

*Descendancy. Irish Protestant histories since 1795.* By David Fitzpatrick. Pp. ix + 271 incl. 9 charts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. £65. 978 1 107 08093 5  
*JEH* (67) 2016; doi:10.1017/S0022046916000178

The Protestants of Ireland can hardly claim to have been ignored by historians. Yet the window through which they have been viewed was for long a narrow one. A teleological focus on the origins and rise of Unionism reduced their place in Irish history to the negative role of opposition to the onward march of nationalism. Meanwhile the seductive term ‘ascendancy’ (wrenched out of an original late eighteenth-century context in which it meant a state of affairs rather than a social group) perpetuated a lazy stereotype of a privileged master caste that in reality never applied to more than a small fraction of the Protestant population. In recent years, by contrast, historians have begun to acknowledge the social and cultural diversity concealed behind the conflation of Protestant/Unionist/ascendancy, although even now the religious culture of Irish Protestants, as opposed to their political identity, remains seriously underexplored.

David Fitzpatrick has already made a major contribution to this more rounded approach to the history of Irish Protestantism with his biography of Bishop Frederick MacNeice, father of the poet Louis MacNeice but also a substantial clerical figure in his own right. This new volume, in comparison, is a less focused work. Fitzpatrick’s introduction is disarmingly frank: to put it together he has ‘raided a drawerful of unpublished and rather obscure published articles’ (p. 4). The punning title hints at large themes. Having rejected ‘ascendancy’ as ‘utterly unrepresentative of Irish Protestants’ (p. 3), Fitzpatrick proposes ‘descendancy’ as highlighting a shared awareness of a loss of privileged status, and also as suggesting ‘descent from a common stock’. But this leaves unanswered the question of why the overthrow of an ascendancy that was, on his own showing, ‘in many respects imaginary’ (p. 6) should be chosen as the key to Irish Protestant identity. The other theme hinted at, of shared identity and origins, is also left hanging, and indeed is undermined by the strong emphasis elsewhere in the volume on the diversity of Protestant mentalities and experience.

The book falls into three main parts. The first offers four essays on specific aspects of Orangeism, the subject of a promised future monograph. A chapter on the close links between the Order and Methodism is a useful reminder of the extent to which Orangeism was a movement of lower middle-class respectability and working-class self-improvement rather than proletarian sectarian thuggery. Three other papers deal with the place of Orangeism in the British armed forces, the ambivalent attitudes to their Orange heritage of the poets Yeats and MacNeice, and the remarkable resilience of Orangeism in the three Ulster counties that became part of the Irish Free State. The second part, on the Ulster Covenant of 1912, adds substance to Fitzpatrick’s emphasis on the diversity of Protestant Unionism. The Covenant, signed by three-quarters of Ulster Protestants of both sexes, was a remarkable exercise of mass mobilisation. But this was achieved through a careful ambiguity as to the exact form that the promised defiance of government would take, making the exercise acceptable to both militant and more moderate opponents of Home Rule. A questionnaire administered during the same period to over three hundred ministers of religion

revealed other important differences in outlook, with Presbyterians more narrowly focussed on the defence of their religious identity, while members of the Church of Ireland also worried about the economic consequences of Home Rule, and the threat to the British Empire.

The final section, and the one likely to attract most attention, focuses on the impact on southern Protestants of the short but intense period of conflict leading up to and following the creation of the Irish Free State. Recent work has brought to light the extent to which IRA violence, particularly in the Cork area, was directed at Protestant civilians, giving rise to polemical claims of ‘ethnic cleansing’, as well as to angry rebuttals from supporters of the traditional narrative of a struggle for national liberation. Fitzpatrick’s analysis confirms conclusions already advanced by other scholars. Although Protestant numbers in southern Ireland fell during 1920–3, this was part of a much longer pattern of decline, attributable primarily to a combination of high emigration and low rates of marriage and fertility. There was no great exodus from the new Irish state to the haven of Northern Ireland. These broad conclusions are given new precision by a detailed analysis of the membership records of the Methodist Church, which uniquely make it possible to track movement both within and out of Ireland, as well as deaths, recruitment of new members and the falling off of existing adherents. An accompanying narrative account of the experience of Methodists in the brutal Cork theatre offers a characteristically well judged balance. On the one hand Fitzpatrick vividly conveys the very real terror created by killings, assaults and forced removals, where in some cases at least charges of disloyalty to the republic served as a cover for plunder or the settling of private scores. Yet he also brings out the resilience, and resistance to panic, that allowed the Cork Methodists, like the Orangemen of the three ‘lost’ Ulster counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal, to keep their community and its identity intact through a short but intense period of civil strife.

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*Catholic faith and practice in England, 1779–1992. The role of revivalism and renewal.* By Margaret H. Turnham. Pp. xi + 222 incl. 3 tables, 1 fig., 3 maps and 4 plates. Rochester, NY–Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015. £65. 978 1 78327 034 7  
*JEH* (67) 2016; doi:10.1017/S002204691600049X

Notwithstanding its implied national scope, this is actually a solid and readable insider’s history of Catholic life, institutions and religious formation in the area which became the diocese of Middlesbrough in 1878–9, following the partition of the diocese of Beverley, which had previously covered the whole of Yorkshire. The diocese of Middlesbrough comprised the North and East Ridings, including Hull, Middlesbrough itself (a ‘new town’ of 1829), and York. Catholicism’s development in the region is traced from modest beginnings, as a predominantly rural and gentrified Church in the late eighteenth century, to a largely urban and majority Irish community by the end of the nineteenth century. Irish inculturation in the diocese peaked in the 1950s, with St Patrick’s Day a greater festival