

Coldrey is in a unique position to write both objectively and with an insider's perspective on the Christian Brothers. An historian from Australia, he is himself a Christian Brother and this book is based on a PhD for the University of Melbourne. It is divided into five main sections: Christian Brothers' education and the patriotic challenge; the education of the rural elite; the ideology of resistance; the language revival and nationalism; and the Brothers and political questions.

This is not a history of the Brothers nor does it pretend to be. The author confines his argument strictly within the limits suggested by the sub-title. What Edmund Rice set out to do was to educate, in a distinctively Catholic fashion, young boys who had no prospect of receiving education from any other source. Later in the nineteenth century the Brothers were to offer secondary education to a slightly higher social class. In both of these activities the Brothers were promoting, probably unconsciously, a social revolution. While the content of their education, particularly the teaching of Irish history, could be seen in retrospect to have had political implications, what was more decisive in the medium term was that an entire segment of society was receiving an education previously restricted to their 'social superiors'. As Coldrey suc-

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cinctly puts it: 'In a colonial situation education is inherently revolutionary'. (p.5)

The Brothers not only taught boys from poorer backgrounds: the content of their education was different from that of other schools, including those of other Catholic teaching orders. The Brothers were concerned above all with the socio-economic advancement of their pupils; hence their concentration on the more practical subjects such as book-keeping and mechanics. Later developments in nineteenth century education laid a far greater emphasis on examination performance and in time the Brothers' Schools, particularly the more famous ones such as the North Monastery in Cork and O'Connell's in Dublin were to dominate the awards arising out of the 'payments by results' system in spite of the strong opposition of the Catholic colleges and their Protestant counterparts.

The author examines in some detail the influence of the Brothers on the generation that eventually achieved Irish independence. His researches have revealed that 125 past-pupils of O'Connell's were involved in the 1916 Rising while only five past-pupils of the Jesuit Belvedere College, a few hundred yards from O'Connell's, were traced. Seven of the fifteen men (not fourteen as Coldrey states) executed in Dublin after the Rising had attended Brothers' schools.

Coldrey does not fail to distinguish differences within the Brothers, above all in the attitudes of the older and younger members towards the 'National Question'. There were frequent differences of opinion between conservative superiors-general such as Richard Maxwell and young novices, just as there were in the priesthood and indeed the hierarchy, although Coldrey does not develop this.

It would be easy to criticise this book for failing to give any account of the relationship between lay teachers and the Brothers who were their employers, or the relationship between the Brothers and the hierarchy, but such topics are outside the scope of this study. The role of the Brothers in cultivating a strong sense of patriotism through a romantic and simple version of Irish history, of Gaelic sports, of songs and ballads, and in the revival of the Irish language are all dealt with convincingly through deep and thorough research.

The structure of the book is thematic rather than chronological and this sometimes makes for repetition. This, however, is a minor criticism. Coldrey has documented admirably the role of the Brothers in the growth of a conscious and articulate Irish nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of the evidence he cites is necessarily impressionistic but compares more than favourably with present-day assessments on the role of the Christian Brothers in independent Ireland, which has not been subject to similar treatment.

Coldrey might have incorporated the growth of the

Brothers within the spectacular growth of the institutional Catholic church in nineteenth century Ireland in order to give a wider context. For example, in 1831 there were only 45 brothers while in 1891 there were nearly 1,000. This great increase did not take place in a vacuum as the increase in the number of priests and particularly nuns, demonstrated. While the great changes wrought by Paul Cullen are touched on, modernisation of Irish society at large is not given the attention it deserves. The inherent equation of Catholicism with Nationalism that runs throughout the book can certainly be questioned. The conflict between Republicanism and Catholicism is not dealt with in any depth, though in this respect it would be unfair to single out Coldrey as most Irish historians have not given this issue the attention it deserves. At times the writing is rather bland and unadventurous: 'In teaching Irish history the Brothers were part of a socialisation process that did something to undermine British hegemony in Ireland'. (p. 139) In his conclusion the author writes that 'The nature of the Brothers' influence is circumstantial and cannot be quantified... but there is such an accumulation of circumstantial evidence that a substantial contribution by the Christian Brothers to the growth of Irish national consciousness can confidently be inferred'. (p. 271) This is, perhaps, too modest a claim. The mass of information that Coldrey has unearthed has added substantially to our knowledge of Irish nationalism and for this reason alone this book deserves a wide readership.

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