

# H-Net Reviews

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**Colin Barr, Hilary M. Carey, eds.** *Religion and Greater Ireland: Christianity and Irish Global Networks, 1750-1950*. McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion Series. Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2015. 472 pp. \$39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7735-4570-0; \$110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-4569-4.



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Scholars of the British world are familiar with attempts to understand the cultural effects of British imperial expansion. Since Charles Dilke, the young Liberal radical member of Parliament, turned his travel writing of the 1860s into a book titled *Greater Britain* (1868), politicians, commentators, political and social scientists, and historians have turned their attention to the concept of "Greater Britain," the "Anglo-World," or the "Anglo-sphere." Such terms were really a consideration of the potentialities of the English-speaking world to create a common cultural and power bloc against the rise of alternative powers, or external threats, such as Germany. The editors of *Religion and Greater Ireland* show that ancient instances of Irish transnationalism, especially in religion, illustrate how Irish religion has long influenced cultures beyond its own island shores. Little wonder that Catholicism dominates the Irish story told here. Four-fifths of the nineteenth-century population was Catholic. As European expansion grew, the Irish spread across the empire and beyond. Irish clerics played a prominent role in the spread of the Catholic Church from Auckland to Africa, from Brisbane to British Columbia.

What we know much less about is the role that the Irish played in this world, and in forging their own distinctive cultural, global identity, utilizing the powerful

networks of the British world. Colin Barr and Hilary M. Carey have produced a wide-ranging collection that tries to extend the range of this precise question, focusing on religion. This book is not only a collection on an aspect of the Irish diaspora but also a series of connected studies of the networks that Irish Christians forged. These networks sometimes buttressed and sometimes challenged the empire around which they became wrapped. Whatever the tensions, it is apparent that Irish folk played key roles in establishing and shaping that world.

The volume has many strengths, not least the range and variety of sects and traditions considered. Perhaps the book's greatest asset is the way many of the contributors engage with the wider connections beyond individual or collective acts of Catholic or Protestant devotion; an entangled dialogue between Ireland and the wider Irish globe is a key component of this quality. Some contributors focus entirely on transnational connections. We see this, for example, in Kevin Molloy's assessment of the global diaspora through the agencies of shared religious print cultures. Molloy describes how Irish-Catholic Australian publishers fostered a vibrant book trade with not only Dublin but also the United States and Canada. We also find here essays on the practical application of transported news culture, for example, Jeff Kildea's striking

piece on sectarianism and sociopolitical conflict in 1920, in Australia, when scaremongers suggested that Bolshevik and Sinn Fein elements would bring the country to revolution.

R. V. Comerford's short chapter on varieties within Irish Christianity in Ireland surveys the rugged landscape of sectarian religiosity in Ireland. He charts the progress of the Catholic question, civil liberties, and liberalism, and asks did not all Irish denominations share a "cultural impact as evangelisers in foreign lands?" (p. 50). The Irish certainly had this commonality, as Catholicism underpinned their faith in far-flung imperial lands, and Irish Protestants staffed Anglican outposts and carried Presbyterianism to the four corners of the globe. Much later in the volume, Eric Richards's chapter considers the relationship of greater Ireland to Australian immigration, pointing out the symbiotic relationship between religion and ethnicity for the Irish there (as indeed elsewhere). Richards's wide-ranging and detailed account of the emergence of Irish religion and its extensive and impressive infrastructure was a feature of life in Australia, and was perhaps made more remarkable by how striking a Gothic church might look in a developing colonial town. Richards devotes due attention to Irish Protestantism in Australia.

Indeed, Protestantism is not at all neglected in the volume. The vital importance of the one-time state church, Anglicanism, and the dissenting traditions are given voices, from Comerford's overview piece, through Leigh-Ann Coffey's careful and well-framed study of the *Church of Ireland Gazette* and southern Protestant migration during and after the Irish revolution. The 2014 work of Joe Hardwick, *An Anglican British World: The Church of England and the Expansion of the Settler Empire*, which shows how important Irish clerics were to colonial Anglicanism, is recognized here, especially in Michael Gladwin's study of Anglicanism in pre-1850 Australia, which illustrates well how important the Church of Ireland was in the Anglican global mission. Rankin Sherling explores how theological arguments within British and Irish Presbyterianism migrated across the Atlantic, while Dianne Hall uncovers another form of transference in her chapter on Ulster settlers, and the emergence of Orange-Irish-Protestantism in Australia. Although she focuses narrowly, she drills deeply. Her study reflects other instances of Ulster-Orange settlement elsewhere, a fact that could have been more fully explored.

Coffey frames revolution-age Protestant migration against a multiplicity of push factors, not merely the

fact of any anti-Protestant violence and oppression. She shows how the Irish Anglican church recognized the necessity of migration for some, while lamenting its overall enervating effects. The *Gazette* also carried the arguments for maintaining the connection between Irish Protestants at home and abroad, and extolled not just the importance but also the centrality of missionary work overseas. In these ways, the globalism of Irish Anglicanism, as well as Catholicism, could foster a real, and not merely imaginary, transnational community. Meanwhile, John Stenhouse, New Zealand's foremost historian of religion, brings issues of Irishness and New World identity through the biography of Rutherford Waddell, an Ulster-born Presbyterian, social reformer, and temperance supporter, who was (with another Ulsterman, John Balance, and William Pember Reeves) central to the huge reformist movement that, between the 1880s and 1920s, saw New Zealand create a social contract for workers, women, and others, which was the envy of other nations. Waddell forged a strong relationship with Catholic Bishop Moran. The "Orange" imperialist Ulster-born premier during World War I, Bill Massey, shared Waddell's belief in putting New Zealand ahead of sectarian loyalties. Stenhouse's chapter is remarkably good at showing how these variant Ulstermen came together in pursuit of a progressive colony and nation.

Each piece on Canada shows how the Irish had to accommodate and tackle both Anglo-Protestant and French blocs, making things tricky at times, but also quite probably contributing to the integrationist approaches of the Catholic Church and other agencies. If Irish Catholicism reached well beyond Ireland, it also crossed into other forms of Catholicism, notably the French variant in Canada. Here, the Irish faced the problem of double indemnity, as Mark McGowan shows in his study of the Franco-Irish struggle over Canadian Catholicism. McGowan, who, in his previous works has illustrated the integrationist trajectories of early twentieth-century Irish Catholic Canadians, here demonstrates that the "double minority status" of the Irish Catholics of Canada created a complex set of interrelationships with Anglo-Protestants and French Catholics (*Canadiens*).<sup>[1]</sup> The Irish Catholic could parley with both sides, defending the church on the one hand, and integrating into Anglo-Protestant-dominated political developments on the other. McGowan shows quite clearly that monolithic conceptions of Irish Catholicism will not do, particularly not in Canada.

Catholicism as a force for New World identity is a theme in Carolyn Lambert's study of Newfoundland.

Here, pre-famine Irish settlers and religious leaders promoted twin identities, and the post-famine church (led by the Newfoundland Bishop Howley, a man of Irish stock), which for decades received no new Irish inflows, stressed education, advancement, and the potential of the Catholic community of Irish extraction to contribute to nation building, often in competition and conflict with the Protestant bloc. In exploring these themes, Lambert demonstrates the pathways from imperial and new-nation citizens to the sacrifices they made in the Great War. Similar themes of social control, conformity, and loyalty are seen in Mike McLaughlin's study of Irish-Catholic Canadian temperance, a chapter in which history echoes the improving ethos seen earlier in Father Theobald Mathew's huge pre-famine Irish crusade. The sole contribution on the United States, by Mimi Cowan, demonstrates how religious groups jostled for space in the apparently nondenominational, almost irreligious, Chicago public school system. Here the theme is one of accommodating to religious difference, as is true of the Canadian chapters.

Several very strong chapters are devoted to Asia. While the Irish there were relatively few, Irish clerics were not. Barry Crosbie, in a close analysis of Irish Catholic interactions in India, illustrates one aspect of the emergence of Irish professional networks and the role played by the Irish in developing imperial knowledge of indigenous culture, through the prisms of Catholic social and spiritual support and interaction. The Female Association for Promoting Christianity, which was founded in Belfast in 1873, was, as Myrtle Hill reveals, a Presbyterian prism through which to illustrate the engagement of issues of empire, race, Protestantism, and gender. Largely focused on the social structures of missionary religion, namely orphanages, hospitals, and the like, Hill nevertheless shows the wide-ranging roles played by the dozens of female missionaries the Female Association sent out to Asia. Though it is impossible to separate this work from the larger imperatives of the European penetration of Asia, Hill nevertheless sees the Female Association as concerned to promote a spiritual rather than political empire.

Turning to the Irish in Cape Colony, Barr picks up some of the themes of emergent, church-shaped loyalty posited by Lambert on Newfoundland. For southern Africa, Barr imputes the relative absence of the Cape Irish from the wider historiography of the diaspora to "ethnic reassignment" and small numbers (p. 254). Race was also an issue of huge significance, more so even than in New Zealand, Barr correctly asserts. South Africa was the only place where St. Patrick's society men regularly

played St. George's society men on the cricket field. It seems that the common threat of a much larger black population focused more Europeans on their common racial interest. As in Canada and New Zealand, but less so in Australia, the Catholic Church was pro-British and loyal in moments of conflict, for example, during the Boer War and World War I, just as Lambert found in Newfoundland.

While this is a scholarly and well-edited work, I have a few quibbles, principal among which is the decision to exclude the Irish in Britain. Everything covered in this volume (save perhaps tackling the Indian caste system or jostling with French Canadians and indigenous Africans) also was experienced by them. The editors claim the volume could not possibly contain the British dimension too. But surely this is offset by pure need: the Irish in Britain were second only to the Irish in the United States in number, and Britain was a more popular destination even than the United States prior to 1840 and after the 1920s. The editors themselves note how important state-religious issues were to the Victorians. It is hard to understand global liberalism, conservatism, Catholicism, Protestants, or Irishness without reference to what went on in Britain. Then again, Comerford assesses some of these issues in a UK context.

I would argue that the Orange Order deserves a fuller exploration than is possible in Hall's case study of New South Wales: after all, it was present in every colony and all parts of the British Empire. Scholars have shown how the order was a global enterprise, spreading out from Ulster to Britain, then Canada, and then throughout the empire and colonies. It was a major organization, though never a mass movement. Moreover, the Triennial Council, formed in 1865, created global mechanisms for trying to maintain its true character, as a zealous bulwark against perceived Catholic disloyalty. Its power bases in Canada, and the United Kingdom, far outstripped its presence elsewhere, and they needed to be considered.

Finally, *Religion and Greater Ireland* is, overall, a very wide-ranging and evocative collection, with strong editorial values. The book contains many interesting and original contributions that challenge our ways of thinking about Irish culture in a global setting.

#### Note

[1]. Mark M. McGowan, citing John S. Moir, "The Problem of a Double Minority: Some Reflections on the Development of the English-Speaking Catholic Church in Canada in the Nineteenth Century," *Histoire Sociale - Social History* 7 (1971): 53-67.

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