

Irish Catholicism, Criminality and Mental Illness in New Zealand from the 1870s to the 1930s



IN AN INFLUENTIAL 1990 STUDY of the Irish in New Zealand, Donald Harman Akenson noted exceptionally high rates of delinquency among Irish-Catholic immigrants in the 1880s.¹ The Irish-born made up only 8.9% of the population but 27.0% of convicted prisoners in 1886. At the same time, Catholics (half of whom were Irish-born immigrants) amounted to only 14.0% of the colony's population but 34.4% of prisoners convicted that year. Protestants of Irish descent, who did not belong to a single church, do not appear to have had a similar impact on crime statistics. Akenson sought to explain the apparent criminality of the Irish-Catholic population by reference to its immigrant origins and age structure. Irish-Catholic delinquency, he argued, reflected the unfavourable position of Irish Catholics in a society dominated by Protestants. Most of their over-representation in prison should be attributed to drunkenness – as distinct from more serious crimes – on the part of the disproportionately large number of single, unskilled males among the Irish immigrants of the 1870s (to which should be added the gold prospectors of the 1860s). Akenson anticipated that if further statistical evidence were available (he was not aware of any), it would show that subsequent generations of New Zealand Catholics of Irish descent exhibited fewer signs of deviance.²

It seems reasonable to accept Akenson's linkage of Catholic affiliation with Irish descent, which is a commonplace among New Zealand historians.³ Crime statistics do not record the ancestry of the New Zealand-born, but any that document religious affiliation could be used to investigate both immigrants and their descendants. By the 1930s, there were Catholics of English, French, German, Polish, Dalmatian, Italian and Lebanese descent in New Zealand, but, despite their sometimes marked concentrations in particular parts of the country, these were still small minorities in the Church as a whole.⁴ In interpreting official statistics, Angela McCarthy has cautioned against any simplistic identification of Irish and Catholic.⁵ The Protestant Irish, however, are excluded from the religious statistics used here, and, while allowing that a few Catholics had no Irish ancestry, there remains the task of explaining Catholic patterns of crime and institutionalization – and their resemblance to Irish-Catholic patterns overseas.

An abundance of information correlating criminality and religion

demonstrates that the Irish-Catholic community continued to display a high level of deviance well beyond the first generation of immigrants. After examining the statistical evidence, this article will explore explanations for Catholic deviance, including those suggested by Akenson and other historians: anti-Catholic polemics and nominal Catholicism; occupation and social class; the demography of the Catholic population; drunkenness; policing practice; and stereotyping. I will argue that Catholics were over-represented in gaols, reformatories and asylums primarily because the Catholic population, particularly men but including some women, included a high proportion of nominal church members, unskilled or semi-skilled workers, single adults without families and dysfunctional drinkers who were poorly integrated into society at large. These four characteristics, commonly found in the same individuals, were in all likelihood compounded by a fifth: the experience of type-casting. Some Irish Catholics may even have internalized the stereotype to the extent that they felt impelled to live by it. These five features of Irish Catholics put them at a higher risk than other New Zealanders of institutionalization as criminals or lunatics.

The New Zealand experience, furthermore, should be placed in an international context since the over-representation of Catholics in prison and other institutions – and a tendency for outsiders to blame religion – was not unique to this country. In the United States, a widely held stereotype of the uncivilized Irishman, as formulated by a Republican newspaper in 1868, included familiar themes: ‘The Irish fill our prisons, our poor-houses, our reform schools, our hospitals, our eleemosynary and reformatory institutions of all sorts. Scratch a convict or a pauper and the chances are that you tickle the skin of an Irish Catholic at the same time – an Irish Catholic made a criminal or a pauper by the priest and politician, who have deceived him and kept him in ignorance; in a word, a savage, as he was born.’⁶ Nor was the problem limited to the first generation, as English observers noted: ‘As a body ... the habitual criminals of London are said to be, in nine cases out of ten, “Irish Cockneys”, i.e. persons born of Irish parents in the Metropolis.’⁷ Elizabeth Malcolm has observed that ‘wherever the Irish went their propensity to be committed to psychiatric institutions became notorious’, and this pattern seems to have extended to the children of immigrants.⁸

Having explored the ‘relationship between the Irish, crime, and disorder in Victorian England’ for many years, Roger Swift concluded a survey article by suggesting that without further quantitative, diachronic and regional investigations, it ‘will continue to remain obscure.’⁹ He also suggests that Irish crime in urban Britain needs to be placed in a wider comparative context, notably Australia and the USA.¹⁰ No doubt, similar forms of deviance among

Irish Catholics in other countries had comparable causes; the explanations explored in this paper are probably applicable wherever Irish Catholics settled in predominantly WASP societies. They would, however, have been compounded or ameliorated in some places by local conditions, such as higher proportions of Irish immigration or higher levels of industrialization and urbanization. For example, Swift argued that ‘much Irish criminality was clearly the by-product of a poverty-stricken and brutalizing slum environment.’¹¹ Such harsh urban conditions were not common in New Zealand, which was far less industrialized and urbanized. A New Zealand study, nevertheless, should shed light on the causes and character of criminality and institutionalization elsewhere in the Irish-Catholic diaspora.

Varieties of Deviance and Institutionalization

Among the figures included in the exceptionally detailed ‘Industrial Distribution’ tables in the 1921 New Zealand census report on religion are the numbers of inmates belonging to the larger Christian denominations in gaols, industrial schools and comparable institutions.¹² As Table 1 shows, Catholics were dramatically over-represented, making up 29.17% of male inmates but only 13.29% of the country’s male population. Catholic over-representation was even more striking among the 309 female ‘Inmates of gaols, &c.’ on census day in 1921. Only 63 of these women and girls were Anglicans, 24 were Presbyterians and four were Methodists – but 192 were Catholics.¹³ While the leading Protestant denominations were markedly under-represented, Catholic women, only 13.65% of the female population, made up 62.14% of female inmates.

	Anglican	Presby- terian	Catholic	Methodist	Baptist	Salvation Army
1080 Males						
Number	513	171	315	34	5	8
Percentage	47.50	15.83	29.17	3.15	0.46	0.74
NZ Pop. (%)	42.12	24.56	13.29	8.76	1.49	0.81
309 Females						
Number	63	24	192	4	0	21
Percentage	20.39	7.77	62.14	1.29	0	6.80
NZ Pop. (%)	42.33	24.59	13.65	9.69	1.79	1.03

Table 1: Inmates of Gaols, Reformatories, and Industrial Schools in 1921

The table shows the number of inmates belonging to the seven largest religious denominations in gaols and comparable institutions according to the 1921 census. The proportion of prisoners belonging to each denomination and each denomination’s representation in the overall population are also given. Source: New Zealand Census, 1921, VII, pp.40, 44.

Many of these delinquent Catholics, and especially the Catholic women, were in industrial schools or reformatory institutions rather than gaols. Among the 1080 males of all denominations, only 683 were classified as prisoners, while the rest (including 68 boys under 15 years of age) were held in reformatories and industrial schools. Of the 309 females, only 28 were prisoners. The other 281 included 128 children and 137 inmates of industrial schools and reformatories.¹⁴ Children committed to industrial schools were often merely the neglected offspring of broken homes, in contrast to the criminal children sent to reformatories; in practice, the distinction was commonly blurred.¹⁵ Under the Reformatory Institutions Act (1909), the courts could send disorderly women to Salvation Army homes and similar institutions. In 1921, Magistrates' Courts ordered 129 such committals – a figure that may count some individuals more than once.¹⁶

The largest such church institution was Mount Magdala, run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in Christchurch from 1886. Mount Magdala took in girls and women either voluntarily or, increasingly after the passage of the Reformatory Institutions Act, upon being committed by the courts.¹⁷ As the *New Zealand Tablet* boasted, Mount Magdala received 'girls and women committed to the care of its Religious [i.e. nuns] by the courts all over the Dominion. There is no discrimination as to creed; members of all denominations find solace and help within its walls'.¹⁸ In July 1921, for example, a woman was sentenced to one month in gaol and 12 months' residence at Mount Magdala for importuning passers-by, and a second woman, guilty of breaching a prohibition order and of being idle and disorderly, was required to live there for two years.¹⁹ Another woman, who pleaded guilty in 1929 to charges of drunkenness and to being a rogue and a vagabond, was released and ordered to appear for sentencing if summoned within 12 months – on condition that she went to Mount Magdala.²⁰ By 1930, there were about 206 'penitents' (evidently including a significant number of elderly women) in the 'Magdalen Asylum' and 120 children in the 'Orphanage and Preservation Home for Girls'.²¹

By far the majority of women in prisons and reformatories were convicted for vagrancy and drunkenness.²² Consolidating earlier legislation, including the Vagrant Act (1866), the Police Offences Act (1884) laid down penalties for public drunkenness and obscenity and for not having lawful means of support. A 'common prostitute' could be fined £2 or imprisoned for up to one month for loitering and importuning, or be gaoled for up to three months for behaving 'in a riotous or indecent manner in any public place'.²³ The annual justice statistics did not record the number of women working as prostitutes since prostitution (as distinct from soliciting and brothel-keeping) was not a

crime in itself. In the words of the 1898 police enquiry, 'The class of prostitutes found in the streets, so long as they conduct themselves with decency and do not "solicit", do not come within the power of the police, however offensive their presence may be to the public'.²⁴ In 1900, for example, the *New Zealand Police Gazette* recorded several Irish women convicted of brothel-keeping or soliciting for prostitution but not for prostitution per se.²⁵

Much more often, the *Police Gazette*, which recorded the names and other details of prisoners released each week (but not their religion), recorded prostitution as the 'trade' but not the crime of female criminals. The actual crimes for which they were convicted were most commonly theft, vagrancy, being idle and disorderly, drunkenness, using obscene language and housebreaking.²⁶ Barbara Weldon, for example, born in County Limerick between 1829 and 1837, was described by a Dunedin magistrate in 1864 as 'the most drunken and disorderly woman in the town'.²⁷ In 1869, the authorities dispatched her to Hokitika. Weldon had convictions for 'drunkenness, disorderly behaviour, vagrancy, obscene language, attempted suicide and, on at least one occasion, soliciting'. Having served numerous prison sentences because she could not pay her fines, she died in a house fire in Kumara in 1882.²⁸ Although not illegal in itself, prostitution was the subject of occasional police campaigns, notably during the First World War.²⁹ It was the Revd Laurence Ginaty's experience as chaplain to the Lyttelton gaol, with its disproportionate numbers of female Irish-Catholic drunks and prostitutes, that led him to work for the establishment of Mount Magdala as a place of refuge and rehabilitation.³⁰

In addition to their over-representation in prisons and reformatories, Catholics and Irish immigrants were admitted in disproportionate numbers to mental institutions in both Australia and New Zealand.³¹ A study of the Dunedin Lunatic Asylum from 1863 to 1876 found that 'there were nearly twice as many Catholic patients as there should have been, with 10.66% in the general population and 20.68 in the Asylum population'; the figures were similar for the Irish population.³² This pattern of over-representation evidently persisted, though not necessarily at such a high rate. The 1936 New Zealand census report on religion indicated that 18.51% of males and 16.33% of females in mental hospitals were Catholics, at a time when they made up 12.89% and 13.30% of the total population respectively.³³

As socially defined categories, mental illness and criminality overlapped: they had similar causes, manifestations and judicial consequences. The Inspector of Prisons lamented in 1896 that, contrary to the intention of the Lunatics Act (1882), 'during the past year ... no less than 63 supposed lunatics have been detained in the prisons of the colony on remands', a high

proportion of whom 'turn out to be cases of *delirium tremens*'.³⁴ In addition to more serious offences, many of the 47 'criminal lunatics' at Seacliff Asylum between 1882 and 1912 were guilty of habitual drunkenness, theft and assault; nearly one-third were vagrants.³⁵

Catholics in Gaol

As well as occasional census data, there is available a whole series of statistics concerning prisoners and their religious affiliations from 1872 to 1931.³⁶ For the years 1871 to 1907, a table of 'Age, Class, Birthplaces, and Religion of Prisoners' was published. In this table, each prison admission in the course of a given year was added together and correlated with religious affiliation and other variables, with the result that repeat offenders were counted several times over. Male and female prisoners were added together, further reducing the value of the resulting totals. However, crimes were classified into four broad categories, thus giving some indication of the offences for which Catholics were most often imprisoned.

Despite its limitations, this series of tables clearly indicates that Catholics continued to account for disproportionate numbers of prison admissions. According to the 1871 census, for example, Catholics made up 13.89% of the non-Māori population, but in 1872 they accounted for 34.94% of prison admissions.³⁷ Some of the 82 Māori imprisonments (only 2.36% of the total) quite probably involved Catholics, but they would have had little impact on the proportions of Catholic prisoners. Catholics were over-represented in all categories of offence, but most of all among the 2459 imprisonments for minor offences (37.05%). They were somewhat less over-represented among imprisonments for misdemeanours (33.71% of 267 imprisonments), felonies (30.50% of 400) and debt or lunacy (26.27% of 354). Tables for successive years show that Catholics continued to be imprisoned at similar rates through the 1870s and 1880s.

From the 1891 publication onwards, the official imprisonment statistics included a new table ('Religious Denominations of Prisoners') recording the percentages of new prisoners belonging to the four major denominations (beginning in 1887 and ending with the statistics for 1931). These tables excluded Māori and persons gaoled for debt or lunacy. Prisoners who were gaoled several times in a given year were counted only once, according to their most serious offence. Figure 1 shows that each denomination's contribution to the prison population was quite stable, but Catholics, about one-seventh of the country's population, made up approximately one-third of prisoners convicted each year.³⁸ Not until the 1920s does the record of Catholics in prison offer a hint of the 'regression towards the national norm' anticipated by Akenson.³⁹

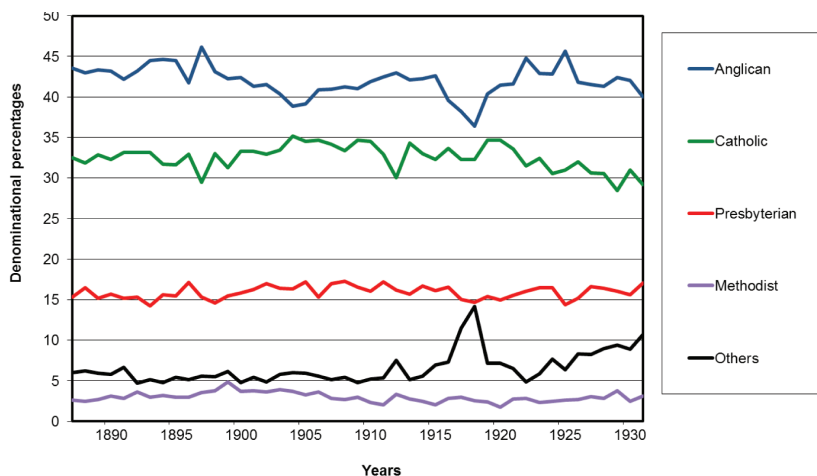


Figure 1: New Prisoners, 1887–1931

The graph shows the proportion of new prisoners belonging to the four largest denominations each year. Source: *Statistics of New Zealand for 1891 – Law and Crime* (and subsequent equivalent annual publications). Anglicans made up around 40–43% of the population, Presbyterians 23–24%, Catholics 13–14% and Methodists 8–10%. Allan K. Davidson and Peter J. Lineham, eds, *Transplanted Christianity: Documents Illustrating Aspects of New Zealand Church History*, Kereru Publishing, Whangaparaoa, 5th ed., 2015.

In addition to the proportions of new prisoners belonging to the larger denominations, the statistical returns for 1891 to 1931 include tables of ‘Distinct Convicted Prisoners’. These tables list the numbers of new male and female prisoners classified according to their main offence and their religious affiliation. Given such details, these are the most useful statistics for understanding why Catholics were imprisoned at relatively high rates. Like the percentage tables, they exclude Māori and persons gaoled for debt or lunacy, as well as children committed to industrial schools, but they do include some children convicted of statutory offences. The classification of offences changed for 1894, though two categories, vagrancy and drunkenness, continued to be used.

As Table 2 indicates, in the four decades from 1891 to 1931, Catholic women usually made up over 40% of new female prisoners each year; in 1925, they made up only 36%, but in 1929 they accounted for almost 50% of new prisoners. In other words, about three times more Catholic women were gaoled than would be expected from their representation in the overall population (approximately 13–14%). While the actual numbers of offenders for certain categories of crime (such as assault and theft) were very small, and the total number of women committed to gaol each year declined, the over-representation of Catholic women remained consistent over a long period.

Year	Person		Property		Miscellaneous			Totals	
	Convicted on Indictment	Summarily Convicted	Theft and Deceit	Mischief	Vagrancy	Drunkenness	Other	Catholic Females	All Females
1891					28	55		147	321
1896	1	2	10	3	28	51	20	115	257
1901	3	2	12	1	43	61	1	123	278
1906	1		5	1	61	36	10	114	267
1911	4	1	7		35	43	26	116	238
1916			6	1	44	21	26	98	244
1921	0	0	9	0	19	11	7	46	110
1926	2	0	13	3	20	20	9	67	150
1931	0	0	13	2	27	10	9	61	136
Mean									
1891–1931					35 (42%)	32 (47%)		93	220
1894–1931	1 (29%)	1 (28%)	9 (33%)	1 (44%)	35 (42%)	30 (48%)	13 (39%)	90	213

Table 2: Catholic Females Admitted to Prison, 1891–1931

The table shows the total number of Catholic women gaoled in selected years, classified according to each prisoner's most serious offence. Means are calculated for all years, not just those detailed in the table. Source: *Statistics of New Zealand, 1891 – Law and Crime* (and subsequent annual publications).

Year	Person		Property		Miscellaneous			Totals	
	Convicted on Indictment	Summarily Convicted	Theft and Deceit	Mischief	Vagrancy	Drunkenness	Other	Catholic Males	All Males Percentage Catholic
1891					51	189		554	1752 32
1896	4	51	136	12	45	157	118	523	1679 31
1901	25	48	129	11	87	201	157	658	2067 32
1906	33	42	199	18	124	313	185	914	2699 34
1911	12	33	131	13	73	318	251	831	2639 31
1916	23	29	114	8	96	217	225	712	2160 33
1921	9	39	138	6	73	172	195	632	1910 33
1926	21	43	185	22	110	196	238	815	2605 31
1931	22	35	249	22	108	131	306	873	3067 28
Mean									
1891–1931					84 (35%)	217 (38%)		725	2290 32
1894–1931	18 (25%)	38 (35%)	157 (26%)	14 (30%)	85 (36%)	219 (38%)	205 (31%)	737	2328 32

Table 3: Catholic Males Admitted to Prison, 1891-1931

The table shows the total number of Catholic men gaol'd in selected years, classified according to each prisoner's most serious offence. Means are calculated for all years, not just those detailed in the table. Source: *Statistics of New Zealand, 1891 – Law and Crime* (and subsequent annual volumes).

The overall proportion of new male prisoners who were Catholics was quite stable, varying between 35% (in 1919) and 27% (in 1929). Catholic men were thus admitted to gaol at about double their share of the overall population (approximately 13–14%). They were over-represented in all the categories of crime for which imprisonment and religious affiliation were recorded, as Table 3 shows. Among summary convictions for crimes against the person and for vagrancy and drunkenness, Catholic men were imprisoned at a rate nearly three times their proportion in the general population. By far the majority of males summarily convicted of crimes against the person were guilty of common assault, and no doubt this generalization applies to Catholic men so convicted.⁴⁰ Moreover, since these statistics record only the most serious offences for which prisoners were gaoled, it is probable that many criminal convictions, such as those for assault and resisting arrest, were a consequence of excessive public drinking.

Contemporary Polemics and Nominal Catholicism

Respectable Catholics were embarrassed by the ill-repute brought upon them by their criminal co-religionists, especially since anti-Catholic polemicists used the high incidence of Catholic imprisonment to berate the Catholic religion and the Church's schools. As Bishop Patrick Moran of Dunedin complained in 1890, during one of his many speeches on Catholic claims for educational funding, 'Our demand for justice is met by the assertion that Catholics are an immoral people, a criminal class, who fill our gaols, lunatic asylums, and reformatories'.⁴¹ Later that year, the politician James Allen argued that 'crime occurs much less from those who are educated through our State system than from those educated under the denominational system carried on by the Roman Catholics'.⁴² In one of his anti-Catholic pamphlets, the Revd J.J. North, a Baptist, maintained that the over-representation of Catholics among criminals demonstrated the ill-effects of auricular confession.⁴³ It is probably not a coincidence that statistics on the religion of prisoners were deleted from the *New Zealand Official Year-Book* after 1909, following complaints by the Revd Dr Henry Cleary, editor of the *New Zealand Tablet*, about their inclusion.⁴⁴ A decade later, the Revd Howard Elliott, founding organizer of the Protestant Political Association, sought their reinstatement – presumably not realizing they were still published elsewhere – as evidence of the connection between Catholic education and criminality.⁴⁵

Catholic apologists typically counter-attacked by stressing that Catholics were usually guilty of only petty crimes, and asserting that other people practised far worse vices that largely escaped the purview of the law. Cleary was 'convinced that in the graver offences that constitute "criminals" – in

murder, suicide, rape, indecent assault, burglary, swindling, infanticide, pre-natal murder, juvenile depravity, flagrant conjugal infidelity, and in other grave infractions of the moral laws of which God takes note where the policeman and the statistician often fail – the Catholics of New Zealand would gladly take their chances as against those of all other sections of the community'.⁴⁶

Alongside such triumphalist rhetoric, the Catholic press offered a more useful contribution to the debate, namely that many 'Catholic' criminals and delinquents were at best only nominal adherents of the religion they professed. In late nineteenth-century Ireland, over 90% of Catholics attended church, but since a disproportionate number of immigrants were single men, we can assume that more than 10% of them were non-attenders.⁴⁷ Their dispersal in the colony would have further weakened links with the Church.⁴⁸ In March 1908, the Revd Charles Venning of the Society of Mary (the Marist Fathers), Catholic chaplain at Wellington Prison, investigated the spiritual condition of the Catholic prisoners in his care. Only six of the 36 prisoners had received any formal Catholic education, and only 11 had made their First Communion. Three were not even baptized. Similar findings resulted from investigations in the Dunedin and Lyttelton gaols.⁴⁹ A year later, six out of 30 'Roman Catholics' in the Wellington Terrace Gaol could not make the sign of the cross; eight could not recite the Lord's Prayer. Three knew only the Protestant version (beginning 'Our Father which ...' rather than 'Our Father who ...', and ending with the doxology, 'for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.'). Perhaps they had learnt it in gaol. Some of the prisoners interviewed by Venning claimed to have been confirmed by priests (among Catholics, this sacrament was conferred only by bishops), while others who had declared themselves Catholics without any legitimate claim to being members of the Church admitted as much after close questioning.⁵⁰ In Australia, too, there were reports of prisoners falsely claiming to be Catholics.⁵¹

It seems quite likely that some non-Catholic women committed to Mount Magdala adopted the religion of their hosts – at least for census purposes – incidentally contributing to the high number of Catholic women included in the 1921 census figure. Such a tendency would explain why the Salvation Army accounted for 21 (6.80%) of the female 'Inmates of gaols, &c.' in April 1921; a very high number for a denomination that stressed upright, sober living and included only 1.03% of the national female population.⁵²

D.P. O'Neill's study of juvenile delinquent Catholics in New Zealand between 1949 and 1951 showed that a disproportionate number were only nominal Catholics. Of all delinquents aged between seven and 17, 19.8% were Catholics, while Catholics made up only 15.72% of the total non-Māori

population in this age-group. Almost two-thirds of the delinquent Catholics in the study had not attended their Church's schools.⁵³

The same was probably true in earlier times, for, despite increasing numbers of Catholic schools, there were never enough to provide for all Catholic children, and not all Catholic parents chose to send their children to them. Towards the end of the period under discussion, the census reports for 1926 and 1936 record the number of Catholic children aged from five to nine years and from ten to 13 years (inclusive).⁵⁴ Together, these two age cohorts can be taken as approximating the primary school age group, giving a total of 33,148 Catholic primary school pupils in 1926 and 34,008 in 1936.⁵⁵ In December 1926, there were 21,137 pupils enrolled at Catholic primary schools, and in December 1936, there were 23,728.⁵⁶ On the basis of these figures, it would seem that about 64% of Catholic primary school pupils attended their Church's schools in 1926 and about 70% in 1936.⁵⁷

By 1930, according to official statistics, there were still only 25 registered Catholic secondary schools, with a total enrolment of merely 1879 pupils.⁵⁸ The *Australasian Catholic Directory* lists further, presumably unregistered, schools, some of which seem to have been informal additions to primary schools.⁵⁹ Catholic children, especially girls, sometimes stayed on to receive further tuition at their primary schools, but many of secondary-school age no longer attended school. The Catholic authorities were understandably concerned about the inadequate provision of secondary and technical education and the consequent attendance of Catholic children at state schools.⁶⁰ Despite the huge Catholic investment in private education, and in the face of clerical exhortations and threats, thousands of Catholic children did not attend their Church's schools. The limited availability of Catholic post-primary education left the Church with limited opportunities to influence adolescents. In part to remedy this deficiency, it sponsored numerous religious, sporting and cultural clubs, but probably only a minority of young Catholics actually joined them.⁶¹

Stevan Eldred-Grigg has suggested that the religious background of prostitutes indicates that 'a belief in purity' was less deeply imbued among New Zealand-born Anglican and Catholic women than among Presbyterians and Methodists.⁶² Of course, the Catholic Church tried hard to inculcate purity among its young women, but those who did not attend its schools or assist regularly at Mass – let alone join the Children of Mary, a sodality modelled on the ideal of the Blessed Virgin herself – would not necessarily have internalized its values. Statistics already cited (from the 1921 census and those in Table 2) show that only a very small number of women were responsible for the relatively high rate of Catholic female incarceration. Bronwyn Dalley's generalization – 'The great majority of female inmates

were recidivists who received short sentences for morality offences and appeared in prison again and again' – certainly applies to them.⁶³ Among the Irish prostitutes imprisoned in 1900, one, convicted of obscene language and theft, had 149 prior convictions, while another, convicted of drunkenness, had 126.⁶⁴

The over-representation of Catholics and Anglicans among prostitutes reflects a section within – or on the margins of – each church that did not live by or even reacted against its values. A rigid code of moral purity made rehabilitation difficult for the lapsed. In Ireland, 'If one could not sustain the role of the chaste Irish woman, one was automatically regarded as a harlot. Nothing in between was admitted.'⁶⁵ At Mount Magdala, reformed women were eligible to join the Community of the Magdalenes, as distinct from the Sisters of the Good Shepherd who operated the establishment. Being an enclosed congregation, the Magdalenes were segregated behind a wall from the rest of the congregation during Mass. As a priest who had been chaplain to Mount Magdala during the 1950s recalled, 'They were not forgiven!'⁶⁶ It would hardly be surprising if a few 'fallen women' preferred the relative freedom of the vagrant to incarceration at Mount Magdala, especially since, as Dalley suggests, this could be combined with occasional short stints in the relative comfort and security of a gaol.⁶⁷

While the Church's critics assumed or at least alleged that the over-representation of Catholics in crime statistics was caused by those who had attended the Church's schools and frequented the sacraments, it is more likely that it reflected inadequacies in the Church's pastoral care. In 1921, Father John Golden, chaplain to St Joseph's Home for the Aged Poor in Ponsonby, wrote a letter to the *Tablet*, lamenting the spiritual condition of some of his elderly charges.⁶⁸ Most of the inmates were 'devoted Catholics' but others he characterized as 'stray sheep'. In their younger days, the majority of them 'had known a priest at a safe distance' but the 'ambassador of Christ' had not fulfilled his finest and most meritorious duty by recalling them to the practice of their religion. Now it was too late: 'The pension and Johnnie Walker lure them away to the police cells....' Single men (and women) could easily be overlooked by a Church whose chief institutions, the school and the parish, were primarily oriented towards children and families. In their old age, indigent Catholics might benefit from the Church's charity, but it was often too late for a change of lifestyle.

Class and Occupation

Contemporaries were aware of the links between social class and statistics for criminality and mental illness – a phenomenon also familiar to historians.

Around the turn of the century, there were concerns that imprisonment was being used excessively for 'non-serious offenders, fine defaulters, the infirm and the aged', as well as for 'lunatics and drunks'.⁶⁹ The Inspector of Prisons complained in 1896 about 'the sending of aged paupers to prison for no fault of their own, but simply because they are too old to labour, or to earn an honest living'.⁷⁰ A study of inmates in the Auckland Lunatic Asylum from 1870 to 1910 identified 'economic distress' as one of the major circumstances contributing to committal: 'it appears that it was the itinerant, casual and unskilled workers who constituted the bulk of the asylum population'.⁷¹ As Erik Olssen has observed with reference to New Zealand between 1890 and 1940, 'A disproportionate number of those in prisons, mental asylums, and industrial schools came from the homes of the unskilled'.⁷² Cleary argued that Catholics should be compared not with the total population but class by class with the rest of New Zealand society. He estimated in 1908 that Catholics were at least twice as numerous in the 'poorer and poorest classes' as were 'the members of [the] other chief denominations taken collectively' and noted that it was the poor who 'furnish the numerically greatest (but not necessarily the worst) part of our prison population'.⁷³

Cleary was exaggerating, but Catholics were indeed over-represented among unskilled and low-income earners.⁷⁴ In 1921, Catholic men made up 12.89% of the paid workforce, but they were under-represented amongst employers (9.77%) and the self-employed (11.74%). They were considerably over-represented in large occupational categories that included many labourers and semi-skilled men, such as agricultural cropping (14.97%), mixed farming (13.46%), bush saw-milling (17.54%), meat-freezing and preserving (14.64%), road building and maintenance (23.82%), railway construction (27.74%), rail transport (17.88%), carrying and cartage (15.29%), shipping services (14.97%), loading and discharging vessels (18.62%) and local government (16.84%).⁷⁵

According to tables printed in the weekly *Police Gazette*, from the week ending 8 January to the week ending 31 December 1921, there were some 2257 individual discharges of male prisoners in New Zealand – a figure that re-counts some men who served several sentences in the same year. Of these men, 1004 were described as labourers and another 36 as 'labourer' paired with some other occupation, the largest being 'seaman' (15). The second most numerous category was made up of firemen (248), to which may be added a small number of stokers (11) and trimmers (7), who were collectively responsible for operating boilers on steam ships. There were also 121 seamen, as well as 32 men described as seamen and labourers, and two as sailors. Labourers, then, were more at risk of imprisonment than any other

group in the workforce (in part because they constituted a large category of workers), and Catholics were over-represented amongst labourers. The second most at-risk category was made up of men on ships, another broad area in which Catholics were over-represented. Other occupations listed in the *Gazette* were much smaller, the next most frequent being 63 cooks and chefs. Many of these presumably also worked on ships, but 24.73% of men employed in hotels and restaurants were Catholics.

Catholic Demography

To judge from the arrest and incarceration of men who worked on ships, towns with ports were the sites of much petty crime. Perhaps unruly townsfolk were more generally at risk of detection than those who lived in more sparsely populated and less heavily policed areas. In 1921, however, when Catholics constituted 13.47% of the total population and 13.09% of the population of the 14 largest towns, they were no more urbanized than the rest of the population.⁷⁶ A closer look at the Catholic percentage of the population in selected boroughs, however, does indicate local over-representations, notably in Auckland (16.80%), Onehunga (14.62%), Gisborne (15.15%), Napier (15.50%), Hastings (15.28%), Petone (14.44%), Wellington (15.77%), Westport (27.33%), Greymouth (31.13%) and Timaru (14.24%).⁷⁷ This was often a reflection of early settlement patterns; for example, high numbers of Irish immigrants went to Auckland and Timaru and to the West Coast. Other denominations, under-represented in criminal statistics, also had over-representations in certain boroughs, so criminality would appear to be more closely connected to occupation than to urbanization per se. The two are obviously linked, though, insofar as workplaces and residences must bear some proximity; for example, large numbers of Catholics in Wellington correlated with a high representation of Catholics in the public service.

A more promising explanation for Catholic criminality is that the Catholic community usually had a higher than average proportion of young men. Figure 2 compares the age-structures of the Catholic and the non-Catholic male populations using five-year age cohorts.⁷⁸ Points above 100 on the vertical axis indicate a higher representation of males in the Catholic population than in the non-Catholic population; conversely, points below the line indicate an under-representation. Apart from a dip below the norm in the 10–14-year-old cohort in 1916 (evident in the same cohort on later censuses), it appears that Catholics were generally over-represented among young New Zealand men, especially in the cohort born between 1896 and 1906.⁷⁹ The youthfulness of the Catholic population should not be exaggerated, but the graph does indicate that Catholics had slightly larger families than did the rest

of the population and were therefore liable to be more heavily represented in the crimes for which young men were most likely to be convicted, including drunkenness, violence and theft.

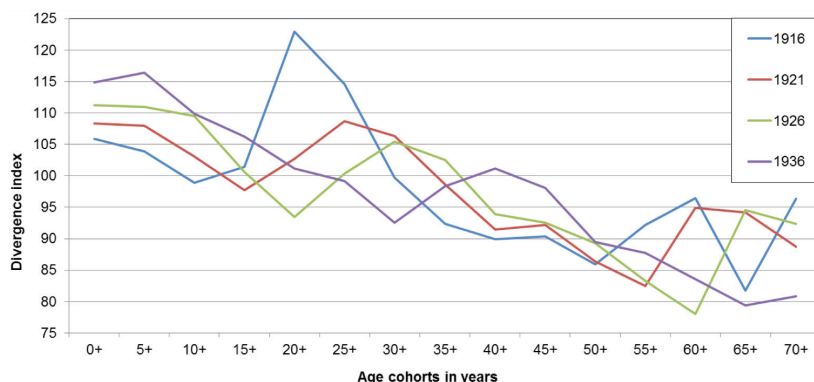


Figure 2: The Divergence of Male Catholic Age Cohorts

The graph compares the proportion of the male Catholic population belonging to successive age cohorts with the proportion of the male non-Catholic population in similar age cohorts according to four censuses. Source: New Zealand Census, 1916, IV, p.6; 1921, VII, p.33; 1926, VIII, pp.28–29; 1936, VI, pp.20–21.

A striking feature of Figure 2 is the downward slope of the lines, reflecting Catholic men's under-representation in the age cohorts for the second half of the life-span. Evidently, Catholic males tended to live shorter lives, as would be expected from a population over-represented in unskilled and often more dangerous forms of employment – and also one inclined to over-indulge in alcohol. If Catholic men were under-represented in the later years of life, however, their over-representation in crime and institutionalization statistics is even more in need of an explanation.

This explanation can be found in another feature of Catholic demography that is characteristically Irish: a high rate of remaining unmarried. The consequent lack of supportive family networks was especially acute in old age, but, as will be argued below, not marrying was linked, particularly among men, with dysfunctional drinking habits and consequently with crime and institutionalization at all ages. In 1926, the percentage of New Zealand men aged 16 and over who were unmarried was reported as 39.5; the percentage for Catholic men was 47.8.⁸⁰ Of Catholic men aged 65 and over in 1936, 23.7% (1230 out of 5191 men) had never married; the proportion of never-married men in this age band in the total male population (excluding

Catholics) was only 12.1%.⁸¹ Only a small proportion of these old Catholic men would have been celibate priests or brothers, of whom there were only about 480 of all ages in 1936.⁸² Akenson was surely correct in ascribing much of the blame for Catholic crime statistics to the large numbers of single male immigrants; what he did not notice, however, was that there continued to be disproportionate numbers of single Catholic men well into the twentieth century.

This is a pattern long familiar to historians of Ireland and its diaspora.⁸³ In rural Ireland, especially after the Famine, young men were discouraged from marrying as only one son could expect to inherit enough land (usually as a tenant) to support a family at an acceptable level of comfort at a time of rising expectations. Unemployment led to a low rate of marriage in towns as well.⁸⁴ A high proportion of the disinherited emigrated, but life-long celibacy persisted among Irish expatriates and their descendants, many of whom evidently lacked the ambition or opportunity to improve their lot.⁸⁵ Reflecting on the Church in New South Wales in 1902, M. MacNamarra lamented that Catholic women were marrying Protestants because so many Catholic men did not marry. He attributed this problem to poverty – which also explained ‘why we have more than our share of Criminals’.⁸⁶ Many Catholic Irishmen in England remained single even before the Famine, and a low rate of marriage also caused some soul-searching in the United States.⁸⁷

In New Zealand, a higher than average rate of remaining unmarried probably also contributed to the high rate of imprisonment among Catholic women. Dalley has argued that ‘Women entered prison because their mode of living contradicted accepted patterns of female behaviour as quiet, decorous, domestic individuals’; they were therefore seen as a threat to social norms.⁸⁸ In 1926, 33.0% of New Zealand women aged 16 or over had never married, but 37.8% of Catholic women were unmarried.⁸⁹ In 1936, 26,451 or 38.3% of the 69,079 Catholic women aged 16 years and older had never married, while the national proportion (excluding Catholics) was 31.9%.⁹⁰ If Catholic women had remained single at this lower rate, 22,028 instead of 26,451 would have been unmarried. Of the ‘extra’ 4423 unmarried women, only about 1718 were nuns.⁹¹ A few of those who neither married nor aspired to perpetual virginity, and who did not pursue a career, were drawn into prostitution and its criminal concomitants such as public drunkenness and vagrancy.

Being unmarried and lacking supportive family networks also contributed to a high rate of admission to mental asylums. Irish Catholics were over-represented in the lunatic asylums of New South Wales between the 1880s and the 1930s. Such inmates, both immigrants and their descendants, were typically unskilled, single and more often male than female.⁹² Patrick O’Farrell

suggested that some Irish immigrants to Australia were committed to mental institutions after being knowingly dispatched by relatives unwilling to care for them, and this was also a problem in New Zealand – albeit one not limited to the Irish.⁹³ Others, continued O’Farrell, were ‘isolated, friendless, unable to cope’ – a description likely to fit some of the many unmarried Irish-Catholic men and women in New Zealand. The Inspector of Asylums argued in his 1886 report that government-run institutions had to care for large numbers of ‘helpless and friendless’ people who had ‘grown old without contracting family ties’ or who had ‘mean and selfish relatives’ unwilling to care for the ‘expensive and troublesome at home’.⁹⁴ As Barbara Brookes has observed, ‘Marriage protected men from committal. Single labourers, seamen, and miners often lacked the family support which could help individuals through a time of crisis.’⁹⁵ The destitute of any age and either sex were more likely to be accommodated in mental hospitals than those with homes of their own or with families able and willing to support a non-earner. Irish Catholics in the Dunedin Lunatic Asylum during the 1860s and 1870s were mainly single young men, most of whom seem to have been come to New Zealand for work on the goldfields; many were alcoholics.⁹⁶

Early in the twentieth century, a comparable group of single but older and at least nominally Catholic men were increasingly committed to mental asylums: Dalmatians who had come to work as kauri gum diggers.⁹⁷ The 1928 appointment of a Yugoslav priest reflected a desire to integrate them more fully into the Auckland diocese, but it was resented by an anti-clerical faction.⁹⁸

High levels of committal to mental asylums must be explained to a large extent as a carry-over from Ireland. To be sure, it was not only the Irish who sometimes dispatched troubled relatives to the Antipodes, and not all Catholic inmates were single or lacking family connections – for better or worse.⁹⁹ For reasons that are still debated, however, later nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ireland experienced exceptionally high rates of institutionalization for mental illness, especially among unmarried men.¹⁰⁰ Inmates tended to be young, single, male peasants and workers, though many older folk were placed in workhouses, and there was only a small predominance of males.¹⁰¹ While stressing that not marrying did not necessarily mean complete social isolation (families often initiated the process of committal), Mark Finnane noted that mental patients tended to come from western counties where the social fabric was weakened by increased emigration and decreasing marriage.¹⁰² More recently, Damien Brennan has insisted that, albeit within a context of depopulation, poverty and food insecurity, the high rate of institutionalization in Ireland was not driven by exceptional levels of insanity but by the legislative framework and a self-perpetuating infrastructure. The

latter benefitted not only its staff but also local communities, which depended on the business, the social networks and even the sporting activities that an asylum generated.¹⁰³

Families relinquished responsibility for alleged dangerous lunatics who, being committed under a judicial procedure, drew to themselves the stigma that might otherwise accrue to a whole family with a relative in the poor house. Such individuals may simply have been quarrelsome, unemployed, pregnant but unmarried, elderly, or suffering from a physical ailment for which the asylum would now take responsibility.¹⁰⁴ Thus, having family connections did not guarantee support for difficult individuals within a family context; it could mean that relatives initiated the committal process. Such an eventuality was presumably even more likely in the case of single individuals than those with closer ties to spouses and adult offspring.

Poverty, high rates of remaining unmarried and abuse of alcohol are all factors conducive to institutionalization that would accompany Irish migrants. Sometimes the stresses of migration itself or, later, disappointed hopes in the new country would have contributed to mental breakdown. While committals in Ireland were mostly involuntary, Brennan observes that 'Irish emigrant communities had experience of asylums in Ireland as sites of social intervention during times of life crises, and the act of emigration itself can provide a context in which such crises can occur.'¹⁰⁵ The Irish at home were more accustomed than other nationalities to availing themselves of institutionalized care, and this tendency continued in the diaspora, where it was not limited to the immigrant generation itself.

Alcohol Abuse

In New Zealand and elsewhere, the crimes and mental illnesses for which Irish Catholics and their descendants were most commonly institutionalized were closely linked to the abuse of alcohol. Roger Swift's observation concerning Britain between 1815 and 1939 largely applies here, too: 'Irish criminality was highly concentrated in the often inter-related categories of drunkenness, disorderly behaviour and assault (including assaults on the police) and, to a lesser extent, petty theft and vagrancy'.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Richard Stivers has noted that 'Contemporary observers and historians unanimously confirm the Irish-American tendency to be arrested and convicted for drunkenness during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.'¹⁰⁷ According to the Australasian bishops, 'no one can close his eyes to the fact that very large percentages of our young men are annually drawn into the drinking classes. There they soon become lost to all self respect, to honour, industry, and domestic happiness.'¹⁰⁸

As a note accompanying the *New Zealand Justice Statistics* always pointed out, moreover, drunkenness (among both men and women) was far more common than was indicated directly by the rate of imprisonment for the offence, since it was more usually punished by a fine. The over-representation of Catholics among those imprisoned for drunkenness is no doubt in part a consequence of their being repeat offenders and therefore subjected to the harsher penalty of imprisonment. Since Catholics tended to be poorer than other groups, many of those gaoled for drunkenness would have been incarcerated because they were unable to pay a fine. In 1921, 416 people went to gaol rather than pay a fine after being convicted of drunkenness.¹⁰⁹ This eventuality was noted by Cleary, whose verbosity could not conceal the admission of a flaw in the Irish character: 'The mercurial disposition of the Western Celt (which is a racial, not a religious, trait) impels him, when tipsy, more than his phlegmatic neighbors [sic], to offences of pugnacity; while his greater comparative poverty makes him do his drinking more in the open, where he is relatively more liable to arrest, and exposes him relatively more to imprisonment, on account of his greater inability to pay a fine. He is, in so far, relatively more exposed to enumeration on the denominational statistics of legal crime.'¹¹⁰ Many petty crimes such as vagrancy, assault and obscene language had their origins in drunkenness. Similarly, the abuse of alcohol was the single most important cause of admissions to mental asylums, especially for men, at least around the turn of the century.¹¹¹

Drawing on interviews of older Irishmen conducted during the 1950s in Limerick, Stivers offers a compelling account of the link between low rates of marriage and Irish drinking habits between the 1870s and the 1930s.¹¹² In this period, same-sex socialization was strongly promoted to encourage a low rate of marriage and to reduce opportunities for sins against chastity (which was much more valued than sobriety).¹¹³

Members of all-male groups would meet in a public house and 'treat' each other, buying drinks for and accepting them from each member of the group.¹¹⁴ American Catholic Irishmen maintained – indeed intensified – this proclivity to drink in public and in all-male groups, though the traditional sanctions against drunkenness were somewhat relaxed. The Irish did not necessarily consume alcohol more frequently or in greater quantities overall than other ethnic groups, but they tended to drink large amounts of beer or whiskey in a single session and without food.¹¹⁵

Key elements of this pattern resemble a traditional New Zealand drinking style – to which Irish immigrants may indeed have contributed. In this country, the public bar was 'a place of virtually unrestrained male conviviality, from which women were excluded' by custom though not

actually by law.¹¹⁶ Treating or shouting, a common practice in New Zealand, was banned under war regulations in 1916.¹¹⁷ Ideally, from December 1917, men would return to their families when the bars closed at six o'clock – but only after participating in the 'six o'clock swill' and its resulting intoxication. Whether or not Catholic New Zealanders ever replicated specifically Irish patterns of male bonding, they were presumably well-represented in the public bar. We do know that they were more likely to remain unmarried and were over-represented in the production and sale of alcohol. At 12.89% of the workforce in 1921, Catholic men accounted for 17.97% of all those engaged in malting, brewing and bottling, and 27.64% of those employed in licensed hotels.¹¹⁸ If Irish-Catholic New Zealanders regarded owning a public house as the acme of financial and social success, the less successful among them were presumably among the most loyal patrons.

While the Church was concerned about intemperance, the remedies offered by Irish-style Catholicism may have exacerbated the problem. Rejecting as Manichean the view that alcohol was inherently evil, Catholics typically opposed prohibition by advocating temperance.¹¹⁹ The 1885 Pastoral Letter of the Plenary Council of Australia (which included New Zealand bishops) called for the establishment of Catholic temperance societies in all parishes.¹²⁰ Not many were established in New Zealand, and, following the Irish model, they actually promoted personal abstinence not moderate drinking.¹²¹ During his 1877–1878 tour of New Zealand, the Irish-American itinerant missionary Patrick Hennebery had combined such 'temperance' with renewed religious commitment; it was claimed on his departure that 23,000 people had been prompted to take the total abstinence pledge.¹²² In later generations, children receiving the sacrament of confirmation were expected to pledge that they would not drink alcohol until the age of 21.¹²³ Abstinence pledges, however, whether permanent or temporary, would have done nothing to train young Catholics in the safe use of alcohol. They may even have encouraged an all-or-nothing attitude; for many, once the pledge was broken or fulfilled (at 21), there may have been no restraint left. As George Vaillant has observed, 'It is consistent with Irish culture to see the use of alcohol in terms of black or white, good or evil, drunkenness or complete abstinence'.¹²⁴ While praising temperance as a Christian virtue, the Church offered institutional support only for abstinence; as in Ireland, there was no Catholic association to encourage moderate drinking, and many families presumably failed to model such behaviour to their children.¹²⁵

Policing and Prejudice

Given the explanations canvassed so far for a high rate of Irish-Catholic criminality and institutionalization, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that

the police targeted Catholics or the Irish out of animosity towards them. It is true that Presbyterians, typically of Northern Irish descent, were over-represented in the police force, and perhaps some of them were prejudiced against Catholics – especially drunken ones.¹²⁶ Yet Catholics were even more heavily over-represented than Presbyterians (including among senior ranks), again because of recruitment from Ireland.¹²⁷ Evidently, they did not turn blind eyes to offending co-religionists, though one could speculate that the ill-repute Catholic offenders brought upon their religious community led Catholic police to treat them more severely. Evidence for such police bias would be difficult to find, though there were occasional allegations of sectarian prejudice on the part of individual constables.¹²⁸

While the police may well have become impatient with Irish or Catholic recidivists, they were reflecting community attitudes as agents of government policy expressed through the law. More precisely, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the police were placed under increasing pressure to enforce a 'bourgeois morality' that was most often resisted when it challenged popular drinking customs.¹²⁹ As in other predominantly Anglo-Saxon Protestant countries, there were many evangelical Christians who considered alcohol the source of most social evils, so even slightly immoderate public drinking was an invitation to censure – and to the intervention of the law. The Vagrant Act (1866) and its successors, under which disproportionate numbers of New Zealand Catholics were prosecuted, were part of an effort to promote social homogeneity by controlling particular forms of deviance.¹³⁰ The police were charged with targeting conspicuous breaches of public order such as vagrancy, obscene language, brawling and drunkenness. Under the Licensing Act (1881), 'Every person found drunk in any highway or other public place, whether a building or not or on any licensed premises' could be fined or imprisoned. Leaving 'drunk' undefined but clearly less serious than being 'in a state of helpless drunkenness', the Act gave considerable discretionary power to the police who laid charges and to Justices of the Peace who judged cases.¹³¹ Policemen and JPs attuned to the problem of Irish-Catholic drunkenness could well have used such discretion unevenly. It seems probable, though, that there really was an over-supply of Irish Catholics who did not conform to the prevailing and potentially quite exacting social standards, and that the police and justice system targeted 'deviants' rather than Catholics *per se*. Similarly, from the second third of the nineteenth century, the new English provincial police sought out 'street crime' such as drunkenness and its corollaries, which seems to have led to an over-representation of Irish Catholics in the criminal statistics.¹³²

Many Irish Catholics and their descendants, moreover, may well have found it difficult or even undesirable to conform to a puritan, middle-class

ethic of respectability when they were already type-cast as prone to poverty and insobriety.¹³³ Prejudice was one of the correlates of Irish criminality suggested by Akenson. Lyndon Fraser has explored 'anti-Catholic and anti-Irish prejudice and bigotry' in nineteenth-century Canterbury, where provincial leaders 'castigated the Irish as a particularly troublesome, disorderly people, prone to excessive drunkenness and rowdiness'.¹³⁴ This characterization, echoing assessments of the Catholic Irish throughout the diaspora, was evidently not entirely a figment of the Protestant imagination. As historians of the Irish in America have argued, a small proportion of Irish Catholics may even have seen in the positive version of this stereotype – 'the happy-go-lucky Irish drunk' – a desirable mark of identity.¹³⁵ In New Zealand, though, a propensity to drink seems to have outlived the sense of Irishness – by contrast with countries that experienced proportionately more substantial Irish immigration. Even on the West Coast, which, by New Zealand standards, had both a high proportion of Catholic Irish and a well-developed drinking culture, Irish immigrants did not establish a strong, enduring ethnic consciousness.¹³⁶ In the case of nominal Catholics, especially, social class was probably of more enduring significance than religion or ethnicity.

For others, though, Irish (and, or, Catholic) identity was accompanied by a siege mentality. Both Catholics and Protestants contributed to sectarian tensions, which reached a peak during and immediately after the First World War, when they coincided with serious political disturbances in Ireland and allegations of Catholic disloyalty in New Zealand.¹³⁷ While there was no serious violence at this time, sectarianism had earlier led, as in Victorian England, to rioting and charges of assault, most notably in 1879 in Timaru and Christchurch.¹³⁸ Sectarian tensions seem also to have played on the minds of some mental patients.¹³⁹

Conclusion

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New Zealand, Catholics, mostly of Irish descent, were greatly over-represented in prisons, industrial schools, reformatories and lunatic asylums. For over half a century, disproportionate numbers of Catholics deviated from law makers' and law enforcers' expectations of citizens as sober, hard-working family men or domesticated wives and mothers. Akenson's expectation that the descendants of Irish-Catholic immigrants would show fewer signs of deviance than their forebears was not fulfilled until after the 1930s.

Explanations for Irish-Catholic deviance, therefore, cannot focus exclusively on the immigrant generation. Seeking to account for Irish crime in mid-Victorian England, Swift has stressed 'the problems of

adaptation faced by newcomers to British society at a time of acute social and economic transformation and the social tensions arising from this process.' While acknowledging that it is as yet unclear whether 'patterns of Irish criminality characteristic of the earlier period persisted into the 1880s, 1890s, and beyond', he suggests that they may not have been as serious.¹⁴⁰ This hypothesis recalls Akenson's expectations for New Zealand; similarly, Finnane has argued that the apparent criminality (particularly drunkenness) of the Irish in late colonial Queensland reflects the predominantly adult age-profile and low socio-economic status of Irish immigrants.¹⁴¹ In New Zealand, Catholics of Irish descent were but one of many 'new' religio-ethnic groups in a population made up of immigrants and their descendants. High rates of institutionalization persisting long past the peak of Irish immigration must be explained by distinctive features this group did not share with other immigrants and their posterities.

In New Zealand, the sustained over-representation of Catholics in criminal and mental health statistics seems to be attributable to five causes operating on the immigrants and their descendants for several generations. First, Catholics were over-represented among labourers and semi-skilled workers, the very occupational categories that were most at risk of arrest for petty crime. Second, some Catholics were immoderate and often public drinkers. Third, high rates of not marrying among Catholics, especially men, led to a lack of social support in times of personal distress. Fourth, the figures for Catholics were inflated by the inclusion of nominal Church members (mostly, no doubt, of Catholic descent) and inmates of Catholic institutions. Fifth, and more speculatively, some Catholics of Irish descent internalized a negative stereotype and perpetuated deviant behaviours that rendered them vulnerable to criminalization and institutionalization. Low socio-economic status, being unmarried, heavy drinking and proneness to institutionalization were part of the Irish-Catholic immigrant culture that was perpetuated in New Zealand.

These features of the Catholic population, moreover, acted in concert: relative poverty and isolation from families contributed to dysfunctional patterns of drinking and hence to related forms of deviance such as vagrancy and violence. As Sheridan Gilley has noted in a survey of the Irish diaspora, "leakage" or "seepage" from the faith ... was probably most acute among the very poorest, and more common among men than among women'.¹⁴² The link between social class and nominal Catholicism was recognized by Hennebery, who commented privately in 1884 that the Australasian Irish were 'generally the scum of Irish society. Hence they are generally bad Catholics'.¹⁴³ As Venning wrote of the 'Catholic' prisoners he interviewed: 'They are in gaol, not because they are Catholics, but because they had no

Catholic influence in their early lives; they had been without a Catholic home, Catholic companions, Catholic teaching, Catholic schools.¹⁴⁴ In all likelihood, most of them had also lacked the advantages of a middle-class or respectable working-class upbringing. Social and ecclesiastical marginality largely coincided; prisons, reformatories and asylums were a final resort for both Church and state.

CHRISTOPHER J. VAN DER KROGT

Massey University

NOTES

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1 D.H. Akenson, *Half the World from Home: Perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand, 1860–1950*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1990, pp.80–82.

2 Akenson, p.82.

3 See, for example, Jock Phillips, 'Irish – The Catholic Church', *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 13 July 2012. URL: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/irish/page-9> and James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Allen Lane, Auckland, 2001, p.222.

4 C.J. van der Krogt, 'More a Part than Apart: The Catholic Community in New Zealand Society, 1918–1940', PhD thesis, Massey University, 1994, pp.3–7.

5 Angela McCarthy, 'Ethnicity, Migration and the Lunatic Asylum in Early Twentieth-Century Auckland, New Zealand', *Social History of Medicine*, 21, 1 (2008), pp.52–53; Angela McCarthy, 'Migration and Ethnic Identities in the Nineteenth Century', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2009, p.194.

6 *Post* (Chicago), 9 September 1868 as quoted in the *Evening Courier and Republic* (Buffalo, NY), 28 September 1868, and other newspapers available at <http://www.fultonhistory.com>. The primary point of the editorial (under the heading 'Nigger, Nigger, Nig!') was that the continued debasement and segregation of the Catholic Irish demonstrated that there was no danger that granting political rights to 'the nigger' would elevate him to social equality or threaten miscegenation. 'The politician' in question was British, for the Irishman was described as 'the innocent victim of the statecraft of England'. To be fair, as Larkin has shown, Irish immigrants to the United States (and no doubt New Zealand) in the later part of the century were 'less drunken and less prone to violence'; 'they also had acquired basic educational skills and were actually less poor.' Emmet Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75', *American Historical Review*, 77, 3 (1972), p.652.

7 H. Mayhew and J. Binny (1862) in Roger Swift, ed., *Irish Migrants in Britain, 1815–1914: A Documentary History*, Cork University Press, Cork, 2002, p.111.

8 Elizabeth Malcolm, 'Mental Health and Migration: The Case of the Irish, 1850s–1990s', in Angela McCarthy and Catherine Coleborne, eds, *Migration, Ethnicity, and Mental Health: International Perspectives, 1840–2010*, Routledge, New York and London, 2012, pp.18–20 (quoting p.18).

9 Roger Swift, 'Heroes or Villains? The Irish, Crime, and Disorder in Victorian England', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British Studies*, 29, 3 (1997), pp.399–401, (quoting p.421).

10 Roger Swift, *Behaving Badly? Irish Migrants and Crime in the Victorian City*, University of Chester, Chester, 2000, p.28.

11 Swift, 'Heroes', p.408; cf. Roger Swift, 'Crime and the Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley, eds, *The Irish in Britain, 1815–1939*, Rowman & Littlefield, London, 1989, pp.176–7.

12 Like most other official statistics in this article, these figures refer to the non-Māori population.

13 New Zealand Census, 1921, VII, p.42. The denominational percentages given below are based on the same source.

14 New Zealand Census, 1921, VIII, p.103. There were also 16 'others'.

15 Roy Shuker, *The One Best System? A Revisionist History of State Schooling in New Zealand*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1987, pp.76–80.

- 16 *Report on the Justice Statistics of the Dominion of New Zealand* (JSNZ), 1921, p.vii.
- 17 Margaret Tennant, "'Magdalenes and Moral Imbeciles': Women's Homes in Nineteenth Century New Zealand", in Barbara Brookes et al., eds, *Women in History* 2, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1992, pp.66–67.
- 18 *Month* (Auckland Catholic newspaper), 1 July 1931, p.27.
- 19 *Press*, 4 July 1921, p.5; 7 July 1921, p.4.
- 20 *Press*, 8 October 1929, p.8.
- 21 *Australasian Catholic Directory for 1931* (ACD), Sydney, p.263. The same figures were given in the 1930 edition (p.260), and they seem to have remained stable through the preceding decade: in 1920, there were 123 children and 205 inmates. *New Zealand Tablet* (NZT, Dunedin Catholic weekly), 25 November 1920, p.21.
- 22 For a survey of research on women's crime in New Zealand, see Charlotte Macdonald, 'Crime and Punishment in New Zealand, 1840–1913: A Gendered History', *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH), 23, 1 (1989), pp.5–21.
- 23 Police Offences Act (1884), section 23.
- 24 Report and Evidence of the Royal Commission on the Police Force of New Zealand, *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR), 1898, H-2, p.xxvi.
- 25 *New Zealand Police Gazette* (NZPG), 1900, pp.28, 181, 197, cf. p.238 for a case of gross indecency, which may or may not have been incidental to this particular woman's 'trade'.
- 26 For examples of Irish-born prostitutes (who may or may not have been Catholics), see NZPG, 1900, pp.51 (theft), 102 (vagrancy), 103 (idle and disorderly), 115 (drunkenness), 170 (obscene language), 229 (housebreaking and theft).
- 27 *Otago Witness*, 10 September 1864, p.9.
- 28 Anne Hutchison, 'Weldon, Barbara', in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Vol. One, 1769–1869, Wellington, 1990, p.581. The Westland District Council records her religion as Roman Catholic: <http://public.westland.govt.nz/cgi-bin/cemetery/cepp?key=13065> (accessed April 2016).
- 29 Bronwyn Dalley, 'Women's Imprisonment in New Zealand, 1880–1920', PhD thesis, University of Otago, 1991, p.80; Dalley, 'Lolly Shops "of the red light kind" and "Soldiers of the King": Suppressing One-Woman Brothels in New Zealand, 1908–1916', *NZJH*, 30, 1 (1996), pp.3–23.
- 30 Michael O'Meehan, *Held Firm by Faith: A History of the Christchurch Diocese, 1840–1987*, Catholic Diocese of Christchurch, Christchurch, 1988, p.151.
- 31 Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, NSW, 1986, pp.168–70; Angela McCarthy, 'Migration and Madness in New Zealand's Asylums, 1863–1910', in McCarthy and Coleborne, eds, *Migration, Ethnicity, and Mental Health*, pp.56–58.
- 32 Jeremy Bloomfield, 'Dunedin Mental Asylum, 1863–1876', in Barbara Brookes and Jane Thomson, eds, *'Unfortunate Folk': Essays on Mental Health Treatment, 1863–1992*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2001, p.27. Angela McCarthy counts 86 Catholics in a sample of 136 Irish-born inmates in the Dunedin and Seacliff asylums between 1863 and 1909. At 63%, Catholics may not have been over-represented among these Irish inmates, though Irish immigrants collectively were greatly over-represented in the national statistics of the time. Angela McCarthy, 'Transnational Ties to Home: Irish Migrants in New Zealand Asylums, 1860–1926', in Pauline Prior, ed., *Asylums, Mental Health Care and the Irish: Historical Studies, 1800–2010*, Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2012, pp.150–2.
- 33 *New Zealand Census* 1936, VI, pp.27, 29.
- 34 A. Hume, Report on the Prisons Branch of the Department of Justice, *AJHR*, 1896, H-20, p.2.
- 35 Jane Adams, "'Criminal Lunacy": A Case Study of Seacliff Lunatic Asylum, 1882–1912' in Brookes and Thomson, eds, *'Unfortunate Folk'*, pp.68–69.

36 *Statistics of New Zealand for 1872* (SNZ), V, no. 12 and subsequent volumes. Figures for 1921 onwards were published in JSNZ.

37 SNZ, 1872, V, no. 12; New Zealand Census, 1871, p.x.

38 Presbyterians and Methodists were under-represented, while only Anglicans approached their level of representation in the overall population. As a proportion of new prisoners, Anglicans declined during the First World War and fluctuated somewhat afterwards. In large measure, this may have reflected the high numbers of men serving overseas, some of whom no doubt found it difficult to settle back into civilian life upon their return. The higher percentages of prisoners not claiming adherence to one of the four large denominations in 1917 and 1918 evidently included gaoled conscientious objectors, most of whom belonged to small sects or professed no religion (some of them being socialists). This increase in the proportion of prisoners not belonging to the four main churches also contributed to the dip in the proportion of Anglican prisoners. SNZ, 1917, I, p.286 and 1918, I, p.293; cf. Paul Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1988, pp.170, 175–8, 243.

39 Akenson, p.82.

40 JSNZ, 1921, p.vii.

41 NZT, 27 June 1890, p.5.

42 NZT, 5 December 1890, p.2. I am grateful to Hugh Laracy for this and the previous reference.

43 J.J. North, *Roman Catholicism: Roots and Fruits*, Napier, 1922, p.97.

44 New Zealand Official Year-Book, 1909, p.184; NZT, 18 February 1909, p.251.

45 *New Zealand Herald*, 27 May 1919, p.8; *Month*, 14 June 1919, pp.5–6; NZT, 6 June 1918, pp.14–15; 7 April 1921, pp.25–26; 1 July 1925, p.22; but cf. *Month*, 15 November 1922, p.4 for a reference to the continued publication of the statistics.

46 NZT, 10 December 1908, p.22; cf. Greg Ryan, 'An Undertaking Worthy only of Fanatics: Catholic Opinion on Temperance and Prohibition in New Zealand c.1870–1910', *Australasian Journal of Irish Studies* 10 (2010), pp.29–30 and Benjamin Hoare, 'Catholics and Crime: Some Old Charges Revived', *Proceedings of the Second Australasian Catholic Congress*, Melbourne, 1905, pp.422–3.

47 Larkin, p.636.

48 H.R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand, 1860–1930*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1987, p.34.

49 NZT, 24 December 1908, p.12; 11 February 1909, p.211.

50 NZT, 18 February 1909, pp.251–2; 7 April 1921, p.26.

51 NZT, 18 March 1909, p.409.

52 New Zealand Census, 1921, VII, p.42.

53 D.P. O'Neill, 'Catholics and Delinquency', MA thesis, Victoria University, 1951, cited by H. Mol and M.T.V. Reidy in Stephen D. Webb and John Collette, eds, *New Zealand Society: Contemporary Perspectives*, Wiley, Sydney, 1973, p.268.

54 New Zealand Census, 1926, VIII, p.32; 1936, VI, pp.20, 22.

55 In 1936, there were 2174 13 year olds enrolled at private primary schools (not all of which were Catholic), but there were more 14 year olds at private secondary schools than at private primary schools (AJHR, 1937, E-2, pp.24, 51).

56 AJHR, 1927, E-2, p.7; 1937, E-2, p.23.

57 Akenson (p.171) estimates that 58% of Catholic children attended Catholic primary schools in 1926 but, despite references to official statistics, he does not indicate precisely how this figure was calculated.

58 AJHR, 1931, E-6, p.23.

59 See, for example, ACD, 1930, pp.244–5, 252–3, 259, 264.

60 Van der Krogt, 'More a Part', pp.213–5.

61 C.J. van der Kragt, 'Catholic Religious Identity and Social Integration in Interwar New Zealand', *Catholic Historical Review*, 86, 1, (2000), pp.52–54, 58–59.

62 Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *Pleasures of the Flesh: Sex & Drugs in Colonial New Zealand, 1840–1915*, Reed, Wellington, 1984, p.162.

63 Dalley, 'Women's Imprisonment', p.83.

64 NZPG, 1900, pp.63, 111.

65 Richard Stivers, *Hair of the Dog: Irish Drinking and its American Stereotype*, Continuum, New York and London: rev. ed., 2000, p.116.

66 Revd Denis Kevin O'Sullivan, conversation with the author, 5 March 2010, in the former Mount Magdala chapel.

67 Bronwyn Dalley, 'Following the Rules? Women's Responses to Incarceration, New Zealand, 1880–1920', *Journal of Social History*, 27, 2 (1993), pp.319–20.

68 NZT, 18 August 1921, p.35.

69 John Pratt, *Punishment in a Perfect Society: The New Zealand Penal System, 1840–1939*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1992, p.151.

70 Hume, p.2. For an expression of similar views by a Wellington magistrate in 1900, see Margaret Tennant, *Paupers and Providers: Charitable Aid in New Zealand*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1989, p.156.

71 Bronwyn Labrum, 'Looking beyond the Asylum: Gender and the Process of Committal in Auckland, 1870–1910', *NZJH*, 26, 2 (1992), p.143.

72 Erik Olssen, 'Towards a New Society', in Geoffrey W. Rice, ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1992, p.279.

73 NZT, 10 December 1908, p.22; 11 February 1909, p.210.

74 C.J. van der Kragt, "'Typical of the New Zealand occupational distribution"? A Reconsideration of Catholic Interwar Employment Patterns', *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, 2 (2003–4), pp.173–95.

75 New Zealand Census, 1921, VII, pp.36–40, 43–44.

76 New Zealand Census, 1921, VII, p.20.

77 New Zealand Census, 1921, VII, pp.27–32. Only boroughs with at least 1000 Catholics have been included in this list.

78 Earlier censuses did not correlate religious affiliation with a full range of ages. Men aged 70 years and over, relatively few in number, are grouped as a single cohort. The numbers on which the graph is based are calculated by dividing the percentage of the total Catholic male population in each age cohort by the percentage of the corresponding male cohort of the total non-Māori population. Multiplying the results by 100 gives a convenient index of deviation from a norm of 100.

79 The high proportion of Catholic male 20–24 year olds in 1916 may have been exaggerated by a reluctance to volunteer for military service, since 42,666 soldiers serving overseas were not counted in the census (New Zealand Census 1916, p.15). Later censuses indicate that this was indeed a large cohort, so a Catholic under-representation of fewer than 300 individuals would account for the sharpness of the peak.

80 New Zealand Census, 1926, VIII, p.4.

81 New Zealand Census, 1936, IV, p.33; VI, p.24.

82 ACD, 1937, p.443.

83 Lyndon Fraser, *Castles of Gold: A History of New Zealand's West Coast Irish*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2007, pp.81–85.

84 Robert E. Kennedy Jr, *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage, and Fertility*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973, pp.139–72; Stivers, pp.55–59; David Fitzpatrick, 'Marriage in Post-Famine Ireland', in Art Cosgrove, ed., *Marriage in Ireland*, College Press, Dublin, 1985, pp.116–20, 129.

85 Mark C. Foley and Timothy W. Guinnane, 'Did Irish Marriage Patterns Survive the Emigrant Voyage? Irish-American Nuptiality, 1880–1920', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 26 (1999), pp.15–34, however, argue that low rates of marriage among Irish Americans came to resemble Irish patterns in the period 1880–1910 (after the peak of immigration) for economic rather than cultural reasons.

86 M. MacNamarra in Patrick and Deirdre O'Farrell, eds, *Documents of Australian Catholic History*, II: 1884–1968, London, 1969, p.65 (quoted from the *Australasian Catholic Record*).

87 Revd T.M. MacDonald (1836) in Swift, *Irish Migrants*, p.81; Stivers, p.116.

88 Dalley, 'Women's Imprisonment', pp.83, 90–91.

89 New Zealand Census, 1926, VIII, p.4.

90 New Zealand Census, 1936, VI, pp.19, 25. An unrounded figure is used for the calculation in the next sentence.

91 ACD, 1937, p.443. Some smaller religious denominations likely to demand high levels of commitment and offering some opportunities for church work (notably the Salvation Army and the Brethren) also had high proportions of single women. See NZ Census, 1926, VIII, p.4.

92 Stephen Garton, *Medicine and Madness: A Social History of Insanity in New South Wales, 1880–1940*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, NSW, 1988, pp.102–104.

93 O'Farrell, pp.169–70; Angela McCarthy, *Migration, Ethnicity, and Madness: New Zealand, 1860–1910*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2015, ch.2.

94 D. MacGregor, Report on Lunatic Asylums of the Colony, AJHR, 1887, H-9, pp.1–2.

95 Barbara Brookes, 'Men and Madness in New Zealand, 1890–1916', in Linda Bryder and Derek A. Dow, eds, *New Countries and Old Medicine: Proceedings of an International Conference on the History of Medicine and Health, Auckland, New Zealand, 1994*, Pyramid Press, Auckland, 1995, p.205. This is not to assume that the unmarried were necessarily isolated, but simply that they were more likely to be so; cf. McCarthy, 'Ethnicity, Migration', p.52.

96 Bloomfield, p.27; cf. the Introduction by Brookes, p.10.

97 Andrew D. Trlin, *Now Respected, Once Despised: Yugoslavs in New Zealand*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1979, pp.66, 79.

98 Trlin, p.174; Nicholas Reid, *James Michael Liston: A Life*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2006, pp.96–97.

99 Malcolm, p.27; McCarthy, 'Migration and Madness', pp.58, 64, 67–68. It is impossible to generalize about Catholic patients in McCarthy's sample from Dunedin and Seacliff except to say that a number did indeed have family connections within New Zealand, including with estranged spouses. McCarthy, 'Transnational Ties', pp.152–7.

100 Malcolm, p.16.

101 Mark Finnane, *Insanity and the Insane in Post-Famine Ireland*, Croom Helm, London, 1981, Totowa, NJ, 1980, pp.131–6.

102 Finnane, *Insanity*, pp.136, 161–9.

103 Damien Brennan, *Irish Insanity, 1800–2000*, Routledge, London and New York, 2014, pp.9, 62–65, 67–69, 77–83, 89, 90–91.

104 Brennan, pp.81, 84, 90–92, 118; cf. Finnane, *Insanity*, pp. 135–6.

105 Brennan, p.65.

106 Swift, 'Crime and the Irish', pp.163–82, esp. pp.167, 176–7; cf. Swift, 'Heroes', p.403.

107 Stivers, p.5.

108 NZT, 14 May 1886, p.23.

109 JSNZ, 1921, p.xv.

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111 Brookes, 'Men and Madness', p.208.

112 Stivers, pp.78–79.

- 113 Stivers, pp.59–69.
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- 115 Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History*, Longman, Harlow, Essex, 2000, pp.200–202; M.B. Clinard and R. Meier, *Sociology of Deviant Behavior*, 13th ed., Thomson/Wadsworth, Belmont, California, 2008, p.266.
- 116 Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture and Power: Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1994, p.42.
- 117 Richard S. Hill, *The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove: The Modernization of Policing in New Zealand, 1886–1917*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1995, pp.341–2.
- 118 New Zealand Census, 1921, VII, pp.37, 40.
- 119 Ryan, 'An Undertaking', pp.16–36, esp. 24–26.
- 120 NZT, 23 April 1886, p.21. The letter was signed by Bishops Patrick Moran, John Edmund Luck and Francis Redwood of New Zealand (NZT, 14 May 1886, p.23).
- 121 Ryan, 'An Undertaking', p.20 (cf. p.31); E.R. Simmons, *In Cruce Salus: A History of the Diocese of Auckland, 1848–1980*, Catholic Publications Centre, Auckland, 1982, pp.138, 194.
- 122 Jackson, pp.66–69.
- 123 NZT, 5 October 1905, p.18; *Marist Messenger*, 1 January 1938, p.14; Stivers, p.101.
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- 125 Stivers, pp.102–103.
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- 127 Van der Krogt, "'Typical'", pp.186–7.
- 128 Hill, p.148.
- 129 Hill, pp.3, 21–23, 26, 31–33, 98, 206–7.
- 130 Pratt, p.107.
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- 136 Fraser, *Castles*, p.78.
- 137 See especially Rory Sweetman, *Bishop in the Dock: The Sedition Trial of James Liston*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1997.
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