

Reviews and short notices

THE JESUIT MISSION IN EARLY MODERN IRELAND, 1560–1760. Edited by Mary Ann Lyons and Brian Mac Cuarta. Pp 269, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2022. €55.

This collection of eleven essays does not purport to present a comprehensive history of the Jesuits' activities or influence in early modern Ireland (p. 23). Nonetheless, it comprises valuable studies that help to deepen our understanding of aspects of religion and society in Ireland in the early modern era.

Alexander De Witt, S.J., and Thomas McCoog, S.J., use six letters from William Good, S.J., an English novice sent to Ireland in 1565, to generate insights into the challenges that confronted the Jesuit mission at that time. Good is a particularly valuable source for studying problems. He was struck down by serious illness while in Ireland. His ministry was hampered by his inability to speak Irish. Local teachers exploited anti-English prejudice to discourage parents from sending their children to his school, and his pedagogic style proved unpopular among the students he did manage to enrol. His school was soon shut down in any case and he was obliged to relocate it several times before he left Ireland in 1570, never to return. The editors conclude that the Jesuit mission 'ended in failure' (p. 8). However, Good's correspondence ought to have been contextualised more fully to reach a more nuanced assessment.

Colm Lennon's chapter on the next mission reveals that 72 per cent of the Jesuits who ministered in Ireland from c.1598 to 1650 came from Irish cities or large towns, 16 per cent sprang from gentry families in urban hinterlands while just over 10 per cent had Gaelic backgrounds. Not surprisingly, given their backgrounds, they tended to base their ministries in a number of urban hubs where they enjoyed all kinds of support from their families, in an environment they found congenial. Lennon outlines in unprecedented detail the strategies through which the Jesuits in Ireland conducted their mission in the first half of the seventeenth century. He discusses their preaching, catechising, counselling, hearing of confessions, and their use of images, relics, processions, religious dramas and sodalities to promote Tridentine forms of Catholicism. Their strategies reflected the fact that the formation of Jesuits was both systematic and standardised to prepare them for whatever mission to which they were assigned. Jason Harris's study of the Latin style of the Irish Jesuit annual letters written by Christopher Holywood, S.J., superior of the Irish mission from 1599 to 1626, demonstrates how they conformed to the Jesuits' correspondence formula drawn up for use across the entire society. On the other hand, Brian Jackson shows through a careful study of the writings of the Old English Jesuit Henry Fitzsimon in the 1630s that despite the institutional homogeneity of the Society of Jesus, its members could and sometimes did develop distinctive strategies for engaging in religious controversy.

Bernadette Cunningham examines the Jesuits' preaching in close detail and assesses its likely impact not only on their lay audiences but also on the parish priests whose ministries they reinforced. Her evidence is drawn overwhelmingly from the first half of the seventeenth century and it is unclear how preaching was subsequently affected by the massive disruptions caused by the Cromwellian conquest. Raymond Gillespie's essay draws attention to the Jesuits' use of music in seventeenth-century Ireland to laud the divine and intensify the bonds of community among the Catholic faithful. He reveals, contrary to what has long been assumed, that music was widely used in Catholic services and in para-liturgical events such as processions and concludes that the musical legacy of the Jesuits in particular is much richer than has been suspected. Again, the evidence adduced comes from the earlier seventeenth century, and it is far from clear how much survived the 'curse of Cromwell'.

Mary Ann Lyons's essay on 'Women and Jesuit ministry in Ireland, c.1600–c.1670' is invaluable in focusing due attention on the roles of women. She shows how a number of women exercised significant agency in supporting the Jesuits, most notably Elizabeth FitzGerald, countess of Kildare. This essay complements recent work published on women in Ireland in the sixteenth century which showed, *inter alia*, that a number of other women associated with the house of Kildare, including Countess Elizabeth's mother, Mabel Browne who came from a prominent English recusant family, were proactive Catholics. Significantly, there is no discussion of Catholic women exercising agency after Cromwell came to Ireland: the later evidence relates to women in passive roles only. Alma O'Donnell's essay on Jesuit involvement in exorcisms in the seventeenth century is interesting in reiterating from a novel angle the degree to which beliefs and practices in Ireland relating to the supernatural conformed to the norms elsewhere in the Christian world. Her most striking discovery is that, contrary to the general European experience, there are more records of demonic possession among Irish men than women. Brian Mac Cuarta's essay on conversions to the Catholic Church within the Slingsby family is presented in fascinating detail and reveals a great deal about New English responses to conversions to Rome, though it begs the question as to what exactly drew some of the Slingsby women to Catholicism in the 1630s.

By any standard this collection of essays is both stimulating and valuable. Yet, historians face a real challenge when trying to assess the true significance of the Jesuit missions in Ireland because a great deal of the records they produced were consciously designed to highlight their achievements as the shock troops of the Counter Reformation. While their *modi operandi* were in many ways comparable to those of their confrères in Catholic states, the Irish Jesuits were severely restricted by their very small numbers: there were two Jesuits in the country in 1599, about forty in 1626 and no more than seven or eight in the early eighteenth century — in a country of approximately 2,400 parishes. Furthermore they struggled to operate effectively under Protestant colonial régimes that were inimical to their ministry. Martin Foerster's essay on Jesuit schooling in Ireland between 1660 and 1690 shows graphically how a promising mission fell prey to Protestant enmity. Liam Chambers' essay on the Irish Jesuits' house of refuge in Poitiers, 1674–1762, is a marvellous piece of work, but it suggests that by the early eighteenth century the Jesuit mission was focused more on institutional survival than on ministry. At the time of the universal dissolution of the Society of Jesus in 1774, the Jesuits in Ireland were practically confined to parishes in Waterford and Clonmel and St Michan's parish, Dublin, 'typically as discreet assistants' (p. 20). All in all, then, this is a valuable book which may unintentionally flatter its subject.

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THE FIRST GREAT CHARITY OF THIS TOWN: BELFAST CHARITABLE SOCIETY AND ITS ROLE IN THE DEVELOPING CITY. Edited by Olwen Purdue. Pp xv + 310. Newbridge, Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press. 2022. £24.79.

Historians have devoted greater attention to nineteenth-century Belfast in recent years, focusing in particular on the things Belfast had in common with other provincial cities in Victorian Britain: the creation and evolution of its philanthropic institutions and the range and vitality of its civic, intellectual and political culture. *The first great charity of this town* both reflects and contributes to this new social history of Belfast. Founded in 1752 to raise funds to build a poorhouse and an infirmary for the poor (opened in 1774), the Belfast Charitable Society provides contributors with a fascinating entry point to explore the development of the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century town.

In a clear and useful introduction, Olwen Purdue lays out the book's two primary goals: to provide a new history of the Belfast Charitable Society (B.C.S.); and to set the institution