

Colmán Ó Clabaigh OSB. *The Friars in Ireland, 1224–1540*.

Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012. xxv + 390 pp. €29.95. ISBN: 978–1–84682–225–4.

Having dealt with the *Franciscans in Ireland 1400–1532* in his first book (2002), Colmán Ó Clabaigh has now extended his research to cover the mendicant phenomenon as a whole, the first time such a broad sweep has been undertaken. Three chapters trace the coming of the friars to Ireland in the thirteenth century, the subsequent decline in the fourteenth, and then the second flowering from the fifteenth century to the eve of the Reformation. While the first period of expansion focused mainly, though not exclusively, on the towns of the Anglo-Norman colony, the second wave, stimulated by Observant reform movements on the Continent, found its center of gravity in Gaelic Ireland, thus exacerbating ethnic tensions between Anglo-Irish and Gaelic friars. The second part of Ó Clabaigh's work, containing seven chapters, deals with the formation, lifestyle, ministry, and impact of the friars, both religious and cultural. An epilogue covers the tumultuous decade of the 1530s as the friars struggled with the consequences of the Henrician Reformation in Ireland, particularly the dissolution of the religious houses.

Ó Clabaigh's approach offers many interesting similarities and contrasts. Despite, or maybe because of their English provenance, the origin legends of both the Irish Dominicans and Franciscans trace their coming to Ireland to commands from their respective founders. Whereas the Franciscans were established as a distinct

province as early as 1230, albeit having to cede the appointment of the provincial to the minister general, the other mendicants functioned as subordinate units of their respective provinces. Notwithstanding their enjoyment of a considerable degree of autonomy in practice, the Dominicans chafed against the denial of full self-government but only gained their wishes in 1536, when they were facing much more serious problems. The Irish Carmelites gained their independence in 1305. While the Augustinians identified with the colony more than any of the other friars, apparently not recruiting Gaelic members before the fourteenth century, the loss of the registers of the priors general between 1394 and 1419 means that we cannot exactly date when the Irish Augustinians gained full independence. When records resume, however, their center of gravity had moved from the colony to mostly Gaelic territories in the west of Ireland. We thus encounter two kinds of tensions among the mendicants in Ireland, one based on ethnic divisions between Anglo-Norman and Gaelic friars, mainly among the Franciscans and the Dominicans, and then disputes concerning jurisdiction between Anglo-Norman friars and their English confrères, which concerned all the mendicants except the Franciscans.

Ó Clabaigh wryly notes that the only significant contribution made by Irish scholars to late medieval theology concerned the dispute between the secular clergy and the mendicants with such senior Anglo-Irish clerics as Richard Fitzralph, Henry Crumpe, John Whitehead, and Philip Norris entering the lists against the mendicants.

Though not as vigorous as the Franciscans in promoting the cult of their respective founders, the friars' preacher more than compensated in encouraging the cult of their protomartyr, Peter of Verona, canonized in 1253, one year after his death at the hands of the Cathars. It is remarkable that thirteen miracles attributed to his intercession in the north Munster region found their way in the earliest life of the saint composed ca. 1270.

Ó Clabaigh furnishes us with gems of information throughout his work such as the hunger strike of Basilia de Bermingham against her husband Stephen Dexter, ca. 1252, to ensure the expulsion of the Franciscans from her husband's foundation at Strade, in favor of the Dominicans whose house at Athenry had been founded by her father.

In 1475 the superiors of the four mendicant orders in Ireland sent a proposal to Pope Sixtus IV, to erect a *studium universale*, or university, in Dublin modelled on that of Oxford, adding that they had enough friars to staff this establishment. This proposal, like its predecessors in 1320 and 1465, unfortunately came to nothing. Had such a foundation come into being, one wonders if and how it would have survived the Reformation.

It is difficult to do justice to Colman Ó Clabaigh's scholarship within the confines of a short review. Suffice to say that his interdisciplinary monograph makes a major contribution to Irish religious, social, and cultural history in the late medieval and early modern periods. He has placed us in his debt.

MÍCHEÁL MAC CRAITH, OFM  
NUI Galway, Emeritus, and Collegio S. Isidoro, Roma