

# Irish migrants and the recruitment of Catholic Sisters in Glasgow, 1847–1878<sup>1</sup>

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There is not an Irishman who owns an acre of land in Scotland, this unsettled exclusiveness gives offence to the country and causes the Irish to be unfavourably looked upon ... The people of Scotland are prejudiced against Catholicity to a degree unequalled in any other country ... Now this antipathy to our holy faith is much intensified here in the western district because it is seen to be professed by congregations almost exclusively belonging to a race which is regarded with distrust if not aversion.<sup>2</sup>

The opinion offered by John Gray, a man conspicuously positioned as the 'Scottish' vicar-apostolic of the Western District, alongside James Lynch, his 'Irish' coadjutor, reveals something of Catholicism's precarious position in the west of Scotland. Increased levels of Irish migration between 1800 and mid-century had forced a reappraisal of the Roman church and sparked widespread anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment. Whilst these were a serious concern, the perceived 'vulgarity' of Irish Catholicism served to further divide the migrants from the native-born population, who projected feelings of intense contempt and distrust towards the newcomers. In Scotland, Catholicism's aristocratic ties and the conservative character it had adopted since the Reformation had enabled its survival on the fringes of society, but the influx of Irish and the perception that many harboured subversive religio-political agendas caused many to regard the migrants with a wary eye. It was believed by a number of Scots Catholics that the Irish would undermine any possibility of Catholicism being accepted as part of Scottish society and its adherents being welcomed as loyal British subjects. In Glasgow, where the Irish congregated in their greatest numbers, the Scottish clergy, particularly the Banffshire-born cohort of bishops (Andrew Scott, John Murdoch, Alexander Smith and John Gray), invested tremendous energy in attempting to minimize Irish influence over Catholic identity in Scotland. Their main concern was the establishment of a religious-run system of Catholic education that would work to transform the city's Catholic population into respectable and loyal citizens, whilst simultaneously sublimating Irish Catholic culture.

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to express her thanks to Graeme Morton, Carmen Mangion, David Stewart, Paul Jenkins and Dara Price for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter. <sup>2</sup> John Gray, *Report on the state of religion in the Western District, 1866*, G[lasgow] A[rchdiocese] A[rchives], WD12/43.

Women religious, specifically sisters from active communities that concentrated on teaching,<sup>3</sup> were to become a central component to this initiative since their religious status, expanding membership and practical training gave them a decided advantage over lay teachers. And in spite of the turbulent relationships that often existed between priests and sisters, Catholic education in Glasgow was very much a cooperative effort. This chapter focuses on two specific communities, the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, founded by two French nuns, and the Sisters of Mercy, whose foundation stemmed from Limerick. Sisters were a fundamental element in the complex, though not entirely successful, campaign to integrate the Irish migrants with Scottish Catholic culture in Glasgow. As the first to provide any 'systematic education' in the city,<sup>4</sup> their role as educators afforded them considerable spiritual authority that extended well beyond their classrooms. The degree to which Sisters influenced Catholic education, identity and culture can be seen through the spread of devotional activities since it corresponded with the expansion of the religious communities and with the increase in the number of schools. The construction of an 'appropriate' convent or community ethos is an important theme to consider because the work women religious undertook with infants, girls and young women placed them in a unique position to shape the social and religious culture of future generations. It was believed that Sisters who were steeped in a decidedly Scottish tradition would ensure the transmission and adoption of a Scottish Catholic culture. Not only is this a useful starting point for further investigation, but it offers the opportunity to consider the importance of ethnicity within religious communities. Archival material that includes annal entries, personal correspondence, reports and unofficial statements reveals that although the number of Irish-born Sisters was high in both communities, they usually remained subordinate to their Scottish or English counterparts and rarely occupied key positions such as superior or novice mistress during the foundations' formative years.

Much of the scholarship written about women religious comes from Ireland, North America and England,<sup>5</sup> very little comes from Scotland. Francis J. O'Hagan has

3 The term 'active' refers to sisters who undertake various works of charity outside of their convent whereas a 'contemplative' order pertains to nuns who remain enclosed. 4 Bernard Aspinwall, 'The formation of the Catholic community in the West of Scotland: some preliminary outlines', *Innes Review*, 33 (1982), 46–8. 5 Some of the major studies are: Mary Peckham Magray, *The transforming power of the nuns: women, religion and cultural changes in Ireland, 1750–1900* (New York, 1998); Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the tradition of mercy* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1995); Susan O'Brien, 'French nuns in nineteenth-century England', *Past and Present*, 154 (1997), 142–80; Barbara Walsh, *Roman Catholic nuns in England and Wales, 1800–1937* (Dublin, 2002); Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in arms: Catholic nuns through two millennia* (Cambridge, 1996); Carol K. Coburn & Martha Smith, *Spirited lives: how nuns shaped Catholic culture and American life, 1838–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the veil: an alternative to marriage, motherhood and spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840–1920* (Toronto, 1987).

produced two books on Glasgow's male and female teaching communities,<sup>6</sup> but neither include much archival material from the convents themselves and his most recent work places too much emphasis on educational theory. Conversely, John Watts' monograph on the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception is rich with archival material; so, despite being a general history of the congregation in Scotland, its meticulously researched content makes it a valuable resource.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, despite these works, the study of women religious in Scotland remains localized to the west whilst centres like Dundee and Edinburgh in the east, and those Catholic regions in the north-east and south-west remain unexamined.<sup>8</sup> While this chapter is also Glasgow-centred, by considering women religious as agents of Catholic cultural transformation, it represents an important departure from the existing scholarship and is a useful first step in the construction of a comparative study with Edinburgh, where the recruitment of women religious also occurred in response to Irish migration.

In this context, the work of two scholars who consider the Irish and Catholicism in Scotland becomes invaluable: Martin Mitchell's ground-breaking book on Irish political activity in the west of Scotland examines the tension that existed between some of the migrants and church authorities, whilst Bernard Aspinwall's writing on the relationship between Catholicism and British identity stresses the inherent need that Scots Catholics had to take part in the Scottish nation as 'loyal' citizens.<sup>9</sup> Together, they highlight the complexities in a relationship charged with ethnic and religious tension at a time when the emergence of ultramontanist threatened the hegemony of the old recusant families. In Ireland, where studies about women religious are more abundant, Mary Peckham Magray's *The Transforming Power of the Nuns* is a highly influential study proposing that between 1750 and 1900 Sisters and nuns transformed Ireland's Catholics into a 'wealthy, well-educated, ambitious, socially disciplined and notoriously devout' population that challenged the hegemony of the Protestant Ascendancy.<sup>10</sup> Whilst her assertions provide support for a similar argument about Glasgow, there is a fundamental difference: despite rapid population growth

<sup>6</sup> Francis J. O'Hagan, *The contribution of the religious orders to education in Glasgow during the period 1847–1918* (Lampeter, 2006); *Change, challenge and achievement: a study of the development of Catholic education in Glasgow in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Glasgow, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> John Watts, *A canticle of love: the story of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception* (Edinburgh, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Other works include Martha Skinnider, 'Catholic elementary education in Glasgow, 1818–1918', in James Scotland (ed.), *History of Scottish education* (London, 1969), pp 13–25 and S. Karly Kehoe, 'Special daughters of Rome: Glasgow and its Roman Catholic Sisters, 1847–1913' (PhD, University of Glasgow, 2004) and 'Nursing the mission: the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and the Sisters of Mercy in Glasgow, 1847–1866', *Innes Review*, 56 (2005), 46–60.

<sup>9</sup> Martin J. Mitchell, *The Irish in the west of Scotland: trade unions, strikes and political movements* (Edinburgh, 1998). Bernard Aspinwall, 'Catholic devotion in Victorian Scotland', Manuscript of paper delivered in May 2003 at the University of Aberdeen. Also, 'Varieties of modern Scottish Catholic conservatism', in Sheridan Gilley (ed.), *Victorian churches and churchmen* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2005), pp 110–38.

<sup>10</sup> Magray, *The transforming power*, p. 87.

and legislative reforms, Catholics in Scotland were never in a position to realistically challenge Presbyterian hegemony, despite exaggerated fears over the so-called 'Catholic creep'.

Mary Hickman's work is equally important since she rightly insists on the need for an alternate historiography for the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain that accounts for their subjection to 'active strateg[ies] of incorporation', particularly those pursued by the Catholic church.<sup>11</sup> She identifies Catholic education as one such strategy since it had the best chance of enabling authorities in England and Scotland to realise their ambition of 'produc[ing] good Catholics [as well as] ... a body of loyal, respectable working-class English and Scottish Catholics of limited social mobility'.<sup>12</sup> Carmen Mangion's piece on the professional identity of Sisters echoes this point and emphasizes that in England, the education of working-class children was the 'prime objective' of the newly re-established hierarchy after 1850.<sup>13</sup> In Scotland, which remained a mission until its Catholic hierarchy was restored in 1878, church organization and the establishment of a Catholic education system was logistically complicated due to the shortage of resources, but it was diligently pursued as part of the wider Scottish Catholic desire for acceptance as loyal citizens because like England, loyalty to the state was a contentious issue that divided the native-born population and the Irish migrants.<sup>14</sup>

According to the Census, Glasgow's population in 1801 was 77,385, but only roughly 500 or 600 were Catholic, and whilst the majority of these would have been Scots, a number were Irish (an exact breakdown cannot be provided because records were not kept). By 1851, the tail end of the Famine, Glasgow's population had jumped to 329,097 including some 59,801 Irish. Two decades later in 1871 the Irish-born represented 14.32 per cent of the city's 477,732 inhabitants and of these it is usually assumed that roughly three quarters were Catholic.<sup>15</sup> As Martin Mitchell's investigation of Irish political activity in the west of Scotland emphasizes, the tension between the Irish migrants who were politically active and the Scottish Catholic clergy, particularly Bishops Andrew Scott and John Murdoch, had been a factor in slow church development since the early 1820s.<sup>16</sup> Issues such as the establishment of the Glasgow Catholic

11 Mary J. Hickman, 'Alternative historiographies of the Irish in Britain: a critique of the segregation/assimilation model', in Roger Swift & Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain* (Dublin, 1999), p. 241. 12 *Ibid.*, p. 249. 13 Carmen Mangion, "'Good teacher" or "good religious"? The professional identity of Catholic women religious in nineteenth-century England and Wales', *Women's History Review*, 14:2 (2005), 229. 14 Mary J. Hickman, 'Incorporating and denationalizing the Irish in England: the role of the Catholic church', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish Worldwide: history, identity. Volume 5: religion and identity* (London, 1996), p. 202. 15 Charles Withers, 'The demographic history of the city, 1831-1911', in W. Hamish Fraser & Irene Maver (eds), *Glasgow: volume II* (Manchester, 1996), pp 142 and 148-9. Graham Walker, 'The Protestant Irish in Scotland', in T.M. Devine (ed.), *Irish immigrants and Scottish society* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp 49-50. 16 Mitchell, *The Irish*.

Association in 1823, the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829 and the Repeal movement of the 1840s made the Scottish clergy fearful of the repercussions such political activities would create for the image of Catholicism in the west of Scotland, and the risk this posed to the financial support that had been received from prominent Protestants.<sup>17</sup> In response, the bishops launched aggressive campaigns aimed at both Irish clerics and laymen, but the blanket bans on participation in political movements, verbal insults, and the transfer of 'disobedient' priests to remote parishes proved largely ineffective.<sup>18</sup> Education thus became a vital stimulus for a culture of devotion and an important recourse for the integration of the Irish with Scottish society, where perceptions of Irish racial, cultural and religious inferiority abounded.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst causing alarm in some Protestant circles, the presence of Sisters and nuns generally tended to enhance external opinions about the progress of the Catholic community and this was not simply because of the extensive social welfare services Sisters provided, but also because of their ability to reshape people's devotional attitudes. In 1850, for example, a report on a reception ceremony for the Franciscan Sisters in the *Glasgow Herald* stated that 'Our fathers would have looked upon the making of nuns in this city with perfect horror and we do not like it yet ... [but] no one is entitled to disturb them in the exercise of their religion so long as these are orderly and peaceful.'<sup>20</sup> Devotional activities in the west of Scotland included sodalities, processions, winter concerts and choirs, and in his pioneering study of the Irish in Scotland, James Handley made a point of mentioning the organizational abilities of sisters and emphasized that with service, their authority grew to the point that 'their word was law in many a household'.<sup>21</sup> Sodalities in particular have been identified as important elements in the development of religious culture, and the Sodality of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and that of the Children of Mary in Ireland, for example, had a tremendous influence on transforming the 'devotional attitudes' of young women and, as a result, their family and friends.<sup>22</sup> Sodality membership could often result in vocations, as was the case with the Dublin Sisters of Charity and their Children of Mary where 370 of the first 1,675 members chose the religious life in Ireland and abroad.<sup>23</sup> Both the Children of Mary and the Immaculate Heart of Mary existed in Glasgow, the former being under the direction of the Mercies as early as 1858.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, apart from the *Catholic Directory for Scotland*, which is littered

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118. <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>19</sup> Colin Kidd discusses this in 'Sentiment, race and revival: Scottish identities in the Aftermath of Enlightenment', in Laurence Brockliss & David Eastwood (eds), *A union of multiple identities: the British Isles, c. 1750–1850* (Manchester, 1997). The broadsides, or the 'tabloids of their day' are useful indicators and some anecdotal references include: *The monkey barber. An account of the wonderful monkey of Glasgow*, c. 1825; *Edinburgh Irish festival; or the popish showman. An account of the procession and progress of Dan, king of the Beggars, in Edinburgh*, c. 1835; *Paddy on the railway*, c. 1860–1880. See the National Library of Scotland's *Word on the Street*. <http://www.nls.uk/broadsides/>, accessed 9 May 2008. <sup>20</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Apr. 1850. <sup>21</sup> James Handley, *The Irish in modern Scotland* (Cork, 1947), pp 226–7. <sup>22</sup> Magray, *The transforming power*, p. 100. <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105. <sup>24</sup> S[cottish] C[atholic] D[irectory], particularly editions after 1858.

with errors and omissions, mid-century documentation about sodalities in Glasgow is sparse since the *Observer*, the city's official Catholic paper, only began publication in 1885 and the dissident *Free Press*, which ran between 1823 and 1834, and again between 1851 and 1867,<sup>25</sup> carried little information about devotional activities. What does exist, however, provides enough of a picture to show that devotional activities, directed by male and female religious, were on the rise from the 1850s.

Apart from these types of organizations, the sister-run schools, which included convent, parish and Sunday schools, were perhaps the most effective way for women religious to exert their influence and transform the religiosity of new generations of Catholic children. When the first Sisters arrived in Glasgow, there were but a handful of Catholic schools and only four missions: St Andrew's (1816); St Mary's (1842); St John's (1846); St A. Liguori's (later St Alphonsus') (1846). Twenty years later, the growth was impressive with an additional four new missions: St Joseph's (1850); St Patrick's (1850); St Mungo's (1850); St Vincent de Paul's (1859). Seven of the eight missions had day and Sunday schools, four are listed as having had evening schools and there were also three convent boarding schools, run by the Franciscan Sisters and Sisters of Mercy, the Jesuits' St Aloysius' College and an academy run by the Marist Brothers.<sup>26</sup> By the time the Scottish Catholic hierarchy was restored in 1878, there were fourteen parishes (a mission officially became a parish after restoration) and all of which had day schools with the vast majority offering primary schools for girls, boys and infants. Around this time, the estimated number of school-age children in Glasgow was approximately 18,578 and, although there was only accommodation for 12,360, it represents the fruits of a collective effort. Overall, by 1880, the Franciscan Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy were responsible for sixteen of the twenty-seven schools for infants and girls in the city, but it must also be recognized that the majority of the lay female teachers working in the other schools would have received their own education from the sisters.<sup>27</sup> The construction of new schools corresponded with the expansion of the religious communities, particularly the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Although having been located at Charlotte Street since 1847, the community had grown enough by 1861 to merit the opening of another house in Abercromby Street, and this was in addition to its other houses already established in Inverness and Aberdeen. Their status as a pontifical institute enabled them to work in a number of missions simultaneously; so, although they had only two Glasgow addresses, their presence was felt across the city.<sup>28</sup> The Mercies, a diocesan community, remained comparatively small, but they too made a considerable impact on the young Catholic women of Glasgow.

Since Catholic education was regarded as a way to curb 'urban working class' problems such as poverty, intemperance and apostasy,<sup>29</sup> the recruitment of teaching

25 John K. M'Dowall, *The people's history of Glasgow: an encyclopedic record of the city from the prehistoric period to the present day* (Republished ed., Wakefield, 1970), p. 51. 26 CDS, 1848 and 1868. 27 *Detailed Statistics of Each School, 1878-1879 and 1880-1881*, Education Reports, GAA, ED7. The Franciscan Sisters were present in 13 parishes whilst the Sisters of Mercy were active in three. 28 Watts, *A canticle*, Appendix Two, p. 258. 29 McNamara,

Sisters, into whose religious communities specific cultural values would be instilled, represented an important first step in the process of cultural transformation. In 1847, the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception were the first religious to arrive in Glasgow and the second to return to Scotland since the Reformation.<sup>30</sup> Two years later, the Sisters of Mercy arrived and like the Franciscans they had been recruited by Fr Peter Forbes, an enterprising priest from Glasgow's St Mary's Parish, Abercromby Street. Like most women religious in the mid-nineteenth century, these sisters responded to sporadic crises, undertaking nursing work during epidemics and the administration of poor relief during periods of extreme impoverishment, but their rules show that education was a primary focus. For example, the *Rule* of the Franciscan Sisters states that they were primarily a teaching community whose Sisters 'devote themselves chiefly to impart a sound Christian education to young girls ... [and] to form their hearts of virtue',<sup>31</sup> whilst that of the Mercies stressed 'a most serious application to the instruction of poor girls, visitation of the sick and protection of distressed women of good character'.<sup>32</sup>

Although Forbes had asked the Sisters of Mercy to come to Glasgow before the Franciscan Sisters (they were unable to do so), it is important to view this request as one of necessity rather than a willingness to welcome Irish Catholic culture. On a practical level, it made sense to recruit from Ireland and France, where Sisters and nuns were far more numerous than in either England or Scotland. In Scotland there were just fourteen Ursulines based in Edinburgh and the vast majority of England's thirteen orders and congregations were contemplative (enclosed) with active sisters (unenclosed) numbering somewhere in the region of sixty. Eight congregations established themselves in England between 1841 and 1849, with the majority being in and around London, but just two arrived in Scotland over the same period.<sup>33</sup> In Ireland the number of women religious increased from just 120 in 1800 to roughly 1,500 by 1850,<sup>34</sup> whereas in France roughly 200,000 women joined over 400 congre-

*Sisters in arms*, p. 621. **30** The first were the Ursulines of Jesus who arrived in Edinburgh from France in 1834. Charles Smith, *Historic south Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 49. Agnes Trail, *Revival of conventual life in Scotland: history of St Margaret's convent, Edinburgh, the first religious house founded in Scotland since the so-called reformation; and the autobiography of the first religious sisters Agnes Xavier Trail* (Edinburgh, 1886) pp 20–1. **31** Box marked 'Copies of Early Constitution', #031.30, F[ranciscan] S[isters of the] I[mmaculate] C[onception] A[rchives]. This object was retained when the *Rule and Constitutions* were revised in 1853. **32** *Rules and constitutions of the religious called the sisters of mercy, part 1st, Glasgow 1849, shelfbooks*, S[isters of] M[er]cy C[onvent] A[rchives], Glasgow. **33** Carmen Mangion, unpublished statistics (2007). The first simple-vowed congregations were the Faithful Companions of Jesus, London (1830), Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, York (1836) and the Sisters of Mercy, London (1839). Walsh, *Roman Catholic nuns*, pp 165, 170–1. *Census of the population in Scotland, 1841*, Convent, St Margaret's, S[cottish] C[atholic] A[rchives], MC/3/7/11. Seven were listed as being foreign, one was from England and five were Scottish, though none of the Scots were from Edinburgh. They ranged in age from 20 to 35. Two servants, one from England and one from Edinburgh were also listed, but they were likely lay sisters. **34** Magray, *The transforming power*, pp 8 and 26.

gations between 1800 and 1880 – a phenomenal trend considered to be a powerful attempt to ‘re-Christianise French culture and society’.<sup>35</sup>

Although the Scottish mission had important links with England, Ireland and the Continent, based on aristocratic ties, kin networks, migration and through the numerous Scots seminaries located in France, Spain, Italy and Belgium, the mission was distinct and somewhat detached, and this was due as much to geography as to custom and ‘Scottish clannishness’.<sup>36</sup> Sisters north of the border were more isolated than their counterparts elsewhere and this would have increased their susceptibility to clerical interference. Convincing women religious to come to Scotland was only the first step in establishing them as part of its religious landscape; the manipulation of a religious community’s ethnicity was the second. It was at this stage that conflict often erupted, either between the religious community and male clerics or amongst Sisters themselves. The manipulation of a community’s ethnic identity was a common feature of religious life and there are numerous illustrative examples of this from England, France and North America. Ethnic tension was widespread within religious communities, and although Sisters were expected to move beyond this, it is clear that nationalisms and cultural biases were rarely left behind in ‘the world’.<sup>37</sup> In England, for example, it is recalled that the election of an English superior to a French community sparked distress amongst the French sisters who did not welcome the ‘infus[ion of] ... an Anglo-Saxon spirit’.<sup>38</sup> In Scotland, the French culture of the Franciscan foundresses Adelaide Vaast, who was struck down by cholera in 1849, and Veronica Cordier, also proved to be occasional obstacles, but it was the Sisters of Irish birth who posed a more immediate concern to the city’s leading clerics. As the number of Irish entrants grew, which is not surprising given the fact that Glasgow housed one of the densest Irish populations in Britain, second only to Liverpool, there were increasing fears that Irish-born Sisters would assume positions of authority within the convents.<sup>39</sup> In the first seven years of the Franciscan Sisters’ existence, and before their first branch house was opened in Inverness, there were fifteen Irish entrants and ten Scots, though surnames and place of birth (Glasgow) indicate that at least three were of Irish descent.<sup>40</sup> The circumstances were somewhat different for the Sisters of Mercy who were an Irish congregation and whose Glasgow establishment had been started by five Irish sisters from Limerick: Mother M. Elizabeth (Anne) Moore, the Limerick superior who returned after the initial foundation

35 O’Brien, ‘French Nuns’, 144. 36 In 1926, the archbishop of Glasgow cited this as one of his reasons for supporting the canonization and beatification cause of Edinburgh’s Margaret Sinclair. D. Mackintosh to Fr T. Agius, 1 Dec. 1926, SCA. HC13/2/1. 37 This theme is dealt with in McNamara’s *Sisters in arms*, pp 265–99. 38 O’Brien, ‘French nuns’, pp 156 and 164. 39 Irene Maver, *Glasgow* (Edinburgh, 2005), pp 84. Roger Swift, ‘The historiography of the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain’, in Roger Swift (ed.), *Volume 2: The Irish in new communities* (Leicester, 1992), p. 57. 40 Kehoe, ‘Special daughters’, Database



arrangements were taken care of, Sr M. Catherine (Anne) McNamara, who became the first superior, Sr M. Clare (Mary) McNamara, Sr M. Joseph (Margaret) Butler and Sr M. Clare (Helen) Kerrin. During their first twenty years, twenty-one women were professed: eight of Irish birth, nine of Scottish birth and four from England.<sup>41</sup>

As mentioned above, convent leadership was a significant concern for the Scots clergy and was thus subjected to considerable scrutiny, intervention and manipulation. Although Sisters had a significant degree of autonomy, it is important to remember that they were not autonomous and that priests and bishops often used their positions as ecclesiastical advisors or superiors to implement changes. In some cases, if they exerted too much pressure, entire communities of Sisters would simply pack-up and relocate to a parish where the priest was more accommodating, but in Glasgow, where individual Sisters did leave under such circumstances, the foundations were never completely abandoned. Much of the tension surrounded two of the most important positions within a convent: the superior or prioress and the mistress of the novices. Superiors were elected by professed sisters and aside from managing a convent's practical affairs they shaped religious identity and set an example for the rest of the community. Superiors were to 'govern with advantage to the community' and were responsible for the selection of Sisters for key posts such as sub-prioress or assistant superior, bursar and novice mistress.<sup>42</sup> The latter was a tremendously influential office whose bearer took responsibility for shaping the religious identity of the new entrants. Both the Franciscan Sisters and Mercy community experienced the close surveillance of these positions by their male superiors and almost as soon as they arrived, the Mercies in particular encountered problems. While gender was an important factor and certainly influenced relations between the clergy and the women religious, much of the tension centred around the ethnicity of the founding Sisters and the control exerted by Mercy Superiors in Limerick and Liverpool. In a statement about the community's troubled state of affairs in the early 1850s, Alexander Smith observed that Murdoch's 'national feelings' made his relationship with the Sisters particularly difficult.<sup>43</sup>

In 1850 a serious dispute erupted over Sister Mary Bernard (Margaret) Garden, a young Aberdeenshire woman whom Murdoch had placed in the Mercy Liverpool novitiate so that she could eventually head the Glasgow foundation. Her transfer from the Mercy community in Liverpool to Dublin and then Limerick during the previous year had sent a strong message to Murdoch about the authority structure within female communities, but his failure to respect this soured relations with the mother superiors, whose membership in a growing international religious congregation afforded them significant collective support. What transpired resulted in Murdoch being forced to travel to Limerick to retrieve the Scottish Sister himself to carry out his ultimate goal of 'phasing out' the original Irish sisters with the installa-

41 Ibid., Database 2. 42 John Nicholas Murphy, *Terra incognita or the convents of the United Kingdom* (London, 1873), pp 702–4. 43 Alexander Smith, *Statement of the convent of mercy* (1857), Mercy International Centre Archives, Dublin.

tion of a Scottish superior. Understanding this to be the case, and having deep suspicions of his 'anti-Irish feelings', the superior in Glasgow, following orders from Moore in Limerick, had begun to gradually remove the original Irish Sisters.<sup>44</sup> The following year, the community fractured along ethnic lines. The transfer back to Limerick of the two remaining Irish Sisters sparked an angry exchange between Peter Forbes, who was anxious for work to be accomplished in his parish, and Sr M. Catherine McNamara, the mother superior, that resulted in the egregious exodus of seven Sisters (three professed and four novices).<sup>45</sup> Just two young professed Sisters remained in Glasgow, among them was Garden who was immediately appointed superior by Murdoch, and five novices and postulants; all but one were Scottish.<sup>46</sup> Ultimately, the Scottish clergy believed they had been wronged by the Mercy superiors who had a poor understanding of the position of Catholicism in Scotland:

I think those who opposed MMB's coming to Glasgow were quite in the wrong ... They might have thought that she was not ripe to become superior. In this I and you too would have joined them ... It was I understand necessity ... But to seek to prevent a Scotch woman from giving & her own poor country women who stood so much in need of religious instruction ... was I think unreasonable and contrary to all due order.<sup>47</sup>

For her part, Garden also exhibited a desire for Scottish, as opposed to Irish, sisters when, in a letter to Smith asking him to send along young women who might be inclined for the religious life, she added, 'we could get as many sisters as we wished from Ireland, but we want persons from this country, if possible.'<sup>48</sup> Her term as superior lasted just one year, her health having broken down on account of the stress of the situation, and aside from an interim superior who arrived from Liverpool to save the fledgling community, there were just three superiors between 1854 and 1871 and all were Scots considered capable of instilling a Scottish identity within the community that could then be transmitted through their schools and other social welfare activities. It was only in 1871 that an Irish superior was elected, but this was three years after Charles Eyre, an Englishman, assumed the position of bishop in an effort to alleviate once and for all the tension between the Irish and Scottish Catholics.<sup>49</sup>

What the above discussion illustrates is that the Glasgow clergy made a direct link between the presence of a Scottish-born superior and the survival of a Catholic identity in Glasgow that was distinctively Scottish. A candid comment from James Kyle, bishop of Scotland's Northern District, is particularly revealing and serves to empha-

44 Ibid. 45 Kehoe, 'Special daughters', p. 62. 46 Names of Sisters who entered in Glasgow, SMCA, Glasgow. 47 Bishop Kyle to Bishop Murdoch, 3 May 1852, SCA, OL2/83/5. 48 Sr M. Bernard Garden to Alexander Smith, 2 Oct. 1851, SCA, BL6/615/1. 49 *Names of sisters who entered in Glasgow*, held in green plastic binder marked 'Brief History of Glasgow Foundation' and 'Hand-written Account of Foundation', SMCA, Glasgow. Bernard Aspinwall, 'Anyone for Glasgow: The Strange Nomination of the Rt. Rev. Charles Eyre in 1868', *Recusant History*, 23 (1997), 589-601.

size the importance placed upon creating a Scottish Catholic identity, [had Garden not returned to Scotland] the Glasgow establishment would never have been, or would have been liable to instant annihilation as the frat of those who know nothing of [the] circumstances.<sup>50</sup> Such examples of the deliberate exclusion of Irish women from positions of authority also exist with the Franciscan Sisters, but seem rather to have been the result of Bishop Smith's interventions as opposed to Murdoch's. It was often the case in missions that difficulties surfaced when continental nuns tried to preserve the older traditions, and whilst it is clear that Cordier's French ways did not suit everyone, the congregation's pontifical status provided a stronger buffer against clerical interference, but even with this status their vow of obedience often meant that they were forced to conform to the wishes of the bishop, into whose mission they had been invited.<sup>51</sup> Upon arriving in Scotland, the Franciscan Sisters officially broke from their old congregation and formed a new one, but they retained the rule from Tourcoing until 1853 when one more suited to their needs in Glasgow, and co-written by Smith, was finally approved by Rome. When the new rule was being constructed, a conflict arose between Cordier and Smith, and although the details of this dispute remain obscured, the rule Rome approved provided their ecclesiastical superior (who at this point was Smith) with considerable authority as evidenced by the following excerpt:

The religious convinced that their bishop or any of his deputies to them is the representative of God, and that whatever commands they receive from him are issued in the name and with the sanction of his Divine Master, will submit with alacrity to whatever orders or direction he may be pleased to communicate to them.<sup>52</sup>

Smith exercised his position as ecclesiastical superior with great assiduousness over a number of important decisions including the community's elections. In 1854, during the first general chapter, Cordier was officially elected prioress and had selected Sr M. Angela (Hannah) McSwinney, a native of Co. Cork, as sub-prioress and novice mistress, but Smith vetoed this choice in favour of Sr M. Aloysius (Barbie) McIntosh, a Jamaican-born woman of Scottish-Catholic parentage. Smith's appointment of McIntosh split the community and after three years of tension, Cordier resigned and, went with three other sisters to found another congregation in Jamaica.<sup>53</sup> When

50 Bishop Kyle to Bishop Murdoch, 3 May 1852, SCA. OL2/83/5. 51 A pontifical institute has a superior general and a mother house and its cardinal protector is appointed by Rome to 'decide in any case of difficulty'. A diocesan community is independent of other communities and has the local bishop at its ultimate authority. However, in both cases, the local bishop preserves all diocesan rights. SCA. MC1/4. General Council, St Margaret's Convent. 52 *Rule of the community of the third order of St Francis, Glasgow, as revised and modified by the sacred congregation of bishops and regulars at Rome and approved by his holiness, Pius IX A.D. 1853.* Ch.2.1.1.1, FSICA. 53 *Obituary list*, FSICA. In 1862 Cordier returned to Tourcoing in poor health, but survived until 13 November 1913. The interesting Scoto-

Cordier resigned her position, the community elected McSwinney prioress and, although Smith did not approve of this choice, her status as one of the foundation's first entrants and as a Sister who had acquired considerable experience under Cordier, would provide the Sisters with much-needed stability at a difficult time. Aware of the potential damaging impact the foundress' resignation could have upon the community and of the protest already being exercised by the Sisters who elected McSwinney, Smith accepted her as superior, and she held the post from 1856 to 1860 and again from 1866 to 1869. The presence of an Irish prioress, however, was clearly displeasing and despite his earlier criticisms of Murdoch's anti-Irish opinions, Smith complained:

The Franciscans – don't please me at all. There is nothing very far amiss – but the prioress is intensely Irish – Irish in her feelings & prejudices, associations, want to order, want of cleanliness – manifesting her sympathies – this in respect to priests, nuns & people and children.<sup>54</sup>

Interestingly, the number of Irish women rejected by the community before McSwinney assumed control was ten (two were French, one was Scottish and seven were Irish), whereas during her leadership no Irish women were dismissed. In addition, it is also worth mentioning that when her second term as prioress came to an end in 1869, all of the succeeding prioresses until 1908 were Scots of old Catholic stock.<sup>55</sup>

Although the majority of the women who joined the Franciscan Sisters were from Scotland (mainly Glasgow and the north east) over 40 per cent were Irish-born and yet this high percentage did not translate into a comparable number of Irish sisters assuming positions of authority. In the Mercy community, Scottish sisters, mainly from Kirkcudbrightshire in the south west and from Glasgow, predominated in a community that had been founded by Irish sisters from an Irish congregation. Just nine of the forty-two Sisters of Mercy (less than 25 per cent) were Irish, a stark contrast to the Franciscan Sisters.<sup>56</sup> This difference must tie in with the clergy's concerted efforts to contain the influence of the Irish sisters in the Mercy community during the early years of the foundation. It also goes some way towards showing that whilst the Franciscan foundresses were also ethnically distinct, their culture was perceived as less threatening and less subversive than the Irishness of the Sisters of Mercy since it was only when Irish Sisters were proposed for the positions of subprioress and novice mistress in the Franciscan community that the clergy ordered changes.

In spite of the challenges outlined above, some 194 women joined the Glasgow

Jamaican connection requires further research. <sup>54</sup> Alexander Smith, report on 'clergy and convents' in his mission, No date, c.1858–1860, SCA, OLA/6/1. <sup>55</sup> Kehoe, 'Special daughters', Database 1, and *Obituary List and Sister Professions & Receptions, Volumes I & II*, FSICA. <sup>56</sup> Kehoe, 'Special daughters', Databases 1 and 2.

novitiate of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception between 1847 and 1913 before being scattered across Scotland to serve in one of the congregation's thirteen communities.<sup>57</sup> Between 1849 and 1907, forty-two women became Sisters of Mercy in Glasgow, but the overall impact of both groups is put into even greater perspective when it is learned that these were just two of the eight female congregations who were active in the city at this time and engaged in work ranging from education, nursing and poor relief to running homes for the disabled, the elderly and the orphaned. In contrast, the number of priests belonging to religious orders was 55 in 1878, growing to 94 by the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>58</sup> These numbers highlight the potential women religious had to influence the masses, and although it has been noted that in 1849 Smith feared Glasgow was 'not yet prepared for the good sisters',<sup>59</sup> just seven years later, he was writing of their indispensability.<sup>60</sup>

Empire and the age of industry had given Scotland the recognition it had long desired and as ideas about nationhood and identity began to emerge and take shape, the Scots Catholics struggled to claim their place in a nation that had defined itself by what it was not – Catholic. Like their counterparts elsewhere, the Scottish Catholic clergy were working to keep both their institution and culture afloat,<sup>61</sup> but unlike Ireland and England, there were fundamental population, cultural and religious differences at play that made Scotland's experience unique. The desire to foster a decidedly Scottish identity within these two congregations of women religious must be seen as a consequence of the deeper notions about identity and citizenship that were confronting the Catholic community in Scotland as a whole. The clash of the Irish and Scottish Catholic cultures saw the Scots adopt an offensive stance and successfully retain the most powerful positions within the mission church for themselves, and it has been shown that notwithstanding the agency of the Sisters, their ethnicity remained a key concern. Their daily contact with 'the people' at a range of levels meant that they were more accessible than the clergy; their religiosity was what would shape that of their pupils, patients and the poor who relied upon them for help. The deliberate exclusion of Irish-born Sisters from the key posts within the religious communities is thus indicative of the broader need to have the Sisters impart a decidedly Scottish influence over the Catholic population, whose exposure to the religious culture of the Sisters would, at a young age or during a period of vulnerability, plant the seeds for a more devout and, ideally, Scottish Catholic community.

57 For a full list see Watts, *Canticle*, Appendix Two, pp 258. 58 Mark Dilworth, 'Religious orders in Scotland, 1878–1978', *Innes Review*, 29 (1978), 103–7. 59 Quoted in Aspinwall, *Catholic devotion*, Footnote 81 in unpublished version. 60 Smith to T.W. Allies on the subject of education by religious – with account of progress, 28 Oct. 1856, SCA, OL2/86/10. 61 Magray, *The transforming power*, p. 3.