

Henry A. Jefferies. *The Irish Church and the Tudor Reformations*.

Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010. 302 pp. €49.50. ISBN: 978-1-84682-050-2.

Jefferies's study sets out to explain why the reformation failed in Ireland. The study begins with an assessment of medieval Catholic piety, and Jefferies goes on to chart the progress of religious reform from Henry VIII's reign to the close of Elizabeth's. In doing so, Jefferies identifies three primary factors, which he believes underlay the failure of a Protestant church to properly establish itself.

In the first instance, Jefferies suggests that the pre-reformation church and lay observance were more buoyant than is generally assumed. Secondly, he identifies an inherent structural-financial problem within the Irish church. Not only was the church in Ireland underfinanced, on the dissolution of the monasteries no provision was made to ensure that farmers of appropriated benefices paid sufficient stipends to the clergy they were meant to employ. This was to greatly diminish the Irish government's ability to attract qualified preachers, which was only to be compounded by the Irish administration's lukewarm commitment to religious reformation. Finally, Jefferies suggests that the failure of the reformation was sealed by an increasingly strong Counter-Reformation presence in the Irish kingdom, which did manage to establish a functional and active pastorate.

Jefferies's study, then, is successful in providing a broad narrative account of the progress of religious change in Ireland. In particular, the decision to begin with an account of the medieval church, and to weave into the narrative the activity of priests such as David Wolfe, provides a needed corrective to the tendency of many scholars to focus primarily on the activities of the administration in Dublin. Aspects of Jefferies's interpretation are, however, problematic. Broadly speaking, the study presents a deterministic account, which gives little weight to the contingent situation. Jefferies himself comments in the opening page of the study that the failure of the protestant reformation was "extremely probable from an early stage" (11), and in line with this comment the study tends to downplay the potential of protestant evangelizing efforts.

More critically, Jefferies fails to draw any clear distinction between pre-reformation popular piety and later Tridentine Catholicism. As wider European historiography has been at pains to point out, popular piety and Counter-Reformation catholicism are not the same thing. Counter-Reformation doctrine emphasized the need for conformity with Rome and attacked popular belief and ritual. Counter-Reformation clergy, therefore, faced a similar task as their Protestant counterparts, in that they had to persuade the populace to abide by new religious norms, even if those norms were closer to medieval observance than Protestant practice. For Jefferies, however, the preexistent religiosity of the Irish was to nearly guarantee the success of Counter-Reformation Catholicism, and this informs Jefferies's assessment of wider events.

In particular, for Jefferies the Desmond rebellions, the Baltinglass and Nugent revolts, and the Nine Years War were primarily confessional in character. He is right to argue that more attention needs to be paid to the "religious convictions" of those

involved. But by simply asserting that Old English and Gaelic Irish entered into rebellion because they had embraced the doctrines of Trent, does seem inadequate. Do we not need to consider more carefully the mentality of the individual believer?

In this respect then, is it not important to do as Ciaran Brady has done with regard to Pale recusancy, and to situate religious change within a broader political context? (Brady, "Conservative Subversives: The Community of the Pale and the Dublin Administration, 1556–86," in *Radicals, Rebels and Establishments: Historical Studies XV*, P. J. Corish, ed., 1985: 11–32). Were disputes over taxation and arguments over the community's traditional rights and privileges not important in leading many in the Pale to decide to reject the established religion and turn to the Counter-Reformation church? This is not to downplay the validity of individual religious commitment, or to "divorce the reformation from religious convictions" (12), as Jefferies suggests. It is to simply seek some explanation as to why a community may have decided to reassess its beliefs.

There is no doubt, then, that this study will provide a useful and needed overview of religious reformation in Ireland for both students and scholars. Nevertheless, there are still many questions to be asked and answered concerning religious change in Tudor Ireland.

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