater London Council and the Greater London Development Plan, 1965–1973,” in *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions*, ed. Jose Harris (Oxford, 2003), 249–74; Hanna, *Modern Dublin*, 67–82. A rare exception is *Connacht Sentinel*, 15 May 1945.

injury when persons now come along and want to despoil us of what we have since lawfully acquired in order to enhance the view of the original usurpation.’<sup>108</sup>

Browne’s rhetoric had its intended effect: the Corporation rolled over and voted unanimously to allow the new central school to be built at O’Brien’s Bridge.<sup>109</sup> Quickly realising the implications for his proposed inner ring-road, O’Toole wrote to Browne to restate his objections: the 1853 Act of Parliament had called for such a road; furthermore, a school would suffer intolerably traffic and noise pollution, and this would affect the ‘minds of the children psychologically.’<sup>110</sup> The bishop declined to change his mind – neither concerns for the city’s Church of Ireland community nor the health risks to the future school children outweighed his desire to proceed with building the school.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Browne, “Address to the Mayor [. . .] of the Galway Borough Council,” 18 February 1946, B/6/12, GDA. The number of Protestants in the city in 1946 was just 264, down from 312 a decade earlier – see *Ireland: Census of Population, 1936: volume III* (Dublin, 1939), 10; *Ireland: Census of Population, 1946: volume III* (Dublin, 1952), 8.

<sup>109</sup> O’Toole to Browne, 6 March 1946, B/12/31, GDA; Browne to Thomas Derrig, 29 January 1947, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>110</sup> O’Toole to Browne, 6 March 1946, B/12/31, GDA. See also Galway Town Improvement Act, 1853 (16 & 17 Vict., c. cc), ss. 27, 33. O’Flynn’s powers as planning officer were also undermined in 1946 by a court case concerning an ‘illegal’ house extension, which he lost on appeal – see *Connacht Tribune*, 10 August 1946.

<sup>111</sup> Browne to O’Toole, 20 March 1946, B/12/31, GDA.



A key part of Browne's strategy was to bypass local government entirely and seek approval from the Department of Education. He assumed, correctly, that they would know or care little for the local politics in Galway. He sent his proposal, to merge two schools into a new central boys' school, to the Department in January 1946, before the Galway Corporation had even voted. Later, when the Department replied, approving the scheme and enclosing a grant application, another major episode erupted.<sup>112</sup>

The dispute was now a classic central-local three-way affair between O'Flynn, Browne, and central government in Dublin.<sup>113</sup> At first, O'Flynn asked his secretary to write to the Department and tell them that the 'Town and Regional Planning Act is in operation in Galway City' and that they should consult with him before approving new schools. When this appeared ineffective, O'Flynn warned that he 'may feel obliged' to exercise his powers as 'Interim Control Officer to make a Prohibition Order,' which could only be overturned on appeal to the Minister for Local Government.<sup>114</sup> Browne requested a copy of all the manager's correspondence from government, which was sent to him by a sympathetic official, and he used this inside knowledge to his advantage when he lobbied ministers on the

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<sup>112</sup> Browne to Ó Muircheartaigh, 22 January 1946, B/2/10, GDA; Ó Muircheartaigh to John J. Hyland, 14 October 1946, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>113</sup> John Davis, "Central Government and the Towns," in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, volume 3: 1840–1950*, ed. Martin Daunton (Cambridge, 2001), 259–86.

<sup>114</sup> C. A. Ruiséal to Ó Muircheartaigh, 28 November 1946; Clerkin to Ó Muircheartaigh, 20 December 1946, B/6/12, GDA.

issue.<sup>115</sup> He was also friendly with the Minister for Education at this time, Thomas Derrig, a Fianna Fáil TD (member of parliament) from Browne's home county, Mayo.<sup>116</sup> Hearing of O'Flynn's intervention, Browne wrote that he was 'very much surprised' and that the matter of a new school 'has given me a considerable amount of trouble.' He questioned O'Flynn's legal powers to block the school and commented that O'Flynn believed 'that a car-park is more important and that an inferior site will do for the school.'<sup>117</sup> Browne also lobbied the local government minister, MacEntee, claiming O'Flynn's actions had been 'gravely discourteous' to him, were 'ultra vires and illegal' and that 'Mr. O'Flynn seems to think that he is bound by no law or principle of honour.' Referring again to an existential threat, Browne played to MacEntee's well-known scepticism for expanding the role of the state, and for the usefulness of town planning, adding that O'Flynn's actions threatened 'the foundation of democracy' and risked 'totalitarianism with all its dangers.'<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Browne to Thomas Derrig, 21 February 1947; Ó Muircheartaigh to Browne, 1 March 1947, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>116</sup> Pauric J. Dempsey, "Thomas Derrig (1897–1956)," in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, eds. James McGuire and James Quinn, 9 vols. (Cambridge, 2009), 3, 185–86. Browne was close to many leading Fianna Fáil politicians of his time, especially Seán T. O'Kelly (President of Ireland, 1945–59) – see B/6/55, B/11/187, and B/11/222, GDA.

<sup>117</sup> Browne to Derrig, 29 January 1947, in B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>118</sup> Browne to Seán MacEntee (hereafter MacEntee), 5 February 1947, B/6/12, GDA. For MacEntee, see Seán MacEntee, Speech at the Architectural Society Inaugural Meeting, UCD, on "Planning and a National Policy," 7 May 1946, P/67/574(1), UCD; Seán MacEntee, Speech at the Town Planning Institute Dinner, Dublin, 11 March 1947, P/67/580(2), UCD; Anon., "A Nomad's Notebook: Minister is 'A Firm Believer in Long-Term Planning,'" *Irish*

By the spring of 1947 the stakes were considerably higher than back in 1944. Irish town planners felt emboldened by the British Planning Bill of 1947, which became the Town and Country Planning Act. Termed ‘revolutionary’ by an editorialist in the *Irish Builder and Engineer*, who considered that ‘its principles cannot fail to be infectious’ in Ireland, this British law essentially nationalised land by controlling development rights and providing for widespread compulsory purchase.<sup>119</sup> Both O’Flynn and Browne must have known what this could mean for Ireland’s constitutional protection of property rights for individuals (article 43) and for religious denominations (article 44).<sup>120</sup> Browne decided to make another public – and even more polemical – address to the Galway Corporation, attacking both O’Flynn and O’Toole, and in particular what he termed ‘the extraordinary mentality of the gentleman who acts as the Town Planning Consultant.’ Highlighting the gulf between sacred and secular

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*Builder and Engineer* 89, no. 6 (22 March 1947): 194; Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985*, 275, 284–86.

<sup>119</sup> S. A. de Smith, “Town and Country Planning Act, 1947,” *The Modern Law Review* 11, no. 1 (January 1948): 72–81, at 72, 77. For an alternative view, see John Stevenson, “The Countryside, Planning, and Civil Society in Britain, 1926–1947,” in Harris, *Civil Society in British History*, 191–212, at 210. See also anon., “A Nomad’s Notebook: The British Planning Bill: £300,000,000 for ‘Development Rights,’” *Irish Builder and Engineer* 89, no. 3 (8 February 1947): 88.

<sup>120</sup> Keane, *Law of Local Government*, 220–27; McDermott and Woulfe, *Compulsory Purchase and Compensation*, 1–9. Despite these constitutional protections, compulsory purchase and clearance orders on sanitation grounds were relatively common in 1930s Ireland – see Connell, “Fromhovels to Homes,” 150, 154, 223–26.

authority in the city, he claimed that O’Flynn ‘seems to regard himself as the supreme authority for everything in Galway and he treats your authority and mine in our respective spheres as non-existing.’ Warning that what he saw as O’Flynn’s autocracy might lead to ‘totalitarian tyranny [that was] completely subversive to the rights of citizens and of the Church’, he asked the Corporation to reaffirm their vote of 1946.<sup>121</sup> O’Flynn’s protests that the city was ‘already over-built’ and that the resolution would be ‘contrary to the recommendations of the Council’s technical advisers’ went unheeded, and the vote was in favour of Browne’s position by 5–1.<sup>122</sup> The bishop turned down a last-minute compromise offer from O’Toole that would have seen both the ring-road and the school built on the site and pushed on with making detailed plans for the new school, emboldened by MacEntee’s comment that ‘I doubt if there is now any possibility that the decision of the Council will at some future time be revoked.’<sup>123</sup> To further solidify his position, Browne began correspondence with the cathedral’s architect, J. J. Robinson, who he also wished to design the new school.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Browne, “Address to the Mayor [. . .] of the Galway Borough Council,” 27 February 1947, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>122</sup> Minutes of the Galway Borough Council, 20 March 1947, B/6/12, GDA; *Connacht Sentinel*, 25 March 1947.

<sup>123</sup> Clerkin to Browne, 31 March 1947, and MacEntee to Browne, 16 April 1947, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>124</sup> Browne, “Points for discussion with the Minister for Education, 30 July 1948,” undated but July 1948; Browne to John J. Robinson (hereafter Robinson), 30 November 1948, P/18/30, GDA.

Despite the extensive central-government programme of building new schools in Ireland from the 1930s onwards, there was little doubt that Irish primary schools were architecturally inferior to those in Britain and many other countries.<sup>125</sup> The British Education Act of 1944 (the ‘Butler’ Act) only widened this gulf, as an editorial in the *Irish Builder and Engineer* noted: ‘there still remain many city schools which by reason of their age, fail to accord with requirements today regarded as basic by scientists, educationalists, humanists and the medical profession.’ A ‘gigantic task’ of school construction lay ahead.<sup>126</sup> Browne was acutely aware of the problem posed by Galway’s old city schools; his solution was a new central school under Catholic management on a site owned by the diocese. By 1949, he considered the long-running controversy as settled, and he had successfully overcome the agenda set by increasingly powerful bureaucracy as personified by the O’Flynn-O’Toole axis. But, in August 1949, soon after the plans for the new school were announced in the *Irish Builder and Engineer*, O’Flynn tried once more to block the development: he pushed for a vote by the Corporation on whether to seek the County Medical Officer (CMO)’s opinion on the healthiness of the site for a primary school.<sup>127</sup> The CMO was another powerful bureaucratic position in Irish local government – in place since the late nineteenth century – and the role included making annual reports of the condition of all the schools in the county.<sup>128</sup> Charles McConn, who held this position in Galway, was a respected medical

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<sup>125</sup> Rowley, “Schools in the Twentieth Century,” 218–19.

<sup>126</sup> Education Act, 1944 (7 & 8 Geo. VI, c. 31); anon., “Education and its Environment,” *Irish Builder and Engineer* 91, no. 13 (25 June 1949): 586.

<sup>127</sup> *Irish Builder and Engineer* 91, no. 15 (23 July 1949): 684.

<sup>128</sup> See Galway School Medical Service files, M11/3, and Reports on Galway School Premises, 1943–55, M11/5, Department of Health files, NAI. See also Andrew McCarthy,

doctor, and O’Flynn wished to use McConn to halt the school project. The councillors were unimpressed with what they saw as a last-minute intervention but they gave in to O’Flynn’s demands: the division was an even split, with McConn appointed by the mayor’s casting vote.<sup>129</sup>

Incensed by what he saw as an under-hand move made in bad faith, Browne read a vitriolic sermon in Galway’s Pro-Cathedral on 7 August 1949. His rhetoric was similar to that satirized in Breandán Ó hEithir 1976 novel on life in 1940s Galway, *Lig Sinn i gCathú [Lead us into Temptation]*, where crowds relish the unpredictable invective of the fictional ‘Bishop Mullins.’<sup>130</sup> The real sermon, worth quoting at some length to see how exactly Browne used both history and contemporary world events to make his case, began with a moral and ethics view on the origins of the dispute:

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“Aspects of Local Health in Ireland in the 1950s,” in *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O’Shea and Carmel Quinlan (Cork, 2004), 118–34, at 124; O’Connor, *History of Galway County Council*, 138–40. McConn had been the acting County Medical Officer for Galway since the late 1930s and was formally appointed in August 1944 – see *Connacht Tribune*, 19 August 1944. The role was created in 1878 – see Public Health (Ireland) Act, 1878 (41 & 42 Vict., c. 52), s. 11. See also Helen Meller, *Towns, Plans and Society in Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1997), 21.

<sup>129</sup> *Connacht Tribune*, 6 August 1949.

<sup>130</sup> Breandán Ó hEithir, *Lig Sinn i gCathú [Lead Us into Temptation]* (first pub. 1976, trans. and repub. Indreabhán, Conamara, Co. Galway, 2009), 121–27.

‘[They] wanted to take the site over as a car park: others wanted to use it for shops and a cinema. I leave you to judge which is more important for the ordinary working men of Galway: a Catholic school for their children, or a car park, or shops and cinema and dance hall for the making of money.’

Concerning O’Flynn’s plans to have McConn reconsider the case, Browne turned to history:

‘This is a gross and flagrant breach of faith and a grave injustice to me . . . I thought they were men of honour, men of their word . . . Limerick is already known as the place dishonoured by broken Treaty [of 1691] and breach of faith: Galway should not rival it in dishonour.’

Browne was equally comfortable invoking Irish history as he was contemporary politics:

‘If this happened in Northern Ireland or in Czechoslovakia, there would be an outcry from Catholics here . . . The Communists also use the excuses of health and traffic. They are never against religion, of course: they always have an alibi . . . What difference is there between their objects and methods and those of the Manager, Mayor, and these five fickle Corporators?’<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Browne refers here to Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty, leader of Catholic church in Hungary, tortured and given a life sentence by the Soviet authorities in February 1949, commenting furthermore that “it was on the pretext of public health and traffic that they prohibited gatherings of Catholics to listen to Cardinal Mindszenty” – see Browne, Text of Sermon

He called on Catholics to stand up against O’Flynn and O’Toole, undermining them in class terms:

‘I want the best site for a school: they want a car park, or shops and a cinema . . . . What do they care for the education of the children of the poor? Where do they send their own children – to expensive schools for the upper class? . . . What alternative sites have they? . . . You will hardly believe it, but the “Town Planner” has suggested sites now occupied by back gardens at Sickeen, Bohermore, and beyond the Railway Station . . . . Any old out-of-the-way place will do for a school in their view.’<sup>132</sup>

He finished with a further attack – and a threat – focussed on O’Flynn in particular:

‘Is there no liberty, are there no rights left in this country, that a paid official can prevent us from using our own property for the good of the people? I protest against the tyranny of the Manager – ~~it reeks more of Communist Russia than of~~ [scribbled out in an early draft] it is entirely alien to this free Catholic land . . . . Those who

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given at the Pro-Cathedral, 7 August 1949, B/6/12, GDA. Browne also devoted a sermon to speaking about Mindszenty on 31 December 1948 – see *Connacht Sentinel*, 4 January 1949.

<sup>132</sup> Browne went to St. Jarlath’s College, Tuam, Co. Galway, in c. 1905–13, a school that also charged fees, though lower than many others in Ireland – see Anne Dolan, “Michael John Browne (1895–1980),” in McGuire and Quinn, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 1, 919–20; and John Cunningham, *St. Jarlath’s College, Tuam, 1800–2000* (Tuam, Co. Galway, 1999), 156–58.



obstruct me in the discharge of my episcopal duties incur a heavy responsibility before Almighty God.’<sup>133</sup>

John Fitzgerald, the editor of the *Connacht Tribune*, deemed large portions of Browne’s sermon to have been so libellous that he refused to print it without substantial redactions.<sup>134</sup> O’Flynn in turn demanded a hard copy from Browne to discuss with his solicitor, but Browne claimed this did not exist and he had spoken from ‘rough notes’ – yet among his papers are several hand-written drafts with extensive reworkings. And in such a small and interwoven city, this excuse was easily exposed: O’Flynn learned that ‘prior to the delivery of your sermon, you gave a transcript copy . . . to a press reporter who informed [you] that it could not be published as it was libellous.’ O’Flynn also met with the Archbishop of Tuam, Joseph Walsh, to protest, and threatened to take the case to the Vatican unless Browne offered an apology.<sup>135</sup> The Mayor, who had cast the deciding vote, publicly regretted his decision and the controversy it had stoked, but he was critical of the tone

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<sup>133</sup> Browne, Text of Sermon given at the Pro-Cathedral, 7 August 1949, B/6/12, GDA. An earlier draft text, undated, containing the omitted phrase “it reeks more of Communist Russia,” also survives in the same folder. See also *Irish Press*, 9, 10, 11 August 1949; *Irish Independent*, 19 August 1949; and *The Standard*, 12, 26 August 1949. See also J. Collins, “The Genesis of City and County Management,” *Administration: Journal of the Institute of Public Administration of Ireland* 2, no. 2 (1954): 27–38, at 36, 38.

<sup>134</sup> John Fitzgerald to Browne, 9 August and 11 August 1949, B/6/12, GDA; *Connacht Tribune*, 13 August 1949.

<sup>135</sup> O’Flynn to Browne, 18 August and 23 August 1949, B/6/12, GDA.

adopted by Browne in his Pro-Cathedral address.<sup>136</sup> The public division encouraged local Catholic charities and societies to offer their support to Browne, including the Legion of Mary, the Convent of Mercy, and the Catholic Young Men’s Society.<sup>137</sup> One supporter summed up what were radically different perspectives on power and governance in the city by expressing his sympathies at ‘the grave discourteousness you have been subjected to by those in temporary authority.’<sup>138</sup> The reassurance of Catholic civil society was welcome to Browne, but he was keen to win over broader public opinion, and to do this he arranged for his architect, Robinson, to send drawings for the attractive, modernist school (**Fig. 4**) to the *Irish Press* and the *Irish Independent*, but was frustrated when the *Press* only printed the plan and not the more appealing elevation sketches.<sup>139</sup>

The robust exchanges between Browne and O’Flynn in 1949 say as much about urban governance as they do of distinctive traditions of public performance, political rhetoric and truculent displays of masculinity; both men were informally referred to as ‘Muscles’ Browne

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<sup>136</sup> Joseph F. Costello to Browne, 11 August and 18 August 1949, B/6/12, GDA; *Galway Observer*, 20 August 1949.

<sup>137</sup> Letters of support from various religious institutions and societies to Browne, 12–20 August 1949, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>138</sup> John O’Hanrahan to Browne, 10 August 1949, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>139</sup> Robinson to the Editor, the *Irish Press*, 18 August 1949; Robinson to Browne, 18 August, 25 August 1949, B/6/12, GDA; *Irish Press*, 17 August 1949, and an unidentified newspaper clipping, undated but c. August 1949, “Proposed New School for Galway,” including elevation sketches, in B/6/12, GDA. See also Madden, “Bishop Michael Browne of Galway and Anti-Communism,” 27–28.

(the bishop had been an amateur boxer in his schooldays), and ‘Cast Iron’ (Clement Ignatius) O’Flynn.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, as Donnelly has shown, Browne was no stranger to major public interventions, no matter how controversial or at times ineffective. He made a reputation for his forthright statements of Catholic social teaching on issues such as dance halls, drinking at the Galway races, and mixed bathing on the county’s beaches.<sup>141</sup> In the case of Browne’s attack from the pulpit, he arguably overplayed his hand. This is only reinforced by a lengthy hand-written memo that he penned at the time. In it he questioned O’Flynn’s religious devotion: was he ‘a Catholic and presumably one who accepts the law and teaching of the Catholic Church.’ As a noted expert in Canon Law and a regular contributor to the journal *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Browne set out what he considered to be his powers as a bishop.<sup>142</sup> He listed the particular code of Canon Law that would allow him to bring ‘censures and other penalties’ against anyone who disobeyed his orders. This, he added, would cover ‘excommunication and interdict.’ ‘I would therefore’, he concluded, ‘have been within my right in proceeding to enforce this law in this case . . . I think that the Manager’s conscience should have taken account of these serious laws of the Church which bind in

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<sup>140</sup> Private correspondence with Tom Kilgariff, Galway, 22 June 2017. See also L. Delap and S. Morgan, eds., *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 2013).

<sup>141</sup> Donnelly, “Bishop Michael Browne of Galway,” 16–39.

<sup>142</sup> See Correspondence concerning Canon Law, 1935–1966, B/11/156 and B/11/158, GDA; and Michael Browne, *Elementary Points of Canon Law for Laymen* (Dublin, 1929).

conscience on every Catholic.’<sup>143</sup> This viewpoint, of course, undermined the very foundations of the idea of secular town planning, and indeed of all secular authority. Furthermore, the degree to which Browne’s rhetoric in his sermon was ill-judged is apparent in a letter from a neighbouring bishop, John Dignan of Clonfert, who wrote to Browne to give advice. ‘Everybody is speaking about [the controversy]’, he commented. ‘I think I should in friendship tell you this – many think your language [is] altogether too strong, and if in your “righteous indignation” you felt bound to speak strongly it should have been done at a meeting in the Town Hall and not in the Church. Note, I am telling you the gossip in this part of the county.’<sup>144</sup> If Dignan’s advice was well-intended, the liberal and Protestant press in Dublin and Belfast were actively hostile to Browne’s intervention, as indeed was O’Casey in his autobiography. The *Irish Times*, *Belfast Telegraph*, and *Belfast Newsletter* carried leaders and many letters and responses on the controversy (‘The Bishop put his foot down, so Council obeys’), with both commenting on what it might mean for religious freedom in a future united Ireland.<sup>145</sup> An editorial in the *Irish Builder and Engineer* at the same time, without making direct reference to the Galway controversy, nostalgically looked back to the ‘high hopes’ of the National Planning Exhibition of 1944 and the ‘vast amount of time and energy embodied in its creation’; five years later the attempts to ‘interest the average citizen

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<sup>143</sup> Browne, handwritten memo, undated but August–September 1949, B/6/12, GDA. For Browne’s references to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, see T. Lincoln Bouscaren and Adam C. Ellis, *Canon Law: a Text and Commentary* (Milwaukee, WI., 1951), 924.

<sup>144</sup> John Dignan to Browne, 23 August 1949, B/6/12, GDA.

<sup>145</sup> See for example *Irish Times*, 24, 29, 31 August, 3, 7 September 1949; *Belfast Telegraph*, 31 August 1949; and *Belfast Newsletter*, 2 September 1949.

in the potentialities of the future, if wisely planned’, were ‘disappointing.’<sup>146</sup> The early utopianism of the mid-1940s had settled into a pragmatic reality: poetry had turned to prose.

Browne’s public assault on the manager and planner concealed the importance of the Medical Officer’s report, which appeared in the spring of 1950. McConn rejected the proposed site. Quoting British and American guidelines on school design, and in particular the progressive provisions of the Butler Act, he argued that he could see ‘no reason . . . why a lesser standard should prevail in this country.’<sup>147</sup> Echoing contemporary newspaper concerns about the traffic congestion near the site, he argued it was simply inadequate for a large school, the playground and classrooms were too small, the number of bathrooms insufficient, and the corridors awkwardly placed.<sup>148</sup> O’Flynn summarised his colleague’s findings to the diocese by noting that while the Corporation had approved of ‘a school’ on the O’Brien’s Bridge site, the size and design of that school remained an open question, and again he urged the diocese to rethink their position and consider an alternative site.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *Irish Builder and Engineer* 91, no. 17 (20 August 1949): 760.

<sup>147</sup> Charles F. McConn (hereafter McConn) to O’Flynn, 24 January, 7 February 1950, P/18/11, GDA; *Irish Independent*, 3 February 1950; and Education Act, 1944 (7 & 8 Geo. VI, c. 31), ss. 53–55.

<sup>148</sup> *Galway Observer*, 18 November 1949 and 7 January 1950. McConn to O’Flynn, 24 January 1950, P/18/11, GDA.

<sup>149</sup> O’Flynn to John J. Hyland, 28 January 1950, P/18/11, GDA.

McConn's reliance on British and American regulations gave Browne an easy rebuttal.<sup>150</sup> Penning another memo on the controversy, he invoked Irish nationalist history to his advantage, writing that O'Flynn and McConn 'do not seem to be aware that Ireland is an independent republic and that the regulations of England and America, however excellent, do not bind here.'<sup>151</sup> His impatience is evident in a comment he made to his architect, Robinson, at this time, saying 'I think it necessary to show that we are in deadly earnest and in fighting mood, for we have suffered from these obstructive tactics too long.'<sup>152</sup> Frustrated by Galway's local bureaucracy, Browne followed through on this threat, writing in April 1950 to three ministers, Michael Donnellan, Richard Mulcahy and Noël Browne. McConn, he claimed, 'seems to think that he can interfere with the rights of citizens of this Republic . . . as if we were still a colony.'<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> McConn lists these regulations in McConn to the Town Clerk, Galway Corporation, 16 February 1950, P/18/11, GDA. See also C. G. Stillman's paper on post-war British schools read to the Architectural Association of Ireland – *Irish Builder and Engineer* 92, no. 6 (18 March 1950): 255–56.

<sup>151</sup> Browne, memo, not dated but February 1950, P/18/11, GDA. McConn had long caused extra work for Browne by exposing deficient schools under the diocese's management – see correspondence between McConn and Browne, B/2/41, GDA.

<sup>152</sup> Browne to Robinson, 13 February 1950, P/18/11, GDA.

<sup>153</sup> Browne to Michael Donnellan, Richard Mulcahy and Noël Browne, 17 April 1950, P/18/11, GDA. See also Browne, Memo concerning List of Documents sent to the Minister for Local Government as part of Appeal, undated but March–April 1950, P/18/11, GDA; *Connacht Tribune*, 15 April 1950.

Ironically, it was only by appealing directly to central government that Browne was able to proceed with his school plans. Browne's victory over the city's council and associated bureaucracy, which he condemned – however unlikely – as akin to Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, came at the same time as he presided over a conference that led to the end of Galway's longest-ever labour dispute – the strike of over 350 workers at McDonogh's and Corbett's for 14 weeks in the spring and summer of 1950.<sup>154</sup> With permission granted to build the new Central Boys' School, he moved quickly to seek tenders and the school was built in 1952–54 (**Fig. 5**).<sup>155</sup> Some of the first pupils were the sons of the city's labourers and dock workers – the children of the strike of 1950. The school, known as St. Patrick's, is still in use today, and Galway's suburbanisation now means that most of the school's pupils are driven in each morning, causing more congestion and pollution than McConn could have imagined in the 1940s. The town planner, for his part, did not succeed in building any portion of his proposed inner ring-road, and the politics of building a bypass is now a major concern in the city. Furthermore, the Corporation decided, unanimously, not to reappoint O'Toole in 1950, with one councillor saying that his ratepayers saw no reason whatsoever to continue the

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<sup>154</sup> Correspondence relating to the Galway Workers' Strike of 1950, B/12/145, GDA; Correspondence relating to Galway trade union disputes, 1939–51, B/1/20–21, GDA; *Galway Observer*, 8 July 1950; *Connacht Tribune*, 15 Apr, 15 July 1950. See also Madden, "Bishop Michael Browne of Galway and anti-Communism," 24–28.

<sup>155</sup> *Connacht Sentinel*, 9 January 1954; Niall T. Coll, *The History of St. Patrick's School, 1954–2004* (Galway, 2006), 15–18. The school features prominently in a 1957 Bord Fáilte [Tourism Board] film – see Colm Ó Laoghaire, "Glamour of Galway" (1957), at 1:37–1:42, 3:15–3:27, 9:23–9:57, and 10:05–10:08, The Bord Fáilte Film Collection, Irish Film Institute, Dublin (available at [www.ifi.ie](http://www.ifi.ie)).

post.<sup>156</sup> Despite this, he did some other municipal work in Galway in the 1950s, including designing a new fire station in the city centre.<sup>157</sup>

## V

The Galway school site controversy shows us that the Catholic Church was, even in the mid-1940s, in a position of profound political weakness. It was forced into an adversarial stance in response to the growing agenda of central state bureaucracy, seen through the county management system and the implementation of town planning schemes. The fact that Browne ultimately succeeded in his mission to build a new primary school in the centre of Galway should not be mistaken for an assured demonstration of political power. The agenda, throughout the entire controversy, was always set by the state and not the Church. The Church was instead responding to the secular, ‘rational’ agenda of town planning. If Browne was in a truly powerful position the controversy would have ended at the first hurdle. But his tactics – the secret pamphlet project, the grandstanding speeches, the sermons from the pulpit, and the lobbying of central government ministers – all show how weak his negotiating position was. If Browne was able to mobilise public opinion to his cause, why did he distribute an anonymous pamphlet without an imprint? Why did he consider the prospect of excommunicating O’Flynn? And why did he so publicly abandon a cordial relationship with the local bureaucratic officials with whom he may have struck a compromise? His actions suggest that mobilising public opinion was easier said than done and that the relationship

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<sup>156</sup> *Irish Press*, 24 October 1950.

<sup>157</sup> See Dermot O’Toole, Drawings for Garryglass Fire Station, Galway, 1948–54, Bin 67, Roll 5, Dermot O’Toole Collection, Acc. 90/30, IAA. The same collection has O’Toole’s proposal for the redevelopment of Eyre Square, Galway, August 1959 – see Bin 67, Roll 21.



between the Church and local political elites was not as close-knit as often suggested. On both sides of the dispute, we gain an insight into the process of political lobbying in mid-century Ireland and the remarkable absence of broader public interaction in urban decision-making. In these formative years of town planning, a different rapprochement between religion and planning – between Church and state – might have been possible.

At the core of the controversy was a division over ownership and authority in the city, and who was in charge – Robert Dahl’s question of ‘who governs?’, and who are they governing for.<sup>158</sup> Browne’s objections to the Galway town plan were fundamental in nature and questioned the intellectual framework that gave the state increased power over the ownership and development of land. Yet his objections appear to have been distinctly urban: the state appropriation of land in rural areas from former ‘big houses’ at the same time, through the post-1922 Irish Land Commission, was less of a worry to Browne, who saw ‘redistribution’ (a helpful euphemism) as beneficial to Catholic small farmers.<sup>159</sup> The battleground was very much the city. When, for example, in later years, O’Flynn requested Browne to change the orientation of his new cathedral to better facilitate traffic, Browne simply ignored him. He refused to engage with the bureaucratic system and regarded the planning of his new cathedral as solely his domain. Whether the main entrance to the

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<sup>158</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (Yale, 1961).

<sup>159</sup> David Seth Jones, “Divisions within the Irish Government over Land-Distribution Policy, 1940–70,” *Éire-Ireland* 36 (Fall/Winter 2001): 83–109, at 105–06; and Terence Dooley, *The Land for the People’: the Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), 226.

cathedral was from the north or the south was none of O’Flynn’s business.<sup>160</sup> For Browne, there were aspects of the governance of the city that did not fall under the remit of town planning. But while he astutely defended the Church’s interests, he rarely controlled the agenda.

It must not be overlooked that at the core of the controversy was a school and the education of young children. This article shows that we need to know more about the building of schools in mid-century Ireland. Tom Garvin’s *News from a new republic* (2010) has a chapter on ‘the education wars’ in Ireland, but in it we learn little about the physical or architectural aspects of education policy in Ireland – classroom, playground, environment. Garvin’s focus, and those of D. K. Akenson and Seán Farren, are almost entirely on issues of staffing, sectarianism, and the curriculum.<sup>161</sup> Irish historians should follow the lead of Tom Hulme’s recent study of British school building in looking at what the process of school building meant for children’s health, and who was controlling the agendas of design and construction.<sup>162</sup> McConn and O’Toole’s objections to the Galway site for health, safety, and ‘psychological’ reasons offer many interesting avenues for further investigation.

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<sup>160</sup> J. B. Collins to Robinson, 5 March 1957; O’Flynn to Browne, 15 April 1957, B/6/61, GDA.

<sup>161</sup> Garvin, *News from a New Republic*, 155–97; Akenson, *Mirror to Kathleen’s Face*, 103; Farren, *Politics of Irish Education*, 196–99.

<sup>162</sup> Tom Hulme, “‘A Nation Depends on its Children’: School Buildings and Citizenship in England and Wales, 1900–1939,” *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 2 (April 2015): 406–32.

Schools, along with churches, meeting halls, and other public buildings were conceived within the framework of town planning from mid-century onwards. The history of European town planning stands to be enriched by including the perspectives of religious groups who maintained distinct – sometimes parallel, sometimes in opposition – concepts of urban governance. Nowhere was this more clearly the case than in mid-century Irish cities. Secular ideas of ‘rational’ urban futures are too often intellectually monopolistic in analyses of the fundamental underpinnings of town planning; bringing back the parish and the diocese (or other ‘sacred’ divisions of the city) into these debates offers a new perspective that disrupts existing paradigms. While Janssen, in his study of Dutch cities, argues that ‘Catholics accepted modernization in the organizational sphere while resisting it ideologically’, it is also true that Catholic forged parallel but different ideas of modernity.<sup>163</sup> Richard Schaefer makes a convincing case for ‘Catholic modernity’ in late nineteenth-century Europe, as Charlotte Wildman does for Manchester and Liverpool in the inter-war years; this article shows that it was similarly true for mid-twentieth century Ireland.<sup>164</sup>

In arguing the case for a Catholic school in the centre of Galway, Browne exposed the myth that O’Toole and O’Flynn’s proposed town plan was – to quote Liam Lanigan and Helen Meller – the fruits of ‘rational knowledge’ that was ‘neutral’, ‘autonomous, context-

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<sup>163</sup> Janssen, “Religiously inspired Urbanism,” 155.

<sup>164</sup> Richard Schaefer, “Program for a new Catholic Wissenschaft: Devotional Activism and Catholic Modernity in the Nineteenth Century,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 3 (2007), 433–62; Wildman, *Urban Redevelopment and Modernity*, 143–89.

free and objective.’<sup>165</sup> Browne showed that an alternative was also possible, deploying his own carefully gathered statistics and his own – in Gillian Rose’s term – ‘masculinist geographical imagination.’<sup>166</sup> O’Toole and O’Flynn’s sometimes cavalier rhetoric rarely invoked history, or saw the need to do so. They were sometimes hostile to its sobering limitations, preferring instead to instrumentalise the potential of the future. Browne’s Catholic modernity – perhaps not unrepresentative of national trends at this time – relied on an explicit use of the rhetoric of the past to argue for a different future. One notable side-effect of this was Browne’s early interest in urban conservation – of protecting the medieval core to save the historic urban parishes. His opposition, for example, to demolition of historic buildings, street widening, surface car-parks, and planning blight, has more in common with secular, progressive politics of later decades than of a Catholic bishop in the 1940s.<sup>167</sup> The conservation aspect of the school site controversy demonstrates in a salient way Ireland’s distinctive engagement with modernity, and the position of Catholic power in the Irish city.

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<sup>165</sup> Lanigan, *James Joyce, Urban Planning and Irish Modernism*, 9; Meller, *Towns, plans, and society*, 87.

<sup>166</sup> Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: the Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge, 1993), 137.

<sup>167</sup> Hanna, “‘Don’t Make Dublin a Museum.’”