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Protestant Approaches
to Begging and Alms-Giving

Introduction

Addressing the annual general meeting of the Dublin Mendicity Society in January 1838, the city’s Church of Ireland archbishop, Richard Whately, boasted of having never given money to a beggar. Whately rejected the notion that one should give alms out of sympathy: instead, Christian feelings ought to prevent one from indiscriminately doling out alms to paupers ‘who most practised deception on the public, and to give them money was but to pay them for the purpose of keeping up the system of public misery and street begging’.¹ This refusal to give alms seems to have been a well-known trait of Whately’s. W.R. Le Fanu, whose father was one of the prelate’s acquaintances, relates Whately’s recollection of one particular mendicant who solicited alms from him: ‘[Whately] used to tell of a beggar who followed him asking alms, to whom he said, “Go away; I never give anything to a beggar in the streets.” The beggar replied, “And where would your reverence wish me to wait on you?”’²

The case of Whately provides a useful entry-point into considering how Protestants perceived and responded to street begging in the subject period, as it brings to light the complexities in negotiating how different people negotiated begging and alms-giving. Whately was a Church of Ireland archbishop and theologian but not an evangelical; his views on begging and alms-giving were grounded in scripture but also in political economy; he never gave alms to a beggar but was a regular and relatively generous contributor to charitable causes. Yet, Whately was a senior cleric and the

¹ FJ, 17 Jan. 1838.
question must be asked as to how representative were his views, either of his fellow Episcopalians or of the clergy (regardless of denomination) in general. How did his views tally with those of Protestant women? Mirroring the approach taken in the preceding chapter, this discussion will pivot on the questions of what Protestants said and did about begging and alms-giving in pre-Famine Ireland. The influence of evangelicalism on concepts of poverty and charity will be considered, before analysing how Protestant commentators contributed to the prolonged and fraught Poor Law debates of this period. Public discussion on matters of social concern did not escape the sectarian nature of contemporary political and religious discourses, and the questions of Ireland’s endemic poverty and prevalent mendicancy were no different. In this light, beggary became associated with the Roman Catholicism of a majority of Ireland’s poorer classes and this chapter will examine how the tropes of beggary and Catholicism became fused together in Protestant social discourse. Attention will then shift to the actions taken by Protestants within their own congregations, wherein internal mechanisms unique to each church or religious society were adopted in corporate responses to destitution and mendicancy, and the role of Protestant women in such initiatives.

Discourses

*Evangelicalism, Begging and Alms-Giving*

The role of Protestant evangelicalism in shaping how contemporaries approached poverty and begging in this period is indispensable to any study of how the main Protestant churches negotiated these social questions. Arising from British Protestantism in the eighteenth century, evangelicalism was a movement of reform and revival which is difficult, if not impossible, strictly to define, for, in Boyd Hilton’s words, ‘it was not a precise phenomenon’;3 Jonathan Wright has described evangelicalism as ‘a complex and varied phenomenon, which cut across both denominational and theological lines’.4 What can be identified are doctrinal traits largely shared by evangelicals of all denominations. Evangelicals stressed four central doctrines: Christ’s atoning death on the Cross for the sins of mankind; the Bible as the chief source of religious authority; conversion to a new life of faith in Christ and assurance of one’s personal salvation; and an activism in spreading the gospel.5 Evangelicals’ beliefs were not new, being grounded

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4 Wright, ‘Natural leaders’, p. 204.
5 D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), pp. 2–17. For a critical discussion on the viability of this
in Judeo-Christian theology, but ‘what distinguished evangelicals was the emphasis they gave to particular doctrines, and the fervour with which they practised “vital religion”’.6

Evangelicalism, as understood by historians of the nineteenth century, was a movement which transcended national boundaries. Its roots can be traced to the missionary zeal of John Wesley (1703–91) and the early Methodists from the 1730s onwards, and successfully developed in north America by George Whitefield (1714–70). A later manifestation of this movement’s evolution emerged from within the Church of England in the 1790s and was associated with the Clapham Sect group of merchants, barristers and politicians in London, of whom William Wilberforce (1759–1833), the author of *Practical view of the prevailing religious system* (which reached its 14th edition in Britain in 1820), was the most influential.7 Evangelicalism built upon the movement for the reformation of manners and morals that emerged in the 1780s and the impetus provided by millennial expectation, which, in itself, had been created by the momentous political crises in France, Britain and Ireland. Furthermore, evangelicals’ zeal for conversion and activism was complemented by the emerging associational culture of middle-class life and spurred the formation of numerous voluntary societies. As Irene Whelan has observed, ‘the evangelical movement throughout the British Isles entered the new century on a wave of enthusiasm expressed through the phenomenal spread of voluntary organisations devoted to everything from Bible and tract distribution to Sunday Schools, home and overseas missions, and countless other charitable and philanthropic concerns’.8 The various denominations’ own manifestations of evangelicalism are not to be treated as identical entities, yet, differences aside, Irish evangelicals – Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist – shared many interests.9 Irish evangelicalism


also evolved differently from its British counterpart, owing to political developments particular to Ireland. The growing assertiveness and success of Catholic reform movements under the leadership of Daniel O’Connell, most notably the campaigns for Catholic Emancipation and repeal of the Act of Union, which saw the mobilisation of priests as political activists, drove evangelicals to advocate the protection of the rights and privileges of an embattled Protestant minority, the various branches of which co-operated in the Bible society and Sunday School movements in pursuit of common interests.10

Turning to the questions of poverty, begging and alms-giving, it can be seen that evangelicalism greatly influenced how the evolving discourses were shaped. Evangelicals placed greater emphasis on the sufferer’s spiritual impoverishment than on his/her bodily wants, as it was salvation through personal conversion that was ultimately sought, and which was the focus of evangelicals’ associational and voluntary work. The emphasis on spiritual salvation reflected a shift in the language of philanthropy when compared with the middle of the previous century; then, the provision of temporal relief guided how charity was framed and bestowed. An English evangelical controversialist at the turn of the century captured the shift in emphasis: ‘How preferable is that bread which endureth to everlasting life, to that which perisheth; and how much more to be dreaded is a famine of the word of truth, than a dearth of earthly food’.11 John Bird Sumner, the evangelical bishop of Chester (later archbishop of Canterbury) who also served on the English Poor Inquiry Commission in the early 1830s, saw alms-giving as duly relieving immediate temporal poverty – ‘this it may and ought to do’ – but failing to strike at the root of the pauper’s destitution, namely his soul weighed down by original sin: ‘No effort of man can take away the consequences of the first sin’.12 Sumner drew on the biblical story of the crippled beggar who asked alms of John and Peter as they entered the temple, to whom Peter replied: ‘Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give

I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk’. Instead of bestowing alms, the apostle assisted the indigent to his feet, ‘and he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God’ (Acts 3: 1–8). According to Sumner, alms would have provided mere temporary sustenance and the beggar’s wants would have remained. ‘But by what he [Peter] did, when he bid him to rise up and walk, he removed his wants, instead of relieving them; he lifted him up to a state which before he could not have reached; the man became a new creature’.

Just as Christians of all denominations grounded their charity in scripture, Sumner here presented a biblical precedent underpinning the evangelical zeal for personal conversion and rebirth in Christ. While salvation trumped bodily relief, the former was inextricably linked to the improvement of the social conditions of the poor. How could the slum dweller or the rural peasant be convinced to turn to Christ and be assured of salvation when living in the morally polluting environments of filth, idleness, intemperance, illiteracy and nakedness among other vices, not to mention irreligion? In disseminating the gospel to the irreligious poor, the personal, face-to-face encounter was the preferred means. This method drew inspiration from the pastoral work of Christ and facilitated the personal evangelisation of the poor by missionaries; the focus of evangelical charity was on the individual and his/her salvation.

Yet, despite these shared approaches, evangelicals could hold contrasting opinions on poverty and charity. These differences were caused by a disparity in views among evangelicals as to the working of divine providence in the world, with a distinction being drawn between ‘moderates’ and ‘extremists’ who perceived worldly happenings as being mostly consequences of man-made actions or divine interferences respectively. Church of Scotland minister and social reformer Thomas Chalmers railed against a state provision for the poor, championing private charity by individuals and, at most, minimal interventions by corporate bodies. In terms of temporal wants, Chalmers’s target was not poverty but pauperism, and he saw the evangelising work of Christian missionaries, visiting the homes of the poor and detecting genuine cases and imposture through their moralising inspections, as, in Hilton’s words, ‘the only sure way to effect a moral regeneration of society’. Chalmers’s opposition to a compulsory poor scheme stood in stark contrast to, for instance, the views of the evangelical Church of Ireland rector of Powerscourt,
Rev. Robert Daly, who shifted from a position of outright hostility to a Poor Law to one whereby he believed that a statutory provision was necessary for the temporal and moral alleviation of the poorer classes. Daly’s interesting argument was that a statutory provision would alleviate the pastoral pressures on clergymen, whose duties were overly concerned with relieving the worldly poverty of their flock. Under the proposed Poor Law these clerics would have greater liberty to attend to the spiritual wants of the poor. These instances demonstrate that while common traits can be identified among nineteenth-century evangelicals, their approaches to social questions could vary greatly. Yet, evangelicals considered these questions with an eye to a common ultimate objective – the salvation of the souls of sinners through personal conversion. In a charity sermon in aid of the Belfast House of Industry the evangelical Presbyterian minister Rev. Henry Cooke drew on a passage from Proverbs 3:27 (‘Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it’) to make a distinction between relieving true, genuine distress and ‘undeserving’ imposture. Beggary was presented by Cooke as an immoral practice, which exposed the poor to ‘continual temptations … [and] to the contagion of bad example’, as well as leaving many ‘almost totally devoid of the means of education, or religious instruction’; furthermore, mendicancy also had wider societal consequences – for example, in the economic value of the individual’s lost labour. Cooke evoked images of ill-health to suggest that beggary exerted a cancerous influence on the social body: the Belfast House of Industry, established to suppress mendicancy and its causes, sought ‘not a temporary palliative, but a radical cure’ to this ‘disease’ through the use of ‘proper remedies’ – namely, a system of home visitations and inspections that constituted ‘a kind of domestic police, which preserves order, so essential to industry; promotes cleanliness, so essential to health; and stimulates to diligence, by the dread of censure, and the hope of reward’.

Protestants, Irish Mendicancy and the Poor Law Question

Anglican clergy were the leading contributors to public debate on poor relief in eighteenth-century Ireland. The condition of the poor did not escape the attention of the Archbishop of Dublin, William King, who established almshouses, granted begging badges to the poor and forbade the destitute to beg outside their own parish. Dean of St Patrick’s, Jonathan Swift, was widely known for his philanthropic endeavours, and his published work includes

17 [Robert Daly], ‘Improvement of Ireland – Poor Laws’ in Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland magazine, x, no. 55 (Jan. 1830), pp. 1–8.
tracts on the state of indigence and beggary in Dublin city. Swift drew a firm line between the local Dublin beggars, who were to be badged and relieved by their own parish, and ‘the Evil of Foreign Beggars’, whom he wished to see whipped and driven out of the city, ‘and let the next country Parish do as they please’. Swift viewed the vast majority of the city’s mendicants as ‘undeserving Wretches’, too lazy to work and whose destitution was owed to ‘their own Idleness, attended with all Manner of Vices, particularly Drunkenness, Thieviness, and Cheating’.

The most significant eighteenth-century contribution to the debate on provision for the poor were two pamphlets by Dean of Clogher, Richard Woodward, proposing the erection of multi-faceted poor houses for various categories of the poor, to be established in every county in Ireland. Woodward was critical of the prevailing manner of relief which was devoid of any statutory provision for the poor and railed against the iniquity of the system based on voluntary and unsystematic relief, whereby almsgiving frequently arose ‘from the Sympathy of Wretches almost as poor as those whom they relieve’, while ‘the Thoughtless, the Unfeeling, and the Absentee contribute nothing’. The clergyman’s scheme did not propose an unqualified right to relief for all in distress but echoed the widespread disdain for the ‘undeserving’ idle poor, suggesting that habitual beggars and vagrants be branded, imprisoned, whipped and, as a last resort for recidivists, transported. In a more detailed pamphlet, published two years later, a 1 per cent tax on agricultural and commercial output to fund a national system of poor assistance was suggested. Woodward’s proposals constituted the most coherent reflection, until that point, of the question of Ireland’s poverty and influenced the Houses of Industry legislation of the early 1770s. Woodward’s pamphlets provide an insight into the evolving philosophical treatment of poverty and begging by contemporary clerics. The language used by Woodward focused on relieving the temporal plight of the destitute, while punishing the bodily frailties of ‘undeserving’ mendicants. His concern was with the provision of suitable lodgings, food and clothing to the poor, as well as increasing ‘the Aggregate of National Industry, and the Security of Property’. There was none of the evangelical emphasis on securing the soul of the sinner which

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21 [Swift], *Proposal for giving badges to the beggars*, p. 6.
22 Ibid., pp. 8–9.
23 [Richard Woodward], *A scheme for establishing county poor-houses, in the kingdom of Ireland* (Dublin, 1766), p. 5.
24 Ibid., p. 10.
27 [Woodward], *A scheme for establishing county poor-houses*, p. 6.
shaped the language of charity in the following decades. While Woodward spoke about ‘humanity’, ‘compassion’ and ‘justice’, nowhere did he suggest the importance of personal salvation or spiritual regeneration.

Woodward’s somewhat utilitarian model contrasted sharply with the sentiments echoed three decades later by Rev. Robert Daly of Powerscourt in his outline of a proposal for inducing the Irish poor to lift themselves out of poverty. A ‘renowned preacher and militant evangelical’, Daly was a leading figure in the ‘Second Reformation’ of the 1820s, and from 1843 until his death three decades later served as bishop of the united dioceses of Cashel, Emly, Waterford and Lismore. His activism included running local schools and supporting various evangelical missionary societies, leading to accusations of proselytism. He was well placed to drive, together with the evangelical members of the landed Wingfield family, a religious revival on the Powerscourt estate throughout the 1820s and 1830s. In evidence to the Poor Inquiry, Daly extolled the virtues of a charitable scheme he had witnessed first-hand in Brighton which promoted a savings scheme among the poor and was supplemented by a cash sum doled out by the charity in question. The scheme was based on the principle that, where possible, gratuitous relief should not be provided, and it taught the poor ‘the importance of very small, if habitual, savings’. The encouragement of prudence and self-sufficiency benefited both the giver and the receiver. Noting that the Brighton scheme led to ‘the suppression of mendicancy and imposture’, Daly contrasted the previous system of poor relief in his County Wicklow parish with the system prevailing in the 1830s (and which was based on the Brighton initiative): ‘Under our former system of almsgiving, it seems to be the object of the poor to be as miserable and squalid as possible, in order to extort alms; under this it is the object of the poor to vie one with the other in comfort and decency of appearance’.

Elsewhere, Daly outlined the development of his views on a statutory poor provision, evolving from a standpoint of outright opposition to his later belief that ‘a national legal provision for the poor is a national duty’. Writing in 1830, in Caesar Otway’s *Christian Examiner*, an evangelical Church of Ireland magazine, Daly argued that a disproportionate amount of the clergy’s time was exerted on handling requests for poor relief. As such, they could not devote sufficient time to the spiritual well-being of their congregation.

30 *PI*, Appendix C, Part II, Addenda to Appendix A, p. 40e.
31 [Daly], ‘Improvement of Ireland’, p. 2.
A statutory relief scheme, which would remove the burden from the parish, would benefit both clergymen and their parishioners, Daly argued:

I conceive, that among other blessings to be derived from a national provision for the poor, one, and not the least, will be the improvement it will introduce in the intercourse between the minister and the poor of his flock; *temporal wants will not form the main subject of every conversation, and his visits will not be sought with the hope of extracting some pecuniary assistance, but with the view of receiving that instruction which can make wise unto salvation*. I am, moreover, induced to give my opinion on this subject, because I know that no one has more opportunity of learning by experience, the real state of the poor under the present system, than the clergyman of a parish.32

Not surprisingly, the author had much to say on the topic of mendicancy and saw the practice of indiscriminate alms-giving to beggars as a greater evil than any faults in the English Speenhamland Poor Law system, which was becoming the subject of increasing public controversy.33 While acknowledging the merits of the argument that a compulsory poor rate would diminish much of the charitable spirit in the alms-giver and the gratitude of the recipient, Daly asserted:

but I have long and attentively watched the spirit in which alms are given and received, under the system of sturdy mendicancy which exists in our country, and I do unhesitatingly say, that nothing was ever levied more in the shape of a tax, than the contributions extracted in this country by the noise and importunate clamour of beggars.

For the clergyman, the prevailing Irish system only encouraged unqualified relief, thus fostering idleness and dependency. In his analysis of Irish poverty, the author adhered to the traditional model of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor, and identified the archetypal threats long associated with the mendicant poor – crime, vice, sedition and disease:

[T]he strolling mendicant utters his imprecations against those who do not contribute according to the scale which he has laid down,

32 Ibid., p. 7 (emphasis added).
33 Under the Speenhamland system, which was first introduced in 1795, the English parish supplemented labourers’ wages and indexed this provision to the fluctuating price of bread. Opponents of the system perceived it as an encouragement to idleness, dependency and pauperism.
and spends the produce of his day’s collection in drunkenness and profligacy; passing through the country he sows the seeds of dishonesty, immorality, and vice, increases sedition, and discontent, and in times of the prevalence of fever, carries its infection throughout the land.34

Daly’s views provide a useful comparison with those of Woodward decades earlier and reflect the shift in the lexicon of the Poor Law debate. The influence of evangelicalism and moralism ensured that for some influential reformers spiritual salvation trumped temporal assistance, yet the latter remained a matter of utmost urgency and importance.

This view of the mendicant poor posing a threat to civil order is reflected in another contribution to *Christian Examiner* a year later. The author, who signed off as ‘Hibernicus’, adopted a different tone from the earlier contribution, and alleged that Roman Catholicism, in particular its mass of priests, was the fundamental source of all that was evil in Ireland. In presenting his argument, the author drew on the popular motif of the beggar as a personification of Popish error and deceit. ‘Hibernicus’ stated that Popery was ‘adverse to all improvement, either of body or mind’, before continuing:

> It is unquestioned, that wandering beggars are the chief agents of the priests, in mock miracles and prophecies, deceptions, and impostures of every kind; they are still more useful in the frightful system of *espionage*, which forms, perhaps, a more powerful source of dominion, than even the confessional itself. They form also a fluctuating medium for the conveyance of sedition and agitation from one district to another.35

For the author, whose views reflected the evangelical obsession with Popish ‘error’ and ‘priestcraft’, wandering mendicants constituted not only a threat to the state but a cancerous influence on the spiritual and moral well-being of the impressionable poor. The beggar’s deviance transcended the temporal and spiritual spheres of human existence. Applying these beliefs to his argument in favour of a Poor Law, ‘Hibernicus’ stated that one advantage of a statutory poor provision would be to remove responsibility for such paupers – almost invariably Catholics – from the priests to appointed officers, who would presumably be Protestants. The intensity of this piece, with its unbridled focus on the perceived moral wickedness of Catholicism, must be seen in the context of increasing sectarian tensions in public discourse in Ireland throughout the 1820s and into the 1830s.

34 [Daly], ‘Improvement of Ireland’, p. 5.
This period witnessed the continued refinement of distinct identities and cultures among the Catholics and Protestants of Ireland, as political issues, most notably Catholic Emancipation, tithes and the proposed repeal of the Act of Union, came to the fore of widely mobilised mass movements. Other factors, such as an increasingly confident and assertive Catholic middle class demanding to be placed on an equal footing as their Established Church counterparts, the emergence of evangelical movements in each of the main Protestant denominations and the radicalisation of the Orange movement, fanned the flames of sectarian hatred and suspicion, and moulded the language employed by commentators and polemicists in discourse on poverty, education and other contentious matters.\(^{36}\)

Among the clerics who publicly and regularly addressed the questions of poverty, beggary and the suitability (or otherwise) of a statutory Poor Law for Ireland was Richard Whately, the Church of Ireland archbishop of Dublin from 1831 to 1863. Whately was among a number of leading Christian political economists in Ireland and Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century who were, in Peter Gray’s words, ‘concerned with reconciling universal truths of classical political economics with the moral teaching of Christianity, arguing that the two were complementary and must be united in the service of good governance’.\(^{37}\) While not an evangelical, Whately shared the moralising conceptions of poverty with the revivalist wings of the Established Church and flavoured them with political economy, drawing particular influence from the theories of demographic (un)sustainability put forward by the evangelical political economist, Rev. Thomas Malthus.

The archbishop’s notorious eccentricities were evident in the manner in which he dealt with street beggars. During his time in Oxford, where he served as a member of the town’s mendicity society, Whately personally inspected beggars’ pockets to ensure that they were not hiding money.\(^{38}\) Whately’s views on begging and alms-giving, outlined in considerable detail in a sermon preached in aid of Dr Steevens’ Hospital in the mid-1830s, drew on ‘Christ’s example’ in drawing distinctions between the sick poor, who were almost invariably deserving of assistance, and able-bodied beggars, from whom indiscriminate charity must be withheld. The numerous instances in the gospels wherein Christ aided the sick and cured illnesses contrasted sharply, Whately argued, with the two instances of him providing alms – in the form of food – to the hungry, as told in the parable of the Loaves

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\(^{36}\) Whelan, *Bible war in Ireland*.


\(^{38}\) Whately, *Life and correspondence of Richard Whately*, i, p. 149.
and the Fishes. After feeding the multitudes, Christ sent them away, ‘not allowing them to remain in expectation of a daily renewal of the like miracle’, Whately observed. Thomas Chalmers, in evidence to the 1830 Irish poor committee, also drew upon the parable of the Loaves and the Fishes to argue that Christ’s teachings supported voluntarist models of poor assistance: Christ identified the ‘sordid principle upon which [the multitudes] ran after Him’ and accordingly exerted discretion in his charity, as the indiscriminate manner of doling out assistance ‘would have disorganized and put into disorder the whole population’.

Whately’s concept of charity was based on personal activism, stressing the need for the better-off to go out and work among the distressed. Underpinning this work was the moral requirement for ‘discrimination in charity’. Relieving the poor was a Christian duty, but assistance must be bestowed warily so as not to foster mendicancy: ‘if no one gave alms, there would be no beggars’. Indiscriminate alms-giving exerted a corruptive influence on both parties within a charitable transaction – the benefactor and the recipient. The former negated his duty to ascertain the credentials of the soliciting poor person and determine ‘whether they are doing good or mischief’, while the mendicant was being induced to continue ‘the wretched and demoralizing trade of begging’. Indiscriminate alms-giving actually constituted a ‘sin’ on the part of the giver, Whately believed, as this misspent charity maintained the beggar in his life of idleness and vice. Furthermore, the morally debilitating effect of this transaction extended beyond the two immediate parties to ‘real objects of compassion’, whose ‘modest and simple’ pleas for assistance were dwarfed by the extravagant fabrications or the grotesque bodily exposures of the fraudulent and professional mendicant. Indiscriminate alms-giving only served to facilitate and encourage ‘this wretched kind of lottery’, in which style won out over substance. Whately’s emphasis on the economic and moral evils which arise from feckless alms-giving – hence his urging for ‘discrimination in charity’ – reflects the influence of Malthus, who asserted that ‘experience has proved, I believe without a single exception, that poverty and misery have always increased in proportion to the quantity of indiscriminate

40 Whately, Christ’s example, p. 10.
41 Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830, p. 320.
42 Whately, Christ’s example, p. 25.
43 Ibid., p. 21.
44 Ibid., pp. 23, 21.
46 Whately, Christ’s example, p. 20.
charity. Whately's use of the lottery metaphor further displays the intellectual reach of Malthus, who regularly deployed this rhetorical device – for example, in asserting the unavoidable extent of suffering and poverty in the human condition, he referred to 'the unhappy persons who in the great lottery of life have drawn a blank'.

In late 1833, Whately was appointed to chair the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland. The inquiry's third and final report forwarded Whately's views, previously articulated in public and in private, which were shared by most of the commissioners and other influential commentators such as Nassau Senior, a lifelong friend and former pupil of the archbishop's. The inquiry rejected the workhouse-based New Poor Law in England, instead championing the 'Scottish system' of minimalist state action, wherein assistance would be provided with discretion largely through voluntary agencies and without a compulsory poor rate, thus preventing a right to relief for the poor and the burden of an additional tax for ratepayers. (A limited state provision was to be made for certain categories of the poor, such as the impotent and sick poor.) On the question of mendicancy, the inquiry echoed Whately's disdain for indiscriminate alms-giving, stating that 'the abundant alms which are bestowed, in particular by the poorer classes, unfortunately tend … to encourage mendicancy with its attendant evils'. Voluntary charities, such as mendicity societies, were to fall under the regulation of a Poor Law Commission, yet the direct provision of relief was to remain in the hands of the voluntary organisations. The report also advocated for revised vagrancy laws, empowering magistrates either to transport convicted vagrants to the colonies as labourers (this was aimed at the mendicant poor who were willing to work) or confine them in Irish penitentiaries for an indefinite period of time, a measure targeting the refractory, able-bodied and idle beggar. In the end, the commission's

47 T.R. Malthus, *An essay on the principle of population; or, a view of its past and present effects on human happiness; with an inquiry into our prospects respecting the future removal or mitigation of the evils which it occasions* (new edn, London, 1803), book iv, chapter ix, p. 564.
50 Among the measures proposed by the Poor Inquiry were: a state-assisted emigration scheme; a system of agricultural education and improvement, including land drainage and reclamation, to be overseen by a Board of Improvement; and improved housing for the rural poor, the expense of which to be met partly by the landlord and partly through local rates.
51 *PI*, third report, p. 25.
52 Ibid., p. 27.
proposed system was rejected by the government, which subsequently adopted George Nicholls’s workhouse- and poor rate-based relief system, modelled on the New English Poor Law.

Whately’s criticism of a rate-based relief provision bestowed upon the able-bodied poor as an entitlement, as per the Speenhamland system in England from 1795, countenanced both ‘the moral and economic hazards involved’.

This system tempted the diligent labourer away from industry and independence, and served as a ‘bounty on idleness … a bounty upon lying … a bounty on theft’. In his evidence to an 1832 parliamentary inquiry on the tithes system, Whately expressed his unyielding opposition to the introduction of a compulsory Poor Law for the able-bodied in Ireland, asserting that the provision in Ireland of a legal right to relief would encourage dependency and idleness among the lower orders, thereby encumbering any attempt to foster industry:

It would tend to make them leave their parents and their children to parish support, instead of attending to them as they do now, and to prevent them from laying by anything for a time of distress. They would work as little as possible, and get all they could from the parish. I have seen that operate a great deal in England, and I think it would operate with much more rapid and destructive effect in Ireland.

Whately’s unrelenting criticism of Poor Law provision was shared by perhaps the leading intellectual and social commentator in the first half of the nineteenth century, Rev. Thomas Chalmers. An evangelical Church of Scotland minister, political economist and prolific writer, Chalmers’s championing of voluntary private charity was influenced by his Calvinist theology, evangelical disposition, an adherence to Christian political economy and his own practical experience of overseeing an urban experiment of voluntary poor relief and moral inspection in his Glasgow parish of St John’s (1819–23). Chalmers’s scheme was based on romantic impressions of a rural, familial and communal basis for alleviating distress, and the inherently Christian practice of visitation to the sick and poor was central to this idealistic model of benevolence. Chalmers’s influence extended to

53 Gray, Making of the Irish Poor Law, p. 125.
55 The evidence of His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin, as taken before the select committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the collection and payment of tithes in Ireland, and the state of the laws relating thereto (London, 1832), p. 97.
Ireland and the Irish Poor Law debate: he appeared as a ‘star witness’ to the 1830 Irish poor committee’s inquiry,\(^{56}\) he was in frequent correspondence with Irish Presbyterian ministers, who regularly invited him to preach charity sermons;\(^ {57}\) his writings were sold and republished in Belfast and Dublin;\(^ {58}\) and he took an active interest in Irish social conditions – for instance, inquiring into the management of the poor in Dublin city and the Presbyterian Church’s relief efforts in Connaught during the Great Famine.\(^ {59}\) As Jonathan Wright has convincingly argued, Chalmers’s views on poverty and charity echoed those of Irish Presbyterians (particularly among the middle classes of Belfast), as opposed to shaping them.\(^ {60}\) These views were shared by other Presbyterian ministers in Ireland, most prominently by Rev. James Carlile of Mary’s Abbey congregation in Dublin. In his letter to Chalmers in 1830, Carlile suggested that ‘the poor would eagerly grasp at a compulsory provision and readily give out all their habits of helping one another’, thus mirroring Chalmers’s own views based on his experiment in St John’s. A compulsory provision, in encouraging dependency and discouraging ‘spontaneous charity’, would only serve as ‘a premium on pauperism’.\(^ {61}\) Almost a decade later, Carlile publicly expounded these views while addressing a meeting of representatives of Dublin’s charitable societies on the topic of the forthcoming rates-funded Poor Law system. He pointed to the English Poor Law system, which conferred a right to relief upon the poor, the effects of which were, he claimed, ‘enormous vagrancy … [and] public pauperism’. This stood in stark contrast to the Scottish system, which excluded the able-bodied, except in cases of emergency wherein assistance was funded through the voluntary raising of subscriptions, thus preventing ‘public pauperism’.\(^ {62}\)

Quakers were also active contributors to the Poor Law debate, which encompassed the related topics of mendicancy and charity. This question was one which demonstrated how the independence of spirit, thought and action that characterised Quakerism filtered through to Irish Friends’ approaches to social issues. Quakers did not adhere, en masse, to particular social and economic theories, and, thus, approached social questions ‘unencumbered

56  Peter Gray, ‘Thomas Chalmers and Irish poverty’ in Frank Ferguson and James McConnel (eds), Ireland and Scotland in the nineteenth century (Dublin, 2009), p. 96.
57 Cooke and Chalmers papers (PRONI, T3307).
59 James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 28 Jan. 1829 (PRONI, Cooke and Chalmers papers, T3307/15); Hamilton Magee, Fifty years in the Irish mission (Belfast and Edinburgh, [c.1905]), p. 55.
60 Wright, ‘Natural leaders’, pp. 221–6.
61 James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 26 Apr. 1830.
62 FJ, 21 Feb. 1838.
by theory … [and] unfettered by untested preconceptions'. For instance, Ebenezer Shackleton’s 1832 pamphlet in favour of a statutory Poor Law in Ireland did not concern itself with attributing blame for Ireland’s structural poverty to any party but, rather, with finding a satisfactory solution; for Shackleton, a statutory Poor Law, based on the English precedent of ‘a right to a sufficiency of wholesome food’, constituted the best means not only of relieving the poor but also of curtailing agrarian unrest. A proposed plan, framed and published by 13 Quaker men in 1825, attributed Ireland’s social, economic and political misery to landlord absenteeism and high rents. Proposing to encourage resident proprietary of land and capital investment, the plan aimed to create an expanding class of small farmers: ‘instead of an oppressed, defrauded, turbulent, lawless, uninformed, idle, poor, miserable peasantry; would spring up an industrious, independent, well-instructed, affluent and contented yeomanry’.

The travel account of the English Quaker Jonathan Binns contains an array of colourful mendicant characters whom the author encountered throughout Ireland. Binns served as an agricultural assistant commissioner on the Whately Poor Inquiry in the mid-1830s and travelled across Ireland in this capacity, carrying out investigations into the social conditions of the poor. In various locations (predominantly in large provincial towns), Binns distinguished between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor yet nuanced these concepts through a consideration of the reality of existence for large numbers of the Irish poor. In Philipstown (Daingean), in King’s County, Binns’s emphasis was on the practical complexities inherent in doling out alms to beggars: ‘the windows were frequently crowded with miserable women, carrying children upon their backs, and soliciting charity with pitiful lamentations. To relieve all was impossible – and to relieve only a few increased the number of those who begged’. Nonetheless, Binns drew comfort from the significance of the work in which he was engaged and the long-term consequences of the Poor Inquiry’s investigations: ‘Under such distressing circumstances, my consolation was, that I was engaged in preparing a full and honest statement of their wretched condition, with a view to the introduction of legislative measures of relief’. His comments

65 Statement of some of the causes of the disturbances in Ireland, and of the miserable state of the peasantry; with a plan for commencing on sound principles, an amelioration of their condition, thereby removing the causes of the disturbances, and bringing the country into a state of peace and quietness (Dublin, 1825), pp. 8–11.
regarding mendicancy in Cork city reveal that while he drew the common distinction between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor he perceived beggary to be a legitimate resort in lieu of a statutory provision, as per the status quo in Ireland: ‘But what can be said in denunciation of a custom which seems to be obliged by the absence of an legal provision for the aged, the infirm, and the deserving needy?’

Protestants and the Trope of the (Catholic) Beggar

Political and social discourse in nineteenth-century Ireland was regularly coloured by confessional allegiances and sectarian mistrust, and this regularly carried over into debates on poverty and charity. For Protestant commentators, the undeniable economic success of the largely Protestant, industrialising north-east of the island contrasted sharply with the rest of the country, whose economic backwardness was attributed to the prevalence of ‘Popery’ and ‘priestcraft’. The north-east was commonly presented as a prosperous and morally upright region while economic and moral impoverishment characterised those parts outside of Ulster. A significant feature of such rhetoric was the deployment of the trope of the beggar to personify the dissoluteness of non–Ulster regions: the perceived ubiquity of mendicancy outside the north-east reflected the idleness, improvidence and misplaced benevolence among the largely Catholic poorer classes, while the supposed absence of beggary in the north-east pointed to a spirit of industry, ‘true religion’, thrift and relief mechanisms that did not encourage pauperism. In an influential address to an anti-Repeal crowd in Belfast, in 1841, Rev. Henry Cooke attributed the prosperity of Ulster under the Union to the ‘genius of industry’ combined with the ‘genius of Protestantism’. Niall Ó Ciosáin has written of how begging distinguished Ireland from Britain in the nineteenth century, and, in some contemporary discourse, came to represent Ireland. ‘This was so not just because the beggars themselves demonstrated the poverty and character flaws of the Irish, but also because, to Protestant observers, their existence represented the Catholicism of those who gave to them’. By the 1830s, the motif of the beggar was applied to the Irish Catholic MP Daniel O'Connell, who became, in conservative Protestant discourse, ‘the big beggarman’ or ‘the king of the beggars’. The association with mendicancy arose from O'Connell's innovative fundraising campaign, through which even the poor could contribute small amounts to the annual ‘Catholic Rent’ or the ‘O'Connell tribute’, the Catholic Association's funding system for remunerating O'Connell during his

67 Ibid., ii, p. 147.
68 BNL, 26 Jan. 1841.
69 Ó Ciosáin, Ireland in official print culture, p. 122.
parliamentary career.\textsuperscript{70} His enemies dismissed the ‘O’Connell tribute’ as ‘collecting the annual alms for the Mendicant-General of Ireland’, through the means of the ‘beggarly Repeal Society’ and the ‘Repeal begging box’;\textsuperscript{71} in Ó Ciosáin’s succinct judgement, ‘this was a big beggar begging from many smaller ones’.\textsuperscript{72}

In 1830, two clergymen attached to the London-based Irish Evangelical Society recorded their impressions of their recent visit to Ireland, noting that:

\begin{quote}
The moment we put our feet on the shore of poor Ireland we were met by the most disgusting evidence of the pauperism and the superstition of its population, as our alms were solicited with those obtestations which at once betrayed the baneful tenets of the religion its inhabitants profess. This characterised every stage of our journey in the southern and central parts of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

Without asserting the explicit comparison, the authors made clear that mendicancy was endemic in those parts of Ireland where Catholicism predominated among the population and the Protestant north was excluded from this sweeping statement. The point, however, was made more explicitly ten years later in a newspaper article entitled ‘The Irish Presbyterians: effects of Presbyterianism in Ireland’, published in the Edinburgh-based The Witness, an evangelical Church of Scotland title, and reprinted in the Belfast News-Letter. The anonymous author, recounting a recent trip to Ireland and writing for a Scottish Presbyterian audience, contrasted ‘the smiling comfort, prosperous agriculture, busy enterprise, and quiet security of the Presbyterian North’ with the rest of the country, where ‘crowds of beggars … swarm in those districts where Popery sits like a night-mare on the energies of the population’. The recurring image of ubiquitous beggary prevailing in the largely Catholic south and west was deployed effectively by the author, and the reader could not be unaware of the associations made between ‘Popery’, idleness and mendicancy:

\begin{quote}
Let any man pass from Drogheda, where this pestilence of beggary and moral degradation first meets the stranger as he goes south, to Dublin, where may be seen, not only in the streets, but at the
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., pp. 121–4.
\textsuperscript{71} Downpatrick Recorder, 20 Nov. 1841, 24 Apr. 1841.
\textsuperscript{72} Ó Ciosáin, Ireland in official print culture, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{73} Irish Evangelical Society minute book, 14 Sept. 1830 (PRONI, Irish Evangelical Society papers, CR7/2/A/1/5).
\end{footnotes}
Mendicity House, appalling exhibitions of teeming wretchedness. Let him pass on to Limerick, marking, as he journeys, the striking contrast between the richness of the soil, the greenness of the natural verdure, and the starved and ragged-looking population, who besiege the coach with their importunities, and pour out their fluent blessings or ready imprecation at every halting place, according to their success or failure in extorting money.

In Galway, the writer observed ‘crowds of beggars on every side’ and implicitly linked this mendicancy to the fact that there was ‘no trade flourishing but priestcraft – none well-fed but Priests’. To demonstrate the stark contrast between the extent of Irish beggary outside of Ulster and the alleged absence of this practice in the north-east, the author concluded by figuratively conveying his readers to Belfast, ‘the capital of Presbyterianism’. He wrote: ‘Arrived at Belfast, let him observe the stir and enterprise, the wide streets, the handsome buildings, the well-dressed people, the nearly total absence of importunate beggars, the harbour filled with vessels which trade with all the world, and the signs of comfort and industry which everywhere prevail’.74

These comments, made by and for Presbyterians, reflected wider Protestant fears and suspicions towards Roman Catholic priests, who were seen as the disseminators of superstitious error and political radicalism, and who consciously ensnared their impoverished flock in conditions of poverty and, worse still, pauperism. To Protestants fired up with the zeal of evangelicalism and the ‘Second Reformation’, eager to disseminate the Bible and to fortify their missionary work through conversions to ‘true religion’, priests were accused of actively thwarting scripture reading among their parishioners, indicating the contrasting emphasis placed by Protestants and Catholics on the significance of the Bible in their religious practice.75 Many of the social, economic and political ills of Ireland were attributed to the dominance of ‘Popery’ and ‘priestcraft’ throughout the country, a centuries-old association in the Protestant mind between Roman Catholicism and

75 State of Ireland select committee, fourth report, 1825, pp. 494–501; A review of the existing causes which at present disturb the tranquillity of Ireland, recommended to the serious attention of landholders, the established clergy, and the Hibernian Sunday School Society: also, an exposure of the system adopted by the Roman Catholic clergy to deter their flocks from reading the sacred scriptures (Dublin, 1822), pp. 14–15; [James Carlile], Memorial recommending the establishment of a mission to the Roman Catholics of Ireland (Dublin, 1825), p. 7.
superstition which resurfaced during the sectarian tensions of the 1820s and 1830s.\footnote{Moffit, \textit{Society for Irish Church Missions}, pp. 1–45. For the perception of priests as instigators of sectarian violence and murder in the 1798 Rebellion, see James Kelly, \textit{Sir Richard Musgrave, 1746–1818: Ultra-Protestant ideologue} (Dublin, 2009), pp. 71–83; Holmes, \textit{The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice}, pp. 101–2.}

Ironically, as S.J. Connolly has shown, this period saw in the Irish Catholic prelates and clergy a determination to rein in folkloric, non-orthodox practices. This suppression of ‘all incantations, charms and spells; all superstitious observations of omens and accidents; and such nonsensical remarks\footnote{Butler’s \textit{Catechism}, p. 41.} was undertaken with such zeal that some commentators remarked of Catholic priests becoming more Protestant in their manners and customs.\footnote{Connolly, \textit{Priests and people}, pp. 110–15.} Crucially, this period also witnessed the growing confidence of Irish Catholicism, mobilised into a significant political force by Daniel O’Connell with the support of Irish priests.\footnote{Patrick M. Geoghegan, \textit{King Dan: the rise of Daniel O’Connell, 1775–1829} (Dublin, 2008), pp. 231–2, 258.} In a Famine-era tract, Rev. John Edgar conveyed to ‘Presbyterian Ulster [and] Presbyterian Scotland’ the need to bring enlightenment, regeneration and spiritual freedom to the poor of Ireland, thus negating the effects of what he termed ‘The Priest’s Curse’.\footnote{John Edgar, \textit{The General Assembly’s Irish schools. The priest’s curse} (n.p. [Belfast?], [c.1847]), p. 16.} In a later publication on the Presbyterian missions in Connaught, Edgar lamented: ‘Whatever other ills have been driven from Connaught, Popery is there still, with all its priests, palsying human energy, darkening human intellect, crushing human liberty, besotting human mind’.\footnote{John Edgar, \textit{Connaught harvest} (Belfast, 1853), p. 5.} Whereas the missionaries toiled daily in teaching poor girls skills so as to encourage them to become self-reliant and economically independent, the local priest was accused of subjecting these families to ‘persecution’ in keeping them ‘ignorant, and idle, and ragged, penniless, and hopelessly poor’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 6.}

Turning to Belfast, it will be seen that these Presbyterian fears and suspicions of Catholics must be placed in the context of demographic changes in the northern town. Eighteenth-century Belfast had been, in Gillespie and Royle’s words, ‘an overwhelmingly Presbyterian town’, with an estimated two-thirds of its population being Presbyterian in 1792. Furthermore, wealth in the region was firmly in Protestant hands: an 1818 estimate of the capital employed by Belfast’s merchants listed just seven Catholics whose capital totalled between £49,500 and £70,000, while 134 Protestant merchants were calculated as cumulatively possessing between
£1.7 million and nearly £2.2 million. However, the position of Catholics quickly transformed from being a miniscule proportion of the town’s population (1,000 in 1784, or less than 7 per cent) to a sizeable minority (19,712 in 1834, or around one-third of the population). The immense growth in the town’s Catholic population was reflected in the fact that three of the four Roman Catholic churches in Belfast in 1837 had been erected in the previous 22 years. Migrating Catholics came into Belfast from the surrounding countryside and mainly comprised the impoverished, poorly educated and unskilled. In 1802, Martha McTier, from a well-known radical Presbyterian family, bemoaned the fact that the ‘R Catholics here [are] now a large though poor and unknown body’. That the town’s first sectarian riots occurred in this period is not insignificant and was emblematic of the simmering community tensions. Catholics constituted a disproportionately large element of Belfast’s destitute classes, thus ensuring that the respectable Presbyterian middle classes’ fears of the lower orders were somewhat coloured by confessional mistrust and animosity.

Actions

Irish Protestants were active in cross-denominational efforts to curtail mendicancy, through parish vestries and voluntary charitable societies, such as mendicity societies. In an attempt to gauge whether any unique characteristics of denominational charity can be ascribed to the main Protestant churches and religious societies, attention now turns to how Protestants responded within their own denominations to social problems. In considering the responses of Protestants, in individual and corporate capacities, to mendicancy, it is helpful to start by tackling a fundamental question: did Protestants give alms to beggars? The evidence shows that the answer is yes, many Protestants of all denominations distributed alms to the mendicant poor; furthermore, alms-giving was oftentimes undertaken without discrimination. This is borne out by the evidence

83 Listing of Catholic and Protestant merchants in Belfast, 1818 (BL, Liverpool papers, Add MS 38368, ff. 159–197).
84 Raymond Gillespie and Stephen A. Royle, *Belfast, Part I, to 1840*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 12 (Dublin, 2003), pp. 8, 21. This increase in church-building was not unique to northern Catholicism and of the 31 places of worship across all denominations in Belfast in 1840, 22 (71 per cent) had been built since 1801: ibid., figure 4 (p. 7).
85 Martha McTier to William Drennan, [1802] in Jean Agnew (ed.), *The Drennan–McTier letters, 1802–19* (3 vols, Dublin, 1999), iii, p. 92. McTier added in the same letter: ‘I begin to fear these people, and think like the Jews they will regain their native land’.
presented to the Poor Inquiry in the mid-1830s, taking County Antrim, the heartland of Irish Presbyterianism, as a case study. In Ahoghill parish, where Protestants comprised 79 per cent of the population according to the 1834 revised census,87 ‘the character of the beggar is seldom considered … Alms would be given even when the character of the applicant is unknown’.88 In Antrim parish, ‘Those who give relief to strangers have no knowledge of their character, no criterion whereby to judge of their destitution, except their appearance’.89 In a series of questionnaires which were sent out by the Poor Inquiry to local elites throughout the country, respondents in County Antrim (among whom Protestant clergymen and public figures predominated) acknowledged the practice of alms-giving in their localities.90 In the above examples it was predominantly the lower and lower-middle classes who provided this assistance through indiscriminate alms-giving – cottiers, small farmers and small shopkeepers – and this raises the important question of the extent to which the laity followed the urgings of their preachers. Despite the public utterances of Protestant ministers and commentators, many of their flock continued to dole out alms to beggars without regard to their supposed deservedness, suggesting a discord between the attitudes of the clergy and the lower classes among the laity. As such, the extent to which social class was a factor in guiding how beggars and begging were perceived is essential. In addition to these non-specific comments about Protestant alms-giving, a small number of individual instances can be identified. For instance, the Presbyterian army surgeon John Gamble was won over by the solicitations of beggars in County Monaghan.91 In November 1820, a Dublin mendicant named Anne Marie Byrne, who subsisted ‘by writing begging petitions’, appealed to the British authorities in Dublin Castle for assistance. In her petition, Byrne praised a Quaker grocer, Stephen Dalton of the Coombe, for previously assisting her:

Only for M Daltons family I should be starved to Death with cold and hunger – my shoes was wore out going to the Park. Mr Dalton gave me money to get shoes. Quakers is good to every one. The[y] never ask the person where the[y] go to worship, the[y] show charity to every perswasion, [sic] according as the[y] know the want.92

87 OSM, xxiii, p. 16.
88 PI, Appendix A, p. 703.
89 PI, Appendix A, p. 704.
90 PI, Supplement to Appendix A, pp. 270–93. The existence of indiscriminate alms-giving in this region was also recorded in the Ordnance Survey memoirs: OSM, xxvi, p. 22.
91 Gamble, Sketches of history, politics, and manners, pp. 165, 184–5.
92 Papers relating to Anne Marie Byrne, Nov. 1820 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1821/909).
Elsewhere in the British Isles, Protestants proved the fallacy in the belief that alms-giving was mostly confined to Catholics: Methodist founder John Wesley was a lifelong distributor of alms to the mendicant poor, while the Scottish Poor Inquiry commissioners in the 1840s recorded the prevalence of Church of Scotland parishes licensing local, known beggars, adding that ‘begging is in many places a recognised means of subsistence for paupers’.

Each of the main Protestant and Dissenting denominations oversaw internal relief measures for impoverished and distressed members of their ecclesiastical community; in some instances, however, it is not clear whether the organised relief extended to non-congregants. These initiatives fulfilled the Christian imperative to relieve one’s neighbours, while also concentrating limited resources to known, ‘deserving’ individuals and families. Anglican canon law set down how members of the Church of Ireland were to contribute on a communal level towards the relief of the poor. The 96th canon required churchwardens to provide a ‘strong chest, with a hole in the upper part thereof’ for use as a collection box for the poor, ‘knowing that to relieve the poor, is a sacrifice which pleaseth God’. The collected alms, ‘to be truly and faithfully delivered to their most poor and needy neighbours’, were to be distributed ‘in the presence of most of the parish’, underlining the public nature of parochial alms-giving within the Anglican communion.

This was the context for the requirement that parishes maintain a poor box. In Bumlin parish, County Roscommon (incorporating the town of Strokestown), among the initiatives in the early nineteenth century of the new curate, seemingly eager to introduce order into the administration of parochial affairs, was the purchase of ‘Vestry & Registry Books, & book of common prayer, & two copper boxes for collecting the poor money’. This sense of communal responsibility for the local poor is reflected in the memorials of the dead in Enniskillen parish church, which record two bequests of ‘copper poor-boxes’ from parishioners, dating from 1753

For the identification of Dalton as a grocer, see Wilson’s Dublin directory for the year 1822 ..., p. 60.


94 E.D. Bullingbrooke, Ecclesiastical law; or, the statutes, constitutions, canons, rubricks, and articles, of the Church of Ireland. Methodically digested under proper heads, with a commentary, historical and juridical (2 vols, Dublin, 1770), i, pp. 275–6. Preachers’ books also reveal the regular distribution of alms from weekly collections: Preachers’ book, St Jude’s parish, Muckamore, County Antrim, 1842–56 (PRONI, St Jude’s parish records, CR/1/75/E/1).

95 Bumlin parish vestry minute book, n.d. (RCBL, Bumlin parish records, P 737.5.1, f. 1').
and 1842. The order for the administration of the Holy Communion, as outlined in the Book of Common Prayer, stipulated a point in the service for the collection of ‘Alms for the Poor … in a decent Bason to be provided by the Parish for that purpose’, while the minister could substitute his sermon for one of 21 homilies on prescribed topics, including ‘Of alms-doing’.

Just as in Britain, Irish dissenting communities maintained their own poor and occasionally operated systems for regulating beggary. In Presbyterian congregations, this operated through the kirk session, a meeting of the minister and elected lay elders of each congregation and represented the base of Presbyterianism’s hierarchical series of church courts. The session largely operated as a disciplinary body, ‘trying’ congregants for moral misdemeanours, such as fornication, Sabbath-breaking and habitual drunkenness; these bodies also oversaw the congregation’s distribution of alms to the poor. The Irish kirk session differed from its Scottish counterpart in that it was not the instrument of the state church, a contrast that filtered down to how congregations managed poverty and mendicancy: Irish kirks had no legal powers to curtail mendicancy, whereas in Scotland, since 1592, legislation recognised the session as the appropriate instrument ‘for punishment of masterful beggaris and releif of the puir’. Among the assistance given by Irish kirk sessions to impoverished congregants was the payment of pew rents (negating a regular cause of non-attendance at service) and funeral expenses, the maintenance of ‘deserving’ congregants (such as widows and the blind) and the operation of alms houses and charity

96 Association for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead, Ireland. Journal for the year 1892, ii, no. 1 ([1892]), p. 113.
97 The Book of Common Prayer (Edinburgh, 1818), p. 194. See also Bullingbroke, Ecclesiastical law, i, p. 479.
98 Bullingbroke, Ecclesiastical law, i, pp. 390–1.
100 Holmes, The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice, pp. 35, 166–75.
102 Holmes, The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice, pp. 63, 69; Memorial of the Presbyterian congregation of May Street, Belfast to the Lord Lieutenant, 4 Apr. 1832 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OPI832/404/16).
103 ‘Funeral account book, Rosemary St. Presbyterian Church (3rd), Belfast, 1752–70’ (PRONI, Presbyterian Church records, MIC1P/7/2, microfilm).
104 ‘Report of the session of the Scots Church [Dublin] to the congregation’, 23 May 1831, p. 1 (Abbey Presbyterian Church, Dublin archives, Mary’s Abbey congregation records, book no. 18); Mary’s Abbey poor list account book, 1814–31 (Abbey Presbyterian Church, Dublin archives, Mary’s Abbey congregation records, book no. 13).
Poor assistance was provided to certain of the ‘deserving’ poor from monies received at weekly voluntary church collections and distributed by the kirk sessions. The collection and distribution of this money was carried out on a voluntary basis by ministers and lay elders, and was not conferred on the needy as a matter of right. Surviving Irish kirk sessions books reveal that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries financial assistance was provided to certain of the deserving poor, such as the sick, widows, victims of crime and those who suffered for the sake of their religious beliefs.

Whereas Scottish kirks oversaw into the early nineteenth century a system of parochial badging of local mendicants, known as ‘Kingsmen’ or ‘Bluegownsmen’, owing to the blue coat granted annually by the parish, no such system appears to have been practised by their Irish counterparts. A rare recorded case of an Irish Presbyterian congregation providing begging licences to its local poor arose in 1774 in Ballycarry, County Antrim. Located 8 kilometres north of Carrickfergus and 23 kilometres north of Belfast, Ballycarry (or Broadisland) is the oldest Presbyterian congregation in Ireland; it was here that Rev. Edward Brice established a presbytery in 1613. In February 1774, the congregation’s kirk session adopted a detailed resolution which ordered its members not to give alms to ‘foreign Vagrants’ and divided the local poor into three categories. The division, and the prescribed manner of dealing with such individuals, adhered to Calvinist views of the virtue of private, voluntary charity: John Calvin pointed to St Paul’s writings in his championing of the virtue of ‘the rich spontaneously and liberally relieving the wants of their brethren, and not grudgingly or of necessity’, while the Scottish Reformation leader John Knox distinguished between ‘stubborne and idill beggaris, quho … mak a craft of their beggyng’ and

105 Wright, *Historical guide to Dublin*, pp. 97–100.
107 For instance, see Aghadowey Presbyterian Church kirk session minute book, printed note inside front cover (Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland Archive, Aghadowey Presbyterian Church records, no reference number); ibid., 7 Aug. 1704, f. 16; Carnmoney Presbyterian Church kirk session poor list, 18 Mar. 1782 (Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland Archive, Carnmoney Presbyterian Church records, MIC/1P/37/6, microfilm).
109 Typed copy of the Ballycarry (Broadisland) Presbyterian Congregation kirk session minute book, 20 Feb. 1774 (PRONI, Calwell papers, D3784/4/11). I am grateful to Dr Andrew Holmes for pointing me in the direction of this source.
‘personis of honestie’ whose indigence ought to be relieved.111 According to the 1774 Ballycarry kirk session resolution, those poor ‘who are incapable of using any Industry; but capable of moving from House to House’ were to be provided with begging badges and were to receive no alms from the public collections. Those ‘who are capable of using some Industry; but not sufficient for their support’ were to be afforded assistance from local inhabitants ‘in a private Way according to their several abilities’. They were also entitled to receive no more than 6½d. per month from the public collections. The third class, ‘who are neither capable of any Industry, nor yet able to crawl from House to House for support’, were to receive alms from the Sabbath collections.112

A number of points merit discussion. Persons in the first category of paupers were to be provided with the means to support themselves, through licensed begging. Any alms proffered to them were at the discretion of local inhabitants, thus avoiding the burden of a compulsory rate and any entitlement to relief for the destitute. Similarly, regarding the second category, it was merely recommended to locals that such persons be assisted – there was to be no compulsion – and the amount allowed to the poor from the collections was, by public consensus, subject to a maximum figure. Those of the third category were to be assisted through the public collections, but in the event that such funds were found to be insufficient, it was ordered that ‘the Minister Do make Representations of such Insufficiency to the Congregation’. Again, the importance of avoiding compulsion was underlined. Local inhabitants were, moreover, subject to expected behavioural norms and duties. As these measures were internal communal agreements, and had no grounding in civil law, the penalty for failing to meet the expected standards was congregational disapproval and possible expulsion. The resolution continued:

Resolved that any Inhabitant within the Bounds of this congregation, who gives alms of Lodging to a Vagrant Beggar (unless in a case of Starving) is and will be deemed an Enemy to industry and the real Poor, as well as to the good order of this Congregation. – and that any of our own Poor, who shall hereafter lodge or harbour a foreign Beggar shall be deemed to have thereby forfeited the Protection and Support of this Congregation.

For local named persons to be approved for a begging badge, their nomination had to be sanctioned at a ‘publick Meeting’.113 The relief of poverty and

112 Typed copy of the Ballycarry kirk session minute book, 20 Feb. 1774.
113 Ibid.
handling of beggars within the Presbyterian congregation was subject to the public approval of the community, wherein operated an independent system of social welfare and moral regulation.

The detailed outline here of the agreed manner for negotiating mendicancy is fascinating. Yet, it raises the question of just how representative this instance was within Irish Presbyterian congregations. Consultation of kirk session books for congregations throughout Ireland reveals examples of assistance being provided to the distressed, but no other instance of such a detailed process for dealing with beggars has yet come to light. The evidence for Scotland suggests that the rarity of beggars’ appearance in kirk session books does not mean that alms-giving was not carried out; rather, that it was conducted by individuals acting in a private capacity, usually at communions and other public occasions.114 Such poor relief ‘was part of the general social obligation of a Christian community, an obligation so central that it was very rarely explicitly laid down … Silence on the subject … comes from the assumptions of basic morality, not from indifference’.115

Within Irish and British Methodism, beggary and destitution were managed through a network of charities called Strangers’ Friend Societies (SFSs). This movement emerged in the late eighteenth century and societies were specifically designed to cater for the non-local, non-Methodist poor in large urban centres. Methodists also organised relief funds for impoverished members of their own congregation.116 As with most charities founded in this period, the SFSs allocated their resources to the assistance of the ‘respectable’, typically industrious poor, who were too ashamed to resort to public begging; such individuals were assisted with money, food and clothes. The establishment of these charities was in response to the social problems associated with a rapidly growing population, the surge of industrialisation and the influx of non-local rural dwellers into towns and cities in search of work or relief, who were in want of a support network on which to fall back in times of distress. These charities drew explicitly upon the example of Christ in developing their modus operandi, which centred on home visitations. Their name was inspired by a passage from the gospel of Matthew (25:35–36): ‘For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me’, and this extract was usually included on the title page of

114 Mitchison and Leneman, Sexuality and social control, pp. 36–7.
116 William Smith, A consecutive history of the rise, progress, and present state of Wesleyan Methodism in Ireland (Dublin, 1830), p. 204.
annual reports. By the early nineteenth century, approximately twenty SFSSs had been founded by Methodists throughout Ireland and Britain, invariably in large urban centres where there were significant and active Methodist communities. In Ireland, they were to be found in Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Waterford and Armagh.117

Strict rules specifically omitted habitual mendicants from the remit of the SFSSs. Such an exclusionary policy was enforced by the Dublin SFSS, founded by Methodist preacher Dr Adam Clarke in 1790. In a 1799 pamphlet, Clarke, also influential in the foundation of SFSSs in Bristol (1786), Liverpool (1789) and Manchester (1791), informed his readers that ‘however deplorable the state of street Beggars may appear, they are not in general the most necessitous’, while advising subscribers that mendicants ‘are not proper objects of your Charity’.118 Instead, the Dublin organisation focused its resources on the poor who inhabited wretched cellars and garrets throughout the city’s slums, who did not resort to public begging and, in many instances, had no network of relatives or friends on which to fall back; the redeeming of artisans’ pawned tools and the payment of prisoners’ debts, allowing them to return of ‘habits of industry’, was typical of the form of assistance provided.119 The suffering of these ‘deserving’ individuals could only be truly relieved through home-visiting, an innovation of Methodist charity volunteers, who built upon the precedent of Methodism’s founder John Wesley.120 Drawing inspiration from the example of Christ in working among the sick and distressed, Wesley demanded that he and other Methodists had personal contact with the people they were relieving:

How better is it, when it can be done, to carry relief to the poor than send it! And that both for our own sakes and theirs. For theirs, as it is so much more comfortable to them, and as we may then assist them in spirituals as well as temporals; and for our own, as it is far more apt to soften our hearts and makes us naturally care for each other.121

118 [Adam Clarke], The nature, design, and general rules of the Strangers’ Friend Society, as established in Dublin, 1790 (Dublin, 1799), pp. 3, 6.
119 Annual report of the Strangers’ Friend Society (founded in 1790) for visiting and relieving distressed strangers and the resident sick poor, in Dublin and its vicinity; with an account of some of the cases relieved, and list of subscribers for 1840 (Dublin, 1841), p. 18; For the year 1806. The annual report of the Strangers’ Friend Society, as established in Dublin, in 1790 (Dublin, 1807), pp. 11–12.
Subscribers to SFSs were assured that those relieved formed ‘a most deserving class of the community. It will at once be seen that they are not the noisy importunate beggars, who impede our progress in the streets, hang about our doors, taking every opportunity to exhibit their misery’. The testimonies of several officers of the Dublin society to the Poor Inquiry reveal that the merits of helping the ‘deserving’ poor, while excluding those whose destitution was self-inflicted, prevailed throughout the institution. Such sentiments were not merely for the purposes of public pronouncements but were deeply held by the Methodist members of the charity. Treasurer Francis White spoke of the fundamental importance of the visitors investigating each case so as to determine the moral disposition of the applicants. ‘The grounds of refusal of relief are want of good character, or the same person attempting to obtain relief from more than one visitor, or having been recently relieved; by want of character I mean where distress has been brought on by drunkenness, extravagance, or indolence, or breach of moral duties’. White added that, ‘there is nothing exclusive in the institution; all persons in distress and of good character are eligible for relief, except common beggars’. Secretary John Ouseley Bonsall, a bookseller by occupation, explained that those whose descent into destitution arose ‘from their own faults’ were excluded from the charity’s remit. The Belfast SFS insisted in its public pronouncements that its beneficiaries were visited by volunteers before being relieved, ‘to prevent imposition’ and ensure that ‘real distress’ was being targeted.

British members of the SFS movement framed their charitable works according to the same model of deservedness. Just as the Manchester Strangers’ Friend Society insisted that it only relieved ‘proper objects’, thus excluding ‘all kinds of Street Beggars [and] Vagrants’, the Bristol society promoted the idea that ‘giving alms to mendicants, without any inquiry as to their necessities, appears to be an encouragement to an idle profession; and as a system of intimidation is now adopted by these vagrants, it is a duty incumbent to resist their demands’. An interesting question is whether these charities, in drawing strict distinctions between who was and was not eligible to receive assistance, had veered significantly from the world view

122 Annual report of the Strangers’ Friend Society (founded in 1790) for visiting and relieving distressed strangers, and the resident sick poor, in Dublin and its vicinity; with an account of some of the cases relieved, and the list of subscribers for 1831 (Dublin, 1832), p. 4.
123 PI, Appendix C, Part II, p. 17.
124 Ibid., p. 18.
125 BNL, 30 Dec. 1808.
127 Bristol Mercury, 21 Dec. 1830.
espoused by Methodism’s founder, John Wesley, whose lifelong mission of extending a charitable hand to all persons in need included doling out alms to beggars with, according to one historian, ‘almost Franciscan abandon’.

Quakers’ monthly meetings, the lowest rung on the denomination’s organisational ladder, operated a poor committee to cater for local distressed Friends. The corporate responses of Quakers to poverty were, therefore, limited to their own community. It was left to individual Quakers’ own initiative to engage in charity aimed at other denominations. One explanation of this may be that the profoundly individualistic nature of Quaker life and the structure of Quaker meetings encouraged greater personal responsibility than in other denominations. On a more practical level, the limited nature of Quaker corporate relief may be attributed to the small size of the Irish Quaker community, which paled in comparison to Catholics, Anglicans and Presbyterians. The assistance which could be generated from within the community was limited and most effective when focused at the distressed within the same community.

The utility of assisting distressed Friends, so as to keep them from penury and pauperism, was also stressed in Quaker meetings, which promoted industrious habits and the education of children. In the mid-seventeenth century, a meeting in north Yorkshire was advised that ‘each particular Meeting should be expected to care for its own poor; to find employment for such as want work or cannot follow their former callings for reason of the evil therein … and to help parents in the education of their children, that there may not be a beggar amongst us’. A mid-eighteenth-century query form distributed to meetings throughout Ireland enquired into the moral condition of the community, asking: ‘Are the Poor taken due care of, and do their Children partake of necessary learning to fit them for Trades?’ Monthly meetings relieved the temporal suffering of Friends in a variety of ways: in Waterford the provision of cash sums ‘for the use of a friend in straitened circumstances’ was a regular item of expenditure at the turn of the century; the Lisburn meeting’s poor committee outlined its object as providing ‘for the care of poor friends in the Bounds of the Mo[nthly]

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132 Waterford Friends monthly meeting poor house accounts, 13 July 1799 (FHLD, Waterford monthly meeting records, MM XI P2); ibid., 9 Nov. 1799, 28 June 1800, 14 Feb. 1801.
Meeting of Lisburn;\textsuperscript{133} the Cork city meeting maintained pensioners on its poor list, purchased medicines for poor Friends and even paid for mentally ill members to be treated at the York Retreat, an English asylum which catered solely for insane Quakers.\textsuperscript{134} The importance of self-reliance and independence is evident in the Cork monthly meeting’s decision in September 1844 to discontinue Mary Corlett’s weekly allowance ‘as her son in law disapproves of her being dependent on the Society for support and is desirous of making adequate provision for her himself’. The same meeting discontinued Thomas Sinton’s weekly allowance:

as it appears not only that he is of ability to earn a livelihood, suited to his present condition but also that he has sufficient open and opportunity so to do, and it is the judgement of this committee that a man so circumstanced, and in the prime of life and health, is not of the class for whom the Society’s provision was ever designed or with whose maintenance it ought to be burdened.\textsuperscript{135}

The decision by Martha Robinson to refuse the offer of ‘suitable apartments both to reside, and to work in’ was not met with approval and it was resolved ‘it is not reasonable that our Monthly meeting should any longer contribute to her rent’.\textsuperscript{136} These instances, all taken from the minutes of the same meeting, demonstrate communal approval for personal responsibility and taking care of one’s own relatives, as well as disapproval for unwarranted idleness and aversion to industry.

\textit{Protestant Women, Poverty and Mendicancy}

Women are noticeably absent from the above discussion on Protestant approaches to poverty, charity and beggary, reflecting the relatively limited role for women in the realm of public philanthropy in this period. Women were not members of mendicity societies or Strangers’ Friend Societies, and they did not generally serve on parish vestries or kirk sessions. Where Protestant women were active within the philanthropic sphere was, first, in

\begin{footnotes}
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\item Lisburn Friends monthly meeting poor committee minutes, n.d. (PRONI, Records of the Religious Society of Friends in Ulster, MIC16/21, f. 1, microfilm).
\item Cork Friends Poor Committee minutes, 5 Mar. 1826 (FHLD, Cork monthly meeting records, MM VIII P1, first book, f. 18'); Cork Friends Poor Committee minutes, 3 Nov. 1810 (FHLD, Cork monthly meeting records, MM VIII P4); Cork Friends Poor Committee minutes, 3 Aug. 1848 (FHLD, Cork monthly meeting records, MM VIII P5); ibid., 26 July 1849, 25 Feb. 1863. See also Richard S. Harrison, \textit{Merchants, mystics and philanthropists: 350 years of Cork Quakers} (Cork, 2006), pp. 56–7.
\item Cork Friends Poor Committee minutes, 9 Sept. 1844 (FHLD, Cork Monthly Meeting records, MM VIII P1, third book, f 8'); ibid., ff. 8’–9’.
\item Cork Friends Poor Committee minutes, 9 Sept. 1844.
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auxiliaries to male-run Bible societies, involved directly in the distribution of Bibles to the poor, and, secondly, in charities that focused on sick and poor women and children, such as lying-in charities, orphan houses and educational establishments. The two types of charitable initiatives complemented each other, as an ignorance of the teachings of Christ and ‘true religion’ was held to cause poverty. As with their Catholic counterparts, Protestant women’s role in charity was focused on providing temporal and spiritual succour to poor women and children while attempting to instil ‘habits of industry’, independence and self-restraint. ‘The foundation of charity for these women was the example of Christ and its purpose was to provide the poor with the means of taking responsibility for their own lives. They did not provide alms indiscriminately but attempted to teach the poor thrift and religion’.137

Instances of Protestant women’s involvement in the direct provision of relief include (to select just a small sample) the ladies’ poor committees within Quaker meetings,138 the Ladies’ Association ‘for attending to the poor of the [Presbyterian] Scots Church’ at Mary’s Abbey, Dublin139 and, in a later period, Ellen Smyly’s Anglican-ethos ragged schools in the Dublin slums.140 However, the most relevant example to this study of approaches to mendicancy is the work of Mary Ann McCracken and the Ladies’ Committee of the Belfast Charitable Society in the town’s poorhouse, which opened in 1774 for the suppression of street begging through institutional-based relief initiatives and a system of badging. The Charitable Society was founded and run by members of Belfast’s largely Presbyterian, liberal middle classes.141 McCracken, whose own family was steeped in the political, intellectual, cultural, social and economic life of the growing town, was the main driver of the Ladies’ Committee, being a joint-founder in 1824 and regularly the only attendee at meetings; the committee’s eventual decline in 1851 came about through McCracken’s advanced years and the lack of enthusiasm for a successor. The committee served as a subsidiary to the

138 Dublin Friends women’s monthly meeting poor committee minutes, 1791–1855 (FHL DL, women’s monthly meeting, Dublin papers, MM II B3, MM II B4, MM II B5); Cork Friends women’s monthly meeting poor committee minutes, 1786–1883 (FHL DL, women’s monthly meeting, Cork papers, MM VIII P2).
139 Scotch Church, Mary’s Abbey annual reports, 1830–62 (Abbey Presbyterian Church, Dublin, Mary’s Abbey congregation records, book no. 18).
140 Preston, Charitable words, pp. 74–82.
141 The most comprehensive account of this institution remains Strain, Belfast and its Charitable Society. For the town’s Presbyterian middle classes at this period, see Wright, ‘Natural leaders’, passim; W.H. Crawford, ‘The Belfast middle-classes in the late eighteenth century’ in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism and rebellion (Dublin, 1993), pp. 62–73.
Charitable Society’s all-male management committee and oversaw gendered work among the female paupers, such as laundry work, needlework and straw-plaiting. However, McCracken devoted particular attention to the fate of pauper children apprenticed to tradespeople in the town, reflecting the wider gendered pattern within Irish and British philanthropy for poor children to be dealt with by women, owing to the ‘maternal role attributed to women’. In proposing a system of regular visitation on the apprentices, as well as inviting them back to the poorhouse for an annual dinner, McCracken sought ‘to inspire self-respect and raise them from their present degraded state of neglected outcasts’. The moral condition of the children also concerned her and the encouragement of attendance at Sunday school and public worship would, she suggested, contribute to their overall moral improvement. For philanthropic women such as McCracken, keeping poor children out of the public streets and training them to ‘habits of industry’ was the most effective means of mitigating the moral and social ‘evil’ of unrestrained beggary.

**Conclusion**

Protestant discourses and actions on the questions of poverty, the Poor Law and begging in pre-Famine Ireland were shaped by different theological and political influences from Roman Catholic approaches. In considering poverty and the place of the poor in society, Protestant evangelicals laid more emphasis on the spiritual state of the distressed than on their temporal wants, as seen in the contrasting views put forward by Richard Woodward in the third quarter of the eighteenth century and contributors to the *Christian Examiner*, such as Robert Daly, decades later. The bestowing of any amount of alms to the poor would not mitigate the fact that they remained weighed down by original sin until such a time as they were reborn in Christ. Evangelicalism also manifested itself in the proliferation of religious and philanthropic societies, many of which concentrated their efforts on the threat and impact of mendicancy. Yet, this examination of Protestant views on begging is not limited to a consideration of evangelicalism. The case of Richard Whately reflects the significance of thinkers such as Malthus on a generation of Protestant social reformers, who perceived a natural relationship between the moral teachings of Christianity and the benefits accruing from theoretical and statistical studies in political economy. Each

of the main Protestant churches and religious societies operated their own system of managing poverty and the poor, and in regulating mendicancy, either directly or indirectly. The Irish kirk sessions mirrored their Church of Scotland counterparts in adhering to a traditional Calvinist model of collecting and distributing alms on a voluntary basis, it being held that such an approach protected, first, the recipient from the corruptive power of dependency and, secondly, the giver from the burden of compulsory assessment. Alms were not distributed without qualification to beggars but were doled out to ‘deserving’ paupers who were subject to communal regulation and moral judgement; similar practices were in place in Irish Quakerism and Methodism. The Church of Ireland's congregationally based responses are strikingly different, with more stringent guidelines, as set out in ecclesiastical law, on the operation of a poor box and the place of charity within the liturgy. Yet, despite these nuances, many of the attitudes and responses of Protestants to beggary mirrored those of Catholics: distinctions were commonly drawn between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ supplicants; alms-giving was, nonetheless, widely carried out and done so largely by members of the lower classes; clergy and middle-class commentators and reformers were most likely to decry the indiscriminate alms-giving and extol the virtues of ‘discrimination in charity’; and women’s performance of public charity was limited and determined by gendered expectations on the propriety of such works, with ladies’ charitable initiatives focused on poor women and children.