

The Irish Franciscans in Prague 1629–1786. Jan Pařez and Hedvika Kuchařová. Trans. Jana Stoddart and Michael Stoddart. Prague: Karolinum Press, 2015. xvi + 210 pp. \$30.

One of the most fascinating aspects of early modern Irish history is the Continental college movement. The establishment of Irish colleges on the Continent was less the result of a strategic option than the consequence of the political-religious upheavals in Ireland in the second half of the sixteenth century. During the Elizabethan conquest it

proved impossible to establish seminaries on the Tridentine model in Ireland itself, while the second phase of the dissolution of the religious houses made the training of aspirants increasingly hazardous. Given these circumstances the only realistic feasibility for training young Irish people for priesthood and religious life was the establishment, with the aid of foreign patrons, of colleges on the Continent. Of the forty-five Irish colleges founded between 1578 and 1700, twenty-three belonged to religious orders, and among these the Franciscans take pride of place with seven establishments to their credit. While St. Anthony's College in Leuven and St. Isidore's College in Rome, founded in 1607 and 1625, respectively, have been well treated by historians, the College of the Immaculate Conception in Prague, founded in 1629, has been largely neglected, despite being the largest of the Franciscan colleges. The volume under review is a welcome effort to fill this lacuna.

Overcrowding in Leuven seems to have provided the impetus to seek a new foundation in Central Europe. Both the emperor Ferdinand II and the cardinal-archbishop of Prague, Ernst Adalbert von Harrach, were kindly disposed to these overtures and the emperor issued the chart of foundation on 29 November 1629. While giving priority to the preparation of candidates for priesthood and religious life, the Irish found themselves compelled to take cognizance of the conflicting aims of their patrons, the emperor and the archbishop, both of whom wished to make use of the educated Irish friars, well qualified in philosophy and theology, in the re-Catholicization of Bohemia. Whereas Ferdinand envisaged the impetus coming from the Jesuit-controlled university, Ernst Adalbert wished both to break the power of the Jesuits and emphasize the importance of his own seminary. Since, due to the upheavals in Bohemia, the religious orders could not supply a sufficient number of trained lecturers to staff the seminary, the Irish Franciscans soon found themselves teaching in the archbishop's institution as well as in their own college. Furthermore, von Harrach considered the Irish promotion of Scotism as an able weapon in breaking the Jesuit monopoly of Catholic education.

While generously undertaking to supply the seminary with four lecturers in philosophy and four in theology, the statutes of the Irish college required that these men be selected on a rotating basis of two each from the four provinces of Ireland. Though failure to uphold this policy caused much unease in the college, the archbishop, whose primary concern was the staffing of his seminary, had little patience with what could have only appeared to him as petty squabbles. Whereas the other religious orders in Bohemia were initially disconcerted by the Irish take-over of the seminary, they lost no time in exploiting these bickerings to regain what they considered to be their rightful role on the seminary staff. Their withdrawal from the seminary led the Irish Franciscans to becoming an isolated introspective community in Prague, though some of its more talented members, such as Francis O' Devlin, succeeded in gaining prestigious positions as tutors to the aristocratic Sporck and Šternberk families.

The Irish Franciscans in Prague 1629–1786, a translation of a monograph that appeared in Czech in the year 2000, is the first comprehensive work in English to be devoted to the history of the College of the Immaculate Conception. As such it is to be warmly welcomed, given that Jan Pařez and Hedvika Kuchařová have consulted essential archival material in the Czech language, a task beyond the capacity of most anglophone scholars.

Over 470 Irish friars passed through Prague during the one-and-a-half centuries of the college's existence. This is no mean number. Their story deserves to be told and Pařez and Kuchařová have served them well. The availability of their work in English also means that a proper comparative study of the three main Irish Franciscan Continental colleges can now begin.

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