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James Murray. *Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590.* Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 374 pp. $120.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-77038-5.

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The Failed Reformation

If the religious changes of early modern England continue to bedevil historians, the Reformation in Ireland presents an even greater complexity. On the one hand, certain points are clear and inarguable. Ireland, for one, did not get a Protestant Reformation but an English Protestant Reformation, imposed from above and by statute, and existing within a larger context of Tudor colonization and dispossession. And the Reformation of course, ultimately failed in Ireland, even as political and military conquest proceeded forward with violent effectiveness. But why and when precisely did this Reformation fail, particularly in the Pale, and can such terms as "success" and "failure" even be utilized to describe the sometimes conciliatory and often moderate religious policies enacted over the course of the sixteenth century? For that matter, how did enforcement of such policies actually proceed? And what role did political figures, and viceroys in particular, play in shaping religious policy, in relation to archbishops and ecclesiastics? In the last forty years, the most notable historians of early modern Ireland, including Brendan Bradshaw and Nicholas Canny, have weighed in on these questions, with lively if at times contentious results; building on this work, and these debates, is James Murray's *Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland*, an essential contribution based on original research that proposes a few convincing theories of its own.

Working from difficult if at times scanty sources, Murray constructs a highly detailed analytical narrative of the Reformation policies enacted in the diocese of Dublin from the reign of Henry VIII through Elizabeth. According to one of the book's main arguments, the enforcement of Tudor religious policies was, with the exception of the reign of Mary, subject to (and ultimately felled by) an ongoing struggle between "reforming archbishops enjoined to use the conventional ecclesiastical structures for reformist purposes and a clerical conservative elite which was equally determined to maintain its traditional stranglehold over those same structures and to use them for its own, essentially Catholic, ideological ends" (p. 17). This Anglo-Norman elite–"Catholic and English to the core"–had developed its identity over the course of centuries, claiming St. Patrick's Cathedral as its administrative "nerve centre" and "most potent symbol," and assiduously upholding the principles of the papal bull *Laudabiliter* (1155), which was used to justify the conquest of Ireland by the English Crown (pp. 49, 33). Indeed, the "threat of the Irishry," including the perceived "fundamental lawlessness and inherent canonical deviancy of Gaelic Irish politics and society," did as much to define this Pale community as one that "preserved English ecclesiastical order and canonical rectitude" as well as the larger "Christian values" that stood behind them (pp. 58, 62, 78).

When the break with Rome came, Murray writes, it was not the assertion of the royal supremacy that elicited such consternation so much as the Crown's "disregard for the independence and liberties of the clerical estate, [which] undermined or threatened to destroy virtually every element of the clerical elite's ethos, including the political basis of the *Laudabiliter* settlement, the intellectual and legal foundations of their cherished notions of canonical correctness, and even their own hallowed position in Pale society" (p. 80). The figure who was charged

with enforcing these changes, and thus became the recipient of the attendant suspicions, was the archbishop of Dublin, beginning with George Browne, to whom Murray devotes two lengthy chapters. Browne's difficulties in the 1530s, however, rested not so much in a concerted clerical opposition but–as Murray writes–in "the fitful nature of the king's and Cromwell's interest in Ireland, and the restricted nature of royal authority there," as well as a general mistrust between Crown and magnates that got off to a bad start with the Kildare revolt in 1534 (p. 95). Though such weaknesses could allow the space for clerical resistance to emerge, Murray proceeds to concentrate on Browne's policies, including the imposition of legal measures enacted in the 1537 Irish Reformation parliament that would, along with visitations by the archbishop himself, ensure clerical obedience and conformity, at least in the Pale. The suppression of the monasteries allowed Browne to further weaken the resistance of the corporate clergy, to the point where the Reformation proceeded to make "significant headway" that was interrupted not by the clerical elite's resistance but by Cromwell's fall in 1540 (p. 123).

Though Murray demonstrates that Browne was hardly a "spent force" as a reformer after Cromwell's death, the focus shifts in subsequent chapters to the new and "wily" Lord Deputy Anthony St. Leger, to whom Browne was indebted, not least for the problem of his being married in a period that witnessed a renewed campaign against incontinent priests (p. 143). St. Leger's regime proceeded to merge political and ecclesiastical reform, represented by Henry's acquiring the title of king rather than lord of Ireland in 1541–an event that produced a "muted response" from a clergy rendered vulnerable by the dissolution of its monasteries. More important, however, was the manner in which the now-conservative reforms of the 1540s were made palatable and "congenial" to–and thus co-opting of–that very clergy (p. 134). The emphasis here thus rests not on resistance but on accommodation, even compromise, from both ends of the ecclesiastical spectrum.

The religious settlement of 1542, minutely detailed by Murray, was reinforced by St. Leger instigating various property giveaways that "lured many of Dublin's most senior clergymen into the web of economic and social relationships that he had spun," resulting in "an exceptional period of religious consensus and tranquility" that lasted up through 1546 (p. 180). Murray argues that St. Leger's reform project was even effected in Gaelic Ulster, in conjunction with Archbishop George Dowdall of Armagh, through the use of a canon law that the viceroy hoped would serve as the "transitional legal medium through which he would proceed with the peaceful and gradual assimilation of Gaelic Ulster into a fully anglicized Irish kingdom" (p. 185). These advancements, effecting reform through a "flexible approach," would end not by way of any clerical resistance but through a series of complex political (and religious) events that would ultimately bring the viceroy down and undermine all previous gains (p. 188).

Murray is particularly strong in a chapter examining the restoration of Catholicism during the reign of Mary, arguing that it was not prompted by any "groundswell of popular affection for traditional religion" nor an ideological Counter-Reformation upsurge, but brought forward instead by a group of senior diocesan clergy led by Archbishop Dowdall, an "ultra loyal Palesman" who used the canon law, as his predecessors did, but this time to effect a return to traditional values and to "defend the English political and socio-cultural order" and impose a "standard of civility" on the "wild Irish," at least until the common law took hold (pp. 210, 212). For Dowdall, political reform was thus "synonymous with Catholic religious orthodoxy and traditional canonical rectitude," with his "rejuvenated, independent, and assertive clericalism" exerting an influence on Dublin and representing a victory for the corporate clergy (p. 219). Returning in the following chapter to the diocese of Dublin and Archbishop Hugh Curwen, installed in 1555, Murray further describes the Marian restoration as an "unqualified success," even if the accession of Elizabeth to the throne brought further change, and with it, Curwen's own acceptance of the new oath of supremacy (p. 252). Curwen's regime, however, had "subversive intentions" (in undercutting the Elizabethan settlement at nearly every turn, with the diocese failing to enforce many of the primary tenets of that settlement–itself an act of resistance) (p. 257). In doing so, Murray writes, Curwen's outward conformity succeeded in "throwing a protective veil over the community of the diocese of Dublin," which "ensured that the local and customary attachment to the old religion … would be preserved and consolidated even as the state endeavored to destroy it" (pp. 258-259). The failure of the Reformation in the diocese of Dublin, Murray concludes, was finally consolidated by the religiously involved policies of Lord Deputy Henry Sidney, despite the attempts of the new archbishop, Adam Loftus and his lord chancellor, Robert Weston, to effect a "carefully modulated" and "less coercive approach to enforcement" of Reformation (pp. 265, 267). Murray seems to imply that despite Curwen's legacy of sustaining Catholicism under Mary, the

Reformation might have been somewhat successful with the "conciliatory and gradualist approach" of Loftus and Weston, were it not for the harsh policies of Sidney, the outbreak of more revolts, and the increasingly hard-liner stance of Loftus himself, which "decisively alienated the Pale community" (pp. 284, 316).

Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland is concerned almost solely with how the enforcement of Reformation policies played itself out not among the population at large but with the clerical elite located within the Pale. This does not detract from the book, but one wonders if part of the resistance by that elite involved playing on the sentiments of the people (St. Leger's attempt to downgrade Christ Church, for example, would be abandoned after "agitated opposition from the loyal citizens of Dublin" [p. 168]). While Murray also makes a convincing case in arguing that the persistence of the old faith was due to the "survivalist" attachment of the corporate clergy to traditional and "deeply colonial" Pale values, more might have been written about how those values proceeded to mesh or clash with the later influence of the Counter-Reformation (pp. 317, 318). Finally, and perhaps most important, though Murray writes that he seeks to understand "the nature of the response of the English Irish community to the Reformation," and states that the book is "the story of a generation of clergymen based in St. Patrick's Cathedral," he is as much concerned with the secular and ecclesiastical policymakers themselves as with the clerical opposition that resisted them (pp. 13, 321). Occasionally, the personalities of these figures tends to overshadow the forces that oppose them, just as their policies appear to be a success–until they are not anymore (and not because of any concerted resistance on the part of the clerical elite). Thus, it is not that resistance necessarily killed the policies of the early 1570s, but the illness and death of Weston (and the coercive policies of Sidney, which "would finally and irrevocably crystallize the Pale community's rejection of the Reformation in the late 1570s and early 1580" and beyond [p. 303]). And of course, the changing nature of religious policies among the Tudors also prevented the necessary stability in order for true change to take hold. These caveats aside, *Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland* is an impressive and much-needed work that succeeds in integrating the complex history of the era, and in skillfully examining the successes and failures, the high-flown plans, and the compromised realities, of bringing the Reformation–or the English Reformation–to Ireland.

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