

'In general, they do not answer well': Irish priests in the western lowlands of Scotland, 1838–50

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Historians have been aware for some time of the civil war within the Western District of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland in the 1860s, between, on the one hand, the Scottish bishops and their senior Scots-born priests, and, on the other, a section of the Irish clergy. The dispute was over the governance of the Church.¹ What is less well known is that this was not the first time that Irish priests in the District had been perceived as being a dangerous and divisive presence. Irish clergymen were recruited from the late 1830s onwards to help to deal with the acute shortage of native priests; however, in the 1840s they were seen by their Scottish colleagues not as a welcome and valuable asset, but instead as a threat to the well-being, and indeed to the identity, of the Catholic Church in the Western District. This chapter, therefore, will look at the attitudes of the Scottish bishops, and their senior clergy, to the Irish priests who served in the District during this period.

I

In the late 1780s there were around 30,000 Roman Catholics in Scotland, of whom only a few lived in the western lowlands (the counties of Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, Ayrshire, Dunbartonshire and Wigtownshire).² The Catholic Church was, not surprisingly, non-existent in this region. Irish immigration from the mid-1790s onwards fundamentally altered this pattern of Catholicism: in the mid-1830s

¹ See James Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland* (Cork, 1947), chapter 3; Vincent Alan McClelland, 'The Irish Clergy and Archbishop Manning's Apostolic Visitation of the Western District of Scotland, 1867', *Catholic Historical Review*, 53 (April and July 1967), pp. 1–27, 229–50; David McRoberts, 'The Restoration of the Scottish Catholic Hierarchy in 1878', *Innes Review*, 29 (1978), pp. 3–29; John F. McCaffrey, 'Roman Catholics in Scotland in the 19th and 20th Centuries', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 21 (1983), pp. 278–88; Bernard Aspinwall, 'Scots and Irish Clergy ministering to immigrants, 1830–1878', *Innes Review*, 47 (1996), pp. 45–68. ² The population of Scotland at this time was around 1.5 million. In the 1780s, approximately one half of Scotland's Roman Catholics lived in the Highlands and Islands. Most of the other half resided in the north-east of the country (the counties of Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, Kincardineshire, Morayshire and Nairnshire).

there were around 70,000 Catholics in the western lowlands, of whom almost all were of Irish birth or descent.³ By that time the Catholic Church had managed to establish six missions in the area.⁴ The Glasgow Mission had two chapels and four priests, including a bishop; the Greenock Mission supported one chapel, a priest and a bishop; and the Paisley, Dumbarton, Ayr and Wigtownshire Missions each had one chapel and one priest. All ten clergymen were Scottish, of whom nine were natives of the north-east of the country.

Despite the progress that had undoubtedly been made in the western lowlands by the Scottish Catholic Church during the first forty years of significant Irish immigration, it is evident that there remained a severe under-provision of priests and chapels. This is even more apparent when it is recognised that the Catholics of each mission did not all live in the town in which their chapel was located. For example, approximately 43,000 of the 50,000 Catholics attached to the Glasgow Mission lived in the city and its suburbs, while most of the remainder resided in towns and villages throughout Lanarkshire; the Ayr Mission embraced almost all of the Catholics in Ayrshire; only around one-half of the congregation of the Paisley Mission lived in the town, while the rest were scattered throughout several civil parishes in Renfrewshire; and the priest of the Wigtownshire Mission, whose chapel was at Newton Stewart, was in charge of all the Catholics who lived in the county. This was a far from ideal state of affairs, as many Catholics had to travel a considerable distance to attend Mass. The clergymen tried to deal with the problem by occasionally holding services in rented halls in some of the towns and villages which were far from the Mission chapels. Despite this, there was widespread recognition that more needed to be done. For example, in 1835 William Thomson, priest of the Ayr Mission, stated that:

Owing to the great increase of Catholics in Kilmarnock, I have frequently to say mass and preach there & in Ayr on the same day. The fasting, quick driving, & whiles a rainy stormy day is exceedingly trying. The labour here now is too great for one man.⁵

3 For the Irish in Scotland in the first half of the nineteenth century see James Handley, *The Irish in Scotland, 1790–1845* (Cork, 1945); Martin J. Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland, 1797–1848: Trade Unions, Strikes and Political Movements* (Edinburgh, 1998); *idem*, 'The Catholic Irish in the West of Scotland: "A Separate and Despised Community"?' in T.M. Devine and James F. McMillan (eds), *Celebrating Columba: Irish-Scottish Connections, 597–1997* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 50–83. 4 The following discussion of the Roman Catholic Church in the region in this period is based on Martin J. Mitchell, 'The Establishment and Early Years of the Hamilton Mission' in T.M. Devine (ed.), *St Mary's Hamilton, 1846–1996: A Social History* (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 1–14. 5 Scottish Catholic Archives [hereafter SCA], Blairs Letters, BL6/122/2, William Thomson to Charles Gordon, 30 March 1835.

Almost three years later, the priest in charge of the Paisley Mission complained that his congregation was '... too numerous and much too scattered to be properly superintended by one individual'.⁶

To help to deal with the shortage of priests, Bishop Andrew Scott, Vicar Apostolic of the Western District of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, decided in 1837 to recruit clergymen from Ireland. Scott's Vicariate consisted of the western lowland counties, as well as the Hebrides, Argyllshire and the southern part of Inverness-shire.⁷ In 1838 four recently ordained Irish priests came to work for him.⁸ Between 1838 and 1849 a total of thirty-three Irishmen were procured from seminaries in Ireland.⁹ The majority were ordained for the Western District, while the remainder were on loan from their bishops in Ireland. In addition to these clergymen, four other Irish priests served in the Vicariate in this period; these men were immigrants who had been educated and trained in seminaries belonging to the Scottish Mission, and who had been ordained for the Western District. The Irish priests were employed almost exclusively in the western lowlands, where, of course, almost all the Catholics were Irish or of Irish descent; at the beginning of 1850, eighteen of the thirty-seven clergymen in this region were Irish born. By contrast, at that time only one of the sixteen priests in the Highlands and Islands portion of the Western District was an Irishman. This was because most of the Catholics here were Gaelic-speaking native Scots, living in rural areas, who needed to be ministered to by clergymen who knew their language and customs. The priests who served in the Gaelic-speaking part of the Vicariate were natives either of that region or of the Highland area of the Northern District.¹⁰

6 Parliamentary Papers, 1837-8, *Reports of the Commissioners of Religious Instruction, Scotland. Eighth Report*, Appendix I, p. 211. 7 From 1727 until 1827 the Scottish Mission was divided into two Vicariates, the Highland District and the Lowland District. In 1827 it was divided into three: the Western District, the Eastern District and the Northern District. This structure remained until the restoration of the Scottish Hierarchy in 1878. 8 The information in this paragraph, and all subsequent information concerning the numbers and the nationalities of the priests who served in the Western District between 1838 and 1849, is taken from the following sources: *The Catholic Directory for Scotland* for the years 1837 to 1850; Bernard J. Canning, *Irish-Born Secular Priests in Scotland, 1829-1979* (1979); Christine Johnson, 'Secular Clergy of the Lowland District 1732-1829', *Innes Review*, 34 (1983), pp. 67-87; *idem*, 'Scottish Secular Clergy, 1830-1878: The Northern and Eastern Districts' and 'Scottish Secular Clergy, 1830-1878: The Western District', *Innes Review*, 40 (1989), pp. 24-68, 106-52; F. Forbes and W.J. Anderson, 'Clergy Lists of the Highland District, 1732-1828', *Innes Review*, 17 (1966), pp. 129-84. 9 By contrast, during the same period, the Eastern District recruited only four clergymen from Irish seminaries, and the Highland District none. 10 Johnson, 'The Western District', p. 108. The sole Irish priest in the Highlands and Islands portion of the Western District in 1850 was Michael Condon, who was in charge of the Campbeltown Mission in Argyllshire. Condon had been moved there from Glasgow in 1847. Each of his three immediate predecessors at Campbeltown was a young Irish clergyman who, like Condon, had been transferred there from his original posting in Glasgow. The Campbeltown Mission, of all the Missions in the Highlands and

The decision to recruit Irish priests must be examined further, as Andrew Scott had previously expressed his strong opposition to the use of such clergymen in the western lowlands of Scotland. In January 1826, when he was priest in charge of the Glasgow Mission, Scott informed his superior, Bishop Alexander Paterson, that he was 'quite convinced that the Glasgow mission in particular would be most seriously injured by bringing an Irishman to it, even for only a few months. . .'. According to Scott, it was

natural even for Scotchmen in a foreign land to draw together. Irishmen have the same feelings, but less prudence. There has been a cry to get Irishmen to Glasgow, and most certainly an Irish priest would soon associate with his countrymen and naturally fall, into all the habits he was accustomed to see between his own country priests at home and their flocks. He would appear to have all their hearts, which might flatter too much a young mind, and if he had not extraordinary prudence, all Episcopal authority would soon be set aside. This has happened elsewhere. He would also impart to them everything that passed, and many things that he ought not to do . . . I should fear the total ruin of the Glasgow mission in its present circumstances from such a step.

Scott added that many 'respectable protestant Gentlemen' in Glasgow had expressed to him their strong opposition to the use of Irish priests in the city.¹¹

Scott soon had first-hand experience of such clergymen. In 1829 James Gibbons, an Irish priest who had been dismissed from his mission in the north-east of Scotland – a region with few Irish Catholics – on account of the scandal that his liking for alcohol had caused, arrived in Glasgow.¹² He quickly inflamed the Irish Catholics in the city against the Scottish bishops (who by this time included Andrew Scott) and the Scottish priests, by telling them that he had been victimised simply because of his nationality. Gibbons argued that ' . . . the Irish Catholics, being the most numerous body of Catholics in all the South of Scotland have a right to be served by Irish priests and governed by Irish bishops'.¹³ Scott informed Bishop Kyle that 'the paddies' in Glasgow believed Gibbons' claims, and considered him to

Islands area of the Western District, was the only one to have a sizeable Irish contingent among its congregation. According to Johnson, 'Here English was widely spoken and the priest did not have to be a Gaelic speaker'. Johnson, 'The Western District', p. 106. See also Handley, *Irish in Scotland*, p.76; Glasgow Archdiocesan Archives (hereafter GAA), Western District Papers, WD5, Michael Condon Memoirs, Miguelide, p. 500. **11** Andrew Scott to Alexander Paterson, 15 January 1826, quoted in Christine Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, 1789–1829* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 138–9. **12** Gibbons had been ordained for the Lowland District in 1827. He was one of only three Irish priests who were employed by the Scottish Mission in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. None was stationed in the western lowlands. See Johnson, *Developments*, pp. 137–9. **13** SCA, Blairs Letters, BL5/248/14, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 15 October 1829.

be 'the victim of a Scots persecution . . .'¹⁴ According to Scott, Gibbons spent his time in the city 'venting his rage and calumnies against Scotch Bishops and Scotch priests. Though the generality know him to be a suspended priest, still they give more credit to him than they would do to us'.¹⁵ The crisis was soon over, however, as Gibbons was dismissed from the Scottish Mission and left the country in late December 1829.¹⁶

Within three years Andrew Scott was faced with a similar problem. In 1832 Revd Byrne, an Irish priest, was stationed at Paisley.¹⁷ He quickly became convinced that he was the victim of an 'injustice' because clergymen who were junior to him were being placed at the Glasgow Mission; Byrne believed that his seniority entitled him to be moved there before them.¹⁸ Byrne was furious about this and in the autumn he inflamed the Irish Catholics in the Glasgow and Paisley Missions against Bishop Scott and the Scottish priests by telling them about the discrimination he had allegedly suffered, and by claiming 'that he was prosecuted merely because he was an Irishman . . .' In November of that year Scott withdrew Byrne's canonical faculties.¹⁹ The rebellious priest, however, was undeterred, and throughout most of 1833 he continued his campaign. According to Andrew Scott, the aim of Byrne and his supporters was ' . . . to raise all the Irish Catholics throughout Scotland in rebellion against their superiors and their immediate Scotch pastors'.²⁰ In September 1833 it was reported that 'a considerable number of the wild paddies' were still attached to Byrne.²¹ Before the year was over, however, he gave up the fight. Byrne expressed regret for his conduct and retracted all the allegations he had made over the period. It would appear that he then left Scotland.²²

The activities of Gibbons and Byrne confirmed Andrew Scott's worst fears about the impact of Irish priests in the western lowlands. Yet in late 1837 Scott had little choice *but* to recruit clergymen from Ireland. By that time not enough Scotsmen had been ordained for the Western District; an insufficient number of boys were training for the priesthood; and he was finding it extremely difficult to persuade others to take up the vocation. Meanwhile, the number of Irish immigrants in the region was increasing daily. Scott made his decision to recruit Irish priests with some reluctance, perhaps even trepidation. He was worried – with

14 SCA, Blairs Letters, BL5/248/17, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 20 October 1829. Kyle was Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District. **15** SCA, Preshome Letters, PL3/154/25, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 23 December 1829. **16** Johnson, 'Secular Clergy of the Lowland District', p. 71. **17** Very little is known about Byrne. For example, he is not mentioned in Johnson's clergy lists, nor is he discussed in Canning's biographies of Irish-born secular priests in Scotland. **18** SCA, Preshome Letters, PL3/214/16, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 22 October 1832. **19** SCA, Preshome Letters, PL3/214/20, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 21 November 1832. **20** SCA, Preshome Letters, PL3/234/7, Andrew Scott to Donald Carmichael, 22 March 1833. **21** SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/8/15, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 3 September 1833. **22** SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/79/21, John Murdoch to James Kyle, 30 October 1833; Preshome Letters, PL3/234/17, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 11 December 1833.

good reason given the events of the late 1820s and early 1830s – that the Irish Catholics in the western lowlands would form a strong attachment to the imported clergymen, and that this could have serious repercussions for his Vicariate if he became involved in a major dispute with one, or several, of the Irish priests. It must, therefore, have been of some comfort to Scott to learn that the first priests to be sent to the Western District from St Patrick's Seminary at Maynooth had been given by its president '... a most excellent character for piety, talents and docility'.²³

II

The Irish clergymen who served in the western lowlands between 1838 and 1843 did not attempt to turn their Irish congregations against Andrew Scott and his co-adjutor, Bishop John Murdoch;²⁴ indeed, it would appear that they did not cause their superiors any great trouble. Nevertheless, Bishop Scott and senior Scottish priests were most unhappy with this Irish presence. For example, the Irishmen who were recruited between 1838 and 1841, nine in total, were not ordained for the Western District, but instead were on short-term loan from their native dioceses. There was a belief among the Scottish Catholic clergy that these priests had no great interest in, or commitment to, the District. For example, in January 1840 Scott stated: 'it is evident that from the hopes of getting some years after this a situation at home, they do not take the same interest in the temporal or spiritual welfare of the Mission as Scotch priests do'.²⁵ The following year John Bremner, priest in charge of the Paisley Mission, complained to Scott about 'Irish clergymen taken by the lump, men, who have no interest in our affairs, & who seem to think they honour us, while they do us only half service...'.²⁶ Moreover, it was felt that the young Irishmen whom the Western District had employed, and was seeking to employ, were second-rate clergymen, very inferior in quality to the Scottish priests. In August 1841 John Bremner described them as 'the half educated, & wholly prejudiced sons of Maynooth...'.²⁷ Two months later, the Revd Peter Forbes, who was in Ireland trying to recruit clergymen, informed John Murdoch that the Irish bishops kept the best graduates from their seminaries for themselves. Forbes believed, as did John Bremner, that one way of improving the quality of Irish clergymen in the Western District, and of increasing their attachment to the Vicariate, was to find talented Irish boys, and then educate and train them in seminaries belonging to the Scottish Mission.²⁸

²³ SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/219/3, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 22 April 1838. ²⁴ At the end of 1834 Scott had retired to Greenock, leaving Murdoch in charge of affairs in and around Glasgow. Scott reserved 'to himself merely the general superintendence of the District...'. *Catholic Directory for Scotland for 1867*, p. 140. ²⁵ SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/281/1, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 15 January 1840. ²⁶ SCA, Oban Letters, OL2/61/3, John Bremner to Andrew Scott, 9 August 1841. ²⁷ *Ibid.* ²⁸ SCA, Oban Letters, OL2/62/6, Peter Forbes to John Murdoch, 24 October 1841. Forbes was one of the

Scott's reaction to this suggestion is not known, but it is unlikely that he was favourable to it. For Scott, the main issue was not the intellectual or the pastoral qualities of the Irish priests, but instead their nationality, indeed their very Irishness, and the effect that he believed this had on the Scottish Catholic Church, and on the Scottish people. In December 1841 he stated that although his Irish priests were 'good moral clergymen generally speaking in every respect', they could not 'advance the interests of Religion' in Scotland as much as Scottish priests could do. According to Scott:

The prejudices of the protestants in this country are so strong against them as to prevent them from listening to any instructions from them, though they might be inclined to listen to those of a Scotch priest. The habits, the ideas, the customs and manners of the Irish priests are in general in such opposition to those of our Scotch population that even those protestants who might be converted by a Scotch priest will not and cannot prevail upon themselves to apply to an Irish priest. Above all the violent political feelings of the Irish clergymen strongly tend to augment the prejudices of the Scotch population against them . . .

Scott added that it was his

sincere conviction . . . that conversions in any great numbers will not take place, and that Religion cannot be increased in our present circumstances in this country either by Irish or English clergymen but only by native Scotch secular missionaries.²⁹

Unfortunately for Scott, there were simply not enough natives coming through the ranks of the Scottish seminaries. For example, in 1842 only two Scotsmen were ordained for the Western District, one of whom was to spend the rest of the decade serving in the Highlands. Yet in that year seven Irishmen were recruited for the Vicariate. Moreover, only one of these men was on loan from Ireland: the others were ordained for the Western District, an acknowledgement by Bishops Scott and Murdoch that Irish priests were now essential for the effective running of the Church in the western lowlands. Despite the serious misgivings which Andrew Scott had about his Irish clergymen during this period, neither he nor John Murdoch encountered any great difficulties managing them. After 1843, however, this situation changed dramatically, largely as a consequence of Daniel O'Connell's campaign for the repeal of the legislative union between Great Britain and Ireland.

Although a Repeal Association was active in Glasgow from at least May 1841 onwards, it was not until 1843 that the campaign for an Irish legislature took off in

priests of the Glasgow Mission. 29 SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/330/12, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 10 December 1841.

Scotland.³⁰ In July of that year Andrew Scott informed a colleague that, in the western lowlands, 'All our poor people are mad about repeal, and they are convinced that before two months an Irish Parliament will be sitting on College Green in Dublin'.³¹ An editorial that month in the *Glasgow Saturday Post* stated:

such is now the number of natives of Ireland in all our principal towns, and such is their zeal and energy, that were any demonstration against the repeal of the union to be attempted, the repealers would be almost certain to muster, and carry the declaration of public opinion in their favour.³²

Indeed, from 1843 to 1847 Repeal was arguably *the* major popular movement, in Scotland, for political reform.

Like their colleagues in Ireland, the Irish Catholic clergy in the western lowlands were heavily involved in the agitation for Repeal.³³ For example, in 1843 they chaired and spoke at meetings on the issue, and helped to raise money for the Repeal Fund in Dublin, activities which were both welcomed and applauded by the Catholic Irish in the region. Indeed, the popularity of the Irish clergy among their congregations increased as a result of their involvement in the campaign. This strengthening of the bond between Irish priests and people greatly troubled Bishops Scott and Murdoch, and either in late 1843 or in early 1844 they banned their priests from participating in the movement.³⁴ Despite this edict, the Irish clergy in the western lowlands continued to promote Repeal. In August 1844 Andrew Scott stated that he had been told that they were spending most of their time going privately among their congregations furthering the cause. Moreover, these priests were, according to the information Scott had received, urging their flocks to donate to the Repeal Fund, yet were not encouraging them, or even asking them, to contribute to the upkeep of their own missions.³⁵

The raising of the Repeal Rent in the western lowlands was an issue of great concern to Andrew Scott. The amount of money sent to Dublin was not inconsiderable. For example, in May 1843 the Repealers in and around Glasgow collected almost £130; during the second half of that year they raised over £300.³⁶ These were funds which Scott could ill-afford to lose, as the Church in the region

³⁰ For the Repeal Movement in the western lowlands, see Mitchell, *Irish in the West of Scotland*, chapters 7 and 8. ³¹ SCA, Preshome Letters, PL3/309/18, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 12 July 1843. ³² *Glasgow Saturday Post*, 29 July 1843. ³³ For the involvement of the Catholic clergy of Ireland in Repeal see Oliver MacDonagh, *O'Connell: The Life of Daniel O'Connell 1775-1847* (London, 1991), pp. 505, 516-17; Gearoid O'Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine* (2nd edition, Dublin, 1990), p. 188; K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (2nd edition, Harlow, 1999), pp. 31-2, 84-5. ³⁴ This in effect was a ban on their Irish clergy, as no Scots-born priest was involved in the agitation. See Mitchell, *Irish in the West of Scotland*, pp. 237-8. Murdoch was in fact opposed to Repeal. See *Glasgow Saturday Post*, 14 December 1844. ³⁵ SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/442/15, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 28 August 1844. ³⁶ Mitchell, *Irish in the West of Scotland*, p. 240.

was by no means a wealthy institution. In the years since the beginning of significant Irish immigration it had struggled to raise money for the building of chapels and the employment of priests. As has been shown, by the mid-1830s progress had been made although several chapels in the region remained heavily in debt. By that time, however, the Church had raised enough money to begin a period of expansion, and in the remainder of the 1830s and throughout the 1840s plots of land were purchased and places of worship erected on them. Debts remained on these buildings, but the practice was, as with the chapels built prior to the late 1830s, that the money owed would be repaid eventually by the new congregations, through their seat rents, their weekly contributions and through special collections.³⁷ The Repeal Rent, therefore, was depriving the Catholic Church in the western lowlands of vital funds, and the Irish priests in the region were in part responsible for persuading the Catholic Irish to contribute to it.

By 1845 some of these Irish priests had left the Western District to resume their vocation in Ireland, while others had been transferred from their original postings to serve in different missions in the Vicariate. Many within the Catholic community in the western lowlands, and in particular in the Glasgow area, were convinced that these clergymen had been punished because of their support for Repeal, and by late 1844 Bishop Murdoch's stewardship was being publicly questioned and indeed criticised.³⁸ At least one of the Irish priests was moved because of his role in the agitation: in November 1844 Revd Hugh Quigley was 'relegated' from St Mary's Chapel in Glasgow to the Mission at Campbeltown because he had 'earnestly advocated "Repeal"'.³⁹ The following month, Bishop Murdoch, from the pulpit at St Mary's during Sunday Mass, attacked the Repeal Movement, condemned Quigley 'for his conduct as a Repeal agitator', and denounced those who had attended a farewell soirée for the Irish priest.⁴⁰ Murdoch's outburst infuriated many of those present, and, according to Quigley's successor at Campbeltown, one half of the congregation walked out of the chapel during it. It was apparently with some difficulty that these Irish Catholics were persuaded to again attend the chapel and contribute to its upkeep.⁴¹

Murdoch and Scott's fears concerning the close relationship between Irish priests and people were again confirmed by the subsequent behaviour of Quigley, and by the activities of another Irish priest, John McDermott, who was in charge

37 For the development of the Roman Catholic Church in the western lowlands during the first half of the nineteenth century see Mitchell, 'Establishment and Early Years of the Hamilton Mission', pp. 1–14; John F. McCaffrey, 'The Stewardship of Resources: Financial Strategies of Roman Catholics in the Glasgow District, 1800–70', in W.J. Shiels and Diana Wood (eds), *Studies in Church History Vol. 24: The Church and Wealth* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 359–70; Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church*, esp. chapters 17, 18, 20, 25. **38** Mitchell, *Irish in the West of Scotland*, pp. 238–9. **39** GAA, Western District Papers, WD5, Michael Condon Memoirs, Miguelide, p. 460. **40** *Glasgow Saturday Post*, 14 December 1844. **41** GAA, Western District Papers, WD5, Michael Condon Memoirs, Miguelide, pp. 459–60, 462.

of the Dalry Mission in Ayrshire. The two clergymen, who had been classmates at St Mary's College in Youghal, disobeyed orders and instructions from Bishop Murdoch, who eventually gave them permission to seek employment outwith the Western District.⁴² Shortly after this, in April 1846, they attended a Repeal meeting in Glasgow at which, according to Bishop Scott, Quigley 'made a most violent harangue' against Murdoch. Scott added that the two priests had 'raised by their calumnies a very bad feeling among the Catholics of Glasgow against Dr Murdoch . . .'⁴³ The following month they left the Vicariate for good. A relieved Andrew Scott described them as 'the most self conceited, ungovernable beings that I ever knew among clergymen'.⁴⁴

The activities of the Irish priests in the western lowlands from 1843 onwards reinforced the view of Andrew Scott that only Scottish clergymen should be used in the region. In November 1844 he stated:

Experience has already proved that Religion will not advance in this part of the Country with so many Irish priests in it. They wish to bring every thing to a level with Irish ideas and Irish practices, and will not encourage the people to contribute for the propagation of Religion. On the contrary, if thwarted in their views they discourage them and even countenance them in resistance to the Bishop.⁴⁵

He therefore redoubled his efforts to obtain as many Scottish boys for the seminaries as was possible, in order to 'do away with the necessity of sending for Irish clergymen'.⁴⁶ In letters to colleagues in the Northern District, Scott asked if they knew of, or could find, boys who wanted to be trained for the priesthood and then be ordained for the Western District. For example, in 1845 a Scottish priest recommended an Irishman to Scott for the college at Blairs, but Scott replied that the man did not satisfy the conditions laid down by the benefactors of that institution. He added:

I will be glad to receive on your recommendation as many Scotch boys from the airds or Strathglass as you can find for me. But you need not recommend any Irishman to me. I have had too much experience of them already.⁴⁷

⁴² Mitchell, *Irish in the West of Scotland*, p. 242. ⁴³ SCA, Preshome Letters, PL3/327/5, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 29 April 1846. ⁴⁴ SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/517/6, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 28 May 1846. ⁴⁵ SCA, Blairs Letters, BL5/442/19, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 27 November 1844. ⁴⁶ SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/442/20, Andrew Scott to James Kyle, 5 December 1844. ⁴⁷ SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/483/10, Andrew Scott to Angus MacKenzie, 5 June 1845. The Northern District consisted of the Counties of Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, Kincardineshire, Morayshire and Nairnshire – i.e. the north-east – as well as the Highland Counties of Sutherland, Caithness-shire, Ross and Cromarty, and

Moreover, despite there being a major shortage of students for the Western District at Blairs, Scott was extremely reluctant to accept for the seminary boys born in the western lowlands of Irish immigrant parents, as he regarded them, as indeed they regarded themselves, as being just as Irish as those who had been born and raised in the old country. For example, in June 1844 he asked a priest at Auchinhalrig, in the north-east, to recommend to him one or two boys for Blairs, adding that:

I could get plenty here [i.e. the western lowlands] whose parents were able and willing to pay for them, and the boys in the mean time seem well enough disposed. But we have too few Scotch priests in this part of the country, and I would rather have Scotch boys if I should pay for them the first years board myself.⁴⁸

Scott was unable to rid the Western District of Irish priests and died in December 1846. He was succeeded as Vicar Apostolic by John Murdoch. Murdoch shared Scott's opinion of the Irish who served in the Vicariate, but soon realised that the dream of an all-Scottish priesthood was not going to become a reality. There were simply not enough Scottish boys who wanted to become priests and afterwards serve in the western lowlands; meanwhile, the number of Irish immigrants was increasing rapidly as thousands flooded into the towns of the region to escape the Great Famine. As John Murdoch wearily stated in May 1848: 'I am sadly annoyed by the unsteadiness of the Hibernian portion of my clergy. I wish to heaven I could do without Irish priests; for, in general, they do not answer well: But it is impossible for me to get on without them'.⁴⁹

III

From 1838 until his death in 1846, Bishop Andrew Scott was hostile towards the presence of Irish clergymen in the Western District. The Catholic Church in Scotland was a missionary church, and Scott was convinced that conversions in significant numbers were not occurring largely because the Scottish Protestant population was prejudiced against clergymen from Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish priests had disobeyed episcopal directives, in particular after 1843 when they continued to promote Repeal despite being told not to participate in that campaign. Such defiance was completely unacceptable to Scott; he was a strict disciplinarian

the northern part of Inverness-shire, along with the Shetland Islands and the Orkney Islands. Most of the Roman Catholics in this Vicariate were Scottish. ⁴⁸ SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/442/10, Andrew Scott to William Caven, 28 June 1844. ⁴⁹ SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/587/6, John Murdoch to James Kyle, 31 May 1848. In August 1850 Murdoch claimed that there were at least 100,000 Catholics in the Western District. *Catholic Directory for Scotland for 1851*, p. 68.

who believed that the Catholics in his Vicariate – priests and people – had to submit to his will on all matters, both spiritual and temporal.⁵⁰

The main reason for Andrew Scott's hostility, however, concerned the future governance of the Western District of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland. Scott was conscious of the fact that the Irish laity and clergy in the western lowlands had a strong sense of national identity. In 1829 he stated that his 'Paddies' were 'poor, ignorant people, enthusiastically attached to every thing that bears the name of Irish'.⁵¹ Fifteen years later, he told the Poor Law Inquiry that the Catholic Irish in the region 'were very national in their ideas and sentiments – rather too much so in some cases'.⁵² The Irish priests in the Western District were equally nationalistic, as, for example, their overwhelming and enthusiastic support for Repeal demonstrated. Andrew Scott was fully aware that a strong bond, based on their love of Ireland and all things Irish, had been formed between the Irish clergy and laity, and he believed that this posed a serious threat to his authority and to the position of the Scottish Catholic clergy in the Vicariate. After all, such a close relationship had previously resulted in trouble within the District: during their disputes with the Church, Revd Gibbons and Revd Byrne, in 1829 and 1832–3 respectively, played the Irish card to inflame the people against Andrew Scott and his Scots-born colleagues.

Scott had been able to weather these storms because he was dealing with only one priest at a time, and was able to use the full weight of Church authority to impose his will on each man. The situation in the 1840s was potentially far more serious for him. Irish priests were now a significant presence in the western lowlands. At the beginning of 1844, 10 of the 22 clergymen in the region were Irish-born; by the time Scott died, in December 1846, the proportion was 16 out of 30. Moreover, the atmosphere within the region was more nationalistic, as O'Connell's Repeal agitation had intensified the sense of national identity of both the Irish clergy and the Irish laity. The campaign had also strengthened the already close relationship between Irish priests and people, while at the same time it had helped to widen the social and cultural gulf between the Scots clergy and the Catholic Irish since the former remained aloof from Repeal activities. Indeed, during the peak years of the agitation two Irish priests (Hugh Quigley and John McDermott) used their influence among the laity to foment hostility towards Bishop Murdoch.

These developments greatly alarmed Andrew Scott, particularly as he was aware that his Irish clergymen, who by the mid-1840s were regarded as a 'party among the Priests',⁵³ wished 'to bring every thing to a level with Irish ideas and practices . . .' In 1829 Revd Gibbons had argued that because the Roman Catholics in the western lowlands were mostly Irish, they should be served by Irish priests and be

50 See, for example, Mitchell, *Irish in the West of Scotland*, chapters 4 and 5. 51 SCA, Blairs Letters, BL2/248/16, Andrew Scott to Alexander Paterson, 23 October 1829. 52 Quoted in Handley, *Irish in Scotland*, pp. 284–5. 53 SCA, Blairs Letters, BL6/492/7, John Bremner to William Caven, 29 December 1846.

governed by Irish bishops. This view found great support among the laity at the time. In the 1840s Scott was undoubtedly worried that the strongly nationalistic – and truculent – alliance of Irish priests and people would lead ultimately (and perhaps very quickly) to demands that Irish clergymen should play the dominant role in the Vicariate, and perhaps even in the Scottish Mission given that the majority of Catholics in the country were Irish or of Irish descent.

Irish ascendancy within the Church was something which Scott, Murdoch and their Scottish colleagues were simply not willing to countenance. The Roman Catholic Church in Scotland had a long history, and a tradition which was distinct from that of the Church both in England and in Ireland. Native Catholics had kept the faith alive in the country since the Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Scottish bishops and clergy did not want to see their Church, the *Scottish Catholic Church*, taken over by Irish priests and bishops, or, even worse, by the Catholic Church of Ireland.⁵⁴ Therefore until his death Scott was determined to rid the Western District of Irish clergymen. John Murdoch also wanted an all-Scottish priesthood but circumstances dictated that this was not to happen. Fortunately for him, the threat posed to his Vicariate by the Irish priests receded considerably shortly after he became Vicar Apostolic. The Repeal agitation in the western lowlands was already in decline at the time of his succession, and government repression in 1848 killed off the Movement throughout the United Kingdom.⁵⁵ Moreover, from 1847 until the early 1850s the attention of the region's Catholic clergy – Scottish and Irish – was focused mainly on how to deal with the huge influx of poverty-stricken refugees from the Famine in Ireland. Throughout the 1850s, the issue of Irish priests in the western lowlands was not one which appears to have troubled the Scottish bishops and their senior clergy to the same extent as it had done in the previous decade. This was probably because the priests and people were more concerned about preserving a united front against the upsurge of anti-Catholic hostility and Protestant proselytism.⁵⁶ In the 1860s, however, the 'Irish issue' within the priesthood in the Western District re-emerged in spectacular fashion, and resulted in a major conflict which ended only when Rome appointed an Englishman, Charles Eyre, to take charge of the Vicariate.

In the 1840s Bishops Scott and Murdoch hoped – and perhaps prayed – that the presence of Irish priests in the western lowlands would be only temporary. In that decade, however, and in subsequent ones, the shortage of Scots-born priests, combined with the continued growth of the Catholic Irish community, ensured that clergymen from Ireland became a permanent, and important, fixture in the region.

⁵⁴ These views were also held by the Scottish clergy during their conflict with a section of the Irish clergy and laity in the 1860s. See n.1. ⁵⁵ See Mitchell, *Irish in the West of Scotland*, chapter 8. ⁵⁶ For this anti-Catholic hostility see Handley, *Irish in Modern Scotland*, pp. 93–113.