

Cardinal Bellarmine, in particular. Given that Willet had been prompted to focus on biblical commentary by a bruising engagement over English church polity, it is perhaps regrettable that Pollock does not explore how the Romans Hexapla bore upon those discussions; although his emphasis on anti-Roman Catholic polemic undoubtedly reflects Willet's own priorities. *Early Stuart polemical hermeneutics* makes an interesting and scholarly contribution to the field of early Stuart church history, and provides welcome encouragement to scholarly engagement with early modern biblical commentary.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

STEPHEN HAMPTON

The Church of Ireland and its past. History, interpretation and identity. Edited by Mark Empey, Alan Ford and Miriam Moffitt. Pp. xii + 322 incl. 4 tables. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017. £50. 978 1 84682 637 5
JEH (70) 2019; doi:10.1017/S0022046918002130

This ambitious work in seventeen chapters by sixteenth authors seeks to provide a comprehensive interpretive understanding of Irish Anglicanism from the foundation of the Church of Ireland in 1536 down to the present. It is written by some of Ireland's leading historians or English historians of Ireland, with one American in the mix. A problem which is intermittently examined but not systematically addressed is the question, can the Church really claim to be the Church of Ireland, except in the very limited sense of being the ecclesiastical body established by law, a status that came to an end on 1 January 1871. This problem of identity goes back at least to the time of James Ussher, the formidably learned archbishop of Armagh, 1625–56, who began a trend in Irish Protestant historiography by trying to demonstrate that the reformed Church in Ireland was discernibly the successor of the Church planted by Patrick in 432. This consistent obsession, until comparatively recently, is perhaps an indication at an unacknowledged psychological level that Anglicanism really was what its Catholic opponents alleged it to be: an English import.

Ussher was a product of Trinity College Dublin, founded in 1592, which, as Alan Ford points out, 'provided the crucible in which Irish Protestant intellectual self-awareness was forged' (p. 20). It was Trinity which in the nineteenth century produced, at a cost in today's values of several hundred thousand euros, the seventeen-volume edition of Ussher's work. It took some forty years to complete. The archbishop's labours on Irish history were taken up by others in subsequent centuries. not least by James and Robert Ware: the latter's distortions and fabrication of documents for purposes of anti-Catholic polemics left a 'malign legacy [that] can scarcely be underestimated' (p. 52). Not all eighteenth-century Church of Ireland historians were so *parti pris*, as T. C. Barnard points out in his entertaining and well written account ('Writing the history of the Church of Ireland in the eighteenth century'), but their antiquarian researches were hampered by an 'almost universal ignorance of the Irish language' (p. 60).

The work of other enormously influential Irish Anglicans is dealt with in various chapters. C. R. Elrington, Richard Mant, J. H. Todd, George T. Stokes and W. A. Phillips all find mention, as does the most important nineteenth-century Irish Presbyterian historian, James S. Reid. One problem is that their names keep coming up and there is a good deal of repetition, perhaps unavoidably so,

but one does think that the editors might have been a bit more scrupulous in wielding the blue pencil. Although the individual essays are of a uniformly high order it is at times difficult to see, apart from a superficial connection with the Church of Ireland, how they are linked, or what unifying factor binds them together. Nor is it entirely clear what occasioned the collection except that it was published in year that marked the five-hundredth anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation. Whatever its merits, and there are many, the work is not in any conventional sense a history of the Church of Ireland. But there is much to be commended in the individual essays and in general this is a marvellous collection.

Ironically the most important, original and illuminating chapters are not directly about the Church of Ireland at all, but concern the Reformation in Ireland. The first of these is by three veteran historians of Ireland's early modern period, Nicholas Canny, Karl S. Bottigheimer and Steven G. Ellis. Together they give a brief and highly informative presentation on the state of the question of Ireland's religious reformations. Canny, after a detour about his own evolution as an historian (he did not stick to his 2,000 word limit), revisits his controversial 1979 essay 'Why the Reformation failed in Ireland: une question mal posée'. After almost forty years it would be astonishing if Canny had not modified his views, but he nevertheless remains convinced that the salient phase when Ireland might have definitively gone over to Protestantism was in the early years of the Stuart dynasty, when government might have enforced compliance to the state religion, and moreover had the resources to do so (p. 248). Bottigheimer is more cautious and warns from a continental perspective that state-sponsored confessionalism was a 'risky business' (p. 253). He is also anxious to stress that social and political as well as religious factors determined the outcome of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religious controversy. Ellis completes this fascinating chapter by refuting Canny; he, by contrast, is convinced that large-scale sustained coercion was not really an option under James I. The crucial period was 1560–80, when religious opinion had not yet polarised and when there was widespread recusant activity among the Old English of the Pale. Most native Irish clung to pre-Tridentine religious practice. Both Canny and Ellis recognise the seminal importance of the work done by the late Brendan Bradshaw in the 1970s, although both have criticism of some aspects of Bradshaw's work.

That work is the subject of a sustained and splendid analysis by James Murray. Further he treats the reader to a brilliant summary of the state of Irish Reformation studies. Bradshaw's reputation suffered to some extent from a polemical piece published in the late 1980s challenging the approach to Irish history of the 'Revisionist School'. Murray, setting that blip aside, dispassionately demonstrates the importance of his old supervisor's work for understanding Ireland in the early modern period. Bradshaw was too taken with his view that the recall of St. Leger as Chief Governor in 1556 and his replacement by Sussex was the crucial point for the survival of Catholicism as the religion of vast majority of the Irish people. Overall however, Murray shows that the effect of Bradshaw's pioneering work was to make the study of the Reformation in Ireland 'wonderfully problematic' (p. 285).

BOSTON COLLEGE

OLIVER P. RAFFERTY SJ