

There is an elegiac quality to his final paragraphs, where he observes that ‘what has been lost [within contemporary Presbyterianism] is a distinctively Irish and Presbyterian intellectual culture in which conservative religious ideas mattered and were often articulated with dignity and ability’ (p. 239). It is entirely in keeping with his uniformly calm, restrained and judicious approaches that Dr Holmes otherwise resists the temptation to pursue any overt comparison between the sophisticated leadership community which he anatomises so skilfully and its latter-day successors. For them in particular this superb volume should be required reading.

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BEGGING, CHARITY AND RELIGION IN PRE-FAMINE IRELAND. By Ciarán McCabe. Pp 320. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 2019. £29.95.

Ciarán McCabe has written an insightful account of begging, charity and religion in pre-Famine Ireland. Containing seven chapters, a substantial introduction and extensive bibliography, the author has engaged with a rich variety of primary sources that offer fresh perspectives on poverty, charity, religious responses and attitudes in the early nineteenth century, highlighting the similarities and differences between various social groups that go beyond the 1838 Poor Law Act and giving voice to the poor, who previously tended to have walk-on parts in the historiography of pre-Famine Ireland.

The collapse of cottage industries in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars saw the formerly industrious poor resort to begging. The politicisation of poverty in Ireland saw various denominations develop distinct approaches and attitudes towards poverty with the concept of virtuous poverty seen to be important and a hierarchy of merit among the poor, though religious sentiment appeared to colour acts of charity. McCabe stresses the importance of social class, gender, rural and urban ideas around alms-giving as well as religion, and poses the question as to whether there were actually different interpretations of poverty between religious denominations. The Whatley Commission into poverty offered great insight, coming in at a whopping 5,000 pages that contained unparalleled information on social and economic conditions in pre-Famine Ireland. Contemporaries remarked that vagrants and beggars were beyond enumeration because there were so many. The government tried but struggled properly to come to terms with poverty and chronicles of Ireland in the nineteenth century commented upon the ubiquity of poverty.

McCabe examines the changing use of the terms beggar and mendicant, while aware of the importance of finding appropriate definitions and nomenclature. The dubious nature of vagrancy laws meant that authorities could use the ambiguity of these terms to their advantage. McCabe argues that arrests have often been used to measure the levels of begging and vagrancy but this is problematic and inadequate in measuring mendicancy. Statistics gathered were largely impressionistic and McCabe has stated that the large-scale mobility of the poor was always a challenge in measuring poverty as mendicants were mobile strangers that engaged in face-to-face interactions.

There were also benevolent and sympathetic views that tended to be wrapped up in the unctuous language of paternalism. Contemporaries stated that a lot of poverty was hidden and there were social and moral obligations in giving alms. Vagrants’ visibility shocked people and their visceral state particularly concerned wealthy people. The Dublin Mendicity Institution paraded the poor and beggars through the streets when times were bad in order to both remind and shame the wealthy. These institutions were seen by the commercial classes as a good way of controlling and removing beggars from public view. Furthermore, the harsh treatment of vagrants and beggars was a form of self-defence that appealed to middle class senses of respectability that also allowed for the demonisation of the lumpenproletariat.

Both Catholic and Protestant interpretations of philanthropy focused upon an active and living faith. McCabe shows that there were really very few differences between Catholic and

Protestant distribution of relief – the same compassion, perspectives, biases and discrimination was on display. There was an ultra-Protestant belief that Catholics were indiscriminate in their alms-giving that stemmed from religious tensions during the 1810s, and the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars and the 1822 famine. The better-off classes saw alms-giving to be a sacred duty to the poor, though there were those that believed there were deserving and undeserving across the religious denominations. There was inter-religious cooperation in the relief of the poor and this was particularly important outside of cities where it was hoped that intimate local knowledge possessed by the clergy would ensure more effective distribution of relief.

McCabe gives us very useful information and insights into the origins and operations of various homes for the poor prior to the establishment of the workhouse system. This ad hoc form was inspired by similar processes of relief elsewhere in Britain and Europe, and this book is excellent in drawing upon such examples and giving a good European overview while also looking at regional patterns of relief. Crucially, McCabe argues ‘the poor exerted agency and made decisions for themselves, drawing on their knowledge of the various welfare options available to them in the “economy of makeshifts”’ (p. 165). The reader is presented with multiple vernacular perspectives of poverty of both men and women that ensures a richly variegated account of poverty in pre-Famine Ireland.

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IRISH WOMEN AND THE CREATION OF MODERN CATHOLICISM, 1850–1950. By Cara Delay. Pp 264. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2019. £80.

In 1987 the sociologist Tom Inglis wrote *Moral monopoly: the Catholic church in modern Irish society* with a view to explaining how the Roman Catholic church had embedded itself so profoundly in Irish society. The book was controversial – described as ‘startling’ by John Whyte, the author of the seminal *Church and state in modern Ireland, 1923–1979* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1980) – largely because of its unashamedly critical position. Inglis regarded the church ‘as a compulsory and coercive organisation’, which used ‘moral discipline’ to effectively eliminate ‘individual freedom’. While Inglis singled out the Irish mother as a crucial agent in the church’s mission, he identified the control of women’s bodies as central to the church’s ability to gain and maintain control over Irish society for so long.

Inglis wrote in the wake of the second wave women’s movement and the bitter debates of the 1980s, in which conservative and liberal Ireland fought for the country’s soul. Women’s history was little more than ten years old and the social history of twentieth-century Ireland was arguably even less developed. Cara Delay has written *Irish women and the creation of modern Catholicism, 1850–1950* in a very different Ireland: the position of the Catholic church as a power bloc is unrecognisable (ironically, exceeding even Inglis’s predictions of decline) prompting the current Catholic archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, to wonder if it is a ‘post-Catholic’ society (*America: the Jesuit review*, 20 May 2013). Women’s history is a vibrant and busy research field and clearly informs Delay’s approach, providing her with a rich historiography to draw upon. In many ways she flips Inglis’s point of inquiry: she wishes to understand what Catholicism had to offer women. Delay seeks to explore the dynamic of Irish women’s relationship with Catholicism, not just the church or the institution, but with its faith, practices and power.

The period between 1850 and 1950 spans the most important period for the creation of modern Irish Catholicism and Delay’s principal thesis is that lay Irish women played an important part in that project. Her book accentuates two main binaries in Catholic women’s relationship with their church: continuity and change, power and agency. While she is conscious of the intersections of gender, geography and class, she is primarily concerned with the former but is careful to note when class, in particular, played a significant part in women’s