

Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants in England and Wales. By Anthony E.C.W. Spencer, edited by Mary E. Daly. Pp Xviii, 137. Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission. 2012. €35.

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This report, completed in 1960 but kept from the public domain until the publication of the present volume by the Irish Manuscripts Commission, was the product of the conjunction of two forces – Catholic church concern for the faith of Catholic migrants in Protestant countries, and the emergence of the relatively new discipline of sociology. Three Catholic welfare bodies were involved: the International Catholic Migration Commission which commissioned the report; the Newman Association of Great Britain, whose Catholic graduate members, particularly Anthony Spencer, were involved in the necessary research and analysis; and the Dublin-based Catholic Social Welfare Bureau (C.S.W.B.) founded by John Charles McQuaid, which took exception to the report and was instrumental in its being shelved. Mary Daly's Introduction to the report teases out the complicated relations between these three bodies, and explores the conflicting approaches to Catholic immigration on the part of the English and Irish Catholic hierarchies. It also traces the tensions between Irish church-centred bodies like the C.S.W.B. (to some extent a mouthpiece of McQuaid) and Catholic sociologists whose deeply held pastoral concerns were counterbalanced by an empirical approach to research. This conflict is further clarified throughout the present publication, where passages to which McQuaid and the C.S.W.B. objected are reproduced in italics, allowing the reader to identify the two rival perspectives simultaneously.

The report itself provides a critical but sympathetic analysis of social and religious attitudes among the Irish population both at home and in Britain. Shining a spotlight on rural Ireland, where so many immigrants in Britain originated, it identifies the same issues raised by another equally perceptive sociological exploration of the time, the Limerick rural survey, published in 1963. Like the Rural survey, it pinpoints the failure of Irish families especially (but not exclusively) in the rural context, to prepare children for independence; the continuance of parental control into adulthood; intense maternal protectiveness; and the prioritisation of family over external commitments (especially employment) – all acceptable within the context of the Irish Catholicism considered ‘traditional’ by the 1950s, but inimical to the integration of the newly-arrived Irish immigrant into a rapidly modernising Britain.

The report provides for its time a particularly astute analysis of Irish Catholic religious observance, pointing out (at the risk of episcopal displeasure) that its foundations in social convention rather than inner conviction allowed for easy drift once transplanted from the hothouse of Catholic Ireland into the secular soil of the British city. Moreover (and this assessment also met with episcopal disapproval), the average Irish Catholic’s lack of any real intellectual engagement with religious belief, and especially the absence of any tradition of religious debate, left individual immigrants at a disadvantage when drawn into religious discussions by those of other or no formal religious affiliations.

The report also pinpointed the difficulties created for the Catholic church in England and Wales by the inflow of Irish immigrants, raising questions as to the effectiveness of the territorial parish as an evangelising force. This was particularly evident when dealing with immigrant worker mobility, whether among foot-loose male labourers following the higher

wages available on the motorway and other major installation building schemes, or among hotel workers (male and female) who eluded pastoral efforts through the irregularity of their working day. More successful than the parish in providing for the religious needs of immigrants were voluntary bodies like the Legion of Mary, though their efforts, too, were undermined by poor co-ordination – lack of contact between home parishes in Ireland and the host dioceses/parishes in Britain, and the absence of an umbrella welfare organisation to inform immigrants on matters ranging from accommodation and employment to religious provision.

What is particularly valuable about the *Integration of Irish immigrants* report as a historical source is the way in which it simultaneously represented two different value systems. On the one hand, it sympathised with the concerns of a Catholic church fearful of the ‘evils’ of secularisation. It was permeated by a high level of concern regarding the detrimental influence of the ‘lapsed Catholic’ – a term I had almost forgotten, but which loomed large (though not necessarily oppressively) in my own childhood. There was also some emphasis on the ‘dangers’ posed by the Communist and Connolly Associations and on their capacity to influence not only individual immigrants but English and Irish society on a broader scale. On the other hand, the report was ahead of its time: the terminology used was nearer in its critical approach to that of Arensberg and Kimball (whose 1930s study is actually referenced in the text) than to the gentler and more circumspect approach of the Limerick rural survey. It categorised rural Ireland as a ‘gerontocracy’, described Irish Catholic church teaching as ‘rigorous and puritan’, referred to the ‘clannishness or ignorance’ of Irish immigrant attitudes towards non-Catholics, and held (not inaccurately) that some immigrants came to Britain ‘with the intention of taking a holiday from religion’. It is not surprising that McQuaid and the C.S.W.B., supremely sensitive to any blot on the image of Catholic Ireland, resented the

approach of the 1960 report and insisted on the rewriting or omission of such terminology and passages.

This publication of the report on the Integration of Irish immigrants and Mary Daly's insightful Introduction to it is a 'must read' for (a) anyone seeking to understand the problems facing both church and immigrants in post-war England and Wales and (b) for those who require a critical but sympathetic interpretation of Catholicism as a social force in the Ireland of the 1950s. Because it was written at that time and from within the Catholic church, it shared and understood views and stances that a purely retrospective analysis can too easily dismiss as dictatorial or church-ridden. Because, on the other hand, it was the product of modern sociological methodology, it balanced its sympathetic approach with a capacity to break through unquestioned values and to subject attitudes and values to a much more critical evaluation. Its success in this regard was amply proven by its relegation to oblivion for half a century.