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## Fr Patrick Lavelle: the rise and fall of an Irish nationalist, 1825-1886

Moran, Gerard Patrick Joseph (1992) *Fr Patrick Lavelle: the rise and fall of an Irish nationalist, 1825-1886*. Doctoral thesis, Durham University.



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### Abstract

This is a study of Father Patrick Lavelle, one of the most radical members of the post- Famine Irish Catholic Church. Lavelle, who came from a comfortable tenant-farming background in

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Mayo, pursued his clerical studies in Maynooth and from an early stage displayed an aggressive and uncompromising manner. His confrontations with John Miley at the Irish College, Paris; Bishop Thomas Plunket in Partry, Cardinal Paul Cullen, John O'Connor Power and others gained him a reputation as a pugnacious and zealous opponent. However, the more gentler side of his nature was revealed when he met Sir Arthur Guinness in Cong in the 1870s. While Lavelle is commonly regarded as a tenacious radical, it is often overlooked that he laboured relentlessly for his poor, oppressed parishioners of Partry against the twin dangers of Evangelicalism and famine. His pastoral duties were similar to those of other clerics in the west of Ireland and highlight the importance of the priest in the survival of their congregations. Lavelle's fame is normally associated with the Fenian movement, in which he defended the right of Irish people to

rebel against tyrannical government. This policy brought him into conflict with Paul Cullen who continuously endeavoured to have Lavelle suspended by the Vatican. Lavelle argued that the Fenian organisation had never been specifically named by the Church. He was able to pursue his radical course in Britain and Ireland because of John MacHale's protection. It is argued that Lavelle espoused militant nationalism because of the demise of constitutional nationalism, a position adopted by many other Irishmen. Once it became clear that the Fenians could not deliver on the national question, Lavelle and others reverted to parliamentary agitation and the Home Rule party. During this period Lavelle's fame declined, symbolising the clergy's fading power in Irish politics in the 1870s and the rise of the Catholic urban middle classes. Nevertheless, Lavelle has to be regarded as the link between the radical pre-Famine Irish Church and the socially aware clerics of the post-

Land League Church.

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