

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

This book was prompted by an important, but inconclusive, historiographical debate on the failure of the Reformation in Ireland, which took place in the 1970s. Prior to that exchange, virtually all studies of the subject were hopelessly symmetrical. Characterised by *parti pris*, and afflicted by a deterministic vision, the majority of them contended that the Tudor state failed immediately and irreversibly to win the allegiance of the indigenous population to its religious dictates, mainly because of the inherently conservative character of the island's inhabitants. The only significant differences displayed by such studies were their use of opposing confessional models to interpret and explain the nature and significance of Ireland's religious conservatism. For Catholic writers, native conservatism represented a deep-seated and laudable attachment to the ancestral faith of Ireland, which found expression in the people's valiant, and ultimately successful, struggle to preserve the faith in an unsullied form during the Reformation. Protestant writers, in contrast, saw it as a collective character defect, an unremitting force built upon an ingrained and wilful ignorance, which was impervious to the 'true' religion advanced by the 'godly' reformers of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1960s and 1970s this cycle of crude deterministic writing was broken by Brendan Bradshaw, whose pioneering work applied what was, in Irish terms, a fresh series of intellectual templates for the exploration of the Reformation. Earlier attempts to do so, following the emergence of the modern 'scientific' school of historical writing, had been unsuccessful, because the perspectives adopted then were still heavily coloured by confessional concerns, or because the authors themselves – despite the new directions suggested by their own source-based researches – seemed unable to break free from the habits of thought associated with the older tradition. The classic examples of this were Robin Dudley Edwards's *Church and*

<sup>1</sup> J. Murray, 'The Church of Ireland: a critical bibliography, 1536–1992. Part I: 1536–1603', *IHS* 28 (1993), pp. 345–6; A. Ford, "'Standing one's ground": religion, polemic and Irish history since the Reformation', in A. Ford, J. McGuire and K. Milne (eds.), *As by law established: the Church of Ireland since the Reformation* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 1–10.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)

*state in Tudor Ireland* and Canon G. V. Jourdan's contributions on the Reformation in the three-volume *History of the Church of Ireland*.<sup>2</sup> Though Edwards's book was a considerable achievement, his concern to find a 'scientific' explanation for an already accepted fact – that the Irish people's struggle to preserve Catholicism in the sixteenth century contributed to the birth of the Irish national tradition – prevented him from exploring in a more nuanced fashion the complex responses of the Gaelic and English Irish to the Reformation, which his own investigations had begun to uncover. Indeed, it compelled him to employ an emotional rhetoric to explain away discoveries that conflicted with his general thesis: witness his implied criticism of the Palesmen for failing to support 'the scheme of a Catholic and independent Ireland' during the Nine Years War. Canon Jourdan also employed the 'scientific' historical method in writing his very thorough analytical narrative of the Reformation. Yet like Edwards, his work displayed strong links with earlier less scholarly writing. For Jourdan, the failure of the Reformation was due to the inability of the pre-existing, 'uncivilised' Irish culture to engage with Protestantism's more advanced tenets, the crucial factor being the 'general ignorance of the Irish'.<sup>3</sup>

Bradshaw, in contrast, removed the subject out of this insular, polemical and necessarily constrictive setting by treating the Reformation initiative seriously and by placing the movement firmly within its contemporary political and social contexts. Thus in studying the career of Dublin's first Reformation archbishop, George Browne (1536–54), he avoided the traditional stereotypes of the archbishop as an ogre to Catholics and a patriarch to Protestants, and produced the more realistic assessment that he was a desultory royal functionary.<sup>4</sup> By examining the Irish Reformation parliament of 1536–7 in the broader context of the major political concern of the day – the fallout from the failed Kildare rebellion – he uncovered the previously hidden secular motivation that underpinned the laity's opposition to the Henrician ecclesiastical legislation. His dispassionate treatment of the dissolution of the religious orders – as an administrative process with its own internal logic – enabled him to identify the spiritual ennui that affected many late medieval Irish religious houses and to conclude thus that the

<sup>2</sup> R. D. Edwards, *Church and state in Tudor Ireland: a history of the penal laws against Irish Catholics, 1534–1603* (Dublin, 1935); W. A. Phillips (ed.), *History of the Church of Ireland from the earliest times to the present day* (3 vols., Oxford, 1933–4), ii, pp. 169–524.

<sup>3</sup> J. Murray, 'Historical revisit: R. Dudley Edwards, *Church and state in Tudor Ireland* (1935)', *IHS* 30 (1996), pp. 233–41; Edwards, *Church and state*, pp. 301–2; Phillips (ed.), *Church of Ireland*, ii, pp. 244–5; Ford, 'Standing one's ground', p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> B. Bradshaw: 'George Browne, first Reformation Bishop of Dublin' (MA thesis, University College Dublin, 1966); 'George Browne, first Reformation Archbishop of Dublin, 1536–1554', *JEH* 21 (1970), pp. 301–26.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

process was not without some external justification too.<sup>5</sup> Most novel of all, the Reformation in its entirety was examined not as a discrete, climactic spiritual conflict between incipient Catholic Irish and Protestant English nations, but, à la Geoffrey Elton, as an integrated element of a 'constitutional revolution' which the Tudor monarchy wished to impose in all its dominions, including not only Ireland, but also the outlying parts of England and the principality of Wales.<sup>6</sup>

The cumulative effect of this body of work was the development of a new conceptual framework and chronology for the failure of the Reformation in Ireland. The new chronology fell into two phases. In the first, which covered the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, Bradshaw put forward the novel argument that the political community of English Ireland willingly accepted the main alterations made by the Tudors to their traditional religious culture – in particular, the introduction of the royal supremacy – although the advent of radical Protestantism under Edward VI was greeted with much less enthusiasm. The main reason the early Reformation received such a favourable welcome was because it was deliberately linked to the conciliatory programme of political reform, promoted by the crown during the vicerealties of Sir Anthony St Leger. Indeed, this feature also ensured that the Reformation secured some support in Gaelic Ireland. Thus, as the reign of Edward VI came to a premature end, Bradshaw concluded that there was no definitive local response to the religious changes that he and his father had instituted in their Irish dominion.

The second phase of Bradshaw's new chronology, which began in the reign of Mary Tudor, was decisive for two reasons. In the first place, it witnessed the official restoration of Catholicism, which allowed the Counter-Reformation to gain an early foothold amongst the old colonial community in the crucial battleground of the English Pale and its satellite towns. By the 1580s, following a period of confessional struggle ushered in by the enactment of the act of uniformity in 1560, this nascent attachment

<sup>5</sup> B. Bradshaw: 'The opposition to the ecclesiastical legislation in the Irish Reformation parliament', *IHS* 16 (1969), pp. 285–303; *The dissolution of the religious orders in Ireland under Henry VIII* (Cambridge, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> B. Bradshaw: 'The beginnings of modern Ireland', in B. Farrell (ed.), *The Irish parliamentary tradition* (Dublin, 1973), pp. 68–97; 'The Edwardian Reformation in Ireland, 1547–53', *AH* 24 (1976–7) pp. 83–99; *The Irish constitutional revolution of the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, 1979). For more recent restatements of the theme see B. Bradshaw: 'The Reformation in the cities: Cork, Limerick and Galway, 1534–1603', in J. Bradley (ed.), *Settlement and society in medieval Ireland* (Kilkenny, 1988), pp. 445–76; 'The Tudor Reformation and revolution in Wales and Ireland: the origins of the British problem', in B. Bradshaw and J. Morrill (eds.), *The British problem, c. 1534–1707. State formation in the Atlantic archipelago* (Basingstoke and London, 1996), pp. 39–65; 'The English Reformation and identity formation in Wales and Ireland', in B. Bradshaw and P. Roberts (eds.), *British consciousness and identity. The making of Britain 1533–1707* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 43–111.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)

had hardened into a thoroughgoing, ideologically driven recusancy. Secondly, it also coincided with the related political alienation of the colonial community, which was a consequence of the growing loss of office and influence experienced by the reform-minded Palesmen to hard-line English officials in the Dublin administration. The coercive political and religious policies advanced by the new generation of English officials were, according to Bradshaw, philosophically rooted in their pessimistic Calvinist faith, which contrasted sharply with the optimistic Erasmian humanism, and increasingly Catholic bent, of the native reformers. This intellectual split, he concluded, was also important in practical terms as it was responsible for creating a debilitating division over the strategy to be employed by church and state in their combined effort to promote the Reformation in Ireland.<sup>7</sup>

Bradshaw's revision of the traditional story of the Irish Reformation, a story hitherto told in terms of the movement's rapid and absolute failure, was immensely stimulating for Irish historians.<sup>8</sup> Yet it did not receive unqualified acceptance. His pronouncements on the later Reformation, in particular, lacking the same evidential basis as his views on the Henrician and Edwardian periods, were the subject of some trenchant criticism from Nicholas Canny in his essay 'Why the Reformation failed in Ireland: *une question mal posée*'. This critique of the Bradshaw *oeuvre* provided a useful corrective to some of the latter's more exaggerated claims. In particular, he challenged the ideas that the English Irish community and their leaders abandoned the state church in the years immediately following the passing of the act of uniformity, and that most English reformers in Ireland favoured compulsory rather than persuasive methods in promoting the established religion.<sup>9</sup> Yet Canny's essay contained its own distracting exaggeration – that the dating of the failure of the Reformation could be postponed indefinitely – a contention which was subsequently and decisively challenged by Karl Bottigheimer.<sup>10</sup>

Canny's most important contribution to the debate, however, was his identification of areas requiring further research, most notably, the Pale community's attachment to conservative religious practices. This was not, he argued, an attachment to Counter-Reformation norms, but the survival of traditional medieval Catholic forms practised within the established

<sup>7</sup> B. Bradshaw: 'Fr. Wolfe's Description of Limerick city, 1574', *NMAJ* 17 (1975), pp. 47–53; 'Sword, word and strategy in the Reformation in Ireland', *HJ* 21 (1978), pp. 475–502; 'English Reformation and identity formation in Wales and Ireland', pp. 48–54.

<sup>8</sup> K. S. Bottigheimer, 'The Reformation in Ireland Revisited', *JBS* 15 (1976), pp. 140–9; A. Clarke, 'Ireland, 1534–1660', in J. Lee (ed.), *Irish historiography 1970–79* (Cork, 1981), pp. 34–55.

<sup>9</sup> *JEH* 30 (1979), pp. 423–50.

<sup>10</sup> K. Bottigheimer, 'The failure of the Reformation in Ireland: *une question bien posée*', *JEH* 36 (1985), pp. 196–207.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

church; an observation which enabled him to recast one of the key questions concerning the fate of the Reformation in Ireland. If, as was the case in England, survivalist Catholicism or ‘church-papism’ could be turned into an attachment to the state church just as easily as into a devoted loyalty to the Counter-Reformation, its durability in Ireland throughout most of Elizabeth’s reign implied that the fate of the Reformation was far from settled as the sixteenth century drew to a close. The real question to be answered, therefore, was not why the Reformation failed in Ireland, but, as Canny put it, why the movement failed to ‘strike deeper roots when the opportunity to do so still existed down to the 1590s’.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, then, the Bradshaw–Canny debate gave rise to a more intellectually mature version of Ireland’s Reformation story. The sixteenth century is now generally recognised as a period of blurred and ambiguous religious allegiances on the island, until the beginning of Queen Mary’s reign in Bradshaw’s case, until the 1590s according to Canny. Yet in one important respect the impact of the debate has been equivocal. Because of its refreshing novelty, and the resultant tendency of historians to value it for its own sake, it failed, in general, to ignite the kind of sustained and systematic research needed to answer the particular questions which the debate itself raised, or to produce a new and authoritative synthesis on the Irish Reformation generally. Indeed, a number of historians would now argue – perhaps out of a sense of frustration at this paradoxically unproductive outcome – that the debate has led the subject into an intellectual cul-de-sac.

Where such criticism has found expression in print, it has tended to focus, either explicitly or implicitly, on what is perceived to be the unnecessarily narrow conceptual framework upon which the debate was originally conducted. Raymond Gillespie, in his study of the religious experiences and belief systems of the people of early modern Ireland, has been particularly critical of the ‘top down’, institutional framework favoured by Bradshaw and Canny, because it concentrated on the views of the political and clerical elites at the expense of the common religious ideas held by the majority of individuals.<sup>12</sup> A similar dissatisfaction has also been articulated by Karl Bottigheimer and Ute Lotz-Heumann, in their essay ‘The Irish Reformation in European perspective’. Among other things, they take issue with the

<sup>11</sup> Canny, ‘Why the Reformation failed’, pp. 432–5. Bradshaw subsequently conceded that the mass non-conformity encountered by the ecclesiastical commissioners in the Pale in the mid-1560s may well be attributable to survivalism. However, drawing a distinction between religion as ‘practice’ or as a ‘code of behaviour’ (characteristic of survivalism) and religion as ‘ideology’, or ‘confession’, and ‘subscribed to as a form of socio-political identity’ (characteristic of the Counter-Reformation in Ireland), he argues that the English Irish community had adopted the latter as their definitive religious stance by the 1580s (Bradshaw, ‘English Reformation and identity formation in Wales and Ireland’, pp. 48–54).

<sup>12</sup> *Devoted people. Belief and religion in early modern Ireland* (Manchester, 1997).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)

commonly held view, often reiterated by Bradshaw, that Ireland's Reformation experience was unique and, by implication, can be studied in isolation without reference to the Reformation experiences of continental European polities.<sup>13</sup>

At the heart of both of these criticisms is a call for the application of a broader range of conceptual models to the study of religion in early modern Ireland than have been used hitherto. Gillespie, following continental early-modernists like Jean Delumeau and Carlo Ginzburg, advocates the use of sociological and anthropological ideas to describe the religious condition of Ireland from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries; while Bottigheimer and Lotz-Heumann argue strongly for the adoption of the German historiographical concept of 'Calvinist confessionalisation' or 'Second Reformation' to help us understand the Dublin government's efforts to impose the Elizabethan settlement after 1560. Yet, while in principle both of these approaches are to be welcomed, and may in time offer valuable new perspectives, their usefulness at this juncture is questionable. This is because the subject still lacks a critical mass of more basic research, with the result that the exploitation of these newly recommended models, in the same, sophisticated manner as they have been utilised elsewhere, is not yet possible.

Gillespie's analysis of popular religion in early modern Ireland, which suffers acutely from the deficit in the research base, is a case in point. Crucially, as he readily admits, it lacks definition in terms of the charting of chronological change and regional variation in religious ideas and practices,<sup>14</sup> a problem which would have been more readily overcome had he been able to draw upon a greater volume of antecedent studies.<sup>15</sup> The same gaps in our knowledge also raise concerns about the comparative approach employed by Bottigheimer and Lotz-Heumann. The continental analogues that they chose for the religious and ecclesiastical upheavals of sixteenth

<sup>13</sup> *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 89 (1998), pp. 268–309. See also U. Lotz-Heumann, 'Confessionalisation in Ireland: periodisation and character, 1534–1649', in A. Ford and J. McCafferty (eds.), *The origins of sectarianism in Early Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 24–53.

<sup>14</sup> Gillespie, *Devoted people*, p. vii.

<sup>15</sup> A good start in remedying this deficiency has been made through projects like the publication of the Christ Church Cathedral documents series. These make more accessible a number of important texts on the history of the cathedral, and provide valuable information on a range of topics including religious practice in Dublin in the sixteenth century. The relevant texts are: R. Gillespie (ed.), *The proctor's accounts of Peter Lewis 1564–1565* (Dublin, 1996) and *The first chapter act book of Christ Church Cathedral Dublin, 1574–1634* (Dublin, 1997); R. Refaüssé with C. Lennon, *The Registers of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin* (Dublin, 1998); B. Boydell (ed.), *Music at Christ Church before 1800: documents and selected anthems* (Dublin, 1999). See also R. Gillespie and R. Refaüssé (eds.), *The medieval manuscripts of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin* (Dublin, 2006); and K. Milne (ed.), *Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin: a history* (Dublin, 2000).



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

7

and early seventeenth-century Ireland are drawn from mature and abundant historiographies, built upon a rich seam of documentary evidence. By comparison, the historiography of the Irish Reformation is much more modest, is constructed from a relatively meagre body of evidence and provides only a fragmentary and incomplete picture of the religious upheavals of the period. Thus it would be unwise to set too much store on the conclusions they draw from their comparisons until a more detailed view of the progress of the Reformation is built up within both the English and Gaelic areas of the island. When this is achieved, it should be possible to assess more accurately whether the opposition of the Old English community to the English crown's political and religious policies was genuinely akin to the opposition of the Brandenburg estates to the 'state-building' and 'confession-building' policies of their Electors; or whether the Catholic religious stance adopted by the patricians of Dublin city closely paralleled the Lutheran credal allegiance of the burghers of the town of Lemgo in Lippe in the German Empire.<sup>16</sup>

The original agenda set by the Bradshaw–Canny debate, then, remains valid and, in the intervening years, many historians have attempted to build upon their pioneering work. For convenience and ease of classification, it is possible to identify at least four coherent lines of enquiry or approaches that have emerged in the subsequent period, though the demarcation lines between them are not rigid or fixed, and particular works can easily fit into one or more category. The first of these lines of enquiry has concentrated upon the creation of an ideological attachment to the Counter-Reformation amongst the Englishry of Ireland. Following Bradshaw, most historians would accept that this was part of a wider process of alienation from the governing methods of the Tudor regime in Ireland, though disagreement persists about how the process occurred. Ciaran Brady's work on the government of Ireland in the period 1540–80 has cast into doubt Bradshaw's early dating of the Palesmen's alienation by moving forward in time the Tudor regime's adoption of an intrinsically violent and more expropriatory policy, and by questioning the whole notion of a preconceived policy of conquest. He has also put forward an alternative explanation of how their political alienation influenced their religious concerns. For him their disaffection stemmed not from the regime's abandonment of

<sup>16</sup> Bottigheimer and Lotz-Heumann, 'Irish Reformation in European perspective', pp. 293–305. Lotz-Heumann's ideas have been developed much more extensively in her book *Die doppelte Konfessionalisierung in Irland. Konflikt und Koexistenz im 16. und in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 2000). Notwithstanding this, the essential question about whether she is comparing like with like remains unanswered. For a valuable review of Lotz-Heumann's work see H. Robinson-Hammerstein 'Review article: the confessionalisation of Ireland? Assessment of a paradigm', *IHS* 32 (2001), pp. 567–78.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)

their favoured policy of assimilating the Gaelic Irish, but, paradoxically, from the great financial burden that this policy imposed upon their own community, as a result of the Elizabethan governors' efforts to implement it systematically. Yet their distaste for the English administration did not lead directly to their rejection of the state church in favour of the Counter-Reformation. While some border magnates like Viscount Baltinglass did reappraise Ireland's relationship with what they saw as an unacceptably aggressive and Protestant monarchy, and elected to rebel under the papal banner, it was the government's draconian reaction to the revolts, rather than any widespread sympathy for the rebels' treasonable actions, which pushed the Pale community into the arms of the Counter-Reformation.<sup>17</sup>

In broad terms, this analysis has been endorsed by Colm Lennon, whose original research has focused on the development of a post-Tridentine Catholic ideology amongst the 'socially ascendant patricians' of Dublin city and its environs.<sup>18</sup> Adopting a lengthy time-span that charts the transition from nominally conformist and Catholic survivalist religious positions to a fully articulated Counter-Reformation faith, his work on the city's mercantile elite and the gentry in the countryside portrays a social grouping whose general religious attitude was one of uncommitted or nominal conformity to the Church of Ireland until the late 1570s. Thereafter, in response to the actions of an increasingly unpopular government, which included the savage suppression of the Baltinglass and Nugent rebellions, and a new and concerted attack on the privileges and liberties of the city of Dublin, they defined their religious position with growing certitude. This process, which was part of a wider defence of the political and cultural traditions of their community, took place in two stages. First, the social elite assumed a recusant position during the 1580s and early 1590s. Then, during the later 1590s and the first decade of the seventeenth century, they adopted a 'more all-embracing Catholicism', which became evident in the very substantial support they provided for the establishment and

<sup>17</sup> C. Brady: 'Conservative subversives: the community of the Pale and the Dublin administration, 1556-86', in P. J. Corish (ed.), *Radicals, rebels and establishments: historical studies XV* (Belfast, 1985), pp. 11-32; 'Court, castle and country: the framework of government in Tudor Ireland', in C. Brady and R. Gillespie (eds.), *Natives and newcomers. The making of Irish colonial society 1534-1641* (Dublin, 1986), pp. 22-49; *The Chief Governors. The rise and fall of reform government in Tudor Ireland, 1536-1588* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> C. Lennon: 'Recusancy and the Dublin Stanihursts', *AH* 33 (1975), pp. 101-10; *Richard Stanyhurst the Dubliner, 1547-1618* (Dublin, 1981); *The lords of Dublin in the age of Reformation* (Dublin, 1989); 'The chantries in the Irish Reformation: the case of St Anne's Guild, Dublin, 1550-1630', in R.V. Comerford, M. Cullen, J. R. Hill and C. Lennon (eds.), *Religion, conflict and coexistence in Ireland* (Dublin, 1991), pp. 8-25; 'Mass in the manor house: the Counter-Reformation in Dublin 1560-1630', in J. Kelly and D. Keogh (eds.), *History of the Catholic diocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 112-26.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

9

maintenance of a network of mass houses and Catholic clergy throughout the city and county.<sup>19</sup>

The second line of enquiry to emerge after the Bradshaw–Canny debate is concerned with the structural deficiencies of the Church of Ireland. In a closely crafted essay Aidan Clarke sought ‘to recall attention to the existence of very practical reasons why the Church of Ireland should have evolved the way it did’, all of which he showed were intimately connected with its ‘prime dilemma’: how best to proceed with making a Protestant church a social reality given the facts of its statutory inheritance of Catholic personnel, and of medieval institutional structures.<sup>20</sup> At the heart of Clarke’s argument was his definition of these ‘practical reasons’ as insuperable problems of human and material resources, which prevented it from adopting what many contemporaries saw as the solution to its central dilemma: the creation of a learned, preaching ministry through the provision of adequately remunerative livings. For Clarke, this proved to be an impossibility because of the legacy of the Church of Ireland’s medieval past. This legacy, an interlocking of its structures and property with the local community – in particular, the lay impropriation of parochial tithes and the accompanying right to select parochial curates – gave its Catholic enemies proprietary rights over its resources and control over its personnel. Evangelical failure, then, stemmed from the ecclesiastical establishment’s inability to act independently of the local community.

Clarke’s broad overview was supported by Steven Ellis’s ‘Economic problems of the church: why the Reformation failed in Ireland’,<sup>21</sup> which provided a critical introduction to an important and hitherto neglected source: the Irish equivalent of the *valor ecclesiasticus*. Although Ellis’s essay also ranged widely – it included an interesting, though excursive, discussion on the limitations of Tudor government in border societies and how they affected the progress of the Reformation – its main focus is on the Church of Ireland’s resource problems. These are thrown into sharp relief by a very welcome statistical analysis of the clergy’s finances, which is based on the Tudor *valor*, and on Jacobean certificates from the state papers that detail the contemporary wealth of many of the same benefices. It complemented Clarke’s suggestion in its analysis of the state of those livings over which the Church of Ireland did maintain autonomy and control. His conclusion – based on a quantitative comparison of the values of Irish and Welsh

<sup>19</sup> The process is conveniently summarised in C. Lennon, ‘The rise of recusancy among the Dublin patricians, 1580–1613’, in W. J. Sheils and D. Wood (eds.), *The churches, Ireland and the Irish, studies in church history*, xxv (Oxford, 1989), pp. 123–32.

<sup>20</sup> A. Clarke, ‘Varieties of uniformity: the first century of the Church of Ireland’, in Sheils and Wood (eds.), *The churches, Ireland and the Irish*, pp. 105–22.

<sup>21</sup> *JEH* 41 (1990), pp. 239–65.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77038-5 - Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534-1590

James Murray

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ecclesiastical livings, and the assumption that modern evaluations of the significance of Welsh clerical poverty are applicable to the Irish situation – is as dismal as Clarke's. For him, poverty of Irish parochial livings was the central impediment to the Reformation's progress, a view which has had a significant influence on a number of local studies undertaken at county and diocesan levels in the past decade.<sup>22</sup>

The third line of enquiry to appear in the wake of Bradshaw and Canny's early work explores the response of the Gaelic Irish to the Reformation. Subsumed generally under the broader discussion of the Gaelic reaction to the Tudor conquest and the related development of Irish nationality, the subject received considerable attention in the 1990s but, as yet, no interpretative consensus has emerged among those historians engaged in the field.<sup>23</sup> Samantha Meigs, for example, has argued in her book *The Reformations in Ireland. Tradition and confessionalism, 1400–1690*<sup>24</sup> that Catholicism endured in Gaelic Ireland because the medieval Irish religious tradition was inextricably linked with the social and mental structures of the traditional Gaelic world; and that its scholar elites played a very active role in transmitting religious beliefs and practices from one generation to another throughout the Reformation era. Yet while this idea is intriguing, it is not clear – given the very limited treatment afforded by Meigs to the implementation of official religious reform in Gaelic Ireland during the sixteenth century – whether the tradition survived by default, in the face of a weak campaign of enforcement on the part of the Dublin government; or because it was sufficiently strong to withstand the challenge mounted by English Protestantism until such time as it was bolstered by the Counter-Reformation.

Meigs dates the emergence of a Counter-Reformation culture in Gaelic Ireland to the early seventeenth century. Other historians, most notably Brendan Bradshaw,<sup>25</sup> Hiram Morgan<sup>26</sup> and Marc Caball,<sup>27</sup> firmly locate it in the latter half of the sixteenth century, and have identified a number of

<sup>22</sup> See, particularly, H. Jefferies, *Priests and prelates of Armagh in the age of reformations* (Dublin, 1997); M. A. Lyons, *Church and society in County Kildare, c. 1470–1547* (Dublin, 2000); B. Scott, *Religion and Reformation in the Tudor diocese of Meath* (Dublin, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> For a useful introduction to the historiography see S.G. Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors 1447–1603: English expansion and the end of Gaelic rule* (London and New York, 1998), pp. 243–65.

<sup>24</sup> Dublin, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> 'English Reformation and identity formation in Wales and Ireland', pp. 54–61.

<sup>26</sup> 'Hugh O'Neill and the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland', *HJ* 36 (1993), pp. 1–17.

<sup>27</sup> 'Faith, culture and sovereignty: Irish nationality and its development, 1558–1625' in Bradshaw and Roberts (eds.), *British consciousness and identity*, pp. 112–39 and *Poets and politics. Reaction and continuity in Irish poetry, 1558–1625* (Cork, 1998); 'Religion, culture and the bardic elite in early modern Ireland', in Ford and McCafferty (eds.) *Sectarianism in Early Modern Ireland*, pp. 158–82.