



THE Icon of Edmund Rice

The Icon Tradition



In the Eastern Christian Church, from very early times, the life stories of holy people were passed on from generation to generation.

ICONS made of splendid materials and painted in rich colours were designed to tell the stories of the saints through illustrations. Various symbols were used in the icons to highlight events which were of special importance in the life of the holy person.

Learning from these stories and illustrations, people drew inspiration from the lives of the saints whom they venerated and strove to imitate in their own lives.

The icons were often stylized rather than realistic as in this example, *“Virgin and Child enthroned with Angels and Saints”*.

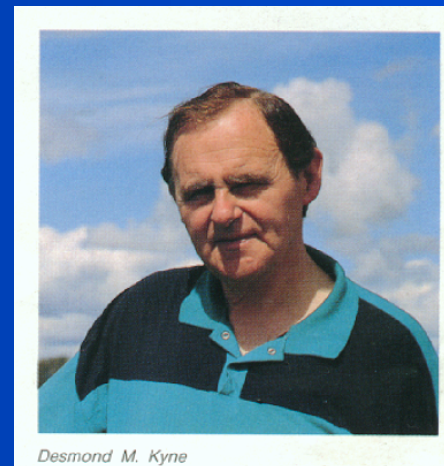
A Modern Iconographer

Byzantium was the ancient name for Istanbul.

It was once the capital of a great Empire which lasted from about 330 to 1453 A.D.

Iconography - the art of drawing and painting icons - flourished in the Byzantine Empire about a thousand years ago.

Ireland also has many beautiful religious paintings dating from early Christian times, those found in the Book of Kells being the best known.



The Irish artist, **Desmond M. Kyne**, is one of only a few who today practise a modern style of iconography. His work closely follows the principles of Byzantine and Celtic iconography but with a modern approach. He skilfully balances and unites story-telling and symbolism.

Many of the Byzantine icons were painted on wood or fresh plaster, or are mosaics - made up of thousands of tiny, coloured tiles.

Desmond Kyne uses kinetic stained glass as his medium. Unlike traditional stained glass, this medium reflects light rather than transmitting it, a myriad of surfaces capturing and fracturing the light with brilliant effect.

Creating beautiful, subtle light patterns with his medium, Mr. Kyne has written icons of Our Lady of Knock, Nano Nagle, and Pope John Paul II as well as the icon of Edmund Rice.



The Edmund Icon

In the Edmund icon, Desmond Kyne helps us to realise the faith and love of Edmund Rice, to appreciate his achievements and his greatness. The icon must be viewed not only with the physical eye but also with the eye of the spirit. We can follow Edmund's story as it unfolds and explore through the symbols the joy and pain, energy and stillness, success and failure, agony and ecstasy which were all present in his life..

Exploring the detail of the icon, as we do in the following frames, may help the viewer to a fuller appreciation of Edmund Rice and of the artist's vision of his subject.

It is not possible to capture the quality and power of Desmond Kyne's work in photographs. One must view the original icons to really experience them.



1. The Central Panel

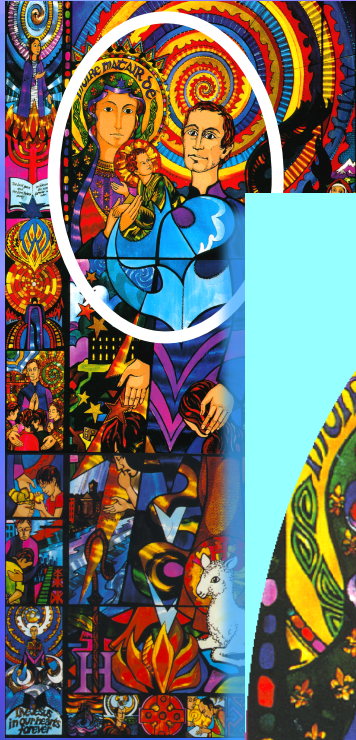
The Mystery of the Blessed Trinity

The place of Mary in Edmund's life

Family ties, the Church, the successful businessman, the disadvantaged

The early Brothers and the first monastery

The evil influences overshadowing the land



Edmund's relaxed yet intent expression commands our attention.

His eyes, kind and compassionate, look to the horizon.

A great spiral, the ancient Celtic symbol of divinity and infinity, the beginning that never was and the ending that shall never be, surrounds Edmund's head.

God the Father is symbolised in the wheeling circle afire with the flame of love.

Edmund is enveloped in the mystery of the Trinity, above him the Father, beside him the Son, within him the Holy Spirit.



The prominent position of Mary in the icon suggests the special place she held in Edmund's life.



In representing Mary the artist drew inspiration from early images of the Eastern Church, from traditional Celtic images and from the icon revered in the Polish city of Czestochowa.

Trust and expectation are suggested in the direct way the child Jesus looks at Edmund.



There is darkness in the icon in the malevolent spirit which hangs threateningly over the goodness of the people and their land.



And there is fear, too - the serpent symbolises the power of evil



Edmund's left hand caresses his handicapped daughter, Mary, and draws her close to him.

She is a central figure in the mystery and meaning of suffering and disability.



With his right hand Edmund reaches beyond his own family to a distressed boy who represents a multitude of poor, illiterate and disadvantaged children.

The power of God working through Edmund is symbolised by the lightning.



At Edmund's feet are symbols of God's blessing: the seven-tongued flame of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here also is the Lamb of God, an image of serenity and sacrifice.

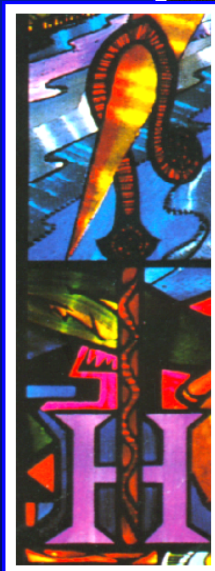


In the background of the main panel are:

Mount Sion,
its
lighted
windows
symbol-
ising
hope



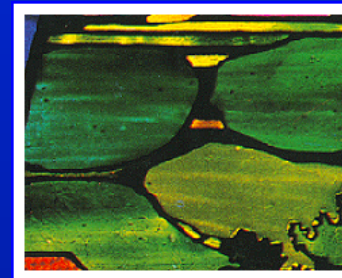
The seven
stars
representing
Edmund's
early
companions
in
mission



The site of Edmund's
business activities
in Waterford



The importance of the
support of Bishop Hussey



The four provinces of
Ireland



Edmund's home and his
early instruction in spiritual
things.



2. The Right Panel

For the greater glory of God

St. Teresa of Avila

Nano Nagle

The Heart of Christ

The Family Rosary

Community Life

Scholarship



A.M.D.G.

*Ad Majorem Dei
Gloriam
(For the greater
glory of God)*

This is the motto of the
Jesuits, who influenced
Edmund in many ways,
It is also the motto
of his
Presentation
Brothers

Edmund and St. Teresa of Avila were similar in their spirituality and in the practical expression of their faith and love of God.

Teresa is shown with one of her writings,

“The Interior Castle.”

At her shoulder are her symbols for God and His action - mountains, rain and river.





Nano Nagle was the foundress of the Presentation Sisters.

She, and the early Sisters, were a great source of inspiration for Edmund.

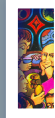
The lantern she carries is the symbol of her great charity - she and Edmund were mother and father to the poor.

Below Nano is the symbol of the Heart of Christ, its spirals signifying the spiritual energy of the risen Christ and encompassing the Cross.



The scene of the family Rosary, a traditional and rich Irish devotion, shows Margaret Rice, Edmund's mother, leading her children in prayer.

The spiral symbolising the Divinity is at the centre of the family circle.



Community life,
good neighbourliness,
was of great importance
to Edmund.

An old Irish proverb
comes to mind:

*“Ar scáth a chéile a
mhaireann na daoine”*

*“It is in the shelter of
one another that
people live.”*



Scholarship
is suggested
by a window
from a
monastery
in the
Aran Islands,
a nursery
of learning.



3. The Base Panel

The Irish
missionary monks

Saint Colmcille

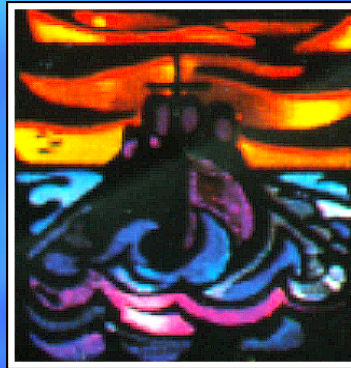
The Celtic cross

The scholar monk

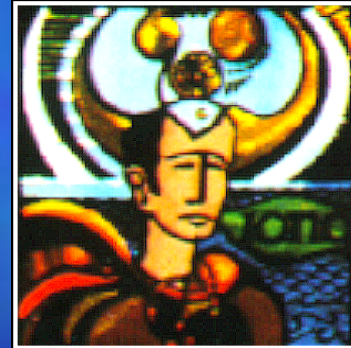
Musical tradition



A series of images at the base of the icon symbolise the Ireland of saints and scholars and the rich spiritual heritage from which Edmund drew inspiration.



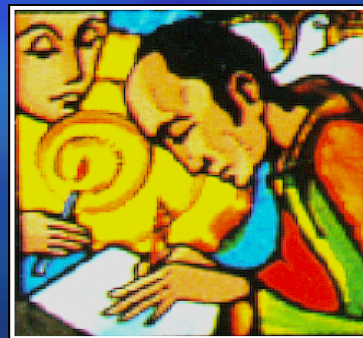
the Irish
missionary
monks



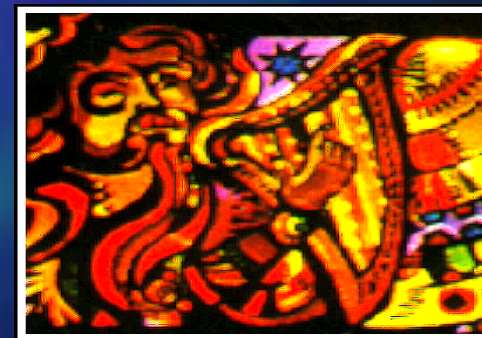
Saint
Colmcille



the
Celtic
cross



the scholar monk



the musical tradition

4. The Left Panel

The Presentation of
Our Lady

Edmund in prayer

Christ in the classroom

Human need

Human tragedy

Edmund transfigured





The left panel begins with the Presentation of Mary.

Through Nano Nagle, this mystery influenced Edmund greatly.

Mary, the finest flower of the Old Testament, moves towards her destiny within the oval-shaped aureole (symbol of virginity and holiness), the Cross of her Son barely visible at its centre.

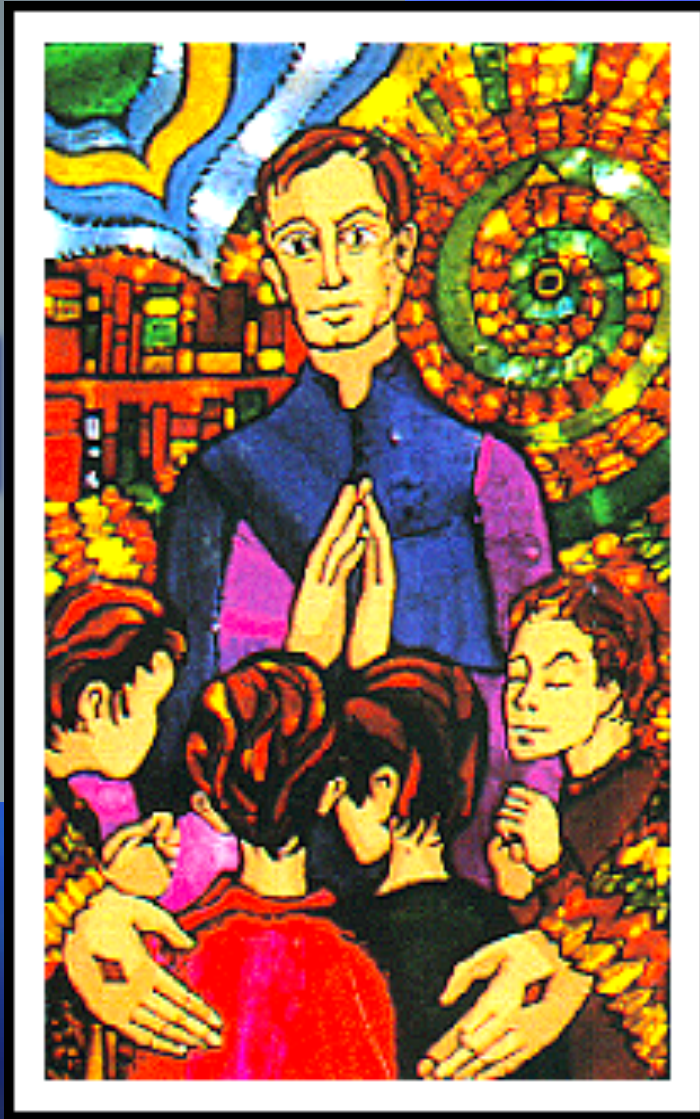
A text which touched Edmund deeply is on the open Scriptures.

*"The Lord gave
and the Lord taketh away,
so blessed be His name
for ever and ever."*



Edmund in prayer before the living God.

The star of David and the seven tongues of fire representing the gifts of the Holy Spirit draw our eyes downwards to the humble figure of Edmund wrapt in prayer before the Blessed Eucharist. The spiral of the Divinity, aflame with love, surrounds the Host.



The man of deep spirituality is also the man of down-to-earth practicality.

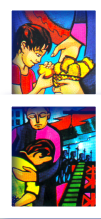
Edmund finds Christ in the classroom as easily as in the Eucharist.

His vision of the future for his poor boys shines in his eyes and radiates from his posture.

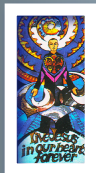
As in so many other images in the icon, symbols of the Trinity permeate this classroom scene.



The scenes of the bakehouse and the gallows indicate Edmund's compassionate response to human need and human tragedy.



Truly, he opened his whole heart to Christ, present and appealing to him in the poor.

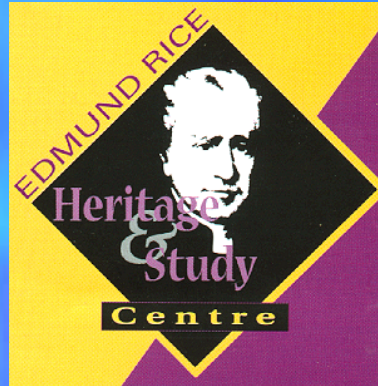


In the final image Edmund is seen transfigured, united with the Trinity, his mission fulfilled, the world he served blessed with his favourite prayer,

“Live, Jesus, in our hearts, forever.”



For the icon of Edmund, we are indebted to Br. Titus Coffey C.F.C. who, when Provincial in England in the early 'eighties, stimulated interest in the project among the Brothers; to Br. Ligouri Gillespie C.F.C, the present Provincial who, in collaboration with Desmond Kyne, ensured that the planning became a reality; and to the late Br. Leonard O'Toole C.F.C, whose knowledge and love of Edmund influenced the content and form of the icon.



Mardyke House, Mardyke, Cork

August 20th 1999