



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Recoveries: Neglected Episodes in Irish Cultural History 1860-1912* by John Wilson Foster

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examination was precisely to create debate. Because Reid has written a page-turner of a book, full of engaging sympathy for his subject and trenchant ideas about its future it is bound to stir discussion. Anyone who is concerned with decline in (any) church should engage with it.

Gillian Wylie

***Recoveries – Neglected Episodes in Irish Cultural History 1860-1912*, by John Wilson Foster, Dublin: University College Dublin Press: 2002 pp.158.**

In his excellent examination of what he rightly refers to as 'neglected episodes in Irish cultural history', John Wilson Foster undertakes to write the history of some unlikely subalterns, namely the charismatic and indefatigable individuals who drove the scientific, mechanical and material development of late Victorian and Edwardian Belfast. While the powerful and influential position of his central protagonists, including the polymath John Tyndall, can hardly be considered as traditionally subaltern, their histories certainly can. Foster sets out to undermine the 'simple narratives' by which the past in Ireland is interpreted, undermining what Homi K. Bhabha refers to as 'grand national narratives' of history by his scholarly and thoroughly researched exposition of three scientific, engineering and cultural movements in late 19th/early 20th century Ulster. Covering Tyndall's Darwinistic controversies of the 1870's, Foster outlines the unique northern Irish contribution to one of the most important debates of the late 19th century, presenting the virulent reaction to Tyndall's pro-Darwin Belfast Address of 1874 as a key moment in the emergence of what he refers to as Presbyterian evolutionism. This essay indicates a rich vein of theoretical scientific thought emerging from what Wilson somewhat tiredly refers to as an 'often misunderstood corner of Ireland'. This examination of scientific theory is then followed by an exploration of the applied science of ship building, set firmly in the context of an examination of the general engineering advances of the late 19th century. This chapter, while impressive in its research, lacks the clarity of the opening evolutionary debate as it tails off into a somewhat disjointed pastiche of literary interpretations of this scientific progress. However, this excursion is interesting in its analysis of an emergent genre of science fiction based on the writings of, amongst others, John Jacob Astor and Henry Adams, although the chapter is on surer ground when Foster paints his impressive picture of the *Titanic*, the largest moveable object ever built. Clearly Foster intends this behemoth to be seen as the zenith of the engineering, manufacturing and construction abilities of the people of Belfast, a modernist project of the most sophisticated kind exemplifying the talents at the disposal of the entrepreneurial minds of Edward Harland and Gustav Woolf, supreme progressives countering the historical perception of a Luddite and traditional Presbyterianism. *Titanic's* dramatic and well-chronicled demise is then cleverly described as 'the fatal culmination of a long and complicated

sequence of interrelated causes which lay deep in human nature itself', in which Foster notes that the mechanical obsession with ever-increasing speed coincided with the Futurist concept of the central role to be played by machines in the twentieth century. Given this now universally accepted mechanical pre-eminence, Foster's analysis of the genesis of one of its myriad roots is particularly timely.

John McDonagh

***Catholic Social Teaching: A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis*, by Charles E. Curran: Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, pp.261.**

This book examines the development of Catholic social teaching from the publication of the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (the condition of labour) in 1891. Curran considers a 'canon' of 13 encyclicals and, since he is writing from an American perspective, two key documents by the U.S bishops. The book examines the theological and ethical methodologies of these documents and the social, political and economic prescriptions that these suggest. The result is an illuminating and clear analysis of shifts within Catholic social teaching over time.

Rerum Novarum (1891) harked back to a time before the Enlightenment when secular individualism did not exist. It idealised the Middle Ages as the form of society that most epitomised the Christian ideal of social solidarity. At one level Catholic social teaching faced the challenges of twentieth century modernisation with a static thirteenth century panacea. At the same time it offered the industrial age a vision of the good society that drew upon a coherent intellectual legacy stretching back to Aristotle via Thomas Aquinas; one that contested both liberalism and Marxism.

Like Marxism, Catholic social doctrine proposed a general plan for the whole world. Thomism emphasised the participation of eternal law in the ordering of the world and deductive interpretations of God's plan. For Curran the deductive methodology of natural law amounted to a distinct anthropological perspective. It emphasised the interdependence of individuals and society and stood opposed to secular individualism and socialism. In *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII brought Thomism to bear on economic and social issues. He insisted that the private ownership of property was based on natural law. He strongly attacked socialism as contrary to natural justice but defended the just wage, the right of workers to organise, and the need for limited state intervention to help groups in trouble. In *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) Pius XI, writing at the time of the Great Depression, proposed a reconstructed social order based on corporatist principles as an alternative to capitalism and socialism. Again, these prescriptions were rooted in the anthropology of natural law. Yet, *Quadragesimo Anno* spoke of the undeserved misery of the working classes and crucially noted that many