The idea that mass migration from nineteenth-century Ireland created an Irish ‘empire’ has had enduring appeal. It proved a rare source of pride during depressed periods in independent Ireland, particularly the 1940s and 1950s, and provided the basis of an evocative title for at least one popular version of the Irish diaspora’s story as late as the turn of this century. In the latter context especially, ‘Irish empire’ can appear simply a wry play on a far more common and not unrelated phrase – ‘British empire’. Yet as many historians of Ireland, its diaspora and particularly the Irish Catholic Church have noted, the existence of a peculiarly Irish ‘spiritual empire’ was widely spoken of even as the country’s ports remained choked with emigrants. This concept, normally involving the perception of a special, God-given emigrants’ ‘mission’ to spread the faith in whatever part of the world they settled, is somewhat problematic given the practical limitations explored in chapter three. Nevertheless, as a continually employed explanation of Irish emigration, and one which was very nearly the sole preserve of clergy, it merits dissection here.

Curiously, while historians in the groups mentioned above allude to the prevalence of this line of thought, there have been few sustained attempts to analyse it. For many historians encountering the ‘spiritual empire’ thesis in the context of migration and the diaspora, its expression can be quickly dismissed as ‘unrealistic’ posturing, or as a merely ‘compensatory discourse’ which formed a more ‘comforting’ counterpoint to angry and generally futile pulpit denunciations of the causes of continuing emigration. Kerby Miller places it among the ‘ambivalent rationalizations’ of emigration offered by Catholic and nationalist commentators, a range of interpretations which he regards as secondary to his overarching ‘exile’ motif and consequently he gives...
it much less attention than it deserves. In the historiography of Irish religion, meanwhile, the ‘spiritual empire’ is an entity more usually and narrowly associated with the Cullenite takeover of Catholic Church leadership in the English-speaking world – what has been variously termed an ‘Irish episcopal invasion’ and ‘Irish episcopal imperialism’ – and with the staffing of its lower echelons with a stream of Irish priests and religious orders. In such readings, lay emigrants can often appear as mere background actors, their scattering, whether directly or indirectly, allowing the creation of new dioceses in which Paul Cullen could then have his Ultramontane acolytes installed as prelates. There is, also, a third category of cultural-historical analysis which places the idea firmly in a continuum of confident, anti-modern Catholic thought which began in the 1860s, reached its first peak during the cultural revival period towards the end of the nineteenth century, and its second in the middle decades of the twentieth. This, as we shall see, substantially misdates the emergence of the idea.

A merging of Irish migration and religious history therefore demands a more detailed and focused treatment of what was a long-running and widespread facet of the clerical discussion of emigration. While Sheridan Gilley’s pioneering work in the area argues that ‘the creation of an international Catholic Church through the Celtic diaspora in the British Empire and North America’ was ‘quite the most remarkable achievement of nineteenth-century Ireland’, this assertion opens an article which is focused primarily on the creation of an ‘international consciousness’ among Irish Catholic emigrants. The roots of the ‘spiritual empire’ concept and its effects on Ireland itself – in other words the Irish spiritual empire ‘at home’ – remain largely untouched. This chapter will therefore address the matter in these terms. It will look firstly at the set of ideas that lay behind the concept of a special emigrants’ mission. It will then trace the development of its expression and any challenges to it – including parallel evocations of the concept from Irish Protestant clergy – before finally examining some important practical consequences of emigration and the ‘spiritual empire’ for the Irish churches.

‘The notion of Ireland as a lever of transformation in the wider world,’ as Declan Kiberd has noted, had considerable currency in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland. W. B. Yeats and Padraig Pearse were exponents of the idea in the cultural sphere, but there were also secular versions from such diverse figures as James Connolly, who registered a hope that ‘Irish apostles of Socialism’
would exercise their influence in America, and Sir William Wilde, who asserted that ‘the manifest destiny of the Celtic race was being fulfilled – to spread the English language, and carry the Irish heart, bravery, and poetry throughout the world’.10 ‘The belief that Ireland, through her considerable diaspora, exercised a disproportionate influence in the world, despite her modest size and her oppressed and persecuted position, functioned as a source of hope for many who sought for it vainly elsewhere. To some, it showed what the Irish would be capable of given self-government; hence the numerous paeans to the Irish abroad which appeared throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, detailing the towering achievements of Irish politicians and businessmen in their adopted homes.11 Such secular success stories, tempered as they were by widespread knowledge of the more mundane and often precarious fates of most Irish emigrants, were the least of it, however. Religious commentators had begun offering a more unambiguously glorious narrative some time earlier.

Broadly speaking, this narrative involved the interpretation of mass emigration from Ireland as the fulfilment of a specific, divine ‘destiny’, which had been specially accorded to the Irish ‘race’. God had chosen the Irish to be, in a repeated phrase, a ‘martyr nation’12 whose millions of exiled children were to form the faithful core of new congregations and dioceses of the Catholic Church wherever they settled around the world. That, as Mathew noted to his secretary on a visit to North America, included virtually everywhere. He saw the peculiar scattering of the Irish, as compared to the concentration of other European immigrants, as a function of their providential destiny.13 Indeed, to many, this was primarily a mission of the laity, only later supported (imperfectly, as we have seen) by the formal structures of the church. As the occasionally hibernophobic American Catholic commentator Orestes Brownson pointed out:

What is peculiar in the modern missions of the Irish […] is that the people precede the pastor. They go out from Ireland as soldiers or as laborers, and wherever they go they carry their faith and devotion to the church with them. The priest soon follows them, and the nucleus of a Christendom is formed.14

This, as Brownson implied, contrasted with Ireland’s earlier missions, the medieval ‘golden age’ when Columbanus, Colm Cille, Aidan and other Irish monks had founded significant early Christian settlements across Europe. Nonetheless, their efforts seemed to offer compelling
parallels with the present. They showed, in the words of the eminent orator Fr Burke, that ‘the Irish exile is a name recognised in history. The Irish exile is not a being of yesterday or of last year’. Migration had always formed an integral part of Ireland’s identity and place in the world, and it had also had a specifically religious purpose. The efforts of Columbanus et al. might even suggest that such evangelism came naturally to the Irish. Moreover, antiquarian interest in these stories had lately reintroduced them to modern readers as glorious figures who, through their exile, had made an evidently lasting impact on the world. Acknowledged by both Irish and European churchmen, this appeared to give every reason to believe that time would reveal a similar higher purpose to the contemporary exodus.

This was, however, just the first of a timely confluence of circumstances which seemed, from mid-century, to lend plausibility to the ‘spiritual empire’ thesis. The second involved further self-congratulation. It was repeatedly asserted that Irish Catholics had proved themselves ‘inviolably attached’ to their religion, and capable of retaining their faith through centuries of challenges. Most recently, neither penal laws nor opportunistic proselytism had swayed anything more than a small minority away from Catholicism. As Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore observed of the Irish, ‘no other people ever suffered for their Catholic faith as they’. This, many commentators felt, put Irish Catholicism on a higher plain. A Donnybrook priest told his congregation in 1850, ‘There is not such a religious people on the face of the earth – so attached to their faith – so attached to their clergy’. The strength and resilience of Irish faith was matched by its ancient ‘purity’. Michael Phelan, an Irish-Australian Jesuit, noted that ‘Ireland had never belonged to the Empire of the Caesars’ and thereby cut off, had been ‘saved from its corruption and final ruin’. In an 1862 pastoral letter, Paul Cullen observed the spreading by emigrants of ‘the faith which they inherited from St Patrick, and which had been handed down to them pure and uncontaminated by their fathers’.

Such an exemplary form of religion was one not merely deserving of propagation, but one that could adapt to any climate, however harsh. One Irish-American bishop attested that the Irish were ‘brave by nature, inured to poverty and hardship, just released from a struggle unto death for the faith’, making them, ‘of all the peoples of Europe’ the ‘best fitted to open the way for religion in a new country’. Moreover, the very experience of persecution would itself be unique preparation for what lay ahead. As the Jesuit Auguste Thébaud wrote:
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Suppose the Irish never to have been persecuted in their own country: suppose that they had found there a benevolent government to supply them with churches, schools, hospitals, homes for the poor [...] how bitterly would they have felt the inconvenience of building all these things up for themselves in their new homes with the labor of their own hands, by their own individual efforts, unaided by the government! [...] persecution had admirably fitted them for the mighty work that lay before them. It was the first time for centuries that they were allowed to give for such sacred purposes.  

Thus, a tested faith, one which had withstood constant attack, commentators appeared to say, was eminently placed to take on both the many difficulties and the new freedoms which a world-wide mission would present.

The third apparently favourable circumstance also concerned a particular quality of the Irish, related to the second but harder for the modern sceptic to dismiss. By the advent of the Famine the ability to speak English had become a prerequisite of social advancement in general, and of emigration in particular. William Wilde may have thought Irish emigrants were thereby destined to spread the English language, but Catholic commentators saw it merely as a medium for conveying another cultural export. Ireland, it was noted, had an exceptional status as the only English-speaking Catholic country in the world. The implication was obvious. As Dr O’Brien of All Hallows observed in 1854, ‘all the nations and dependencies which speak the English tongue, ha[ve] only Ireland to save them’. ‘The children of St Patrick,’ his college’s annual asserted, ‘are the missionaries of the English-speaking population of the globe’. Given that ‘the English tongue [was] becoming the world language’, Ireland’s vital global importance to the Catholic cause was apparent. Cardinal Newman hit upon the heart of the matter when he noted that ‘The English language and the Irish race are overrunning the world’. This, he implied, was no coincidence.

On the point of language, it is curious to note that, as Patrick O’Farrell does, that the notion of an Irish religious destiny was especially popular among Irish scholar priests of the Gaelic Revival, the otherwise lamentable fact that English had superseded the native language could be painted in positive terms. A sermon by an unnamed Co. Antrim cleric, which greatly impressed the editor of the Irish Monthly in 1887, elaborated:
Population, providence and empire

But surely it is some consolation for the loss of our language and of many other things that thus we are enabled to turn into an agent for the propagation of God’s church, that language which is at present the chief medium of communication between the civilised races of mankind, and whose world-wide ascendency is certain to be increased in every successive generation. […] The language of Shakespeare, so copious, so pliable, and so strong, is not all given over to the service of heresy, scepticism, infidelity, and modern Paganism. English with an Irish accent has been the medium of some of the noblest bursts of eloquence and of some of the sweetest strains of poetry; and in another sphere, the most fervent prayers that ever went up from earth to heaven. 29

Rev. P. S. Dineen later extended this idea in his own interpretation of ‘the world-wide empire of the Irish race’, when he suggested that a combination of religious fervour and a uniquely Irish ‘oratorical genius’ were key to its success in spreading the church abroad. 30

This third element was in turn linked to the fourth, for if English was the emerging world language, it was in part because England was the emerging world power. Indeed, it was widely understood, as English Oratorian Frederick Faber pointed out to Irish congregations in 1852, that ‘The destiny of Ireland is common with that of England. She whose mighty empire extends over the globe, and upon whose realm the sun never sets.’ ‘The very tide of emigration flowing from [Ireland’s] shores’ bore the Gospel to the remotest extremes of the earth through England’s colonial possessions, and indeed to England itself. 31 Britain and her empire were to be construed, therefore, as the means through which an alternative Irish spiritual empire might be forged. That process began at home, where the injuries – and even the occasional blessings – of British rule encouraged emigration. The English Jesuit George Porter, speaking in 1864, could see in almost every piece of English legislation enacted in Ireland the hand of God preparing and spurring forward the Irish nation for its mission. National education had ‘fitted the peasant for the work he was destined for’; the Encumbered Estates Court had ‘enacted the most glorious revolution’ which attracted ‘a new set of landlords, who cared not for the peasantry, and who drove many thousands forth from this land’; the unchecked Famine had seen emigration intensify. ‘Look at the cause,’ he said, ‘and see how God had used the mind and government of England and the instincts of men for his own ends’. 32

More common was a sense that “The very ambition and desire for gain which impel England to extend her power and plant her colonies
in the most distant countries of the globe, become the instruments for carrying also the undying faith of Ireland to the regions which England has conquered. In Ireland, as Bartholomew Woodlock claimed in 1863 before the Catholic University opening session, ‘the haughty Protestant mistress of the seas’ had ‘an humble Catholic handmaid’. This, once more, was deemed a deliberate design of Providence. Indeed, it was only, according to Michael O’Connor, ‘because of the higher role God wanted her to play in making way for the Irish to spread their faith’ that England had been allowed to acquire an empire at all. Such thinking had its ancient allegories, Auguste Thébaud explaining that the Irish would accomplish the spreading of the Gospel in distant regions ‘without a navy of their own’. Rather, ‘as their ancestors did in pagan times, they would use the vessels of nations born for thrift and trade; the stately ships of the “Egyptians”, would be used by the “people of God”’.

Thébaud’s reference to English ‘thrift and trade’ was pointed, intimating that, in this line of thought, Britain’s empire was one of venal materialism and unchecked cruelty, which stood in unfavourable comparison – rather than in loose union – with Catholic Ireland’s more noble empire of the spirit, ‘cemented by racial sympathy and love’. For the popular Cork novelist, Canon Patrick Sheehan, this contrast spoke of Ireland’s fundamentally Christian ideals of humble self-sacrifice. ‘Ireland will never rank amongst the great powers,’ he wrote in 1887, ‘Neither would I desire it […] And, surely, there is no true Irishman who would not rather see your harbour ploughed by the emigrant ship, carrying your evangelists over the world to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, than to see its waters blackened with the hulls of warships crammed with deadly instruments of destruction for the annihilation of the weaker nations of the earth.’ Ireland may have been one of those ‘weaker nations’, Sheehan proclaimed elsewhere, but Irish emigrants were bound to follow the mightier nation and establish ‘a spiritual empire coterminous with that political empire’.

If it was ‘coterminous’, it was also greater – in extent as well as purpose. Certainly, the fact that the chief destination of Irish emigrants was in itself a separate, and increasingly powerful empire of capital was a point not lost on Irish Catholic rhetoricians of a particularly nationalist bent. Fr Thomas Burke, as recent work has shown, ‘envision[ed] a Catholic empire in North America with a decidedly Irish character’.

Others saw in the United States, especially, the
coming revenge for English misdeeds. Fr Daniel Cahill was fond of expounding on England’s folly in causing the displacement of so many Irish to the United States, where their voices were being raised in Ireland’s favour. ‘Even now’, he noted in 1853, ‘if you will be quiet, you can audibly distinguish the shout of joy raised by seven millions of our blood, and our race, and our faith, all along the free shores of glorious hospitable America’.41 Indeed, Cahill was among those who dreamed of the United States one day annexing Ireland.42 Such thinking clearly pre-figured the emergence of the Fenians from among the diaspora and their powerful motivating factor of ‘revenge for Skibbereen’ or the belief that Irish America would, in one emigrant’s words, pay the British government ‘a just reward for their oppression’.43 While this idea had its providential element – the cry of ‘God save Ireland’, after all, belonged to the Fenians as much as anyone else – it also had a more overtly religious parallel, wherein the mistakes and iniquities of England would be answered not by a military or a political revenge but by a spiritual one. Irish Catholic emigration, lamented though it was, would ultimately prove to be the bane of Protestant England’s empire. In Cullen’s fire and brimstone description, God, through the dispersal of the Irish people and all that this was destined to entail, was ‘confound[ing] the counsels of the wicked, and turn[ing] the arts of the children of darkness against themselves’.44

It ought to be noted that the idea that an essentially political and commercial empire could also be used – indeed, was divinely designed to be used – for higher, religious purposes was not original. Even as Catholics made such claims for Ireland, British Protestant missionaries were everywhere striving to prove their own version.45 How to explain, as Stewart Brown has elaborated, ‘that the inhabitants of a group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe had come to exercise dominion over such vast territories and hundreds of millions of non-Christians’, if not that they had been ‘chosen by God’ to do so?46 As historians have lately demonstrated, however, the relationship between ‘the bible and the flag’ – between Protestant missions and empire – was a highly complex one. Missionaries sometimes ran ahead of secular imperial expansion, or moved into areas the empire would never reach; they often objected to its worst excesses; and they did not always act as enthusiastic ‘agents of empire’ to the degree that is sometimes popularly imagined. ‘Religion versus Empire’, to address Andrew Porter’s question, may be a step too far, but at the very least, there was often an uneasy alliance between secular and
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religious British overseas expansion. Nonetheless, the notion that God had given Britain its empire for the purpose of Christianising the globe was widespread among British Protestants from at least the eighteenth century, and could be expressed whether or not one agreed with all the secular pursuits of imperialism. In an odd sense, it is the kind of Irish Catholic rhetoric just discussed which most clearly demonstrates this fact.

The question of how Irish Protestants figured in all of this is therefore an interesting one, and ought to detain us here at least briefly. Two competing propositions present themselves. Firstly, did commentators from each (or either) denomination match Irish Catholics in claiming that their lay emigrants were instrumental in creating specifically Irish ‘spiritual empires’ of their own? Or, secondly, was the Irish Protestant diaspora as easily assimilated into a broader British narrative in such rhetoric as it apparently was on the ground in the colonies? There appears relatively little evidence of the former in the case of the Irish Presbyterian and Anglican churches. Invocations of Ireland’s medieval missionary past can be found, but are much less frequent than in Catholic commentary, and generally refer to the work of missionary societies and their agents rather than to lay emigration. If some Irish Protestants did see a particular religious role for their migrant brethren, it was a familiar one; given their experiences in Ireland, they were deemed especially well equipped to act (though in unspecific terms) as a bulwark against ‘disloyal’ Irish Catholic designs on the empire, of which the Protestant churches clearly were not unaware. As Orange Order histories attest, Irish Protestant migrants could number among the most enthusiastic proponents of an empire that they particularly held to be a bastion of ‘distinctive Protestantism’, and those left at home were conscious and proud of a vibrant ‘Orange world’ – which was, however, neither exclusively Irish nor specifically ‘spiritual’ – within that empire.

The Irish Protestant diaspora was, therefore, interpreted as being very much inside the British empire, patriotically contributing to ‘the imperial nationality’, rather than disloyally using it as a foundation on which to construct its own alternative Irish spiritual empire or empires. Protestant Irishmen, Church of Ireland bishops asserted, were ‘integral’ to the empire’s spread of ‘civilisation and religion’, operating ‘side by side with their English brethren’. Like these brethren, however, Irish Protestants could also offer critiques of some of the more distasteful facets of imperialism. The Ulster Presbyte-
rian minister John Brown, for example, noted as early as 1865 that while the colonies offered protection to Protestant emigrants who were ‘the most powerful means of diffusing the Gospel’, the ‘unjustifiably severe’ treatment of their ‘aboriginal inhabitants’ ought to be condemned. In that sense, the Protestants of Ireland viewed their providential mission to spread the faith as a joint enterprise with the sister island, and saw it in the same, sometimes conflicting terms as English, Scottish and Welsh Protestants did.

Thus, there was little that was distinctively Irish about Irish Protestants’ conceptions of a ‘spiritual empire’, except perhaps that when occasion eventually called for it, the role of the Irish Protestant was put to more overt political use than may have been the case for the rest of the United Kingdom. The ‘empire card’, according to one analysis, was the second most popular argument used against a Dublin parliament during three Home Rule crises. The churches, particularly the Church of Ireland, made their share of the plays. One minister, still smarting from disestablishment, warned William Gladstone in 1882 that the empire was at risk if he continued to ignore the Protestants of Ireland, who were, he noted, ‘destined to take a noble part in transmitting the light further westward’ via the rising American empire, if not via the British. As alluded to in the previous chapter, Presbyterian commentators had likewise long looked to the United States to fulfil any notions of a religious ‘destiny’, although it was arguably a more mutually cooperative, transatlantic exchange of ideas that they saw themselves engaged in, than the singular, exclusive mission Irish Catholics had assigned to themselves. Indeed, Hempton and Hill have noted that Irish evangelicals ‘could think of themselves either as a faithful remnant of righteousness in a pagan land or as part of a great and civilising world empire’, ‘depending on circumstances’. At least insofar as the emigration of their own congregants went, circumstances did not seem to demand that Irish Protestants construct a providential narrative as complex, multi-faceted, and pervasive as the one invented by their Catholic equivalents.

Catholics, therefore, had a set of apparently cogent reasons to believe that mass migration from Ireland was part of a divine plan. History, a much-vaunted purity and strength of faith in the face of persecution, knowledge of an increasingly universal language, and the opening up to a great stream of Irish emigrants of empires both political and mercantile, appeared to have converged in timely fashion to create a perfect missionary storm. A modern, secular perspective
might find obvious problems with this thesis. While the characterisation and dismissal of it as unrealistic by some scholars is understandable, that fails to take account of how persuasive these accumulated factors, continually recited in sermons, lectures and public journals, must have appeared to those of genuine faith. After all, as Sheridan Gilley has observed, Catholicism has at its core a belief that ‘all men are exiles, poor banished children of Eve’ whose lives had a destiny to fulfill in getting to heaven. It was not such a great theoretical leap from this accepted individual assignment to a more general national or tribal ‘calling’ exercised through mass outward migration. Misguided or not, the belief had tangible consequences and simply alleging a lack of realism for this explanation of emigration somewhat misses the point.

Similarly, the straightforward impression that the notion of a ‘spiritual empire’ served to comfort or compensate for the diminution of flocks at home, though certainly true in part, also tends towards simplification and a disallowance of genuine religious belief. The clear implication is that this was a concept consciously invented for that purpose alone, and that an element of self-delusion at best, or, at worst, cynicism lay behind its repeated espousal. Certainly, there are reasons to suppose that either may have been the case. There can be no doubt that the idea of a God-given mission was sometimes a convenient rhetorical weapon to deploy. In certain contexts, it was used to boost self-esteem – news reports suggest that it could be relied upon to reap cheers and applause at public gatherings – to distract from empty pews at home, and even to indemnify those home losses. On one occasion in 1852, for example, Cullen told the French Catholic newspaper L’Univers, from whose readers he had received aid to fight proselytism and the causes of emigration, that ‘One sole reflection is able to fortify us – it is, that those emigrants without number who quit our shores, or who are inhumanly driven from them, are destined to raise the standard of the cross in distant countries, and to carry the light of the Gospel to nations seated in the shadow of death’.

It is also possible to speculate that another calculated interpretation was being developed. As discussed in Chapter Four, many Protestant commentators from the Famine onwards delighted in believing that most emigrants’ Catholicism barely lasted the Atlantic crossing and would leap on any and all public hints from Catholics concerned about the spiritual destitution of the diaspora to confirm as much. To counter these suggestions, the construction of a matching propaganda,
involving an entirely different providential plan for Irish Catholic migrants, would have held an obvious attraction. While that may occasionally have been the case, the Catholic thesis would arguably have developed and taken hold regardless. As has been seen, the more usual and reasonably effective Catholic response to such Protestant rhetoric consisted of a non-engagement with it: it was either quietly ignored or acerbically ridiculed. Therefore, the notion of an Irish Catholic ‘spiritual empire’ cannot be seen as simply a cynical reaction to Irish Protestant claims of the opposite.

Proof of the sincerity of the belief in a higher purpose to emigration can, moreover, be found in its private expression. More than one letter to Dr Kirby at the Irish College, Rome employed such language specifically to explain the continued outflow. The Waterford Christian Brother M. P. Riordan wrote in 1847 that ‘such of the people as have a trifle of money are mostly emigrating to America, and tens of thousands are going to England […] God has his own wise ends in my view, and will, doubtless, turn this pressing calamity to our advantage’. In 1863, a Waterford curate, George Commins, complained that the exodus went on despite apparently good harvest prospects. It was, he said ‘most alarming and melancholy’, that ‘every day the peasant class are leaving our Quay and no longer with that wild expression of sorrow with which they were accustomed to leave poor Ireland some years ago, but with the stolid coolness of men who have grown weary of the striving and poverty of home’. Still, he felt, ‘Providence no doubt has his own wise ends in this and has chosen them as instruments for a great work viz. of carrying the faith into all parts of [the] world’. The following year, the president of St Colman’s College in Fermoy speculated similarly that despite the ‘Sixty four thousand people [who] left Queenstown by one line of boats, between the January of ’63, and the January of ’64, a figure he described as ‘terrible’, ‘we must only hope and believe, notwithstanding, that Providence has something good in store for us yet’.

Stripped of its public bluster, the notion of a special providential mission of the Irish appears for the theodicy it essentially was. It represented the obvious and, on their terms, rational response of the pious to a dispiriting phenomenon which came to require, not simply condemnation in a political or economic context, but explanation in religious terms. Why would a merciful God allow such a terrible drain to occur otherwise? On that score, recourse to the notion of Ireland as ‘the centre of a world-wide mission’ came easily in the aftermath
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of the Famine, in part because it had existed in a nascent form before then, when, let us recall, emigration had been a much less controversial political and economic issue for many Catholic clerics. This had allowed the development of a definite, positive sense that Irish emigrants were helping form the nucleus of an infant and growing church in Britain, America and beyond, a fact only magnified when prelates in the American church increasingly had names that were distinctly Irish in origin. The newly formed Irish Association for the Propagation of the Faith pushed this line from its beginning, and one Dublin Review writer was moved to speculate in 1839 that, owing to emigration, both Irish and German, ‘all America will be a Catholic country’.67 Two years later, one of that journal’s founders, Dr Wiseman, told an Irish audience that ‘emigration ha[d] extended the influence of the church to distant countries’.68

What is more, two of the most prominent contemporary Catholic spokesmen in Ireland were making similar and even more explicit claims. As far back as 1840, Archbishop John MacHale had been quoted in the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, claiming that ‘England is suffering from Ireland the generous retaliation of the Gospel; for, by filling England with its industrious Catholic emigrants, our country is silently bringing that fine nation back to the yoke of the Gospel’.69 A year later, Daniel O’Connell reportedly told Fr James Maher that through emigration, ‘Ireland is fulfilling her destiny – that of Catholicising other nations’:

Wherever a few exiled Irish get together, the first thing they think of is, to procure the ministration of a priest for their little community. Thus a nucleus of Catholicism is formed, and the surrounding inhabitants are attracted; first by curiosity; then they are led to inquire; and, finally, several will end by embracing the faith. It is these little colonies of Irish who have largely helped to diffuse Catholicity through England.70

It was natural, therefore, that as the shock of the Famine sank in, the revival of this idea saw opinions of Irish influence on the church abroad inflated to match the hugely increased Irish population abroad. Indeed, German and French Catholic migrants, often mentioned alongside the Irish before the Famine, tend to go uncredited in such discourse after it. The unprecedentedly extensive exodus from Ireland which began in 1846 really seemed to many to speak of an unprecedentedly extensive – and exclusive – Irish mission. This could seem an empty boast in certain contexts, but it was also the case that even
certain public commentators protested an excess of pride in the idea of an Irish mission which, they emphasised, was a result not of 'the workings of human prudence or human power, but the strong hand of a merciful God.' If pride nonetheless seeped through, it was a pride in the Irish having been thus providentially 'chosen'.

How to square even this muted pride, however, with the parallel dismay at continued emigration which contemporaneously became apparent in public and private, from both priests and bishops? For many, there was no conflict. As the French priest Adolphe Perraud explained in his popular *Ireland under English rule*:

> Considered individually, the moral and religious results of Emigration are frequently deplorable [...] If, on the contrary, we consider the Emigration movement as a whole; if our view embrace not merely its individual but its general consequences; we find ourselves in the presence of an admirable spectacle, and we cannot refrain from extolling that divine Wisdom which makes everything concur in the execution of its plans …

This distinction was important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it gave believers in a providential mission a way of explaining the well-known (if exaggerated) 'leakages' from the church abroad which clearly seemed to contravene it. Canon Sheehan, once again, put the issue in sacrificial terms. Though the people had to abandon their homes in Ireland, though many of them would lose their faith, especially in the second and third generations, though many were subject to anti-Catholic sentiment, and though all of this, indeed, caused the deserted Irish parish priest considerable anguish, there was a greater purpose. 'It is a sacrifice,' wrote Sheehan, 'but necessary'.

Moreover, the dichotomy between the individual and the general allowed criticism of what were perceived as the immediate, tangible causes of the exodus – evicting landlords, neglectful government, religious persecution – to continue, even as these were being cited as elements of a divine plan to spread the faith. A trust in Providence did not dictate that all of its apparent exigencies had to be meekly borne. The variety of responses to the 'visitation of God' which the Famine seemed to represent perhaps serves as the best example of this. British and Irish Protestant charity towards the nation being 'punished' for its sinfulness may in one sense have defied that providential judgement, but it was also, for many, the proper Christian response to the suffering of individual humans. As the Belfast Presbyterian James
Morgan preached, ‘While humbled before God, we must be active and benevolent toward men’.\textsuperscript{74} Equally, if John MacHale initially saw the Famine as ‘no doubt a chastisement of the Almighty’, he was also, like certain Protestant clerics, a vigorous critic of those government policies which he believed had hastened it and those which failed to deal adequately with its fallout.\textsuperscript{75} In the same vein, providentialist thinking helped to explain continued emigration, but it did not, as Monsignor Michael O’Riordan, a later rector of the Irish College Rome, was among those to point out, absolve of blame anyone deemed responsible for it and the individual suffering it frequently caused.\textsuperscript{76}

There was some irony, therefore, that in much of this apostolic theorising, individual emigrants could appear, more even than in economic theory, as mere ciphers for certain commentators’ grandiose visions. Just as economists had claimed that emigrants would materially benefit themselves and Ireland by leaving, Catholic spokesmen said that emigrants and the wider world might benefit spiritually through the same process. If economists could then be criticised for seeing people as pawns to be moved about at will to fit an overarching game-plan, they at least spoke in the knowledge that most emigration did occur for economic reasons: people left Ireland either to escape crippling poverty or to achieve a betterment that was impossible at home. That made their claims for emigrants – and possibly Ireland – seem plausible, if not entirely noble. Catholic commentators had to acknowledge, on the other hand, that emigrants did not leave with any intention of fulfilling a religious destiny. One of the earliest full-length expositions of the ’providential mission’ in the English Catholic journal The Rambler in 1853 described Irish emigrants as ‘a band of unconscious crusaders’, who believed they left for material reasons, but were simply unaware of their true divine mission. Three years earlier, Dr O’Connell of Donnybrook had painted emigrants similarly as ‘unaware of the noble end of their expatriation’, and a Rev. Hegarty of Derry spoke of Ireland as ‘the unwilling pioneer of the Catholic faith’.\textsuperscript{77} As time went on and the idea of a ‘spiritual empire’ took hold, emigrants surely became aware of the supposed higher purpose of their departures, not least when faced in their new homes with St Patrick’s Day sermons which lauded the mission of their race and with wildly popular literature, often written by clergy and squarely aimed at them, which explored similar themes.\textsuperscript{78} Moreover, even if Canon Sheehan was given to dismay in one novel that at home ‘the idea of Ireland as a great missionary country is scoffed at’, as David Fitzpat-
rick has noted, letters from Ireland constantly boasted of the ‘power and pervasiveness’ of Irish Catholicism, and encouraged emigrants to match it. Nevertheless, there soon came criticism from various quarters of the Catholic thinking which seemed to resign emigrants to an earthly fate which, in Sheehan’s admission, so often involved great suffering.

Archbishop John Joseph Lynch’s 1864 circular *The evils of wholesale and improvident emigration from Ireland* was the catalyst for much of this criticism. The Toronto prelate’s revelations of wretched poverty and criminality were bad enough, but his confirmation that many Irish immigrants had abandoned their faith, afforded, so the Fenian John O’Leary felt, ‘a strong commentary upon a supposed saying of Archbishop Cullen’s, that the famine of ’45 was a dispensation of Providence, to drive the Irish abroad to spread the Catholic faith’. O’Leary’s colleague, Charles Kickham, in welcoming Lynch’s pamphlet was still more scathing, asking sarcastically, ‘does not the bishop of Toronto know that it is our glory to be the martyr nation? It is [by] the mercy of Heaven that Irish men and women are wallowing in crime and misery from Quebec to New Orleans’. Except that Lynch did know, of course. Only a year before, in a St Patrick’s Day homily in Toronto he had unselfconsciously said as much, and he would say so again on several further occasions. His purpose in urging a stay on the exodus from Ireland was, as the title of his publication suggests, merely to prevent the ‘improvident’ emigration; to forestall the ‘wallowing in misery’ in cities and redirect emigrants towards the land. Such an outcome, he felt, would help them better fulfil their providential mission by avoiding quite so much temptation to immorality and apostasy along the way.

It was not just Fenians who chose to misinterpret Lynch’s point, however. As well as the usual Protestant seizure of any remarks that seemed to support their assertions of mass Irish Catholic emigrant apostasy, there were those within the Catholic Church who took his intervention as proof of the wrong-headedness of the entire ‘providential mission’ thesis. The most remarkable, full-throated expression of this sentiment came in 1864 from Patrick Durcan, Bishop of Achonry. Dedicating a church in Ballymote, Co. Sligo, his sermon turned, not unusually on such occasions, to the sad spectacle of continuing emigration from among the local population. His next reported words departed from the normal script, however:
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He might be told that the emigrants were the instruments of propa-
gating religion in foreign countries. [...] Let people misrepresent this
state of things as they choose [...] No doubt there might be benefits in
this emigration to religion; but if there were benefits there were also
evils, which were deplored by bishops in foreign countries, who adjured
them to keep at home the sons and daughters of Ireland [...] he trusted
he would never be one of those who would find in the Catholic coloni-
sation of foreign countries an unfeeling and unprincipled apology for
the Catholic desolation of their own.85

These strong words – subtly directed at many of his fellow bishops –
were matched a year later in a letter received by Dr Kirby from one
of his former pupils. James O'Leary, a priest-professor at St Colman's
College in Fermoy with Fenian sympathies, hinted that others shared
his view when he told Kirby: ‘The country is rapidly pining away. The
people are going to America in numbers. [...] Fathers at home are
saying that if the Irish are spreading the faith they likewise fill the
brothels’.86

Still others were rendered lukewarm towards the idea by Lynch's
reminder of the less welcome religious consequences of emigra-
tion. O'Leary's bishop, William Keane of Cloyne, had once spoken
in familiar, glowing terms of Ireland exercising ‘a lay apostleship’,
'sending forth her children to America and Canada, to England, and
to all the colonial establishments of England'.87 He issued a decidedly
more equivocal pastoral letter on the subject in 1865:

Of the emigrants who have left this country, some have preserved and
some have lost their faith; some have preserved and some have lost their
virtue. [...] Thus, while the priest has reason to believe to rejoice over
the good which his Catholic countrymen are doing in other countries,
he has reason and still greater reason, for the past and for the future, to
weep over the ruins he cannot avert.88

On balance, Keane thought it best to attempt to keep as many young
people as possible from running the risk of being among those ruins.

Lynch's pamphlet aside, it is unsurprising that the 1860s – far from
providing the first signs of the 'spiritual empire' thesis – saw the first
objections to what had previously been an unchallenged trope. Despite
ongoing civil war in the chief destination, an agricultural depression
meant emigration reached a ten-year peak of over 100,000 annual
departures between 1863 and 1865, including an apparently sharp
upturn in emigration from among the farming class.89 The latter
especially prompted much hand-wringing among the Irish hierarchy, particularly in western and southern dioceses. Their renewed concern was reflected in the founding of the National Association in December of 1864, an attempt to fill a political chasm in danger of colonisation by the Fenians. Growing emigration, as Larkin has shown, was its other parent. If the former was Cullen's peculiar obsession, Patrick Leahy, Archbishop of Cashel, could take credit for mobilising opinion on the latter, having begun lobbying Cullen about the church taking a stand on the land question – which, as he and Cullen both believed, had emigration as its most serious effect – late in the previous year. As he told the ‘aggregate meeting’ which established the Association, it was the drain of the people from the land that ‘has brought us bishops to the determination not any longer to remain quiescent’.

This drain, as Leahy told Kirby in March 1863, had one very serious potential consequence for Ireland and her Catholic Church:

If God in his mercy does not preserve to us a remnant of our people, in a short time the Protestants will outnumber us. For, mark you! – it is only the poor Celts, the poor Catholics, the beloved members of our flock that are going – not one Protestant, I may say. The Landlord and Tenant laws are rooting the Celtic population out of the land, as surely as any physical cause produces its effect – and this wicked Anti-Catholic, Anti-Roman, Anti-Irish, Anti-everything-dear-to-us-Government is looking on, laughing with delight, seeing that the direct, the certain effect of these laws is to root out our Catholic people, that in fact they are as effectual penal laws against our people as any ever enforced, and therefore they will not raise a little finger so as to change these Laws as at once to do justice to both Landlord & Tenant. God help us. If he does not, I fear we are lost, as a Nation, as a Catholic nation.

Leahy’s gloom, if not his anger towards the government, was somewhat tempered by uncertain thoughts of a higher purpose to the exodus. In June he wrote the Bishop of Philadelphia asking: ‘Great a calamity as is the dispersion of our fine people, would it not seem as if, in the views of Providence, they were a missionary people, destined, by their very dispersion, to scatter [and] broadcast over the earth the seeds of the true faith nurtured for ages in their own Island of Saints? Is it a consolation that God thus draws good out of evil?’ ‘But’ he added, ‘there is no excuse for the heedlessness and the heartlessness of the Government that will not try to correct the evil’.

In company with his fellow bishops, though not the Association as a whole, Leahy was subsequently given to ‘temperate satisfaction’
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with the 1870 Land Act which was partially the result of their labours on this front.96 While it is unlikely that the Act really put the brake on emigration, it would seem that its implementation was sufficient for Leahy, at least, to invest more fully and more positively in the notion of a spiritual empire.97 A sermon he preached at the consecration of Dr Moran as Bishop of Ossory in 1872 saw him acknowledge that:

While we deplore as one of the greatest national calamities the loss of millions of our fine people, we are not left without some compensation for the loss, seeing that God, who knows how to draw good from evil, has built them up in other lands into a mighty people, or rather peoples, who, faithful to their country’s traditions, have in every region of the earth to which they have gone, whether they be found on the banks of the Ohio, or in far-off Australia, or elsewhere, planted churches full of new life, and all in the closest connection with Rome.98

With the loss of ‘the best of the people’ apparently stemmed, the ‘missionary’ achievements of those who had gone were again ripe for glorification.

The Fenian criticism, and Leahy’s mention of ‘the closest connection with Rome’ here prompt an obvious question: did belief in emigration as a providential mission correlate in any respect to the splits in the Irish hierarchy, whether defined as ‘castle’ versus ‘patriot’, Ultramontane versus Gallican, or, the inexact short-hand for both, Cullen and his allies versus MacHale and his? Notwithstanding that there were always figures on the episcopal bench who did not neatly conform to such simplified categories, the answer would appear to be no – and also yes. No, because although John O’Leary later damned the by then deceased Cullen with the charge that he had fostered ‘no feeling about his country other than that it was a good Catholic machine, fashioned mainly to spread the faith over the world’,99 and although the strongly nationalist sensibilities of his namesake, Fr James O’Leary, seemed similarly offended by the belief that emigration conformed to a specific dispensation of providence,100 that belief, as seen above, tended to be shared across otherwise intractable divides. To be sure, Cullen frequently resorted to the language of ‘spiritual empire’ in his pastoral letters and other public pronouncements, but so too did John MacHale. The Archbishop of Tuam was not averse to referring to Irishmen in America ‘labouring to roll back the tide of Catholicity so long receding from its shores’, nor even in his Lenten pastoral of ‘Black ‘47, to ‘the exiled children
of Erin’ having ‘scattered the blessing of the Catholic religion over distant lands’.101

Furthermore, for every supposed ‘castle bishop’ such as David Moriarty, who, understandably, given his former role at All Hallows, extolled the glory of the spiritual empire,102 there was a confirmed Cullenite like Laurence Gillooly of Elphin who mentioned emigration quite frequently in his public speeches and private correspondence around the time of its 1860s peak, but seems always to have refrained from any allusion to the exodus being providential – although he did not reject that idea outright.103 As to the only bishop who seems to have done so, Patrick Durcan’s position on the episcopal spectrum, far from aligning him with like-minded ultra-nationalists, was one of relative moderation. He had been favoured for the see of Achonry in 1852 because he was (rightly) thought not to be a slavish MacHale supporter, but neither could he have been regarded as a Cullenite.104 Therefore it is clear that espousal or rejection of the idea of a special religious purpose to Irish emigration could not serve as a litmus test for any other ‘political’ viewpoint so far as the hierarchy was concerned.

It may be, however, that advocacy of the idea did gradually develop into a more explicitly ‘Roman’ impulse. Clear though MacHale’s pronouncements were, they seem to have tailed off by the mid-1850s, even though there can be no question that he was aware of the continued and increasing potency of the notion. Certainly, on at least two occasions, he found himself at public meetings where other speakers spoke of Irish emigrants as ‘God’s appointed missionaries’.105 It is difficult to know how to interpret MacHale’s later silence on this point, but it is worth noting that like other prelates, including Cullen, MacHale was especially given to eulogising Ireland’s special missionary status while speaking in support of the Catholic University.106 His subsequent opposition to Cullen’s control of that institution meant, as Colin Barr has noted, that he ‘remain[ed] an enemy of the C.U.I.’ from around 1854–55 to ‘the end of his days’.107 Thus, while it is odd that such a voluble figure would not, like Bishop Durcan, have publicly objected had that been his inclination, it may be that the increasingly ‘Hiberno-Roman’ character of the Irish spiritual empire – and its domination by Cullen – rendered it less attractive and less useful to MacHale.

What, then, of O’Leary’s specific charge against Cullen? Regarding the more general point that he had ‘no feeling about his country’,
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others must judge. The implication that he dehumanised emigration and saw it merely as a convenient means to an end – that end being a Romanised global church – seems like the casual slur of an implacable opponent. In fact, there was much more common ground between the Fenians and Cullen on emigration than either O’Leary or Kickham were prepared to acknowledge. As Paul Bew has correctly noted, certain passages on poverty and emigration in Cullen’s pastoral letters read as though lifted straight from the leader column of *The Irish People*, a function of Cullen’s genuine distaste for the economics of landlordism and the failure of the government to arrest its evils. Furthermore, in private, Cullen often expressed his sadness at the continuing exodus, even if, as Larkin notes, he was less given to ‘hysteria’ on the subject than most. In 1864 he told Kirby, perhaps his closest confidante, that, ‘We have beautiful weather and everything is looking well but the people are running away every day. God help them.’ In the same year he wrote Moran that ‘the people are running away to America very fast [...] It is a sad state of things’. Cullen frequently despaired at his inability to stop the ‘emigrants who are going out or wishing to go – I could say nothing to them’. He also worried for their welfare once abroad: Lynch’s circular appeared genuinely to touch him, and, unsurprisingly, he deemed that the Fenians had ‘done great harm to the poor Irish workmen and servants in England’, who were being turned away from work on account of their outrages.

In any case Cullen was clearly not the originator of the idea that Irish emigrants were the agents of a providential mission, contrary to O’Leary’s hazy, probably second-hand recollection. It is difficult to pinpoint who was. While McCartney and Steele each credit O’Connell with popularising the idea, they offer no evidence that he spoke about it publicly and it appears that Daunt’s previously cited recollection, dated 1841, is their only source. Yet the concept was certainly sufficiently advanced by the late 1830s for Bishop England to desire to challenge it with his letter on Catholic leakages in the United States. Moreover, if there was a leading early advocate of the idea in the Irish Catholic hierarchy, it was John MacHale, given his 1840 statement that Irish emigrants were bringing about the conversion of England and his quick resort to similar sentiments during the Famine. It is important to note, moreover, that such hopes for England’s conversion had been privately rejected at the time by a surprising figure: Paul Cullen. A visit to his family in Liverpool in 1842 had seen the then Rector...
of the Irish College observing to Kirby that scarcely one tenth of the Catholics in the city – most of whom were Irish – attended Mass. ‘I fear’, he said, ‘that the talk of the immediate conversion of England is without the least prospect of becoming even probable. However, God can do as He likes. I think more lose the faith than those who are converted.’ This was all, of course, before Cullen returned to Ireland from Rome to take up the primacy. However, it is fair to say that even after 1850, he was certainly not the only proponent of the ‘spiritual empire’ thesis.

As an aside to that point, it is worth remarking on the extent to which the thesis was promoted by clergy outside of Ireland. If self-praise is no recommendation, the reputed missionary endeavours of Ireland and its emigrants were sufficiently lauded by external commentators for no such charge to be brought against Irish clergy. Not surprisingly, it found particular expression among clergy and bishops of Irish origin or ancestry, and presented itself, as noted, as a popular and rather obvious theme of St Patrick’s Day sermons in immigrant cities. Other Catholic writers also perceived it, however. The French cleric Adolphe Perraud, the French-American Jesuit Auguste Thébaud, and the highly influential Anglo-American convert Orestes Brownson, as has been seen, each wrote admiringly of the positive impact they believed Irish emigration had on the spread of Catholicism across the world.

Moreover, English Catholic churchmen like the aforementioned Faber, da Haerne, Porter and Newman, along with Cardinal Manning of Westminster, also recognised the special destiny of ‘the children of St Patrick’. According to his biographer, Manning ‘was ever speaking of the great work the Irish people had done in spreading the faith’. Indeed, the latter’s own position as part of the restored English Catholic hierarchy had in part been made possible by the immigration into England of those very children. So enthusiastic was Manning for these sentiments that he was even invited to repeat them at the church of the Irish Franciscans in Rome on St Patrick’s Day in 1879. That location highlights a notable exception to this general acknowledgement of a special Irish mission: the Vatican, whose incumbents surely deemed that they, rather than the Irish nation, presided over the worldwide Catholic ‘empire’, seems never to have offered any. While Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII were certainly aware of the idea of a special Irish mission, neither went so far as to approve it publicly, and each merely acknowledged the fortitude of the faith in Ireland. Given that
both men had biographers of Irish ethnicity, it seems likely that any more concrete pronouncement would not have gone uncelebrated.123 Interestingly, Michael Davitt, of all people, intended to argue in an audience with Leo XIII that the existence of this mission merited the opening of diplomatic relations with Ireland.124 In the end however, he failed to get his audience with the same politically unsympathetic pontiff who condemned the Land League and was supposed later to have told Thomas Croke that he was ‘not only the Pope of Ireland, but of the Universal church’ and could not therefore ‘sacrifice the church to Ireland’. ‘Nor Ireland to the church’, the archbishop claimed to have shot back.125

‘Sacrificing Ireland to the church’ was, returning to Cullen, the essence of the Fenian indictment of him. While he might be excused the charge of anything so heedless of the plight of the individual emigrant as O’Leary alleged, however, it is also clear that Cullen, both as Irish primate and as Barr’s ‘episcopal imperialist’, was acutely conscious of the advantages to the worldwide church of the Irish outflow. This takes us back to Perraud’s separation of the individual and the general consequences of emigration. Cullen’s letter to Cardinal Barnabo of Propaganda Fide in the wake of the Archbishop of Toronto’s circular, typifies this dichotomous response and is worth quoting at length:

I am sorry to say that the people are fleeing Ireland in great numbers. […] The poor people go totally unprovided of the necessities of life, and then endure incredible misfortunes in America. Our government however does not give the least protection to these poor people. […] If the King of Naples and the Pope had treated their subjects as the poor Irish are treated, England would have been full of indignation, and the English newspapers would have been hurling insults against the sovereigns who did not protect their people. They do not say a word however in favour of the Irish people, but so great is their hatred of the Catholic religion, that they appear to exult in the destruction of the poor people. It is clear that just now Ireland will lose a great deal, but I have the greatest hope that religion will not lose anything, the losses that we now suffer will be repaired. […] Within the last three hundred years, the population was almost totally destroyed five or six times, however it always recovered again, and has demonstrated an amazing vitality. I hope things will turn out as they have turned out so many other times, that is for the present the Irish will form new Catholic congregations in England and in America, while Ireland will remain completely Catholic.126
There are several points to be noted here. Firstly, Cullen displayed an apparently genuine anger at the government and landlord policies which he believed caused emigration, a point he had also made to Barnabo before Lynch's pamphlet, and was re-emphasising here in light of the Archbishop of Toronto's mild admonition of the Irish hierarchy. Secondly, he seemed very firmly to believe that such policies were motivated by anti-Catholicism. This was in direct contradiction to what Kickham would later identify as the most important point from Lynch's pamphlet – the idea that 'a religious persecution would produce martyrs; but this social persecution and oppression of the poor ruins souls'. For Cullen, the treatment of the Irish poor by the government was religiously motivated persecution, and to that end, its often terrible social consequences were to be regretted, and arrested where possible, but its religious consequences had to be regarded as the outworkings of Providence. Those outworkings were often positive, but where they were negative, they were no less providential, and as Canon Sheehan would later elaborate, they could be seen as the unfortunate elements of a necessary sacrifice, of the creation of a true 'martyr nation'. In Cullen's words to a gathering at Clonea, Co. Waterford later that year, 'The suffering which we as Roman Catholics have suffered from being in connection with England has made its recompense, we have been thereby able to confer the benefits of our holy religion on other countries.'

Finally, Cullen predicted, despite Lynch's warning, that emigration would entail no overall loss to the global church, and would, moreover, fail seriously to harm the church in Ireland in the longer term. This last point echoed the feeling of the Catholic journalist Martin Haverty, who had recently made the confident claim that 'Ireland will be Irish and Catholic still in spite of the exodus' and foreshadowed Archbishop Leahy's later belief that 'after the exhaustion of famine and emigration, we have yet millions to be the seed of a great people, and we thank God that we have no reason to fear for the future of our religion, but the contrary', which itself formed a stark contrast to the Cashel prelate's gloomy prediction to Kirby in 1863. The second point, however, appeared to contradict Cullen's own doubts about Irish emigrants retaining their faith as expressed in Liverpool twenty years before. What had changed? The words of an early pastoral letter give some indication. In 1853, partly in response to the Fr Mullen controversy, Cullen had stated that, 'Many of our poor people who emigrate, would be more punctual in performing
their religious duties in distant countries, had they been accustomed
to approach the sacraments in the churches at home. In the inter-
vening years, Cullen had spearheaded a campaign to remedy this
situation, so that, by the time of Lynch's warning, it was apparent that
the emigrants who were leaving were in many cases the first products
of the processes which came to be termed the devotional revolu-
tion. The anti-proselytism campaign that had promoted the parish
mission, increased membership of sodalities, including the female-
oriented 'Children of Mary', and the expansion of Catholic schools,
which, it was increasingly realised, were necessary to galvanise the
faith of children who were likely future emigrants, were producing
the desired orthodoxy. There was certainly no longer any notion of a
90 per cent rate of religious attrition among emigrants. Indeed, Cullen
was given to complaints that churches in London with capacities of
six or seven hundred were not big enough to accommodate the now
much more devout Irish communities. There seemed to be less to
worry about, both for emigrants and for the church they left behind.
What was ultimately perceived, therefore, was a near-perfect arrange-
ment, from which there would certainly still be casualties, but which
would nonetheless see Ireland spread the Catholic religion in its most
avowedly Roman form, while retaining and even strengthening the
same doctrines at home.

Irish Catholic emigrants – at least, those who retained and helped
to spread the faith – were a continuing source of pride to the church
they left behind, reinforcing the popular self-conception of the Irish
as 'the most intensely religious and practical Catholics in the world'.
Moreover, as Emmet Larkin has argued, Famine and post-Famine
migrants had an indirect practical impact on the devotional revolu-
tion, their absence meaning that increased vocations had an even
greater proportional effect, and that those already more prosperous
and devout classes who remained in Ireland were enabled to become
even more so. It ought to be recognised, however, that the diaspora
also exercised direct influences on the increasing orthodoxy of the
Catholic Church in Ireland, which both fed on and fed into the notion
of a 'spiritual empire' with Ireland at its centre. One as yet rather
uncertain aspect of this appears to correlate with Irish evangelical
experience. Transformations in religious practice can be diffuse and
their causes difficult to pinpoint. Yet, if there were, as noted, clear
directional elements to the 1859 revival, in the sense that it took
place (and was understood as taking place) within a wider evangelical
world, something similar might be said of parallel Catholic developments. The trajectory of religious and devotional literature, which was likely useful in the spread of new and renewed Catholic devotional practices, helps illustrate the point.\textsuperscript{137}

There had been a minor explosion in Catholic publishing in Ireland in the early decades of the century with Bishop James Doyle's efforts in promoting parish lending libraries and founding the Catholic Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge throughout Ireland (better known as the Catholic Book Society) of particular note. However most of these initiatives seem to have been patchy and short-lived: evidently there was not yet a sufficiently large domestic market to sustain them long-term. Thus those commercial publishers who attempted to provide cheap volumes soon went out of business and, since not enough people could afford to buy more expensive books, the books remained expensive, limited in their range and few in number.\textsuperscript{138} For those who could afford to extend their collections, priests and bishops with lending libraries and reading rooms among them, London publishers, particularly Burns and Oates plugged some gaps. However, as Dublin reviewers later griped, it was 'English with an Irish accent' that was needed to bring Catholic teachings home to the mass of their readers.\textsuperscript{139}

Consequently, as the book review columns of Irish Catholic journals, including the \textit{Irish Monthly} and the \textit{Irish Ecclesiastical Record} indicate, in the second half of the century an increasing number of important volumes originated in the 'colonies' of the 'spiritual empire'. In particular, several significant Irish-American Catholic publishers had been established in the 1840s and 1850s – among them P. O'Shea and P. J. Kenedy, both of New York, Sadlier of New York, Boston and Montreal and John Murphy of Baltimore. These companies produced books that smaller Irish imprints often could not hope to, whether lavishly bound and illustrated productions worthy of the episcopal library or, perhaps more significantly, affordable editions meant for mass consumption.\textsuperscript{140} Of especial importance in the latter respect were the American Paulists’ Catholic Publication Society, which was founded in 1866 (and managed by an Irishman, Laurence Kehoe), and, to a lesser extent, its mirror, the English Catholic Truth Society, which was founded two years later by the Bishop of Salford and future Cardinal, Herbert Vaughan, and produced a variety of 'shilling publications', 'sixpenny publications' and 'penny publications'.\textsuperscript{141} Both these organisations essentially aped Doyle’s by then defunct book society
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in producing cheap volumes, but they were better placed to achieve critical mass, succeed commercially, and endure. That this all came some thirty years before Ireland’s own lasting equivalent, the Catholic Truth Society was founded in 1899 is surely a key point.

The nature of the books coming from diaspora publishers and authors was also noteworthy, and it seems clear that they had the potential to feed into the devotional revolution. Religious histories, biographies, and fiction were most popular, but Irish Monthly reviewers were also impressed by, amongst others, ‘the prettiest and holiest book which the English language has lately added to the literature of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus’ and ‘the only journal in the English language which is specially devoted to the honour of the Blessed Virgin’. The latter, the reviewer noted, ‘ought to be welcomed by us here at home where filial devotion to the Mother of God is, thanks be to God, one of the national hereditary instincts of our warm-hearted Celtic race.’

The same column, moreover, opened a review of the Philadelphia-based American Catholic Quarterly Review and the Melbourne-based St Patrick’s College Gazette with the pithy observation that ‘Living at the centre of civilisation – namely, Sackville-street, Dublin – we can afford to bestow a word of encouragement on deserving periodicals published at the antipodes or across the Atlantic’. The reviewer was keen to point out that while the Australian journal was probably ‘not meant for home circulation’, readers in Ireland could very easily put their hands on the American publication since – an important point – ‘the new postage to the US is the same as to the other side of the Liffey’.

Another notable genre given impetus by Irish publishers outside Ireland was yet more practical: a stream of instructional manuals on how to begin and run sodalities and confraternities, which were lay devotional organisations that were themselves significant in the diffusion of Catholic teachings and sometimes had significant lending libraries of their own. The spread of these societies, as Cormac Begadon has elaborated, was a notable feature of the devotional revolution. Meanwhile, works like Bernard O’Reilly’s New York-published, The mirror of true womanhood, subtitled ‘a book of instruction for women in the world’ aimed to encourage an idealised version of Catholic family and devotional life. Irish clerics, too, found that the spiritual empire which they spoke of as the Irish church’s creation had lessons in turn for them. The devotional revolution’s new emphasis on the importance of ceremony and ritual meant that a strain of improving
literature aimed at priests and even bishops emerged. These kinds of works had existed before, often in French or Latin, and they were occasionally produced in English (and only rarely Irish) by Dublin publishers including McGlashan and M. H. Gill, but the number and range of books afforded by a vast English-speaking Catholic ‘empire’ was likely significant in reinforcing Roman orthodoxy at home, among both clergy and laity.

There is, however, a more obvious facet of the diasporic influence on the devotional revolution to be seen in church-building. Indeed, arguably the most obvious physical manifestation of Emmet Larkin’s specifically mid-century delineation of his concept can be found in the stylistic contrast between many of the churches built before the Famine and those constructed after. As many of the memoirs, diaries, and letters of clergy used in this study attest, from the 1840s on, emigrants were routinely called upon to contribute financially to the physical growth and sacred embellishment of those churches. This final section will therefore explore the extent and nature of this practice, and determine what it may mean for the ‘spiritual empire’.

While a vast programme of church-building was begun in Ireland as soon as Catholic Emancipation was in sight, it was notably emboldened during the second half of the century. Precise figures for the post-Famine period are not available, but Thomas Kennedy estimated that in the century following Emancipation, twenty four cathedrals and three thousand churches were built. Emmet Larkin, citing an 1864 study by Myles O’Reilly, claimed that a total of 1,805 churches had been erected since 1800, a figure with which Desmond Keenan agreed. As both Keenan and Nigel Yates have noted, most of the churches built before the Famine were of simple design, many simply larger versions of the ordinary Irish cottage, perhaps still with thatched roofs, clay floors or unplastered walls. In the better case scenario, they were ‘huge and ungainly barns’. In a context where the consecrated chapel was becoming the centre of parish life and the scene of elaborate Ultramontane devotions, they hardly provided sufficiently holy settings, nor offered any reason to the waverer to attend. However, these simple chapels were in most cases rebuilt or remodelled in the second half of the century, generally conforming to a much more ornate, impressive and expensive style of architecture, and thereby symbolising the new orthodoxy, self-confidence and ebullience of Irish Catholicism.

Continued emigration, in one respect, could have presented an obvious problem for such grand edifices. In 1875 J. Duncan Craig,
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a Church of Ireland vicar, somewhat hopefully recounted the tale of a colleague ‘travelling in a carriage with a Roman Catholic bishop’ who ‘pointed out a very fine-looking cathedral, with the exclamation, “I am sorry to tell you we have now no more people than to half fill it”’. If that was the case at the time, it would not remain so; near-universal church attendance became a defining feature of Irish Catholicism by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and church-builders everywhere strove to keep up with demand. In fact, emigration’s impact on this physical expansion of the Irish church reflects an overlooked aspect of the existing discussion. If a defining trait of imperialism is the exploitation by the central power and its agents of the resources of the colonised territories, then in that sense at least, the Irish church truly did preside over a worldwide empire of its own. Donald Akenson’s memorable description of Irish missionary clergy as ‘the shock troops of the spiritual empire’ might be said to have a counterpart; another class of priests could be termed its revenue-collecting officials, proving, despite what the likes of Canon Sheehan might have claimed, that God and Mammon sometimes had strikingly similar aims.

It should be noted from the outset that, once again, Presbyterians may well have got there first. Although the 1830s and 1840s saw intensive Presbyterian church-building in Belfast, largely funded by the city’s wealthy laymen, it had long been the case that ministers of poorer, especially rural congregations often sought money for necessary building projects abroad. In 1843, for example, the newly installed incumbent of the infant Portrush congregation, Jonathan Simpson, made the first of three successful visits to the United States begging funds for ‘a wee kirk’. However, while money almost certainly still flowed back to Irish Presbyterian coffers from the diaspora, the practice of clerical fundraising tours seems to have been substantively discontinued with the advent of the General Assembly’s Manse and Church building fund, aimed at helping ‘weak’, meaning poorer congregations in 1854. At a meeting to explain the parameters of the new scheme, James Morgan, himself an able church-builder, was particularly disapproving of foreign fundraising tours undertaken by pastors of such congregations. They forced long clerical absences on congregations that could ill bear them, did not always reap adequate rewards, and they were, he said, ‘disrespectable to religion’. Morgan saw an unbecoming indignity in such sojourns; as he apparently thought to himself on meeting a young Ulster minister fundraising in
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London, despite letters of character from home, ‘everyone thinks you are a rogue and will treat you as such.’

Notwithstanding a confirmed case of such roguery in 1842 – an Irishman in London impersonated a priest and fraudulently solicited donations for an invented Co. Wicklow chapel-building fund – there were evidently no such qualms in the Catholic Church. Indeed, just as the Presbyterian Church was resolving to abandon such fundraising methods, Catholic clergy had begun stepping up what had hitherto been a practice of last resort. This made increasing sense. Ha’penny-a-week collections were a non-starter for the poorest parishes, lucrative charity sermons could only take place so often, and the sizeable donations which used to come from election candidates before the Famine seem to have been less common after. The problem, as ever, was particularly acute in the west of Ireland, and it was in that context that Bishops William Browne of Galway and William Higgins of Ardagh made trips to London in 1837 and America in 1842 respectively. As Higgins told Cullen in Rome, ‘in order to complete the undertaking [the diocesan cathedral] I must not confine my exertions to a narrow sphere and having done what I can in Ireland, it will be necessary to appeal to the religious generosity of other countries.’ His example was to be followed more widely during the second half of the century.

The most well known such campaign was that for the putative Catholic University, begun with great fanfare at the Synod of Thurles in 1850. It was anticipated that ‘our brethren, who are scattered not only through the sister kingdom and the British Colonies, but throughout the Continent of America’ might be appealed to for ‘the pecuniary means for the accomplishment of such an object.’ This appeal took the form, initially, of an address by the Catholic University Committee to the Irish in America, which used much the same kind of impassioned language already witnessed:

Ireland turns with confidence to her children in the ‘far west’, and their numerous and prosperous descendants in the land of freedom. She has nurtured them in the true faith, which she has preserved for them and for herself by the ready sacrifice of earthly possessions, and often, when the occasion demanded, by the generous expenditure of her blood. In poverty she asks for assistance from the wealth and generosity of her friends and children.

At least eight clergymen were subsequently sent in personal pursuit of this assistance, two to England – Francis M’Ginity, curate of Dundalk...
and Michael Hope, parish priest of Ballymore, Co. Meath – and six to North America.\textsuperscript{164} Two of the latter have already been encountered: Fr Mullen, whose indiscreet letter was discussed in Chapter Three, and Fr Peyton, whose emigrant guide featured in Chapter Two, jointly toured the interior dioceses of the United States from late 1851 to early 1853.\textsuperscript{165} A separate team, consisting of James Donnelly (also mentioned above), and Philip Devlin, a Donegal curate, had been sent in July 1851 and appears to have concentrated on the east coast. They were accompanied on their transatlantic voyage by Daniel Hearne, a well-known Manchester priest, who seems to have collected mainly in Canadian dioceses.\textsuperscript{166} Finally, at least one priest was also sent to the United States on behalf of the University in 1864.\textsuperscript{167} As head of the University committee, Cullen had written in advance of the collectors to the bishops of the dioceses they planned to visit, asking co-operation.\textsuperscript{168} By and large, the collectors got it. There seems to have been a genuine enthusiasm for their cause among some members of the North American hierarchy, particularly Dr Walsh of Halifax, who was an early and vocal champion of the university project.\textsuperscript{169} In addition, it certainly helped that, as Archbishop Hughes pointed out in a letter to the clergy of New York, the Pope himself had sanctioned the collection.\textsuperscript{170}

This all attracted healthy sums of money – each collector’s total ran into the thousands – for the never-built institution.\textsuperscript{171} Even before this major undertaking, however, there were already smaller-scale collections taking place on behalf of churches and cathedrals which did get erected. Batt O’Connor, parish priest of Milltown, Co. Kerry, was dispatched to Boston to collect for Killarney cathedral in 1847;\textsuperscript{172} Michael Quinnivan, curate in Ennis, fundraised for a local church in England in 1850;\textsuperscript{173} and Fr Mathew made a fundraising trip to the United States between 1849 and 1851. This last trip was remarkably, perhaps uniquely unsuccessful. Mathew’s appeal as a temperance advocate was cross-denominational and his attempt to raise money not merely for that cause, but also for the completion of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Cork consequently backfired. Non-Catholics in his audiences were left with the uncomfortable impression that their contributions might end up benefiting the Catholic Church, and his efforts therefore raised little but Protestant hackles.\textsuperscript{174}

That notable failure could not prevent an escalation in the number of foreign fundraising trips in the University collectors’ train. The trend appears to have branched into three. Firstly, of the nineteen
Catholic cathedrals built wholly or in part during the second half of the nineteenth century – cathedral-building generally being a process phased out over many years – at least sixteen were partially funded by a priest of the relevant diocese touring abroad in England, Scotland, North America or Australia. Of the other three, the builders of St Peter’s cathedral in Belfast probably did not use this method of fundraising; the cathedral at Loughrea certainly received substantial donations from emigrants in America, but a priest was not sent abroad to fundraise therefore only the prelate of Ossory could boast that his episcopal seat in Kilkenny was built using subscriptions gathered wholly within his diocese. The planned Killaloe diocesan cathedral in Nenagh, which was never completed, was also begun with the proceeds of a priest’s tour in America. Often, as with the University collection, more than one priest was fundraising abroad at a time, and in several cases collection tours were undertaken more than once, as each new phase of the building required it.

Secondly, there appears to have been a tendency to fundraise abroad for the chapels attached to religious institutions. The Augustinians in both Galway and Dublin, the Franciscans in Clara, Co. Offaly and Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, the Jesuits in Galway, the Passionists of Mount Argus in Dublin, and the nuns of an unspecified St Joseph’s convent school each went down this route, with the latter order employing the services of a Canon Magee to do the collecting. College chapels and seminary buildings could be similarly funded. It is likely that such activity exploited close connections with sister orders and alumni working among emigrant communities, and may have been considered a particular necessity for chapels which were normally the secondary church in a parish, and could not command a monopoly on local people’s largesse.

Thirdly, and possibly most significantly, there seems to have been a pattern of priests in some very poor parishes seeking donations from emigrants, who often, but not exclusively, had a personal connection to the area. To a great extent, this remains a hidden process. There are a number of mentions of foreign collections for ordinary parish chapels in the Freeman’s Journal, with references found particularly in speeches made at opening consecration Masses. These are surely a tiny sample of what was by and large a localised undertaking repeated across the country. Nevertheless, this limited evidence, coupled with occasional mentions in parish and diocesan histories, and in the Kirby collection, hint that it was thought common practice for priests
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to travel to raise otherwise unobtainable sums in emigrant destinations. As one church architect recalled, when he challenged a recent clerical client on the unsuitability of the cheaper altars he had chosen, the priest laughed, said he was not bound by architectural rules and might very well ‘go to America some day, collect funds, and build a church to suit the altars’.183

The clerical tour abroad was not, however, the only means of extracting money from the diaspora for religious purposes. The amount of remittances sent home by ordinary Irish emigrants to their families was a source of amazement and curious pride among the great and good in Ireland. Charles Gavan Duffy MP spoke for many, when at a meeting to devise how to pay for the completion of St Catherine’s Church in Meath Street, Dublin, he reminded those present, including Archbishop Cullen, that ‘it was a known fact that more money was transmitted home by Irish emigrants in every part of the world than by emigrants of any other nation’.184 Indeed, an otherwise puzzling note in one of the earliest issues of the Dublin Builder, the Irish architecture magazine, pointed out that ‘serving girls and working people’ in New York had recently been paid one and a half million dollars in dividends on the ‘upwards of 30,000,000 dollars’ they had deposited in savings banks. The clear implication was that a portion of this wealth might ultimately help pay for Irish architects’ work.185 Priests and church-building projects certainly commanded their share of the bounty. It is highly likely, if difficult to prove, that a significant proportion of cash remittances sent to family members, particularly elderly parents who did not intend to emigrate, found its way into church offerings. Meanwhile, direct emigrant contributions were certainly made to bazaars, or raffles, which became an increasingly popular method of raising money from the 1860s. Tickets were frequently sent for sale to emigrant destinations, and there were sometimes reports of postponing the drawing of prizes until such time as tickets could be more widely distributed among the diaspora.186 ‘There were also cases of emigrants remitting money or liturgical items directly to Irish clergy.’187

Given these various revenue streams, putting a reliable figure on how much emigrant money was contributed to post-Famine Irish church-building is a tall order. That did not, however, prevent confident estimates being made in the early years of the new century by those answering criticism, of inappropriately high expenditure.188 Horace Plunkett’s ill-judged critique of the ‘extravagance’ of so many
‘gaudy edifices’ built ‘at the expense of poor communities’, which, he
asserted, ‘shocks the economic sense’, prompted Monsignor Michael
O’Riordan’s claim that somewhere between a fifth and a quarter of
all money used for the purpose came not from the Irish at home but
from the Irish abroad.189 The art critic Robert Elliott went further,
suggesting that, factoring in all forms of fundraising, half the money
had been collected abroad, while the barrister Michael McDonnell
asserted that Catholic churches had ‘in large measure’ been built by
emigrant contributions.190 Patrick Moran agreed with these estimates,
reporting that Cardinal Michael Logue had told him that ‘it is from
the United States, from friends of Ireland in the home countries, and
in the colonies, that the greater part of the funds have been derived
to erect such noble monuments of religion’.191 The credibility of all
of these estimates, each, perhaps, with its own agenda, is question-
able. However, even in the absence of an exhaustive examination of
parish and diocesan accounts, and without challenging the notion
that a remarkable, mass, micro-donation culture largely built the
ecclesiastical infrastructure of Catholic Ireland,192 there can be little
doubt that the diaspora’s direct and indirect contributions to church-
building funds were highly significant, and in very many individual
cases, vital.193

While that conclusion can certainly be qualified by evidence that,
in the case of some larger projects, the contribution from foreign
fundraising trips could be tiny, relative to the vast overall building
cost, a key point to be made here is that there was nonetheless an
habitual, almost instinctive resort to fundraising among the wider
‘Irish race’. This trend, despite the logistical difficulties of fundraising
abroad, and its sometimes relatively meagre returns, indicates that
the idea of a specifically Irish spiritual empire was keenly felt among
Irish clergy and that it embraced lay emigrants every bit as much as
the ‘shock troops’ who ministered to them.194 The Irish church – as
distinct from the missionaries it sent out – did not sever its ties with
emigrants when they became immigrants. The oft-repeated descrip-
tion of them as ‘the children of St Patrick’ was no mere rhetorical
flourish, but rather reflected a widespread belief that, just as the parent
church had a duty of pastoral care towards emigrants, a kind of familial
allegiance was owed by them to their home church. This created its
own tensions. The legendary generosity of the Irish, and especially
Irish-American servant girls, may have helped build many churches
in the United States, but as Joseph Dixon, Archbishop of Armagh,
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emphasised in 1863, the 'daughters of Erin' were also expected to 'rival the zeal of the women of Israel' when it came to erecting churches in Ireland.\textsuperscript{195} This could rile foreign churchmen, including those of Irish origin, who saw their own collections threatened by interlopers.\textsuperscript{196} Many bishops therefore refused to grant the necessary permission for Irish priests to collect in their dioceses, and consequently Tobias Kirby was sometimes asked to procure a powerful Papal recommendation for such missions.\textsuperscript{197} Even where bishops did allow Irish collectors, there could be obstructionism from discommoded parish clergy, as the entertainingly frank tour diary of the Passionist Father Pius Devine attests.\textsuperscript{198}

Despite these worries, it seems likely that what all of this meant for the more devout emigrants was simply a double taxation on their resources. That may have been tolerable for the likes of the old woman who reportedly sent $10,000 for the upkeep of churches to the Bishop of Limerick,\textsuperscript{199} but must have been a considerable burden for the poor domestic servants and labourers who were being asked to pay towards chapels in which they would never even worship, and who were, as Michael Buckley noted, usually ready to give to any Irish priest who begged from them, often donating well beyond their apparent means, and brooking no objections on the priest's part.\textsuperscript{200} Consciously or not, collectors were adept at exploiting emigrants' sense of longing for 'the ould sod' for their own ends, just as 'the priest too poor to travel' was adept at using familial expectations for his purposes. There are clear hints in some emigrant correspondence that Irish relatives, who wrung vital personal remittances from their departed kin, could also pressure them into donating to local church-building funds in order to burnish the family's 'respectable' reputation at home. Nothing perhaps, symbolised the achievement of financial success, the retention of what was deemed a proper sense of duty to those left behind, and the maintenance of a devout Catholic faith quite as much as a donation toward the home chapel, and its announcement from the pulpit.\textsuperscript{201} Certainly, there were some who declined to donate to Irish churches. Yet while Devine's diary contains a number of indecorous references to 'stingy' people who 'don't give well', they serve merely to highlight the towering sense of entitlement that Irish priests harboured toward the disposable incomes of Irish emigrants and even their descendants, mirroring the attitude of Irish families, who, in Grace Neville's stinging judgement, seemed to believe they had 'an unspoken right to the hard-earned dollars of those who left.'\textsuperscript{202} It can be difficult not to
agree with Fr John Brummer of Cincinnati, who observed some Irish going ‘to ruin’ in the United States ‘on account of not being cared for but to collect their hard earned dollars’. Nonetheless, it seems clear that, for all its sometimes overblown rhetoric, the widely held idea of a ‘spiritual empire’ emerging from a ‘divine mission’ accorded to Irish emigrants had important repercussions. Beyond the expansion of Irish ecclesiastical power and the manufacture of a useful sense of pride among emigrants and the Irish at home alike, the Irish Catholic Church managed to use the narrative in a way which boosted its own prestige and capacity at home. This does not suggest a desire to see emigration from Ireland perpetuated – there had to be, after all, worshippers to fill the churches as well as to contribute towards their erection – but it does constitute an impressive ability on the part of church spokesmen, not only to rationalise an exodus over which the hierarchy and the clergy realised they could exercise very little control, but also to make the best of the situation in which they found themselves. Indeed, while Paul Cullen felt able to condemn the Fenians in an 1866 pastoral letter for having ‘collected millions of dollars’ in the United States with which they had hired ‘noble palaces’, he, and the church that he led, were ultimately open to a similar charge.

Notes


2 This title has also been used with a more scholarly question mark for an edited volume dealing with Ireland and empire. Keith Jeffery (ed.), An Irish Empire?: Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire (Manchester, 1996); see also Christine Kinealy, ‘At home with the empire: the example of Ireland’ in Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds), At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World (Cambridge, 2006), p. 96.
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6 Rafferty, ‘The Catholic Church and the British Empire 1800–1921’, p. 6; Donald Harman Akenson, Half the World from Home Perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand 1860–1950 (Wellington, 1990), pp. 163–4. Colin Barr, whose concentration is on Irish domination of the upper echelons of the global Catholic Church, appears to posit a weak connection between the diffusion of Irish emigrants and the appointment of Irishmen to foreign dioceses. Many such appointments, he explains, were not ‘the necessary consequence of large-scale Irish emigration’ but ‘the result of a carefully-planned campaign [by Cullen] to install Irish bishops in the several national hierarchies’. That argument, backed by evidence that in certain instances, Irish bishops preceded any significant Irish population, is convincing. However, as Barr comes close to admitting, it would have been inconceivable that such a campaign could have succeeded in the absence of mass Irish Catholic migration. Colin Barr, “Imperium in Imperio”: Irish episcopal imperialism in the nineteenth century’ in English Historical Review, cxxiii:502 (June, 2008), 611–13.


9 Kiberd, Inventing Ireland, p. 276.


11 John Francis Maguire, The Irish in America (London, 1868); Nicholas Flood Davin, The Irishman in Canada (London, 1877); James Francis Hogan, The Irish in Australia (London, 1888); F. A. Fahy and D. J. O’Donoghue, Ireland in London (Dublin, 1889); P. S. Cleary, Australia’s Debt to Irish Nation-Builders (Sydney, 1933). A throwback to this kind of literature – from a rather different perspective – can be found in Ian R. K. Paisley, America’s Debt to Ulster (Belfast, 1976).

12 For Cullen’s use of the phrase, see Patrick Francis Moran, The Pastoral Letters and other Writings of Cardinal Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin (3 vols, Dublin, 1882), i, 624; Archbishop Lynch of Toronto also described Ireland as such in a speech reported by the F.J., 14 Aug. 1879.


14 Orestes A. Brownson, ‘Father Thébault’s Irish race’ in Orestes A. Brownson and Henry Francis Brownson (eds), The Works of Orestes A. Brownson (1884), p. 560.

15 Burke, Lectures, p. 212.

16 Kevin Collins, Catholic Churchmen and the Celtic Revival in Ireland, 1848–1916 (Dublin, 2002), pp. 60–79; Patrick F. Moran, Essays on the Origin, Doctrines and Discipline of the Early Irish Church (Dublin, 1864); Patrick F. Moran, Irish Saints in Great Britain (Dublin, 1879); Martin Haverty, The History of Ireland, Ancient and Modern (Dublin, 1867), pp.
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17 This description came from the Rector of the English College in Bruges, Monsignor de Haerne. *F.J.*, 13 Sept. 1878.


19 *F.J.*, 30 May 1850.


24 W.T., 9 Dec. 1854.

25 *Annals of All Hallows* (1862), 31.


30 P. S. Dineen, ‘The world-wide empire of the Irish race: A plea for its organisation’ in *Journal of the Ivernian Society* ii:6 (Jan. 1910), 79–94. This could be taken to refer only to preaching by Irish priests in the new world. However, the former Bishop of Pittsburgh, Michael O’Connor, related an anecdote of a mistress reading letters to her illiterate servant girl from a priest in Ireland and being convinced by them into converting. Moreover, as Oscar Handlin observed, the servant girl or other immigrant who converted their employer whether through pious example or active proselytism was lauded in immigrant literature. Michael O’Connor, *The Sogarth Aroon, or, the Irish Priest: A Lecture* (Baltimore, 1869), p. 21; Óscar Handlin, *Boston’s Immigrants, 1790–1880: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 185–6.
41 W.T., 26 Mar. 1853.
42 D. W. Cahill, *Argumentative Letter from the Rev. Dr Cahill to the Rt. Hon. Earl of Derby on the General Character of English Staresmen in Endeavouring to Uproot the Catholic Church – and, as it were, to send the Protestant Bible to teach all Nations?*, (Dublin, 1852), pp. 11–12.
43 Kerby A. Miller, ‘Revenge for Skibbereen’: Irish emigration and the meaning of the Great Famine’ in Miller, *Ireland and Irish America*, p. 66.
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51 Buckle, Saint Patrick, apostle of Ireland, pp. 11–14; A work by the professor of ecclesiastical history at Assembly’s College, Belfast declined even to make the connection between past missions and present missions explicitly. James Heron, The Celtic Church in Ireland: The Story of Ireland and Irish Christianity from before the Time of St Patrick to the Reformation (London, 1898).

52 Hempton and Hill, Evangelical Protestantism, pp. 182; More recent work on the Anglican church and the settler empire notes that Anti-Catholicism was the most striking Irish contribution to colonial Anglicanism. Hardwick, An Anglican British World, ch. 5.


56 John Brown, Jacob, pp. 8–12.


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60 M.H. (1862), 4; Evangelical Witness and Presbyterian Review, 1 Aug. 1866.  
61 Hempton and Hill, Evangelical Protestantism, p. 182.  
63 F.J., 2 Jan. 1852.  
64 I.C.R.A., Kirby papers, KIR/1847/545, letter from M. P. Riordan, Waterford to Kirby, 30 Mar. 1847.  
65 Ibid., KIR/1863/170, letter from George Commins to Kirby, 19 June 1863.  
66 Ibid., KIR/1864/82, letter from T. W. Croke to Kirby, 8 Apr. 1864.  
72 Perraud, Ireland, pp. 241–2.  
75 The Tablet, 29 Aug. 1846. There are obvious sympathies here with John Mitchel’s infamous dictum that ‘The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight but the English created the Famine,’ which he elsewhere describes as ‘the British government fulfil[ing] the designs and administ[ering] the dispensation of Providence’. John Mitchel, The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps) (Dublin, 1861), p. 219; John Mitchel, Jail Journal; Or Five Years in British Prisons (New York, 1854), p. 22. An earlier MacHale pastoral had suggested that ‘the people are on the verge of famine, in punishment of the sins of their infidelity’. The Tablet, 20 Feb. 1846.  
76 Peadar MacSuibhne, Paul Cullen and his Contemporaries (5 vols, Naas, 1965), iii, pp. 353–4.  
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81 Irish People, 21 May 1864.
86 I.C.R.A., Kirby papers, KIR/1865/172, letter from J. O’Leary to Kirby, 28 July, 1865. Similar rejection of the idea came in the wake of the 1880s peak of emigration. John Riordan, chaplain at New York’s Mission of Our Lady of the Rosary sounded a note of caution in 1884, while an Irish-American doctor wrote Archbishop Croke in 1887: ‘Tis said they [Irish emigrants] are the missionaries of the world being so destined by God. No, no. If those who say so or think so could but see what daily falls to my lot to witness, they should quickly change these ideas. If God so destined the Irish people then he predestined them to carry and give the faith to others and to lose it themselves, for this is just what is daily going on around me here. The Church is rapidly dying out’; *F.J.*, 15 Aug. 1884; C.D.A., Croke papers, 1887/21: microfilm, N.L.I., p. 6010–13, letter from P. O’Connell, Chicago to Croke, 10 June 1887.
87 *F.J.*, 25 July 1862.
90 See Larkin, *Consolidation*, pp. 101–5, pp. 282–7. It is worth noting that the obvious physical dangers posed to emigrants by the American Civil War appear to have troubled Irish bishops less than the moral and spiritual dangers of which Lynch warned. See D.D.A., Cullen papers, outgoing letter book 121/5, Cullen to Moran, 20 May 1864; D.D.A., Cullen papers, outgoing letter book 121/4, Cullen to Charles Langdon, 1 July 1865.

91 Larkin, *Consolidation*, p. 287.


95 Catholic Telegraph, 20 June 1863.

96 Norman, *Catholic Church*, p. 409.

97 While the average of c. 70,000 departures per year did more than halve between 1875 and 1879 – until another harvest crisis restored it to the former level – it is highly doubtful that the Land Act was responsible. Guinnane, *Vanishing Irish*, pp. 238–9.


100 James O’Leary also argued strongly to Kirby during 1865 that the people felt abandoned by their bishops because of their condemnation of the Fenians, and that emigration was partly a result of that sense of abandonment. I.C.R.A., Kirby papers, KIR/1865/172, letter from James O’Leary, St Colman’s, Fermoy to Kirby, 28 July, 1865 and KIR/1865/218, letter from same to same, 5 Oct. 1865.


103 I.C.R.A., Kirby papers, KIR/1863/13, letter from Gillooly to Kirby, 10 Jan. 1863; *F.J.*, 11 June 1866.

104 In fact it is impossible to escape the suspicion that Durcan was an otherwise unremarkable figure. Local lore recalls him as a church-building bishop – ‘Patrick of the churches’ – but in the mid-nineteenth century hierarchy that was a trait barely more distinctive than the wearing of a mitre. Liam Swords’ comment that his era ‘coincided with the period of church-building’ is instructive. As to his politics, by the 1860s, Durcan was aged and ailing and unable – rather than unwilling – to curb widespread clerical sympathy with Fenianism in his diocese. Emmet Larkin, *The
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John MacHale, The Splendid Oration delivered by the Most Reverend Dr MacHale, Abp of Tuam, at the Opening of the Second Session of the National Synod of Ireland, on Thursday, August 29th, 1850 (Dublin, 1850), p. 12; F.J., 8 June 1854.


Larkin, Consolidation, p. 282; If that was indeed the case, it might be explained by the fact that, as Cullen noted to Kirby, ‘The emigration from Munster & from Connaught is very great – scarcely anyone is going away from this diocese. This country was cleared one hundred years ago.’ I.C.R.A., Kirby papers, KIR/1863/322, letter from Cullen to Kirby, 11 December, 1863.

Ibid., KIR/1864/86, letter from Cullen to Kirby, 15 Apr. 1864.


I.C.R.A., Kirby papers, KIR/NC/1/1860/34, letter from Cullen to Kirby, 27 Apr. 1860.

Ibid., KIR/1864/178, letter from Cullen to Kirby, 29 Sept. 1864; Ibid., KIR/1868/11, letter from Cullen to Kirby, 7 Jan. 1868.

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119 To the many examples cited earlier might be added James Cardinal Gibbons, ‘St Patrick. The apostolic mission of the Irish race’ in Idem, A Retrospect of Fifty Years (2 vols, Baltimore, 1916), ii, pp. 170–89 [Sermon originally preached in Baltimore, 17 March 1871]; also worth noting is an anniversary celebration of St Columba by Dr Shahan of the Catholic University of America as reported in the New York Times, 7 June 1897.
120 To an extent this tied in with continental European religious orders’ attitude to Ireland; French orders, in particular, set up dozens of houses in (fulfilled) expectation of a flood of Irish postulants. Rafferty, ‘The Catholic Church and the British Empire 1800–1921’, p. 300; Ciaran O’Neill, ‘Colonised twice?: Rethinking the relationship between Catholics and empire in the nineteenth century’, paper before Catholic Historical Society of Ireland Conference, NUI Maynooth, 3 Nov. 2012.
123 John Francis Maguire, Pontificate of Pope Pius the Ninth (being the 3rd edition of ‘Rome and its Ruler’ continued to the Latest Moment and Greatly Enlarged) (London, 1870); Justin McCarthy, Pope Leo XIII (London, 1896), pp. 89–90; Bernard O’Reilly, Life of Leo XIII. From an Authentic Memoir published by his order with the Encouragement, Approbation and Blessing of His Holiness the Pope (London, 1903), p. 129; James F. Talbot, Pope Leo XIII. His Life and Letters from Recent and Authentic Sources (Boston, 1886), pp. 129–30.
125 Croke’s account features in William Scawen Blunt, The Land War in Ireland being a Personal Narrative of Events (London, 1912), p. 280. As Lawrence McCaffrey has noted, Davitt gave a different version of the encounter, though he was not present, and relayed only what Croke had told him. Michael Davitt, The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland: Or, the Story of the Land League Revolution (Dublin, 1904), p. 400; Lawrence J. McCaffrey, Irish Nationalism and the American Contribution (New York, 1976), p. 420.
126 Larkin, Consolidation, pp. 284–5. [The letter is originally in Italian]
127 Ibid., pp. 282–3. Larkin sees this letter as Cullen ‘cover[ing] the exposed Roman flank’ in light of Lynch having in effect ‘report[ed] the Irish bishops to the Pope for not making greater temporal efforts on behalf of their
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people. That is arguably too dramatic an interpretation. Criticism of the Irish hierarchy in the pamphlet itself is muted, though Lynch was more cutting in a letter to Kirby. I.C.R.A., Kirby papers, KIR/1864/96, letter from Lynch to Kirby, 12 May 1864. In any case, Cullen’s response to Lynch was a note of genuine thanks for his ‘valuable letter’. D.D.A., Cullen papers, outgoing letter book 121/4, letter from Cullen to Lynch, 13 May 1864.

129 F.J., 19 Oct. 1864. Cullen repeated these sentiments privately in a letter to his niece Margaret in 1870 when he wrote ‘religion has gained by the sufferings which our poor people have had to undergo at home’. Peadar MacSuibhne, Paul Cullen and his Contemporaries, v, p. 36.
131 Dr Cullen, Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of Dublin, on the Fast of Lent, 1853 (Dublin, 1853).
133 See Cullen to Sisters of Mercy, Rathdrum, F.J., 16 Sept. 1867; The Nation, 1 Mar. 1884.
134 Peadar MacSuibhne, Paul Cullen and his Contemporaries, iii, pp. 247–8.
135 I.C.R.A., Kirby papers, KIR/1892/190, letter from Catherine Aherne to Kirby, 4 Apr. 1892.

139 ‘New books’ in Irish Monthly, xiii:146 (Aug. 1885), 443.
140 Fanning, Irish Voice in America, p. 77.
142 Anon., ‘New books’ in Irish Monthly, viii:85 (July 1880), 404; The book was Eleanor C. Donnelly Pearls from the Casket of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (New York, Cincinnati, St Louis, 1880) and the journal Ave Maria, published at Notre Dame.
146 Clerical manuals reviewed included Priests of St Paul, Five Minute Sermons for the Low Masses on all Sundays of the Year (New York, 1880); American Ecclesiastical Review, Manual of Ceremonies for the Episcopal Visitation of Parishes, and the Administration of the Sacrament of Confirmation (New York[?], 1897).
150 William Carleton, Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry (3 vols, Dublin, 1834), ii, p. 161; Hall, Ireland, ii, pp. 18–19. However, thatched chapels could certainly still be found in the post-Famine landscape. The Nation, 7 June 1854.
152 Keenan, Catholic Church, p. 124; Yates, Religious Condition, p. 214; Church-building at this time had, as Oliver Rafferty has noted, particular significance in the North, where it ‘indicated the refusal of Ulster Catholicism
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155 See Killen, *Memoir*, p. 174 for similar sentiments.

156 *B.N.L.*, 20 Jan. 1854.


158 Other Protestant denominations, including Methodists, continued occasionally to use this fundraising method. John Ker, *The Clarke Memorial Church, Portrush* (Glasgow, 1887), p. 28; Dudley Levistone Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland A Short History* (Dublin, 2001), p. 235

159 Ignatius Murphy, ‘Building a church in 19th century Ireland’ in *The Other Clare*, ii (Apr. 1978), 20–5. Political candidates’ donations to priests were criticised by the Independent Irish Party as making clerics ‘beholden’ to politicians. *F.J.*, 29 Sept. 1853.


161 St Mel’s cathedral was, not unusually, not finally completed for another fifty years. *F.J.*, 12 May 1889. One local historian noted that Higgins had also been given unprecedented leave by other Irish bishops to fundraise in their dioceses. Perhaps the scale of his ambition for what he felt would be ‘the most extensive and most elegant church of modern times, in any part of the United Kingdom’ impressed other prelates, even if this avowedly Roman temple does not seem entirely at home in its modest surroundings. Peter Galloway notes, ‘it looks as though it was put here by mistake’ M. J. Masterson, ‘Centenary of St Mel’s cathedral, 1840–1940’ in *Ardagh and Clonmacnoise Antiquarian Journal*, ii:7 (1940), 59; James MacNamee, *History of the Diocese of Ardagh* (Dublin, 1954), p. 436; Peter Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland* (Belfast, 1992), p. 171; Yates, *Religious Condition*, p. 247.

162 *The Synodical Address of the Fathers of the National Council of Thurles to their Beloved Flock, the Catholics of Ireland* (Dublin, 1850), p. 11.

163 Anon., ‘Address of the Catholic University Committee to their brethren in America’ in *Battersby’s Catholic Register* (1852), 184–6.

164 *F.J.*, 12 July 1851.

165 *F.J.*, 22 Feb. 1853; P.R.O.N.I., Clogher Diocesan Records, DIO(RC)1/11 B/2, Diary of Rev. Dr James Donnelly, written during fundraising trip in America, 1852–53.

166 Hearne was the only collector with an English parish and the only one not to return home, taking on a vacant parish in Massachusetts. Anon., ‘Very Rev. Daniel Hearne’ in *Catholic Directory, Almanac and Registry* (1866), 402.
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168 See, for example, U.N.D.A., Purcell papers, II-4–l, letter from Cullen to Purcell, Cincinnati, 8 July 1851; U.N.D.A., Blanc papers, V-1–b, letter from Cullen to Anthony Blanc, New Orleans, 8 July 1851; U.N.D.A., Lefebvre papers, III-2–h, letter from Cullen to Peter Paul Lefebvre, Detroit, 8 July 1851.

169 *F.J.*, 1 July 1851, 16 Oct. 1851, 13 Nov. 1851.


171 Patrick Leahy, ‘Dr Leahy’s inaugural lecture as vice-rector of the Catholic University, 16 Nov. 1854’ in *Catholic University Gazette*, i:34 (Jan. 1855), 285.


176 Murphy, *Diocese of Killaloe, 1850–1914*, pp. 69–70.

177 St Patrick’s Armagh, for example, necessitated collections in the United States in 1854, 1856, 1868 and 1900. A.D.A., Dixon papers, II Box 1, Folder 2, letter from Archdeacon Felix Slane to Dixon, 4 Dec. 1854; *F.J.*, 26 June 1856; (A.D.A., Kieran papers, 1 Mar. 1868); *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 11 Mar. 1900.


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183 This fateful story was related by William Hague at the inquest into the death of Fr Kavanagh, P.P. of Rathangan, Co. Kildare. The blackly ironic verdict: death by a blow to the head from a falling altar statue. *F.J.*, 7 Oct. 1886.


185 ‘Property of the working classes in America’ in *Dublin Builder* (Sept. 1859), 118.

186 *F.J.*, 3 Nov. 1890.


188 For the virulent, anti-clerical take of a Catholic barrister and polemicist see Michael J. F. McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland* (Dublin, 1902), p. 262. This kind of criticism has continued to rear its head periodically. In 1966, a T.C.D. student, Brian Trevaskis, notoriously called the Bishop of Galway ‘a moron’ on R.T.E. television’s *Late Late Show*, for spending money on building a ‘monstrosity’ of a cathedral instead of on the poor. *Irish Times*, 29 Mar. 1966; Marcus Tanner, *Ireland’s Holy Wars: The Struggle for a Nation’s Soul, 1500–2000* (Dublin, 1999), p. 162. More recently, the bishop of Ardagh was criticised for soliciting donations from ‘vulnerable’ confirmation candidates for the rebuilding of the fire-damaged St Mel’s cathedral in Longford. *Irish Independent*, 17 May 2010.


193 Fr Peter Conway, parish priest of Headford, Co. Galway built his chapel
entirely from the proceeds of three trips made to the United States in the early 1860s. He consequently attempted to nickname it 'the Irish-American church', but the moniker failed to endure, presumably because it was far from unusual for a church to be thus financed. *F.J.*, 23 Mar. 1861.

194 Nigel Yates records that Batt O'Connor's trip raised £837 of the £15,000 cost of Killarney cathedral. Yates, *Religious Condition*, p. 248; Frs Hegarty and McKenna collected £2,000 of the £40,000 cost of Derry cathedral. Stephen McLoughlin, ‘The development of the cathedral church in Derry under the leadership of Bishop Francis Kelly (1849–1888): a study of stewardship’ in Henry A. Jeffries and Ciarán Devlin (eds), *Derry from Earliest Times* (Dublin, 2000), p. 231; Peter Galloway, citing no source, claims that only £4,000 of the £45,000 it took to build Thurles cathedral was raised abroad. Galloway, *Cathedrals of Ireland*, p. 203.


196 Michael Buckley, collecting for Cork cathedral, met this problem on several occasions. Buckley, *Diary*, pp. 137–40.


198 American parish clergy are variously described by Devine as ‘more Turkish than Christian with regard to beggars,’ gruff, stiff, and stubborn, determined that he would not aid; ‘an old, smug, comfortable gentleman’. Devine, ‘Jolly beggar’.


200 Buckley, *Diary*, p. 100, p. 114.

201 I.E.D., Doran letters, Doc. no. 107161, letter from Jane Doran to William [Doran?], 30 Mar. 1870; Barber, *Prendergast Letters*, pp. 128–9; Cara Delay, “The gates were shut”: Catholics, chapels, and power in late nineteenth-century Ireland’ in *New Hibernia Review*, xiv:1 (Spring 2010), 27.

202 Grace Neville, ‘She never then after that forgot him’: Irishwomen and emigration to the United States in Irish Folklore’ in *Mid-America*, lxxiv:3 (Oct. 1992), 280.
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