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'In what orbit we shall find ourselves, no one could predict': institutional reform, the university merger and ecclesiastical influence on Irish higher education in the 1960s

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ABSTRACT. *This paper explores the persistence of ecclesiastical influence on higher education in Ireland during an era of far-reaching policy change in the 1960s. The extensive interaction between political and official elites and the Catholic bishops offers a fascinating insight into the complex and contested process of policy formulation during an era of transformation in higher education. This study offers a re-interpretation of Whyte's thesis that the Irish bishops displayed a 'new flexibility' in their response to governmental policy initiatives during this period, especially the initiative for university merger launched by Donogh O'Malley in 1967. Catholic prelates, notably John Charles McQuaid, the influential archbishop of Dublin, were pursuing a traditional Catholic religious and socio-political agenda in higher education, which sought not so much to accommodate new official initiatives as to shape such reforms in the ideological direction favoured by the bishops. McQuaid in particular enjoyed exceptional access to policy-makers and was an indispensable partner in launching the initiative for the university merger. The eventual failure of the merger, which was influenced by the successful resistance of academic elites and the declining significance of religious divisions in higher education, underlined the limits of ecclesiastical power in a rapidly changing society.*

The interaction between successive ministers for education and the Catholic church was a defining feature of the politics of educational expansion at higher level between 1957 and 1970.[1] John Whyte's seminal study on church–state relations points to 'a new flexibility' on the part of the Catholic bishops from the 1960s onwards, indicating a pragmatic acceptance by the bishops of far-reaching educational reforms, which contrasted with the uncompromising opposition by leading prelates to the expansion of the authority of the state in previous decades.[2] Whyte, indeed, presents the hierarchy's response to the

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[1] John Walsh, *The politics of expansion: the transformation of educational policy in the Republic of Ireland, 1957–72* (Manchester, 2009), pp 1–4.

[2] J. H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1980), pp 337–43.

initiative for university merger in 1967 as a particularly interesting example of this new-found flexibility.[3] Yet recently available archival records suggest a more complex and nuanced picture, in which bishops accommodated a greater role for an authoritative political leadership but maintained considerable influence on educational policy and remained indispensable to the achievement of institutional change. Leading Catholic prelates, particularly Dr John Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin, sought to shape policy and institutional change at higher level in accordance with Catholic social teaching and the traditional objectives of the hierarchy in education. This study identifies the persistence of ecclesiastical influence in higher education throughout the 1960s, which may be exemplified by the extensive interaction between McQuaid and the Department of Education on the dramatic but ultimately unsuccessful initiative for merger between University College Dublin (U.C.D.) and Trinity College Dublin (T.C.D.). The McQuaid papers point to intensive contacts between Archbishop's House and the Department of Education on higher education, reflecting a close personal relationship informed by shared religious values between McQuaid and Dr Tarlach Ó Raifeartaigh, secretary to the Department of Education, and more pragmatic collaboration with successive ministers, particularly the mercurial Donogh O'Malley.

Other accounts of higher education policy in this period have considered the merger itself, its origins and the reasons for its failure in considerable detail; most recently Walsh has analysed the official motivations behind the initiative for merger, the response of academic elites to the minister's plan and its long-term significance for higher education policy.[4] The focus of this paper, however, is on the previously under-researched relationships between key figures in church and state during this period, and the extent to which the bishops exerted influence on initiatives such as the merger. This paper will explore the extent to which the continuing influence of the bishops, and particularly McQuaid's collaboration with ministers and officials over the university merger, shaped the evolution of higher education policy during the 1960s.

I

The Catholic bishops opposed the attendance of Catholic students at Trinity College since 1875, originally due to its Protestant heritage but increasingly because it was perceived as a centre of secular, irreligious and atheistic influences. Ironically, the abolition of religious tests in the University of Dublin through Fawcett's act in 1873 merely intensified the hostility to Trinity on the part of the Irish hierarchy. Bartholomew Woodlock, rector of the Catholic University of Ireland from 1861 to 1879, aptly summed up the position of the hierarchy towards 'neutral' higher education: 'As a Protestant is to be preferred to a man of no religion, so also is a University founded on Protestantism to a University which has no religious basis'.[5]

[3] Ibid., pp 341–3.

[4] John Walsh, '"The problem of Trinity College Dublin": a historical perspective on rationalisation in higher education in Ireland' in *Irish Educational Studies,* xxxiii, no. 1 (2014), pp 3–4.

[5] William J. Rigney, 'Bartholomew Woodlock and the Catholic University of Ireland, 1861–79' (Ph.D. thesis, U.C.D., 1995), p. 12.

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The bishops believed that Fawcett's legislation simply created another 'godless college', placing Trinity on a similar level to the Queen's Colleges condemned by the Synod of Thurles in 1850.[6] The Maynooth synod in 1875 issued decrees explicitly condemning attendance at T.C.D. by Catholics for the first time, on the basis that it offered 'a purely secular education' following the passage of Fawcett's act.[7]

The National University of Ireland (N.U.I.) enjoyed a very different cultural inheritance to its older counterpart. The N.U.I. was established formally as a non-denominational institution under the Irish Universities Act, 1908, brought forward by the Liberal chief secretary Augustine Birrell, but was explicitly designed to offer higher education acceptable to the Catholic majority. The constituent colleges of the N.U.I., particularly U.C.D., enjoyed significant connections with the political elite of the new Irish state: indeed, the first two ministers for education, Eoin MacNéill and John Marcus O'Sullivan, held university chairs in U.C.D. Moreover, Éamon de Valera, the dominant political figure of the Irish state during its first generation, was also the chancellor of the N.U.I. from 1921 to 1975.[8] Yet the prominence of N.U.I. graduates, professors and members of the Senate in the political elite did not translate into a high public profile for the institution or generous financial support for its colleges. De Valera was not inclined to intervene in the management or internal policy-making of the N.U.I. and the sector did not greatly benefit in financial terms from his prominent position.[9]

Irish society during the early post-war period was profoundly influenced by integralist Catholicism, which sought to transform Ireland into a more completely Catholic state than it had yet become.[10] Although the decision by de Valera's government to provide a state grant to Trinity College for the first time in 1947 marked a new departure in the college's relations with the Irish state,[11] it did not end Trinity's isolation in an overwhelmingly Catholic society. Michael Browne, bishop of Galway, in an address at St Mary's College, Galway on 30 May 1949, denounced the 'extraordinary discrimination' displayed by the government grant to Trinity College, when no public support was given to St Patrick's College, Maynooth.[12] Browne reminded his audience that Trinity was the product of the sins of the Reformation and the penal laws: 'No explanation has been given why an institution which still enjoys the proceeds of vast confiscated estates, and for centuries did everything to prevent Catholics having university education should now receive £35,000

[6] George Conroy to Paul Cardinal Cullen, 20 March 1873 (Dublin Diocesan Archives (hereafter D.D.A.), Cullen papers, 335/4/I/65); Gilhooley to Cullen, 21 March 1873 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, 335/4/I/66).

[7] James Lydon, '"The silent sister": Trinity College Dublin and Catholic Ireland' in C. H. Holland (ed.), *Trinity College Dublin and the idea of a university* (Dublin, 1992), p. 39.

[8] John Walsh, 'Éamon de Valera, 1921–1975' in Tom Dunne *et al.* (eds), *The National University of Ireland, 1908–2008* (Dublin, 2008), pp 135–45.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Whyte, *Church and state,* pp 158–61.

[11] 'Report made to the Board of Trinity College on February 20 1947 by the Provost and Registrar' (T.C.D., MUN V/6/7, companion vol. 6, p. 1).

[12] *Irish Independent,* 31 May 1949; Maynooth had not received any state grant since the abolition of its parliamentary grant in 1869 but the college secured exchequer support from the first inter-party government in November 1950.

from this State'.[13] Most bishops were more circumspect in their public remarks than Browne, but his attack captured the sentiments of the Catholic hierarchy towards T.C.D. Browne's fusillade left no doubt that, whatever the government might do, the bishops had not relented in their hostility to Trinity College.

The hierarchy re-affirmed their policy as late as 1956, at the instigation of John Charles McQuaid, the archbishop of Dublin, a formidable exponent of integralist Catholicism. The bishops adopted a comprehensive regulation prohibiting the attendance of Catholics at Trinity College without the explicit permission of the archbishop.[14] Quoting his predecessor, Dr Edward Byrne, McQuaid referred to Trinity College in 1967 as a 'fortress of aggressiveness and ascendency'.[15] Trinity was vulnerable to such criticisms due to its extensive reliance on non-Irish students, which reached its height in the early post-war era. The college drew a majority of its students from outside the Irish state in the early 1960s, while almost half of the student population of 3,000 in 1962–3 was admitted from outside the island of Ireland.[16] This distribution was influenced by Trinity's international prestige and an influx of British students, including veterans of the global conflict, during the decade following the Second World War and could not be attributed simply to the ban. Yet the implementation of the ecclesiastical decrees against Trinity, pursued with renewed vigour during McQuaid's lengthy term as archbishop, had an undoubted impact in the mid-twentieth century, as Catholics accounted for only seventeen per cent of admissions in 1960.[17]

II

Tarlach Ó Raifeartaigh, the secretary of the Department of Education since 1958, enjoyed a close, collaborative relationship with McQuaid which was based on shared educational and religious values. Ó Raifeartaigh was a frequent correspondent with the archbishop and a welcome visitor to Archbishop's House in Drumcondra. When the secretary embarked on an inspection of institutions of higher education in the U.S.A. in 1961, McQuaid prepared a letter of introduction for Ó Raifeartaigh to the hierarchy in the United States which testified to his high regard for the senior official:

> May I be allowed to present Mr. O'Rafferty as one of the most reliable and best Catholic laymen that I have known. He is a scholar in his own right, but, better still, he has, without fear, defended the Church's teaching in international congresses and here in his own Department. We owe him a very great deal.[18]

[13] Ibid.; *Irish Times,* 31 May 1949.
[14] James Lydon, '"The silent sister"', pp 39–42.
[15] McQuaid to the Convent of the Holy Child, Killacoona, Killiney, 14 Dec. 1967 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, XVIII/38A/10).
[16] J. V. Luce, *Trinity College Dublin: the first 400 years* (Dublin, 1992), p. 183.
[17] Ibid., p. 196.
[18] McQuaid to U.S. cardinals and archbishops, 25 Mar. 1960 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, XVIII/38/200/6).

Ó Raifeartaigh was a leading adviser to four ministers (Jack Lynch, 1957–9; Patrick Hillery, 1959–65; George Colley, 1965–6; Donogh O'Malley, 1966–8) during an era of transformation in the Irish educational sector. While other officials were influential in shaping ministerial priorities, Ó Raifeartaigh was throughout this period the principal intermediary between successive ministers and the Catholic bishops at a time when ecclesiastical support (or at least reluctant acquiescence) was crucial to the acceptance of reforming policies. He took the lead on negotiations with the bishops on a variety of reforming policy initiatives, starting with the liberalisation of the school inspection regime in 1958, but was most influential in facilitating the introduction of comprehensive schools in 1966 and the implementation of free post-primary schooling in the following year.[19] The secretary was also the leading interlocutor on behalf of the state as politicians and officials sought to develop a coherent framework for the expansion of higher education, which emerged as a key policy focus for the first time from the early to mid-1960s. Ó Raifeartaigh's reputation as a devout Catholic layman and close connections with McQuaid proved invaluable to his political superiors over the course of a tumultuous decade.

McQuaid was deeply engaged in the negotiations on second-level education, due to his background as an educator, pivotal position as head of the largest metropolitan diocese in the state and pervasive knowledge of the traditional religious and educational networks whose collaboration was essential to reform at post-primary level. But the archbishop also enjoyed considerable influence at higher level, despite the formally non-denominational basis of the universities. McQuaid was effectively the hierarchy's specialist on higher education and maintained close relations with a network of current and former university leaders within the N.U.I., including Michael Tierney and his successor Prof. J. J. Hogan in U.C.D., Alfred O'Rahilly (president of University College Cork from 1943 to 1954) and Monsignor Pádraig de Brún (president of University College Galway, from 1945 to 1960). It was not surprising that both Ó Raifeartaigh and the ministers whom he advised treated McQuaid as an indispensable partner in attempting to initiate any new departure in university education.

III

The idea of merger, which emerged in the mid-twentieth century due in part to the frequently acrimonious debate over the future of U.C.D., initially provoked influential political and ecclesiastical opposition. Michael Tierney, president of U.C.D. (1947–64), championed the transfer of the entire college to a new suburban site at Belfield along the Stillorgan Road, a cause which defined his presidency. Tierney was a hugely controversial figure both within U.C.D. and in the political realm by the late 1950s. Association or even merger between Trinity and U.C.D. was presented by his opponents as an alternative to the Belfield project.[20] A close association between the two universities was

[19] John Walsh, *The politics of expansion*, pp 323–4; idem, 'Ministers, bishops and the changing balance of power in Irish education, 1950–70' in *I.H.S.*, xxxviii, no. 149 (May 2012), pp 108–27.

[20] Seán O'Connor, *A troubled sky: reflections on the Irish educational scene, 1957–1968* (Dublin, 1986), p. 46.

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mooted in March 1958 by John J. O'Meara, professor of classical languages at U.C.D. who argued that 'Dublin would have one of the greatest universities in the English-speaking world, if to the old and great tradition of Trinity College were joined the traditions of Newman's Catholic University.'[21] But Cardinal John D'Alton, archbishop of Armagh, issued a public warning against amalgamation of the universities only three months later, describing a merger between T.C.D. and U.C.D. as 'a union of incompatibles'.[22] Moreover, the transfer to Belfield received an official imprimatur in 1959 from a commission to examine accommodation needs for the N.U.I. established by de Valera's final government.[23] Trinity was excluded from its terms of reference and the cabinet explicitly rejected a plea from a member of the commission, Aodhogán O'Rahilly, to allow consideration of the option of amalgamation between Trinity and U.C.D.[24] Merger was outside the realm of practical politics in the late 1950s, not least due to the ecclesiastical ban on the attendance of Catholics at T.C.D. and the reluctance of influential political leaders, including de Valera, to contemplate a radical redrawing of the traditional landscape of higher education.

When the government's proposal to sanction the transfer of U.C.D. to Belfield came before the Dáil on 23 March 1960, Dr Patrick Hillery rejected amalgamation as a threat to the parental and religious freedoms guaranteed in Article 42 of the constitution, which required the state to respect the lawful preference of parents not to send their children to any educational institution in violation of their conscience.[25] The minister's statement to the Dáil was made in the context of the ecclesiastical condemnation of Trinity College, reiterated most recently by D'Alton. While Hillery emphasised that all four universities, including Trinity College, had their own unique role to play in national life, his statement implied that the religious acceptability of proposals for reform of higher education would be a key test in any debate on university integration. Hillery implicitly accepted the existing denominational divisions in higher education and avoided any challenge to ecclesiastical power expressed by the decrees against Trinity College.

Hillery's statement on higher education was drafted by Ó Raifeartaigh, his principal adviser on university affairs. The secretary consulted closely with McQuaid on the minister's statement and the proposal to transfer U.C.D. to Belfield. Despite the undoubted warmth of their relationship, this consultation with the archbishop was not a unilateral step by Ó Raifeartaigh, but occurred with the approval of the minister. McQuaid, as chairman of the episcopal commission on university education, wrote to the minister and the secretary on 24 March 1960 to offer his congratulations on Hillery's Dáil statement. The archbishop thanked Hillery for his courage, adding:

> Your treatment of the University question was succinct and objective, but especially just. I regard it as a document of unusual historic value.

[21] *Irish Times*, 28 Mar. 1958.
[22] *Irish Press*, 24 June 1958.
[23] *Report of the commission on accommodation needs of the constituent colleges of the National University of Ireland* (Dublin, 1959), pp 47–8.
[24] Decision slip, 'Commission on accommodation needs of university colleges: terms of reference', 14 Mar. 1958 (N.A.I., D/T S.16289).
[25] *Dáil Éireann deb.*, clxxx, 940–1 (23 Mar. 1960).

> For the first time a Government has stated in effect that the Catholics have a right to their own University education.[26]

McQuaid also praised Ó Raifeartagh in terms which left no doubt about the secretary's influential part in drafting the statement: 'For your share in securing our right to a Catholic education, I am very grateful.'[27] In his prompt response to the archbishop, Ó Raifeartaigh indicated the extent of the collaboration between the two men. The secretary paid tribute to McQuaid for his staunch advocacy of higher education for Catholics which both men saw as being vindicated by Hillery's statement:

> [Catholic higher education] has now been publicly and officially accepted, after its loss for more than four hundred years. For that position the credit is due, here below, in the very greatest part to yourself … With most respectful kind wishes and thanks for Your Grace's inspiration and guidance throughout …[28]

McQuaid's collaborative relationship with Ó Raifeartaigh testified less to overt ecclesiastical pressure than the pursuit of shared objectives rooted in a common world view defined by integralist Catholicism. While the development of the Belfield site was driven by Tierney's relentless lobbying, strong elite backing for the project and de Valera's influence, Hillery's statement was the product of collaboration between the secretary and the archbishop. The minister's carefully worded assertion that reform of university education must be acceptable to all religious denominations underscored the influence of Ó Raifeartaigh. The bishops did not determine the state's policy in favour of the transfer to Belfield, as the initiative commanded influential support within the political and administrative elite. But the opposition of the bishops to Trinity College effectively defined the acceptable parameters for policy; this created a highly favourable political context in which the Belfield campus was the path of least resistance for policy-makers.

Although the government established a new Commission on Higher Education in 1960 to undertake a comprehensive investigation of all aspects of higher education, the die was cast on the transfer of U.C.D. to Belfield, arguably the most far-reaching policy decision by an Irish government in higher education since 1922, which was excluded from the commission's terms of reference.[29] The commission subsequently recommended the dissolution of the N.U.I. to allow the establishment of its constituent colleges as independent universities on the same level as Trinity; they favoured maintaining the autonomy of both Trinity and U.C.D., while encouraging greater collaboration between them.[30] The commissioners also declined to make any substantive comment on the ecclesiastical regulation concerning T.C.D. on

[26] McQuaid to Patrick Hillery, 24 Mar. 1960 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, XVIII/38/200/3).
[27] McQuaid to Tarlach Ó Raifeartaigh, 24 Mar. 1960 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, XVIII/38/200/1).
[28] Ó Raifeartaigh to McQuaid, 24 Mar. 1960 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, XVIII/38/200/2).
[29] *Report of the Commission on Higher Education* (Dublin, 1967), pp 1–2.
[30] Ibid., pp 47–51.

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the basis that 'it would not be proper for us to pronounce on matters of conscience'.[31] But the lengthy deliberations of the commission, which did not report until February 1967, delayed the articulation of a coherent official policy towards higher education and diluted its own influence.

IV

Government policy towards higher education remained in transition for much of the following decade, but was abruptly transformed in the mid-1960s. Donogh O'Malley, who was appointed by Taoiseach Seán Lemass as minister for education in July 1966, favoured from the outset a radical restructuring of the traditional universities.[32] In the course of the debate surrounding the transfer of U.C.D. from Earlsfort Terrace to Belfield in 1960, O'Malley, then a backbench T.D., supported O'Rahilly in favouring an amalgamation between the two Dublin universities and criticised the U.C.D. 'junta' led by Tierney.[33] O'Malley enjoyed a favourable political and institutional environment to launch his initiative, created in part by the delay in the commission's report, frustration within the department at unplanned expansion in student numbers and Lemass's willingness to prioritise ambitious educational reforms. The new minister also benefited from an unacknowledged but valuable alliance with McQuaid, still the most influential prelate in the Irish state.

O'Malley submitted far-reaching proposals for the merger of Trinity College and U.C.D. to the cabinet on 15 December 1966. This memorandum, bluntly entitled 'The Problem of Trinity College Dublin', emphasised that T.C.D. was seeking substantial capital investment from the state at a time when the college still attracted a high proportion of non-Irish students.[34] The department was outraged at the decision by the board of T.C.D. in 1965 to expand the maximum student body from 3,000 to 4,000 students by 1970 'without consultation with the Minister for Education'.[35] Ó Raifeartaigh informed McQuaid privately that 'though Mr. Winkelman had been explicitly warned orally not to go beyond the figure of 3,000 students and had been told to await a written confirmation, he had not paid the slightest attention but increased the numbers. This was an action that could not be passed over.'[36] O'Malley was determined to end Trinity's semi-detached position within Irish society, which he attributed both to its own unaccountable elite and the policy of the Catholic bishops.[37] The official memorandum expressed bluntly his dissatisfaction with the college's dependence on British students: 'The Minister feels that we cannot allow a position to continue in which one University in Dublin would be allowed to remain apart from the main stream of the nation

[31] Ibid., p. 444.
[32] John Walsh, '"The problem of Trinity College Dublin"', pp 3–4. This piece is the most recent detailed exploration of the university merger.
[33] *Dáil Éireann deb*., clxxx, 966–78 (23 Mar. 1960).
[34] Department of Education memorandum, 'The problem of Trinity College Dublin', 15 Dec. 1966 (N.A.I., D/T 98/6/195, pp 1–3).
[35] Ibid., p. 1.
[36] McQuaid, 'T.C.D. and the Ministry – At Occasional functions in the autumn of 1966' (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, ABXVIII/38/212A/1). Franz Winkelman was the treasurer of Trinity College from 1962.
[37] 'The problem of Trinity College Dublin', p. 2.

and continue to recruit its student body to a large extent from foreigners.'[38] Both O'Malley and his senior officials were frustrated at the autonomy enjoyed by the board of Trinity, especially its control over admissions and ability to decide on expansion of student numbers apparently without reference to the department. The department singled out the traditional independence of Trinity's academic elite for particular criticism:

> The answer is not in anything that the Trinity authorities may be expected to do, for a body with absolute power has never been known willingly to abdicate it … If Trinity is really to fit into Irish life – and it can scarcely be done without, for it has the means of providing for up to 3,000 Irish students who will undoubtedly be seeking for university places which will not otherwise be available, – then it would appear to be necessary for its constitution and government organisation to be democratised in the same way as are those of the other University Colleges.[39]

The crucial impetus for merger was provided by O'Malley himself, who had no hesitation in sidelining the report of the commission. The detailed drafting of the memorandum fell mainly to Ó Raifeartaigh: much of its rhetoric and argument bore the hallmarks of the secretary's distinctive lay Catholic perspective. The dissatisfaction of the minister and senior officials at the de facto independence of the board of Trinity was a key catalyst for the merger and formed crucial common ground with McQuaid.

Merger was a notable reversal of policy by the government. Significantly, the departmental memorandum indicated confidence on the secretary's part that merger would be acceptable to the Catholic bishops, which could only have come from his personal connections with McQuaid: 'While possibly the ideal of the Catholic Church authorities would be to see a new University in Dublin an officially Catholic one, there is, as far as one may read, a strong current of opinion in the Church that a State-supported officially Catholic University is not in practice the best solution. For one thing there is always the danger of State interference in things that are not Caesar's.'[40] This was indeed McQuaid's view and ensured that he became the leading advocate for the initiative among the bishops.

The minister worked hard to secure McQuaid's support, which he correctly perceived as crucial to the acceptance of his initiative by the bishops. O'Malley consulted McQuaid well before any government decision was made: the minister met McQuaid, with the bishops of Down and Connor, Cork and Galway in November 1966, to brief them on his proposals. The archbishop noted that the initial meeting was followed by 'a long silence during which no document was given and our understanding was that a very strict secrecy was to be maintained'.[41] This was almost certainly due to the government's deferral of any decision until the publication of the commission's report in February 1967. But this caused only a brief delay in O'Malley's cherished project for merger. The minister spoke directly to McQuaid about his

[38] Department of Education memorandum, 9 March 1967 (N.A.I., D/T 98/6/195, p. 1).
[39] 'The problem of Trinity College Dublin', pp 11–12.
[40] Ibid., p. 23.
[41] McQuaid, 'T.C.D. and the Ministry', p. 1.

intentions at the opening of an extension to Synge Street secondary school on 25 January 1967. In handwritten notes which meticulously documented his discussions with O'Malley, McQuaid revealed both his strong interest in O'Malley's plan and his suspicion that Trinity would manage to derail it:

> Mr. Donogh O'Malley, the new Minister for Education, spoke to me of his determination to alter T.C.D. constitution and charter. I learned that he had the permission of the government to negotiate. At once I added: 'Permit me to say that you ought to be very clear about the points of negotiation. You are dealing with very subtle people.' 'They may have the subtlety, he answered, but I have the money'. Then he launched into a strong condemnation of Trinity and its spirit of irreligion. He would extinguish Trinity.[42]

This characteristically blunt avowal of his intentions by O'Malley helped to cement an informal, almost entirely unknown but profoundly influential alliance between the minister and archbishop in favour of the merger. McQuaid was convinced that the minister shared his hostility to Trinity College. While O'Malley might speak in public of the impossibility of subsidising duplication of two rival universities, McQuaid believed that 'In truth Mr O'Malley was also actuated by a deep opposition to Trinity as a non-Catholic, self-governing university. He genuinely disliked Trinity, but he was able to conceal his feelings in front of Trinity representatives.'[43] Ó Raifeartaigh played a crucial part in developing this alliance as O'Malley's intermediary to McQuaid. The archbishop noted that he had seen 'Dr. Ó Raifeartaigh several times in order to keep as closely in touch as possible.'[44] In fact McQuaid met the secretary on seven occasions between 18 January and 12 April 1967, in the run-up to the policy announcement by O'Malley on 18 April. This amounted to an exceptionally high level of engagement between the department and McQuaid, even at a time of very considerable ecclesiastical influence.

McQuaid was kept informed of the main features of the scheme and, more strikingly, was also briefed on at least some of the internal discussions within the government. Ó Raifeartaigh informed him that the government was reluctant 'to eliminate the ancient and venerable University of Trinity College' by a fusion between the two universities as O'Malley had originally intended. But the proposal for a merged university with two colleges was entirely acceptable to McQuaid. He recorded approvingly that 'The Scheme would break up the T.C.D. system of a private University, self governing and self perpetuating, according to the Letters Patent of 1911.'[45] Moreover, McQuaid kept the details of the negotiations secret from most of his fellow bishops, including Cardinal William Conway, archbishop of Armagh, until the merger was announced. When Conway argued at a meeting of the standing committee of the bishops in January 1967, which McQuaid was unable to attend, that the committee should have been informed about the meeting with the minister in

[42] Ibid.
[43] McQuaid, 'Memorandum to the bishops', 18–19 Sept. 1968 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, AB8/B/XXXIV).
[44] McQuaid, 'T.C.D. and the Ministry', p. 2.
[45] Ibid., p. 3.

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November, McQuaid disagreed, recording in his own notes that open discussion with his fellow prelates was counter-productive:

> There was no such obligation: our discussion was meant to be kept, most secret. Any reference could have gravely embarrassed the Minister and the Government in their dealings with T.C.D. and I would not trust any such highly secret information to any group of Bishops, at this crucial stage of negotiation.[46]

Apart from highlighting that the bishops were not a unified or monolithic group, McQuaid's determination to maintain secrecy underlined his growing hopes for the nascent initiative presented by O'Malley.

Following the submission of the report to the government, O'Malley secured the cabinet's approval on 31 March to open discussions with university leaders with the objective of creating a single University of Dublin encompassing the two colleges on a complementary basis.[47] O'Malley's initiative committed the government to the most radical restructuring of the institutional architecture of higher education since the foundation of the state. The announcement of the new policy was preceded by secret negotiations between the archbishop and the minister. Ó Raifeartaigh called to see McQuaid on Wednesday 12 April when they discussed the content and timing of the statement that O'Malley proposed to make. McQuaid noted that Ó Raifeartaigh 'gave me the document and what is more important, the text of a Press Conference of {2} foolscap pages'.[48] The archbishop advised Ó Raifeartaigh on how to approach the more contentious issues likely to arise, suggesting changes in the minister's speaking notes: in relation to the ecclesiastical ban on T.C.D., McQuaid urged that O'Malley should say 'not that … his plan would be "acceptable to all reasonable people" but "acceptable to parents and to the Church" thereby basing the answer on the natural and divine law and on the Irish Constitution. Dr O'R agreed at once'.[49] More significantly, the archbishop advised a change of language around how the minister would characterise the merged university: 'I suggested that the word "pluralist" be avoided in respect of the new university and the answer be multi-denominational, again basing the answer on the true dogmatic ground and on the Irish Constitution. Dr. Ó R. saw the point at once and agreed.'[50] McQuaid also advised more minor changes in the speaking notes, urging that instead of outlining a timeframe of ten or fifteen years for the transition to a single university in Dublin, the minister might simply say 'several years'. Ó Raifeartaigh agreed with almost all of McQuaid's suggestions, which did not involve any fundamental change in O'Malley's plans, but were designed to underline their consistency with Catholic social teaching.[51] The final meeting before the minister's announcement on 18 April underlined not only the exceptionally close relationship between McQuaid and Ó Raifeartaigh but perhaps more significantly the extent to which the

[46] Ibid., p. 2.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., p. 4.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

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archbishop was treated as an indispensable ally and partner in bringing about a major policy change.

Following a well-informed leak about his proposal in the *Sunday Press* on 9 April, O'Malley decided to delay his announcement, proposing to make a statement in the Senate on 26 April instead.[52] This strategy was also overtaken by events when a Dáil question was put down about the merger, provoking O'Malley to hold the press conference on 18 April after all: A. J. McConnell, the provost of Trinity and J. J. Hogan, his counterpart in U.C.D., were informed by the minister of the sweeping nature of his statement only on the morning of the press conference. O'Malley's statement was grounded in a pragmatic economic and political rationale for merger rather than any detailed educational arguments. The minister claimed that the state could not continue to subsidise 'avoidable duplication' of two rival universities in the same metropolitan area.[53] He also highlighted the cultural and political benefits of the merger for Irish society and T.C.D. itself, adding that 'Trinity is not going to pass away. It will be merely taking the final step across the threshold of that mansion to which it properly belongs, the Irish nation.'[54] This was a somewhat different portrayal of merger from the one presented to the bishops and highlighted O'Malley's subtlety in appealing to different audiences. Yet the influence of the archbishop was apparent in other aspects of the minister's statement. O'Malley emphasised the wishes of parents, as suggested by McQuaid, although he stopped short of stating that the plan should be acceptable to the church. O'Malley declared that the new university would not be neutral denominationally but 'multi-denominational'.[55] While O'Malley was careful not to challenge the bishops' position, he undoubtedly intended that the merger would circumvent the ban. But the minister's rejection of 'neutral' educational principles was reassuring to McQuaid, not least in the context of the Catholic church's long-term condemnation of 'godless' colleges, a category to which Trinity was consigned since Fawcett's act in 1873. O'Malley also promised that the new University of Dublin (a vision he presented for the future without a determined timeline, as suggested by McQuaid) would allow Catholic and Protestant schools of divinity and theology, which had not been permitted under the 1908 act establishing the N.U.I.

McQuaid was delighted by the outcome. Ó Raifeartaigh personally delivered three copies of the minister's statement to Archbishop's House on the evening of 18 April but did not disturb McQuaid who was otherwise engaged.[56] The archbishop quickly telephoned Ó Raifeartaigh to congratulate him in fulsome terms:

> I thanked him and congratulated him on an excellent statement which expanded the original statement and embodied well the points I had emphasised, especially on the multidenominational, not the neutral

[52] Ó Raifeartaigh to McQuaid, 17 Apr. 1967 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, AB XVIII/38/212A/2).

[53] Donogh O'Malley, 'University education in Dublin: statement of minister for education – 18 April 1967' in *Studies*, lvi, no. 2 (Summer 1967), p. 113.

[54] Ibid., p. 118.

[55] Ibid., pp 121–2.

[56] McQuaid, 'T.C.D. and the Ministry'.

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> aspect. He was very pleased and assured me the Minister would be delighted to have my opinion.[57]

When McQuaid received a letter from Peter Birch, bishop of Ossory, on 22 April 1967 congratulating him on his efforts, pursued in the interests of 'education and religion', the archbishop annotated in the margin of the letter:

> T.C.D. – U.C.D. Thank you. All that we can say is that we are launched. In what orbit we shall yet find ourselves, no one could predict. I think it is not realised what a revolutionary change is proposed. + J.C. 24.IV.67[58]

The launch of the merger was preceded by intensive engagement between O'Malley, Ó Raifeartaigh and McQuaid and the initiative was facilitated by a private understanding between the minister and the leading Catholic prelate in the state. McQuaid enjoyed extraordinary access to the department and was treated as a de facto participant in policy-making, in sharp contrast to the provost of Trinity or the U.C.D. administration who were simply informed of the policy change.

The alliance between the archbishop and the minister was all the more striking considering their real differences in personality and outlook. O'Malley was a flamboyant, impetuous figure, known for his willingness to shoot from the hip – very different from the careful, precise archbishop. The minister showed no indication of being concerned about 'the spirit of irreligion' in Trinity, which preoccupied McQuaid – significantly, many of his more inflammatory statements to McQuaid about Trinity were not repeated publicly or even to other government ministers and may well have been tailored to the prejudices of his ecclesiastical audience. Yet O'Malley was not simply motivated by economic objectives or attempting to curb 'duplication' of resources, which was a key issue for his officials. M. D. McCarthy, who had just been elected as president of U.C.C. (1967–78), was convinced that O'Malley was driven by a wider political and ideological rationale focusing on the anomalous position of T.C.D.:

> … the main reasons which motivated the Minister for Education … were basically neither economic nor educational but socio-political ... The fundamental reason for the whole exercise was, and is, I believe, the overwhelming necessity to ensure that Trinity College should become, in the fullest sense and as soon as possible, a truly Irish institution.[59]

McCarthy's interpretation fits well with the original rationale for merger set out by O'Malley in the memo of December 1966 – 'The problem of Trinity College Dublin' – and his private remarks to the archbishop. McQuaid and O'Malley found common ground in their shared distaste for the status quo in Trinity College. McQuaid wanted to break the power of Trinity's academic elite and erode the traditional identity of the 'Protestant university'. O'Malley also sought to curb the board's autonomy, so that Trinity would be

[57] Ibid.
[58] Birch to McQuaid, 22 Apr. 1967 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, XVIII/38/212a/7).
[59] M. D. McCarthy, 'The university situation in Dublin', n.d. (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, AB8/B/XXXIV – Universities: U.C.D.–T.C.D. merger).

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transformed into a genuinely 'Irish institution' which would be responsive to government decisions and policies and no longer an 'enclave' serving mainly non-Irish students.[60] The convergence between them was more a pragmatic accommodation than an understanding based on shared values of the kind which united McQuaid and Ó Raifeartaigh, but it proved crucial in transforming the public debate on higher education.

The collaboration between McQuaid and O'Malley continued in the months following the policy announcement, as the archbishop became the leading advocate for merger within the hierarchy. The discussions between the minister and the Catholic bishops on the merger were remarkably harmonious, considering that both the government and the bishops were effectively reversing their previous opposition to merger. When O'Malley and Ó Raifeartaigh met the episcopal committee on university education in Archbishop's House on 2 May 1967 to discuss the details of the merger, McQuaid recorded that: 'The discussion was very friendly … A delightful conference.'[61] O'Malley and the bishops agreed on the importance of a single central authority for the university: 'there must be one university and one authority, the Senate, while the governing bodies would be merely administrative'.[62] The unitary constitution of the new entity was crucial to McQuaid, who saw a strong senate with a majority of Catholic nominees as the only means of ending Trinity's influence and guaranteeing that the new institution would protect the Catholic faith. When O'Malley expressed optimism that the 'commingling' of students would give the Catholic students complete dominance within five years, the bishops dissented, warning of 'the weak Irish Catholics who would show their tolerance by yielding to Protestants'.[63] It was a revealing admission that enforcement of the ban was an expression of weakness rather than strength. The bishops feared the corrupting influence of Trinity on fallible young Catholics and placed no reliance on lay Catholics to uphold their beliefs in secular or irreligious surroundings – a consistent rationale for ecclesiastical condemnation of 'godless' colleges which could be traced back to the original decrees issued by Cardinal Cullen in the mid-nineteenth century.[64]

Yet McQuaid was well aware that the ban itself had a finite lifespan and this was a key factor in his support for merger. When he offered the hierarchy a detailed brief on the government plan for merger in September 1968, the archbishop noted that the ban was already being undermined: 'The entrance of Catholics is certain to increase. Already Catholics have in large numbers been treating our Statute as non-existent … in a matter of years the majority of T.C.D. students will be Irish and Catholic.'[65] He warned the hierarchy that in the absence of a merger Trinity would continue to be 'self-governing, self

[60] 'The problem of Trinity College Dublin', p. 10.

[61] McQuaid. 'Personal notes' (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, AB8/B/XXXIV, pp 1–2). The meeting was attended by McQuaid, William Philbin (Down and Connor), Michael Browne (Galway) and Cornelius Lucey (Cork) – the same group as the meeting in November.

[62] Ibid., p. 2.

[63] Ibid., p. 2.

[64] *The pastoral letters and other writings of Cardinal Cullen*, ed. Patrick Moran (3 vols, Dublin, 1882), i, 31.

[65] McQuaid, 'Memorandum to the bishops', 18–19 Sept. 1968.

perpetuating and in its control, non-Catholic'.[66] The archbishop saw that the ban could not be maintained indefinitely, but was determined to exact an acceptable price if it was to be consigned to history. Commenting on this issue in a letter to Ó Raifeartaigh in June 1967, McQuaid emphasised the importance of ensuring the preservation of the Catholic faith in a merged university which would involve a division of disciplines between the two colleges:

> If each student is directed to a college, I wonder what guarantees can we have that T.C.D. will now be safe for Catholics. People talk lightly of 'removing the ban'. That is a foolish statement: it is rather a question of securing conditions favourable to the preservation and practice of the faith.[67]

McQuaid was willing to remove the ban provided that Trinity was itself transformed by breaking down the traditional independence of its academic elite and bringing it under a strong central university authority, in which Catholics would have a majority and U.C.D. would be the stronger partner.

The bishops generally followed McQuaid's lead in their response to the merger. The hierarchy issued a statement on 20 June 1967 which did not explicitly support the merger but welcomed O'Malley's efforts to achieve 'a satisfactory solution' of this problem, while entering a proviso that any sound system of university education had to respect 'the fundamental religious and moral principles of our people'.[68] This statement effectively gave a green light to the minister, particularly in the context of the stern opposition of leading bishops to amalgamation less than a decade earlier.[69] O'Malley's statement received an almost universally positive response across the political and religious spectrum, drawing praise from the Church of Ireland archbishop of Dublin, George Otto Simms, and Cornelius Lucey, Catholic bishop of Cork.[70]

While the announcement was a public relations triumph for the minister, negotiation of the terms of implementation proved much more problematic. Both O'Malley and McQuaid underestimated the resilience of academic elites determined to maintain their autonomy.[71] The different reactions of the provost of Trinity College and the U.C.D. authorities underlined a deep divergence between the two institutions. McConnell commented that Trinity would 'look to the Minister's plans with the utmost sympathy' while looking forward to the development of a single two-college university on the basis of the minister's proposals.[72] The governing body of U.C.D. also welcomed the

[66] Ibid.
[67] McQuaid to Ó Raifeartaigh, 11 June 1967 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, XVIII/38/212a/11).
[68] Ó Raifeartaigh, 'Towards a satisfactory outcome of the forthcoming negotiations on the U.C.D.–T.C.D. Merger', 10 Apr. 1968 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, XVIII/38A/18/2).
[69] Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: the undoing of a culture* (Dublin, 2002), pp 187–8.
[70] *Irish Press,* 19 Apr. 1967.
[71] 'Amalgamation of Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin' (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, XVIII/38A/1–25).
[72] *Irish Times,* 19 Apr. 1967.

minister's proposals in principle but sought 'a complete unification of the two institutions'.[73] This statement represented the first hint of discord, which did not augur well for the success of his initiative, as the government had already rejected a complete fusion of the two Dublin universities as 'an appallingly bad decision'.[74] Fundamental divisions emerged over the structure of a merged university from the outset of the debate. While college leaders such as McConnell couched their reservations about a unitary university in diplomatic language, other influential voices bluntly rejected the unitary authority endorsed by U.C.D. and assiduously promoted by McQuaid in his private discussions with the minister, officials and university leaders. T. W. Moody, professor of modern history at T.C.D. and a former member of the Commission on Higher Education, warned that only a two-college structure stood any chance of acceptance by the college's staff: 'There being no death-wish in T.C.D., it will resist a unitary university to the utmost'.[75] Moody's trenchant opposition was representative of the climate of opinion among the academic staff, even if the board took a more conciliatory line. If McQuaid could visualise the potential of the merger to absorb Trinity into a single institution with a predominantly Catholic ethos, his critics in Trinity were no less aware of the threat to their position.

V

Negotiations were initiated between the two institutions but soon broke down over the thorny issue of the allocation of faculties between the two colleges. The hierarchy had no effective input into the formal negotiations, which were conducted between the two academic negotiating teams with Ó Raifeartaigh as chairman. Indeed the bishops were not always in agreement among themselves. William Philbin, bishop of Down and Connor, wrote to McQuaid in February 1968 to comment on newspaper reports about a proposal floated by the U.C.D. negotiators which placed the entire arts faculty in Trinity but gave U.C.D. almost all other faculties. Philbin believed that there was a strong case for this solution, which marked a change of position by the U.C.D. negotiators in January 1968.[76] McQuaid, however, was firmly opposed to this initiative by U.C.D., warning Hogan in September 1968 that 'you would make an immense sacrifice in allowing the Arts Faculty to be set up only in Trinity'.[77] He went further in a confidential report to the bishops written on 18–19 September, describing the proposal as 'an astounding surrender, it seems to me, if one considers the history of Universities'.[78] McQuaid enjoyed amicable relations with both Hogan, who kept him informed of the progress of negotiations with Trinity, and his predecessor, Tierney, but the archbishop's ability to influence the U.C.D. negotiators was limited. The board of Trinity, in any event, rejected U.C.D.'s proposal, instead insisting on its own plan which would have kept most arts and social science disciplines in

[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] T. W. Moody, 'Comment' in *Studies*, lvi, no. 2 (Summer 1967), pp 173–5.
[76] Philbin to McQuaid, 23 Feb. 1968 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, AB8/XVIII/38A/24).
[77] McQuaid to Hogan, 28 Sept. 1968 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, AB8/B/XXXIV).
[78] McQuaid, 'Memorandum to the bishops', 18–19 Sept. 1968.

T.C.D. – perhaps not surprisingly, each governing body ultimately determined that only its own plan for merger was acceptable.[79] James Meenan, one of U.C.D.'s negotiators, commented that the negotiations were conducted in good faith on each side but amounted to 'an attempt to square a circle'.[80]

The untimely death of Donogh O'Malley in March 1968 deprived the initiative of its most determined advocate. Yet O'Malley's death did not disturb the convergence of interests between the department and the hierarchy over merger. Ó Raifeartaigh remained the leading official adviser on higher education to O'Malley's successor, Brian Lenihan, first as secretary of the department and later as the first chairman of the Higher Education Authority (H.E.A.), which was established on a non-statutory basis in September 1968. Ó Raifeartaigh kept in close contact with McQuaid, briefing the archbishop on the abortive negotiations between the colleges and the official attempts to salvage the merger. The failure of the negotiations left the initiative with the government and Lenihan produced his own plan for a detailed redistribution of faculties on 6 July 1968. The government's latest plan allocated most professional faculties, including law, medicine, and dentistry, solely to Trinity, while giving social science, engineering, and commerce to U.C.D.[81] McQuaid staunchly supported Lenihan's plan in his report to the bishops on 18–19 September 1968. The archbishop emphasised its advantages for protecting the Catholic faith through a strong central authority in which U.C.D. would have the strongest voice: 'The Government's plan would for the first time give control over appointments in Trinity to a body in which Catholics would be in the majority and which would be guided by Christian principles.'[82] McQuaid's position was consistent with his long-term hostility to Trinity and his conviction that its continuation in its traditional form undermined the Catholic faith. He posited a stark choice for his fellow bishops, warning that only the government's plan for a merged university would prevent Trinity from becoming a magnet for middle-class Catholics, resulting in great harm to the faith:

> The choice is therefore between a Trinity free and independent to go its own way in perpetuity with its control and staff in majority non-Catholic but the majority of its students Catholic and with ample means of attracting the elite of Irish youth or its control and appointments under majority Catholic control and its standard and conditions for entry precisely the same as those for the other Colleges.[83]

This admirably summed up the integralist Catholic case for merger, informed by McQuaid's clear-sighted realisation that the ban was unsustainable in the long-term and that the absorption of Trinity into a new university framework in Dublin offered the best hope of diluting its non-denominational character. The collective response of the bishops to McQuaid's appeal is not recorded,

[79] Ibid.
[80] James Meenan, 'The university in Dublin' in *Studies*, lvii, no.3 (Autumn 1968), p. 317.
[81] McQuaid, 'Memorandum to the bishops', 18–19 Sept. 1968.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

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but certainly the hierarchy made no attempt to obstruct the minister's plans, suggesting that most bishops were willing to follow McQuaid's lead.

McQuaid's logic had no attraction, however, to the academic authorities in U.C.D., despite their own traditional devotion to the institutional church and Catholic social teaching. Hogan submitted a scathing critique of Lenihan's plan to the minister on 17 September 1968, questioning whether 'the Government decision is wise or in the national interest'.[84] The governing body of U.C.D. also emphatically rejected the government plan, claiming that it amounted to 'the partial destruction and total discouragement' of U.C.D. as a university institution.[85] The loss of medicine (the original core of the Catholic university) and law was widely considered to be unacceptable within U.C.D. and Lenihan's plans were decisively rejected by various faculties, as Meenan highlighted in a *Studies* article in September 1968: 'It could be said with great truth that University College has never been so united about any issue throughout its existence as it is about this.'[86] The governing body's determination to retain law and medicine contrasted with McQuaid's pragmatic judgement that U.C.D. had more to gain by securing social sciences – 'a very serious gain for Catholic students and a growth point of such influence and importance to the country that … T.C.D. has been fighting with intense perseverance to retain some Social Science'.[87] In this instance, however, the interests of academic elites, including staunchly Catholic university leaders, diverged sharply from the priorities of the archbishop.

The academic authorities of each college ultimately found common ground in their mutual distaste for the government plan for merger. The N.U.I.–T.C.D. agreement, an unprecedented accord between the board of Trinity and the authorities of the National University of Ireland in April 1970, proposed the retention of two independent universities in Dublin, albeit with greatly enhanced collaboration and even rationalisation of their activity.[88] Ironically the government initiative had at least temporarily brought together previously antagonistic elements of a professional elite, who were alarmed at such a striking assertion of power by the political centre, to block the merger itself.[89] The H.E.A. effectively endorsed this institutional entente in its report on university reorganisation in December 1971, when the authority accepted that there should be two separate universities in Dublin.[90] The merger was quietly shelved by political and official elites and institutional restructuring of the major universities was deferred indefinitely.

The N.U.I.–T.C.D. agreement was followed closely by the removal of the 'ban' itself. The proportion of Catholic entrants to T.C.D. was increasing in the mid- to late-1960s – a fact which was not lost on McQuaid. The

[84] Hogan to Lenihan, 17 Sept. 1968 (D.D.A., McQuaid papers, AB8/B/XXXIV).
[85] Memorandum, 'The Case for University College Dublin' (N.A.I., D/T/2000/6/655, S.18347B, p. 15).
[86] Meenan, 'The university in Dublin', pp 314–15.
[87] McQuaid, 'Memorandum to the bishops', 18–19 Sept. 1968.
[88] H.E.A., *Report to the minister for education on university reorganisation* (Dublin, 1972), pp 83–7.
[89] John Walsh, '"The problem of Trinity College Dublin"', pp 5–19. This article offers greater detail on the collaboration envisaged in the N.U.I./T.C.D. agreement and the very limited collaboration which ultimately ensued.
[90] H.E.A., *University reorganisation*, p. 59.

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archbishop's support for merger owed a great deal to his fear that the ecclesiastical ban was ultimately untenable. Martin O'Donoghue, a lecturer in the T.C.D. economics department, argued that the ministerial announcement of merger triggered 'a flood of applications from Catholics almost immediately'.[91] Yet the increasing attraction of T.C.D. to middle-class Catholics was also the product of wider cultural change associated with the Second Vatican Council and the transformation of economic and educational policies during the 1960s. The council in particular had a profound influence on Irish Catholicism, contributing to a decline of traditional attitudes of deference among lay Catholics and to some extent clergy towards the bishops.[92] Both departmental and internal Trinity records indicated that Catholics formed approximately half of the first year entrants to the college by 1969–70.[93] The Catholic bishops withdrew their long-standing regulation restricting the entry of Catholics to Trinity College in June 1970, citing positive developments such as the announcement of the proposed merger, which held out the prospect of 'a new Trinity College'.[94] Yet, as Fuller notes, the bishops were also responding to changing attitudes among lay Catholics, as the ban was 'increasingly being ignored' by the late 1960s.[95] The appeal of Trinity to middle-class Catholics had already decisively undermined the ban, as McQuaid had foreseen two years earlier.

VI

The extensive interaction between political and official elites and the Catholic bishops offers a fascinating insight to the complex and sometimes tortuous process of policy formulation during an era of transformation in higher education. The transfer of U.C.D. to Belfield occurred within a cultural and political context in which the power of the Catholic bishops largely defined the options available to politicians and officials. The abortive merger offers a much more complex and revealing portrayal of political, official and ecclesiastical collaboration in a major policy initiative. O'Malley and McQuaid found common ground in producing an initiative which transformed previous state policies towards university education. This did not mean that their aims and values were always consistent – there is no indication that O'Malley was greatly concerned about the religious aspect of the debate which was central to McQuaid. But the common ground they shared was more significant than any differences – both men wanted to see Trinity fundamentally transformed and sought to break the power of its governing elite. McQuaid was influential in formulating O'Malley's statement and gave the minister the vital assurance of powerful ecclesiastical support.

[91] Interview with Martin O'Donoghue (10 Jan. 2005).
[92] Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, pp 201–4.
[93] Ó Raifeartaigh, 'Briefing note, meeting of the Taoiseach with the N.U.I. Senate deputation on Thursday, 6 February 1969' (N.A.I., D/T/2000/6/655, S.18347B, pp 2–3); Luce, *Trinity College Dublin*, p. 197; F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1973), p. 655.
[94] Minutes, General meeting of the Irish hierarchy, 22–24 June 1970 (D.D.A., AB8/B/XV/b/07, p. 5); Fuller, *Irish Catholicism*, p. 188.
[95] Fuller, *Irish Catholicism*, p. 188.

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McQuaid maintained exceptional access to policy-makers – both ministers and officials – and was an indispensable partner in launching a major new policy departure by the government.

Whyte's seminal study on church–state relations pointed to a more flexible approach by the hierarchy and particularly an openness to educational reforms involving a greater role for the state in education during the 1960s.[96] Yet the evidence of the extensive contacts between McQuaid and O'Malley suggest that such an interpretation both underestimates the reality of continuing ecclesiastical power and misunderstands how such power was being exercised. Leading prelates, particularly McQuaid, were pursuing tenaciously a traditional Catholic religious and socio-political agenda in higher education, which sought not so much to accommodate new official initiatives as to achieve the opposite result by shaping such reforms in the ideological direction favoured by the bishops. The adaptation by most bishops to new policies reflected an attempt to pursue long-term objectives grounded in Catholic social teaching through more pragmatic means than previously. The position taken by the bishops, influenced by McQuaid, on the merger underlined their willingness to facilitate reforms but only on terms which advanced their traditional interests – in this instance the merger was perceived as the most effective means to curb the autonomy of Trinity College and reshape the university framework to offer greater security for the higher education of Catholics. McQuaid was correct about the 'revolutionary' implications of the initiative. If the three main actors in the intricate church–state negotiations – O'Malley, McQuaid and Ó Raifeartaigh – had succeeded in their ambitious endeavour to reshape the universities, the traditional architecture of university education in the Irish state would have been transformed. Unfortunately for the shared ambitions of ministers and bishops, academic elites in both institutions proved unreceptive to their grand design and were powerful enough to block it. The outcome underlined that even an agreement between the Catholic bishops and a newly interventionist government could not guarantee radical institutional reform in the face of universities which staunchly defended their autonomy and traditional institutional structures.

The collaboration between O'Malley, McQuaid and Ó Raifeartaigh was crucial in making merger a credible policy option but assumed too readily that consensus between the top levels of church and state could deliver a new university settlement. The secret negotiations which facilitated O'Malley's initiative and McQuaid's close collaboration with Ó Raifeartaigh underlined that the merger, to a far greater extent than was previously understood, was not a unilateral manoeuvre by O'Malley but a co-operative venture involving the minister, senior officials and the most powerful Catholic prelate in the Irish state. Yet the ultimate failure of merger, closely linked to the decline of traditional denominational divisions in higher education, reflected the limits to the power of the bishops in a rapidly changing society.[97]

[96] Whyte, *Church and state*, p. 17.

[97] We wish to express our thanks and sincere appreciation to the archivist Ms Noelle Dowling, and the staff of the Dublin Diocesan Archives, for their help and support in accessing the McQuaid papers.