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978-0-521-07636-4 - The Dissolution of the Religious Orders in Ireland under Henry VIII

Brendan Bradshaw

Frontmatter

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IN IRELAND UNDER HENRY VIII

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Fratribus Sodalibus

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Uaigneach a-taoi, a theagh na mbráthar;
beag dod bhuidhnibh tairisi
do-chí tusa i ndáil do dhorchla;
ní náir orchra ar th'airi-si.

Lochlann Ó Dálaigh, *c.* 1600

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Preface

Few historians have had a good word to say for the monks and friars who occupied the religious houses in Ireland at the time of the dissolution, or about those who participated in the campaign to suppress them and enriched themselves from the confiscated properties. This book has a good word to say for both. That it is so I attribute, perhaps predictably, neither to ingenuity nor perversity, but to extreme care to get the evidence in proper focus. To this extent the book has benefited from being written *en passant*. The scope of the original project that brought me to the documentary sources of Henrician Ireland was so broad that I was able to reconstruct the political, social, and economic context in which dissolution took place with greater thoroughness than might otherwise have been.

This book also endeavours to examine the dissolution of the religious orders in the context of developments in sixteenth-century Ireland as a whole. Readers may find that cataclysmic century as it is presented in the following pages strange and unfamiliar. They will recognise the landmarks of rebellion, reformation and plantation. But the mood is different. We are used to having sixteenth-century Ireland presented to us in very sombre colours indeed. I believe that its history is not nearly so gloomy as its historiography. In what follows I indicate briefly the basis of my belief, particularly in examining the history of the suppression campaign under Sir Anthony St Leger, whose conciliatory programme as lord deputy, launched in 1540, substantially influenced the course of modern Irish history. A full demonstration of the thesis must await another occasion. Nevertheless I am moderately confident that those who read this book will share the conviction that there were vast areas of light in the history of sixteenth-century Ireland which the historians have toned down or completely obscured.

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Modern man, I understand, finds litanies, however admirable, a distraction. I may plead the fact to excuse me from reciting here my debt to many who have helped one way or another to bring the work to fruition. But there are a few whom I cannot pass over. Principally I must thank Professor G. R. Elton of Cambridge. I wrote this book because I became convinced that such a work needed to be written, that if I did not write it nobody else would, and that if I did not write it now I should never write it at all. This conviction became an awkward obsession when I was already well into research on another topic as a doctoral student under the supervision of Professor Elton. I must thank him, therefore, for wise and disinterested counsel at that critical stage, and subsequently for lavishing the same care and affection on this project as he is wont to do on those which come within the call of duty. I must also express my deep indebtedness to Professor Rev. F. X. Martin, O.S.A., of University College, Dublin, for unflinching support not only in the course of the present work but ever since I was confided to his charge as a fledgling research student in 1964.

A modicum of conviviality and material comfort helps to make the slog of research and writing more tolerable. I have had the good fortune to enjoy much more than a modicum of both while engaged on this study, through the generosity of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, which granted me a research scholarship and membership of its graduate community at Leckhampton. The necessary research required prolonged visits to the London archival repositories, during which periods the Marist community of St Anne's, Whitechapel, offered me a welcoming home. Finally I should like to thank Mrs Christine Linehan of the Cambridge University Press for kindly and efficient treatment of my typescript and me in the preparation of the work for publication.

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BRENDAN BRADSHAW

St John's College
Cambridge, May 1973

