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# *Economic Problems of the Church: Why the Reformation Failed in Ireland*

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The present paper is intended as a contribution to the recent debate on the failure of the Irish Reformation. It commences with a critical summary of the modern historiography of the subject, which serves also to highlight a potentially significant imbalance between the early and later Reformation periods in the identification and exploitation of relevant source material by historians. Arguably, the nature of the evidence hitherto deployed goes far towards explaining the dimensions of the present controversy. The paper addresses this controversy mainly in two ways. First, it aims to draw attention to, and analyse, a neglected source compilation which is of central importance in assessing the reasons for the failure of the Irish Reformation. Second, and partly in order to establish the full significance of this evidence, it seeks to develop a wider perspective from which to assess the potential for, and chronology of, religious change in Ireland.

## I

The past twenty years have witnessed something of a renaissance in the history of Tudor Ireland. A glance through bibliographies on the subject discloses that, since 1968, at least a dozen major books – monographs, surveys and collections of essays – and over forty pamphlets and substantial articles have been published which deal primarily with aspects of the subject. For a small research field, this is a major achievement. Two prominent and novel features of this revival have been the attention

*IHS = Irish Historical Studies*; *Arch. Hib. = Archivium Hibernicum*; *Anal. Hib. = Analecta Hibernica*; TCD = Trinity College, Dublin; *CSPI = Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1603–6*; *LP = Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*; PROI = Public Record Office of Ireland

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devoted to the fate of the Tudor Reformation there and the important role of formal debate among historians in advancing our understanding of developments.

It is, of course, understandable that sixty years ago, in the aftermath of political partition and civil war and at a time when religious differences were a significant source of civil unrest, professional historians should have been reluctant to embroil themselves in debates about the potential for religious reform in sixteenth-century Ireland and the reasons for, or advisability of, the policies pursued by the Tudor government. This reluctance was reinforced by the growth in the 1930s of the so-called new, scientific history with its emphasis on the disinterested pursuit of the facts.[1] In consequence, for over thirty years Irish Reformation studies advanced little beyond the investigation of what happened, about which the facts had been assembled in convenient and scholarly form by R. D. Edwards.[2] Beyond this, the confessional historians of the day felt able to agree only on the unsuitability of Irish conditions to the Tudor Reformation and the unremitting local opposition to its imposition there.[3] The utter failure of the Reformation to take root in Ireland was thus neatly contrasted with the situation in England, for which an equally determinist argument posited a rapid Protestant breakthrough.[4]

It is a truism that each generation rewrites its own history; and by 1968 there were growing indications of dissatisfaction with an interpretation which refused even to consider the possibility of Protestant success and which dismissed partial conformity as mere time-serving. Over the next ten years, Brendan Bradshaw almost single-handedly demolished the previous interpretation. He demonstrated, instead, that in English Ireland the impact of the Henrician Reformation was not altogether different from that in outlying parts of England. Crucially, in explaining this partial success, he established the existence of a native reform movement among the Englishry of Ireland. Historiographically, the heart of this reinterpretation was Bradshaw's magisterial account of *The Dissolution of the Religious Orders in Ireland under Henry VIII*.[5] By exploiting both the surviving records of the Dublin administration relating to the dissolution – jury presentments, inquisitions and surveys, financial accounts and patent rolls – as well as documents emanating from ecclesiastical sources and the ubiquitous state papers, he provided a rounded picture of the state of the pre-Reformation religious orders and the impact of the dissolution on both Church and society. Bradshaw's second book also

[1] I owe these points to conversations with Professor David Quinn about his recollections of the academic environment of Irish historians in the 1930s.

[2] *Church and State in Tudor Ireland: a history of the penal laws against Irish Catholics, 1534–1603*, Dublin 1935.

[3] Ibid. Cf. G. V. Jourdan, in W. A. Phillips (ed.), *History of the Church of Ireland*, 3 vols, London 1933–4.

[4] See now Christopher Haigh, 'The recent historiography of the English Reformation', repr. in idem (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised*, Cambridge 1987, 21–6.

[5] Cambridge 1974.

focused on the Henrician period. It attempted, *inter alia*, to set the local response to the Tudor Reformation in the wider context of the Irish intellectual environment of the period.[6] Along with some related specialist articles,[7] these works collectively provided a major re-evaluation of Henrician policy towards Ireland.

Much of this work also had profound implications for the later Tudor period and beyond; and, as a kind of postscript, Bradshaw mounted a series of historical skirmishes forward in time,[8] in which he elaborated on ideas and remarks made elsewhere. The reigns of Edward VI and Mary were characterised as a transitional phase in Tudor policy towards Ireland. The gradual introduction under Edward VI of an unambiguously Protestant religious settlement elicited an increasingly equivocal response from the local community. And Bradshaw linked Lord Deputy St Leger's final recall in 1556, and the drift towards a more coercive political strategy, with the restoration of Catholicism under Mary and the opportunity thereby provided for the establishment of the Counter-Reformation. He argued that in Ireland the official reform campaign was greatly hindered when latent tensions in the movement developed into a deep division between advocates of persuasion and coercion. This ultimately proved fatal, he suggested, when the split between advocates of rival reform strategies became associated with another political division which promoted an increasing polarisation in government between Old English and New English politicians. By the 1570s, therefore, at a time when the Elizabethan settlement was consolidating its hold in England, the attitude of the Old English in Ireland was 'firmly fixed in recusancy'.[9]

As Nicholas Canny has pointed out,[10] the assumptions underlying Bradshaw's discussion of these two phases of the Irish Reformation differ significantly. The discussion of the Henrician phase admits the possibility of eventual success and examines the implementation of the reform programme: in the later phase the discussion centres on the evidence for failure and the reasons for it. A further important difference, however, concerns the quality of the evidence underpinning the discussion of the two phases. The treatment of the Dissolution – the most radical and

[6] *The Irish Constitutional Revolution of the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge 1979.

[7] 'The opposition to the ecclesiastical legislation in the Irish Reformation Parliament', *IHS* xvi (1968–9), 285–303; 'George Browne, first Reformation archbishop of Dublin, 1536–1554', this JOURNAL xxi (1970), 301–26; 'Cromwellian reform and the origins of the Kildare rebellion, 1533–4', *TRHS*, 5th ser. xxvii (1977), 69–93.

[8] 'The Edwardian Reformation in Ireland', *Arch. Hib.* xxvi (1976–7), 83–99; 'The beginnings of modern Ireland', in Brian Farrell (ed.), *The Irish Parliamentary Tradition*, Dublin 1973, 68–87; 'Fr. Wolfe's description of Limerick, 1574', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* xvii (1975), 47–53; 'The Elizabethans and the Irish', *IHS* xlvi (1977), 38–50; 'Sword, word and strategy in the Reformation in Ireland', *Historical Journal* xxi (1978), 475–502; '"A treatise for the Reformation of Ireland, 1554–5"', *Irish Jurist*, NS xvi (1981), 299–315; 'The Elizabethans and the Irish: a muddled model', *IHS* xx (1981), 233–43.

[9] Bradshaw, 'Fr. Wolfe's description', 50.

[10] 'Why the Reformation failed in Ireland: *une question mal posée*', this JOURNAL xxx (1979), 423–50, esp. pp. 424–5.

visible departure of the Henrician Church from pre-Reformation norms – is based on a thorough investigation of a wide range of historical sources, whereas that of the later phase apparently confines itself to a survey of the most obvious printed sources and state papers. This is hardly surprising, because the later articles were very evidently a provocative and preliminary survey aimed at stimulating more detailed research. Unfortunately, although they provoked a lengthy response, they have so far failed in their main objective.[11]

Canny's reply, 'Why the Reformation failed in Ireland: une question mal posée',[12] provided valuable evidence of indigenous support for the Elizabethan Church from both Gaelic and Old English communities. Yet, in other respects the intervention was less helpful. Karl Bottigheimer argued in a stimulating rejoinder that, particularly by his choice of title, Canny implied that the reasons for failure were a question not worth exploring. Yet Canny's evidence does not disprove the question's relevance;[13] it simply challenges Bradshaw's particular answer. In other respects, too, the reply was something of a distraction. It considered the Irish reform campaign largely in isolation from the wider context of Tudor planning and enforcement. And this distortion was further reinforced by viewing the Irish Reformation as an extended process which spanned several centuries and whose outcome remained in doubt even into the nineteenth century. Such an interpretation implies that the Irish Reformation was a very different movement from the Tudor Reformation elsewhere because, outside Ireland, the issue is everywhere regarded as having been decided largely by 1600. Moreover, the disappointingly narrow range of sources employed by Canny leaves his interpretation open to the same criticisms as Bradshaw's later surveys. Even if we could isolate the *ex parte* statements in the state papers from the more informed or impartial reports on religious conditions, the selective citation of general impressions by government officials in support of an argument is an inadequate evidential basis on which to rest our judgements, particularly in a society so politically polarised as was Elizabethan Ireland.

In fact, Bottigheimer's rejoinder, supported by the recent work of Alan Ford and P. J. Corish, argues convincingly that, in the half-century from 1590, the evidence that the Irish Reformation was everywhere losing ground is overwhelming. There is, for instance, abundant evidence that

[11] This is not to say that nothing has since appeared on the Tudor Reformation in Ireland. Yet the most substantial new work, Alan Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590–1641*, Frankfurt am Main 1985, is primarily concerned with the later period, and other works are chiefly surveys, notably the articles by Dr Colm Lennon, 'The Counter-Reformation in Ireland', and Dr Alan Ford, 'The Protestant Reformation in Ireland', in Ciaran Brady and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *Natives and Newcomers: the making of Irish colonial society, 1534–1641*, Dublin 1986; and P. J. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: a historical survey*, Dublin 1985, ch. iii.

[12] Art. cit.

[13] Karl Bottigheimer, 'The failure of the Reformation in Ireland: *une question bien posée*', this JOURNAL xxxvi (1985), 196–207.

Catholic missionary activity was successfully re-establishing its own resident ecclesiastical authority based on bishops and vicars-general; and among Anglican clergy there was widespread dismay and despair both at the deplorable state of the Church of Ireland and at the unconcealed vigour of the Catholic revival.[14] Moreover, the growing polarisation of religious opinion in Ireland, which is likewise well documented, also greatly increased the reformers' task, since general recusancy precluded reliance on the traditional Tudor strategy of harnessing the pressures for outward conformity to accomplish a gradual movement to inward conversion. Finally, Ford's admirable study of *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590–1641* has demonstrated, crucially, that, while the general quality and qualifications of Church of Ireland ministers improved considerably in the early Stuart period, their numbers were quite inadequate for the task in hand, because the resources of the Irish Church had been so reduced by lay encroachment on church property.[15] Collectively, these works suggest that a renewed investigation of the Tudor period should yet reveal the reasons for the overall failure of the Irish Reformation. Indeed, Bottigheimer was careful to state that his arguments were not meant 'to exclude the possibility that critical changes had occurred earlier' than the 1590s.[16] The present paper contends that the Tudor period was central to the outcome and that the Irish Reformation can only be properly understood within the wider context of Tudor government rather than as part of a long-term Hiberno-centric presentation of developments.

## II

Unfortunately, the vast bulk of diocesan records from which the rate of religious change in the English provinces has been assessed no longer survives for Tudor Ireland. Yet the materials for such an approach are not altogether lacking in Ireland.[17] Much the most promising diocese for a study of this sort is Dublin, for which the evidence is plentiful, while the dioceses of Meath and Armagh *inter Anglicos* would probably also repay investigation.[18] In the wider context, however, a major source of information about the wealth and structure of the Church in England and Wales in the early Reformation period is the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*.[19] It was

[14] Ibid. 198–202; P. J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Dublin 1981, 18–42; the works at n. 11.

[15] Ford, op. cit., see esp. ch. iv.

[16] Ibid. 198.

[17] Many of these have recently been listed in R. D. Edwards and M. O'Dowd, *Sources for Early Modern Irish History, 1534–1641*, Cambridge 1985, esp. ch. iv.

[18] Mr James Murray of Trinity College, Dublin, is completing a doctoral dissertation on the Tudor diocese of Dublin. I am indebted to him for many stimulating conversations on this topic and for the point about the feasibility of a diocesan approach for other dioceses.

[19] J. Caley (ed.), *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Henr. VIII*, 6 vols (Record Commission, 1810–34).

compiled in response to the administrative needs created by the Reformation Parliament's Act for First Fruits and Tenths (26 Hen. VIII, c. 3). The act effectively transferred to the new Supreme Head the old papal tax of annates on the income of major benefices, broadened it into a tax of the first year's income of all benefices and, for good measure, added a continuing tax of a tenth of each subsequent year's income. The *Valor* was the product of a systematic survey of clerical income and listed the value of each benefice in each diocese throughout England and Wales.[20]

When the Irish Reformation Parliament met in May 1536, the government introduced similar bills for the Church of Ireland. An Act for First Fruits (28 Hen. VIII, c. 10) passed the same month, but opposition in parliament eventually led to a modified Act for the Twentieth Part (29 Hen. VIII, c. 25), passed in October 1537, whereby the English tenth was reduced to a twentieth in Ireland.[21] Nevertheless, the Irish statutes created a similar need for a survey of Irish benefices, and it is no surprise that the Dublin administration compiled a similar *Valor Beneficiorum Ecclesiasticorum in Hibernia*.[22]

Following the appointment in 1544 of a separate clerk to supervise the levy of these taxes, a First Fruits Office gradually developed in the exchequer, with custody of records relating to first fruits and twentieths. These records all perished in the destruction of the Public Record Office of Ireland at the start of the Irish civil war in 1922, although Wood's *Guide* to the Irish Public Record Office of 1919 gives some indication of their extent.[23] Fortunately, a printed edition of the *Valor* had been made in the eighteenth century from a copy, since destroyed, in the Chief Remembrancer's Office, and there also survives a copy of part in a manuscript in

[20] See especially A. Savine, 'English monasteries on the eve of the Dissolution', in P. Vinogradoff (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History*, Oxford 1909, 1–303.

[21] *The Statutes at Large, Passed in the Parliaments Held in Ireland*, 20 vols, Dublin 1786–1801, i. 96–9; D. B. Quinn, 'The bills and statutes of the Irish parliaments of Henry VII and Henry VIII', *Anal. Hib.* x (1941), 155; S. G. Ellis, *Tudor Ireland: Crown, community and the conflict of cultures, 1470–1603*, London 1985, 131–2, 194–5.

[22] Published as *Valor Beneficiorum Ecclesiasticorum in Hibernia: or the First-Fruits of all the Ecclesiastical Benefices in the Kingdom of Ireland, as taxed in the King's Books, with an Account shewing how this Royal Fund vested in Trustees, hath hitherto been disposed of*, printed for Edward Exshaw, Bookseller on Cork-Hill, Dublin 1741, xiv + 26 pp. A corrected reprint of the *Valor* was issued in 1780. I have to thank Professor Gearóid Mac Niocaill, who first drew the printed version of the *Valor* to my attention.

[23] H. Wood, *A Guide to the Records Deposited in the Public Record Office of Ireland*, Dublin 1919, 116, 127, 157–9; Ellis, op. cit. 175. The records included: three copies of the *Valor*, described as 'Valor Beneficiorum 29 Hen. VIII–5 Car. I' (1537–1630); some valuations of bishoprics and other benefices not already valued, dated 1591–2; some accounts of the clerk of the first fruits for the period 1564–1706; an account of the archbishop of Dublin for twentieths and subsidies, 1566–85; and some nineteenth-century copies and comparative valuations. In addition, the Chief Remembrancer's Office in the exchequer included another copy of the *Valor* and some original returns to a commission of 14 Jac. I (1616–17).

the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, now described as 'Valor Beneficiorum Eccles. in Hibernia a 29 Hen. VIII ad 1591'.[24] Neither version is altogether unknown to historians,[25] but so far scant attention has been paid to them.

In order to appreciate the full significance of the *Valor*, some analysis is first necessary of its surviving versions and how they were compiled. The printed *Valor* exhibits significant differences from the manuscript copy in Trinity College, Dublin. The manuscript version appears to be in an early seventeenth-century hand and was probably copied for an archbishop of Dublin (possibly James Ussher), since it commences with the diocese of Dublin and, exceptionally, also lists the patron of Dublin benefices and occasionally a more modern valuation. In some cases the benefices are listed in a different order from the printed *Valor*, and there are a few other minor discrepancies. The manuscript version generally includes slightly more information for the area it covers. In particular, the heading for each diocese frequently preserves fuller details about the commissioners charged with making the original inquisitions, when and where taken, or the date of their return into the exchequer. A few marginalia – later incumbents, patrons or valuations of benefices – were often added, some faded and only partly legible; but those benefices and dioceses which were not taxed until after the completion of the Tudor conquest are omitted. The printed version commences with Armagh diocese and province and preserves a more traditional order of listing. Moreover, by comparison with the English *Valor*, the entries are much less informative. Normally only the net annual value of the benefice is listed, without the name of the incumbent or a breakdown of the various sources of revenue and approved deductions. Yet some further information was evidently available to the exchequer officials administering the tax, presumably from the original returns. In the mid-1540s, for example, the chief remembrancer could certify that the valuation of IR£373 12*s.* 0½*d.* for the bishopric of Meath was made up of IR£99 13*s.* 4*d.* in spiritualties and IR£273 18*s.* 8½*d.* in temporalties.[26]

Nevertheless, much more so than its English counterpart, the Irish *Valor* was a composite record. Its compilation clearly reflected the extension of English control in Ireland. The nucleus was the benefices in those regions which comprised the English lordship of Ireland in the late Middle Ages. To these were subsequently added piecemeal valuations for other dioceses as they came under crown control. The original valuations were expressed in pounds Irish and, in most cases, dated by regnal year: 29, 30, 31 Henry VIII (1537–8, 1538–9, 1539–40). The later valuations were expressed in pounds sterling. Frequently the names of the royal commissioners who made the valuations are given. The original valuations,

[24] MS 567 (E. 3. 15). The return for Ossory diocese is printed from this in P. F. Moran (ed.), *Spicilegium Ossoriense*, 1st ser., Dublin 1874, 10–12.

[25] For instance, both are listed in the bibliography to Edwards, *Church and State*.

[26] BL, Add. MS 4767, fo. 65v.

scattered through the twenty-six pages of the published version, but immediately recognisable from their expression in pounds Irish are, with the exception of south Munster, a fair reflection of the extent of the late medieval lordship (dates, places and commissioners, where stated, given in parentheses): Armagh *inter Anglicos* (i.e. that part of Armagh diocese lying among the Englishry), plus the rectory of Carrickfergus (30 Hen. VIII and 'ab initio'); Meath ('31 Hen. VIII' in the printed *Valor*, but TCD, MS 567, fo. 3, has '30 Hen. VIII', which seems more likely); Dublin (30 Hen. VIII); Kildare ('tempore Regis Hen. VIII'), excluding fourteen benefices mainly in the Irishry; Ossory (13 March 1538 at Kilkenny; Walter Cowley and James White);[27] Ferns (18 February 1538); half of Leighlin ('de antiquo'), excluding the Gaelic lordship of Leix; Cashel (28 February 1538; Walter Cowley and James White); Waterford (25 February 1538; Walter Cowley and James White). In addition, five benefices on the borders of Co. Meath, but in the dioceses of Kilmore and Ardagh, and nine benefices in the diocese of Waterford were supplied from a visitation book and an old taxation in Trinity College. No doubt these in turn derived from records in the First Fruits Office. And about half the benefices in Limerick diocese (but not the bishopric itself) are also valued in pounds Irish. Quite possibly all these benefices were also valued under Henry VIII, although the returns may not have been entered in the Chief Remembrancer's copy from which both the printed 'Valor' and at least parts of the manuscript copy derive. In this regard, it is significant that, following a scrutiny of the returns in the mid-1540s, the chief remembrancer noted: 'Episcopatus Limerici nulla remanet inde extenta in scaccario.'[28]

Subsequently, other areas were added. In Leighlin diocese, valuations of twenty-one benefices in Leix were made in pounds Irish, presumably after the plantation of the lordship and its erection into Queen's County in the 1550s. And a further fourteen benefices in the county were assessed, in pounds sterling, by the bishop of Kildare and others about mid-1586. All the later valuations were expressed in pounds sterling. Most of the province of Tuam was assessed in 1585–6: Tuam diocese itself, Kilmacduagh, and parts of Elphin, Clonfert, Killala and Achonry. In addition the assessments of Ardagh, four benefices in Meath (assessed by the bishop of Kildare and others) and six more benefices in Kildare are also dated 28 Elizabeth (1585–6). Four more benefices in Armagh were assessed 'ab antiquo'. Emly diocese was assessed by virtue of a commission

[27] TCD, MS 567, supplies fuller information on this point: 'Extentus beneficiorum et dignitatum ultra-reprisas Ossoriensis diocesis captus apud Kilkenny die Mercurii proxime ante festum S. Patricii episcopi anno Regni Regis Henrici 8$^{vi}$ xxix per Walterum Cowly et Jacobum White, commissarios': fo. 5v. William Brabazon's account as under treasurer, 1537–40, also notes a reward paid to James White of Waterford, Walter Cowley, and Walter Archer of Kilkenny for taxation of first fruits and twentieths in Cos Wexford, Waterford, Kilkenny and Tipperary (presumably the dioceses of Ossory, Ferns, Cashel and Waterford), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, London 1862–1932, xvi. no. 777.

[28] BL, Add. MS 4767, fo. 65v.

addressed to Arthur Hyde and Fulk Mounsloe, dated 1 June 1584. The same commissioners sat at Dingle on 18 May 1591 to tax Ardfert diocese, and they valued most of Lismore diocese on 26 May 1591. Cork, Cloyne and Ross dioceses were taxed in mid-1589 by Arthur Hyde and Arthur Robbins, and by Hyde and Mounsloe in 1590–1. Most of the remaining dioceses were not assessed until towards the end of James I's reign. The valuations of Clogher, Down, Derry, Raphoe, Kilmore and Dromore, all in the province of Armagh, plus Armagh *inter Hibernicos* (valued by the bishop of Meath and Francis Aungier), are dated 15 Jac. I (1617–18). Fifteen benefices in Dublin and Kildare dioceses were added at three dates around 1616. The valuation of the diocese of Limerick is entered as having been made by its bishop and others on 2 October 1629; but since, as we have seen, half the valuations are made in pounds Irish, it seems likely that this assessment was a revision and extension of an earlier, Henrician, one. The assessments of dioceses in Tuam province were also completed at this time: Killaloe (by Rowland Delahide and others), Elphin and Killala (all dated 5 Car. I [1629–30]), Achonry (5 October 1629, by Sir Roger Jones and others), and Clonfert (3 Car. I [1627–8]). Finally, the entries of a dozen more benefices are described as having been supplied from a manuscript copy of first-fruits in Trinity College, Dublin, certified from the Office of the Auditor General, or taxed in 1629, or by order of the court of exchequer in Hilary term, 1668.

It would seem, therefore, that the printed *Valor* was based on an original in the Chief Remembrancer's Office but supplemented by evidence drawn from two or more manuscripts in Trinity College, Dublin, and, in two cases (the valuations of the bishoprics of Cork and Ross), from records in the Office of the Auditor General. The Trinity College manuscripts were probably themselves copies of other records in the exchequer. Altogether, the printed *Valor* gives valuations for 1,678 livings, mainly rectories, vicarages and cathedral prebends. Yet the earlier and later valuations are not directly comparable. It is clear that each valuation was meant to reflect the actual income of the living at the date of assessment: the later valuations were not an extrapolation from the earlier ones based on a comparison of their wealth with those of benefices previously assessed. Paradoxically, therefore, many benefices in Ulster which were in fact wretchedly poor, but which were assessed in the period of comparative peace and prosperity under James I, were taxed more heavily than comparatively rich livings in the English Pale. And the bishopric of Clogher, taxed at £350 sterling, paid considerably more than any benefice in the Englishry save the archbishopric of Dublin, which was by far the wealthiest living in Ireland. Indeed, a very few livings were assessed more than once: the archbishopric of Armagh, for instance, was valued at IR£183 17*s.* 1½*d.* in 1538–9 and £400 sterling in 1617–18. No doubt further research would reveal something of the circumstances in which the valuations of particular dioceses were made. And with adjustments for inflation – assuming reliable figures for that could be

constructed along the lines of the indices for English history – it might eventually be possible to construct from the valuations a rough guide to the comparative wealth of livings throughout early modern Ireland. Even a cursory glance at the valuations as they stand shows, however, that Irish benefices were, as might be expected, generally poor by comparison with their English counterparts.

## III

One of the major values of the discovery of the Irish *Valor* is that it permits a much more exact comparison of the condition of the Irish Church with the Tudor Church elsewhere, particularly with regard to its economic base. The full significance of the returns of the Irish *Valor* can perhaps best be understood by a detailed comparison with those for other outlying parts of the Tudor state. For this purpose, it has seemed wiser to exclude those valuations which were supplied from the Trinity College manuscript(s), as well as those of Limerick diocese given in pounds Irish, on the grounds that their dating is less certain, and to confine the calculations to the dioceses covered by the more clearly Henrician valuations. These were Armagh *inter Anglicos* (plus Carrickfergus), Meath, Dublin, Kildare (excluding the later additions), Ossory, Ferns, half of Leighlin, Cashel and most of Waterford. Conveniently, these Henrician valuations covered an area of very roughly the same size as Wales, a region which in many ways presented very similar problems to the Tudor government and is therefore an appropriate object of comparison. Accordingly, a comparison with Wales is included in the following paragraphs dealing primarily with the economic base of the Church in Tudor Ireland and the impact of the Reformation there. This comparison is then developed more generally in section IV as a means of identifying both the particular problems faced by the government in enforcing religious change in Ireland and the reasons for the failure of the Reformation there.

It has long been appreciated that the ability of the government to secure enforcement of the ecclesiastical changes in the parishes was, to a large extent, determined by the value of the livings and the size of the parishes. Broadly, where benefices were sufficiently rich to attract the services of well-qualified or graduate clergy, and where parishes were comparatively small – as in most of England – more effective instruments of conversion and control could be brought to bear. In the English north, Wales and most of Ireland, however, more dispersed patterns of settlement were the norm, parishes were larger and livings were poorer. Thus the government's capacity to secure conformity was correspondingly reduced. The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* suggests that a benefice with a clear income of £13 per annum was about the minimum on which a rector or vicar could comfortably subsist with his 'usual' expenses – although, of course, these expenses varied considerably. In England, however, about half the livings were worth less than £10 per annum, and in Wales the proportion was

70 per cent.[29] The Irish *Valor* suggests that, in English Ireland, 85 per cent of the livings were worth only IR£15 (= £10) or less. And since, in parts of England and Wales, the poverty of the livings was identified as a major cause of the ignorance of the clergy, the situation in Ireland was probably even more serious. Of course, before the Reformation, when priests had been expected only to read mass and perform the sacraments in accordance with traditional teachings which were largely unquestioned, this had not mattered so much. But in a period of rapid and fundamental change, when the traditional visual presentation of religion was replaced by a bibliocentric one, and when ministers were encouraged to preach and teach – and also required to explain far-reaching changes to their congregations – a much higher level of literacy and education was needed. Thus in Ireland, where peace was precarious and the government's general powers of control attenuated, the chances of recruiting a highly qualified ministry for reform in the parishes were clearly remote.

Pre-Reformation Ireland was divided into thirty-two dioceses, whereas England, although larger, wealthier and more populous, had only seventeen dioceses and Wales just four. Moreover, whereas the English bishoprics were generally wealthy, and rated in the *Valor* as worth between £411 0*s.* 11¾*d.* (Rochester) and £3,880 3*s.* 3⅞*d.* (Winchester), those in Ireland and Wales were comparatively poor.[30] St David's was rated at £[illegible]91 18*s.* 2½*d.* and Dublin at IR£534 15*s.* 2⅔*d.* (= £356 10*s.* 2*d.*), the wealthiest sees in Wales and Ireland respectively; but the other bishoprics were worth far less than this. Indeed, although two more Irish bishoprics, Meath (IR£373 12*s.* 0½*d.* = £249 1*s.* 4½*d.*) and Armagh (IR£183 17*s.* 1½*d.* = £123 4*s.* 9*d.*), were comparable in value with the other three Welsh bishoprics (St Asaph, £202 11*s.* 6*d.*, Llandaff, £169 14*s.* 1*d.*, and Bangor, £151 3*s.* 0½*d.*), the other six Irish bishoprics taxed in 1538–40 were all worth less than £75. Altogether, some 795 benefices in the four Welsh sees are catalogued in the *Valor*, but the Irish *Valor* lists only 541 benefices for the equivalent of about seven dioceses in English Ireland, which covered a roughly similar area. Of these 541 livings, 345 or 64 per cent were wretchedly poor, being worth less than £5 (= IR£7 10*s.*) a year, whereas Glanmor Williams has calculated that only 192, or 24 per cent, of the Welsh benefices fell into this category.[31] The overall picture created by the returns of the Irish *Valor* is perhaps best understood when the figures are set out in tabular form, and the equivalent Welsh figures reproduced for comparison.

Williams considered that a major reason for the slow progress of the Reformation in Wales was the comparative poverty of the livings there by English standards.[32] Yet, as the following table shows only too clearly, the

[29] Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from the Conquest to the Reformation*, Cardiff 1962, 285; Peter Heath, *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation*, London 1969; Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire*, Cambridge 1975, esp. chs i–iii. [30] *Valor* i. 100; ii. 2, et passim. [31] Williams, op. cit. 273, 285.

[32] Glanmor Williams, *Welsh Reformation Essays*, Cardiff 1967, esp. pp. 22–3.

Table 1. *Lordship of Ireland*

| Diocese | Annual income of bishopric | No. benefices listed | Range of income per benefice: over £20 | £10–20 | £5–10 | under £5 | Average income per benefice |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Armagh (*inter Anglicos*) | IR£183 17*s.* 1½*d.* | 33 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 24 | IR£11 18*s.* 2*d.* |
| Meath | IR£373 12*s.* 0½*d.* | 106 | 4 | 14 | 29 | 59 | IR£13 9*s.* 10*d.* |
| Dublin | IR£534 15*s.* 2½*d.* | 70 | 8 | 13 | 20 | 29 | IR£22 8*s.* 8*d.* |
| Kildare | IR£69 11*s.* 4*d.* | 53 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 38 | IR£8 16*s.* 2*d.* |
| Ossory | IR£66 13*s.* 4*d.* | 76 | 2 | 6 | 20 | 48 | IR£8 14*s.* 11*d.* |
| Ferns | IR£108 13*s.* 4*d.* | 81 | 7 | 12 | 17 | 45 | IR£11 3*s.* 4*d.* |
| Leighlin (*inter Anglicos*) | IR£50 0*s.* 0*d.* | 30 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 29 | IR£4 14*s.* 1*d.* |
| Cashel | IR£66 13*s.* 4*d.* | 58 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 51 | IR£4 1*s.* 3*d.* |
| Waterford (excl. Lismore) | IR£72 8*s.* 1*d.* | 34 | 1 | 4 | 7 | 22 | IR£8 4*s.* 11*d.** |
| Total | | 541 | 28 (5%) | 54 (10%) | 114 (21%) | 345 (64%) | |
| | | | Wales† | | | | |
| St David's | £491 18*s.* 2½*d.* | 340 | 16 | 62 | 168 | 94 | |
| Llandaff | £169 14*s.* 1*d.* | 187 | 5 | 34 | 83 | 65 | |
| Bangor | £151 3*s.* 0½*d.* | 112 | 17 | 39 | 43 | 13 | |
| St Asaph | £202 11*s.* 6*d.* | 156 | 15 | 49 | 72 | 20 | |
| Total | | 795 | 53 (6%) | 184 (23½%) | 366 (46%) | 192 (24%) | |

* Average income per benefice throughout English Ireland IR£11 5*s.* 2½*d.* † Figures supplied from Williams, *Welsh Church*, 273, 285.

position was markedly worse in Ireland. And this meant that clerical talent was likely to be spread even more thinly in Ireland than Wales, since the better-qualified clergy would tend to gravitate to the richer livings or leave for greener English pastures. Nevertheless, even within English Ireland marked fluctuations between the dioceses occurred in the average wealth of livings – from the modest affluence of Dublin (average annual income per benefice, IR £22 8*s.* 8*d.*) to the wretched poverty of Cashel (IR £4 1*s.* 3*d.*). Predictably, clerical wealth – such as it was – was largely concentrated around Dublin, eastern Meath, Louth, north Kildare, Kilkenny, south Wexford and Waterford city. Elsewhere, in modern Westmeath, Wicklow, south Kildare, Carlow, north Wexford, Waterford and most of Tipperary, which were predominantly border districts, the livings were very poor. Indeed, a handful of livings, such as the vicarage of Ardnurcher in the extreme south-west march of Meath, were returned as of no value. The vicarage was still waste in 1604, although valued at £50 in time of peace.[33] Similarly, on the Anglo-Scottish borders, a few livings north of Carlisle were returned as of no value in time of war.[34] In the purely Gaelic dioceses the indications are that most of the livings were also miserably poor. Overall, the valuations of the Irish *Valor* are a considerable help in explaining the compromise in the Irish Reformation Parliament whereby clerical taxation in Ireland was restricted to half of the tenth demanded of clergy in England and Wales.[35] Initially, the twentieths yielded about IR £300 a year, a figure which seems to confirm the accuracy of the speculation above as to what comprised the original Henrician assessment, since the combined income of the 541 benefices included in the table amounted to IR £6,091 16*s.* 9*d.* By the start of Mary's reign, however, the yield had risen to just over IR £370 per annum, apparently from a wider tax net.[36]

Unlike its English counterpart, the Irish *Valor* did not include valuations of the religious houses. A statute of 1536 (28 Hen. VIII, c. 18) did indeed extend the incidence of first fruits to the monasteries, but presumably they were omitted from the *Valor* because, by 1520, the suppression campaign was approaching completion. Yet, in order to paint a rounded picture of the overall impact of the Reformation on ecclesiastical wealth in English Ireland, it is necessary to include the religious houses. Fortunately, their possessions were included in the 1540–1 survey of crown property in Ireland, and the resultant information is conveniently assembled in Newport White's modern edition of the monastic returns.[37] Overall, the

[33] *CSPI*, 174.

[34] *Valor* v. 287.

[35] Bradshaw, 'Opposition', 285–303; Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 131–2, 194–5.

[36] Ibid. 175; BL, Add. MS 4767, fo. 73. For instance, immediately after the monastic dissolutions, in 1541–2, the yield was IR £287 2*s.* 1½*d.*, PRO, SP 60/10, fo. 45, *LP* xviii. no. 553(2).

[37] N. B. White (ed.), *Extents of Irish Monastic Possessions, 1540–41*, Dublin 1943. Bradshaw correlated White's edition with the originals, PRO, SP 65/1/2, 65/2, 65/3/1, 3, 65/4/1–3, 65/5; SC 11/795–6, and made pencilled corrections to the copy in Cambridge University Library. This saved me from some slips.

Henrician dissolution in Ireland yielded the Crown a nominal IR£4,069 11*s.* 4¾*d.* net per annum in additional revenue – which was rather less than the £3,178 calculated by Williams as accruing from the dissolution in Wales.[38] Yet, in the case of monastic wealth, the division between the lordship's richer and poorer regions was much sharper than for secular livings. By county, no less than 64 per cent of the gross total of IR£4,929 18*s.* 10¾*d.* derived from Dublin (IR£1,767 11*s.* 8¾*d.*) and Meath (IR£1,365 17*s.* 6*d.*, of which Westmeath yielded only IR£282 18*s.* 9*d.*). Of the other nine counties surveyed, only Louth (IR£557 15*s.* 8½*d.*) and Kilkenny (IR£413) yielded more than IR£250 a year. By monastery, this inequality was equally marked, with five houses in Cos Dublin, Meath and Louth in receipt of 55 per cent of the total net income. Although comparatively poor by English standards, St Mary's Abbey (IR£504 7*s.* 9*d.* per annum net) and St Thomas's Abbey (IR£404 18*s.* 6*d.*) in Dublin city were the envy of many an Irish bishop, while the richest house of all in Ireland, the Hospitallers of St John (IR£676 13*s.* 11½*d.*), lay a short distance away at Kilmainham. The two next wealthiest foundations, Mellifont in Louth (IR£324 19*s.* 6*d.*) and the cells of the English priory of Llanthony at Duleek and Colpe in Meath (IR£342 13*s.* 0*d.*), also compared favourably in wealth with the two richest Welsh houses, Tintern (£192) and Valle Crucis (£188).[39] Thus, the Henrician dissolution hit the ecclesiastical establishment in Ireland particularly severely, in that it stripped of about half their endowments the only two Irish dioceses in which the clergy generally enjoyed incomes comparable with those in England. And in the case of Dublin, there were persistent efforts to dissolve or downgrade one or other of the two cathedrals. Bowing to public pressure, Henry VIII agreed to the transformation of Christ Church into a secular college in 1540, but the eventual price was the downgrading, in 1546, of St Patrick's into a parish church, which netted the Crown an additional IR£1,432 2*s.* 9½*d.* a year. Mary's restoration and re-endowment of St Patrick's in 1558 was, in the event, upheld by Elizabeth, but there followed a series of damaging but abortive proposals to appropriate the foundation for the establishment of a university.[40] Moreover, Elizabeth reduced the value of some of the cathedral dignities by leasing them to favoured laymen at rents which less adequately supported the incumbents. Three dignities which had yielded IR£94 6*s.* 8*d.* in 1539–40 were listed in 1604 as leased for only £100, despite the mid-Tudor inflation.[41] Overall, the impact of the Reformation on clerical wealth in English Ireland was to reduce drastically the number of livings which were financially attractive to the better educated clergy.

[38] White, op. cit. 376; Williams, *Welsh Church*, 348.

[39] White, op. cit. 376, et passim; PRO, SP 65/1/2 (which corrects White in the case of Llanthony); Williams, op. cit. 348–9.

[40] Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 201, 204, 210, 218; BL, Add. MS 4767, fo. 73.

[41] *Valor*, 9–10; *CSPI*, 169–70.

Had more of this wealth been utilised for the endowment of secular colleges, king's preachers, schools and a university, rather than simply [illegible] the crown [illegible] of Dublin and Meath in particular might have proved more capable of providing the Church of Ireland with the leadership which was so evidently lacking under the [illegible]ors.

These calculations of clerical income in Ireland prompt the question of the accuracy and reliability of the commissioners' returns for the *Valor*. Unfortunately, there is no way of checking conclusively. No doubt, as in England, there was an understandable tendency to under-value, and some commissioners were probably more conscientious than others. For instance, the values of benefices in those dioceses surveyed by Walter Cowley and James White were usually rounded to the nearest half-mark or ten shillings. Yet there is reason to believe that the returns bore at least a rough approximation to the actual values of the benefices at the time of their valuation. For example, Under-treasurer Brabazon's account for 1534–7, which was made before the *Valor* was compiled, includes an entry of IR£398 17*s.* 0*d.* received in compositions for the first fruits from beneficed clergy inducted since 1536. The compositions were usually a little less than the valuations of the benefices in the *Valor*: William Power paid IR£40 for the archdeaconry of Dublin, which was valued in the *Valor* at IR£42 15*s.* 8*d.* a year, and Simon Geffrey paid IR£20 for the rectory of Howth, valued at IR£24 16*s.* 10*d.* in the *Valor*. In the same account, the profits of the archbishopric of Dublin *sede vacante* averaged IR£415 10*s.* 6*d.* per annum over eighteen months, as against IR£534 15*s.* 2½*d.* in the *Valor*.[42] Another very rough guide is provided by the jurors' estimate, in process enrolled on the exchequer memoranda rolls, of the value of livings taken into the king's hand because a Gaelic clerk had been presented to them. Three examples were the rectory of Wicklow, valued at IR£20 by a jury in 1524, and IR£10 by the *Valor*; the vicarage of Girley, Meath, valued at IR£5 in 1507 and IR£8 16*s.* 0*d.* in the *Valor*; and the vicarage of Athlomney, Meath, valued at IR£10 in 1536 and IR£6 2*s.* 0*d.* in the *Valor*.[43] These valuations, and others which could be cited, tend to show significant, but not excessive, differences from those of the *Valor* – given that many of the livings concerned were in the marches and frequently affected by war and political instability.

Perhaps a more reliable guide to the *Valor*'s relative accuracy would be to compare the *Valor*'s assessments more systematically with later estimates of the value of livings. Conveniently for this purpose, two certificates survive among the state papers of benefices in the dioceses of Dublin and

[42] *Valor*, 9; PRO, SP 65/1/2. See also the archbishop of Dublin's allegations that Undertreasurer Brabazon had defrauded the king of over £100 st. on his account of the profits of the archbishopric, PRO SP 60/4, fo. 71, *LP* xii/1. no. 1077.

[43] Memoranda rolls, 15 Henry viii m. 11, PROI, Ferguson Collection iv. fos 80–2; 23 Henry vii m. 4, PROI, RC 8/43, 213–14; 28 Henry viii m. 23d, PROI, Ferguson Coll. iv. fo. 201; *Valor*, 4, 9. See also S. G. Ellis, *Reform and Revival: English government in Ireland, 1470–1534*, London 1986, 128–9.

Meath respectively which were thought by their bishops to exceed the yearly value of £30. These certificates (unfortunately in rounded figures) were drawn up in 1604, following a directive from the council in England to the deputy and council in Ireland to consider ways of planting a godly ministry in Ireland. In response, the Irish council consulted with some senior clergy and drew up certain memorials for the reformation of the clergy in Ireland. Among these were proposals that every learned (i.e. preaching) minister have an annual income of at least 100 marks (IR), and that farmers of impropriations which yielded IR £40 a year above the rent be required to maintain a reading minister with a stipend of at least 20 marks (IR).[44] Nevertheless, the bishops of Dublin and Meath, in enclosing certificates of benefices which were of any value to maintain a preacher, implied that £30 sterling was the absolute minimum, although, in the event, they returned that five prebendaries of St Patrick's who were preaching ministers received less than this.[45]

The certificate for Dublin diocese discloses that, in 1604, 24 benefices were reputedly worth £30 or more annually, as against only four in 1539, in addition to the archbishopric itself. And in the case of Meath diocese, 33 benefices were returned as normally worth at least that amount, as against only two in 1539, although some had recently been damaged by war.[46] No doubt the major intervening factor here was the sixteenth-century price rise, but other possible influences are the restoration of peace in 1603 and the fact that government control over the English Pale had been relatively secure in the later sixteenth century. Correlating the returns for 29 benefices in Meath with their assessments in the *Valor*, the average increase in their valuations was 385 per cent. Yet the increase in the case of the more exposed benefices in the marches was occasionally much higher than this. In Dublin diocese the average increase for 19 benefices was rather lower, 317 per cent, probably because the richer livings, mostly prebends of St Patrick's, tended to be located in districts which, even in the 1530s, had been relatively peaceful and prosperous. Nevertheless, these increases are roughly the same as for parts of England over the same period.[47] Moreover, in the case of Dublin diocese, there is a fairly close correlation between livings listed in the *Valor* as worth IR £10 or more and those which are listed in the certificate as worth £30 or more in 1604. All those listed in the certificate as worth at least £30 were worth at least IR £10 in the *Valor*, with the exception of the prebend of St Audoen's (IR £7 9*s.* 10*d.*), while four livings held by preaching ministers but worth less than £30 in 1604 were valued at between IR £6 and IR £11 15*s.* 11*d.* in the *Valor*. In addition, nine other livings worth between IR £10 0*s.* 7*d.* and IR £24 in the *Valor* do not appear in the

[44] PRO, SP 63/216, no. 20 I, *CSPI*, no. 267; SP 63/216, no. 20 II, *CSPI*, no. 268; *CSPI*, nos 266, 407.

[45] *CSPI*, nos 223, 267.

[46] PRO, SP 63/216, no. 20 II, *CSPI*, no. 268.

[47] See especially Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament*, Oxford 1956, 109–12.

certificate. In Meath diocese the picture is less tidy. Eight of 29 from among those listed in 1604 as worth at least £30 had been assessed at less than IR£10 in the *Valor*, mostly livings in the marches; but 13 of those livings assessed at IR£10 or more in the *Valor* do not appear in the certificate. Overall, therefore, these figures do not indicate any serious under-valuation of livings in the *Valor*.

They do suggest that a further significant spoliation of church property had occurred between 1539 and 1604. Although in 1604 the two richest dioceses in Ireland together had 57 benefices capable of supporting preaching ministers, a further 22 livings which should, on the evidence of the *Valor*, have been sufficiently wealthy to support preachers were apparently too impoverished to do so. Indeed, nine of these had formerly been worth at least IR£15 a year, and five more had been valued at between IR£13 and IR£15. No doubt a detailed investigation would disclose evidence about the precise circumstances in which many of these livings had become impoverished, but an obvious suggestion is that the livings were impropriated. As Alan Ford has shown, the proportion of impropriate livings in Ireland was far higher than in England – 60 per cent compared with roughly 40 per cent.[48] In 1576 Bishop Brady of Meath had reported after personal inquiry throughout his diocese that there were 224 parish churches, of which 105 were impropriated to farms held of the Crown and served only by curates who lived on the bare altarages, 52 had endowed vicarages and were in less bad but still poor condition, and there were 52 more livings in the gift of others where conditions were barely adequate.[49] His successor, Bishop Jones, thought that more than half the churches in his diocese, about 120, had belonged to suppressed abbeys and religious houses: they were mostly farmed to Catholic recusants who allowed the curates whom they chose quite inadequate stipends and failed to maintain the church chancels.[50] The royal visitations of 1615 and 1634 revealed 133 (70.7 per cent) and 138 (71.7 per cent) respectively of the rectories impropriate.[51] Similarly, in 1604 Sir John Davies reported to Cecil that, in many parts, the incumbents were poor unlettered clerks who had, by contract with the patron or ordinary before their institution, alienated the greater part of the profits to laymen or even recusant priests.[52]

In the 1604 certificates it is noticeable that, exceptionally, in Dublin diocese the archbishop was patron of 17 out of the 24 richest livings. Of these 17 incumbents only two were not preachers, although the archbishop of Armagh and the bishop of Meath held two prebends in plurality. Of the other seven livings, the king was patron of two, the cathedral chapters of

[48] Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, 68.

[49] J. Healy, *History of the Diocese of Meath* i, London 1908, 198–9.

[50] PRO, SP 63/216, no. 20 II, *CSPI*, no. 268. See also Ford, 'Protestant Reformation', and Lennon, 'Counter-Reformation', 61, 84.

[51] Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, 88.

[52] Healy, op. cit. i. 198–9; *CSPI*, nos 213, 407.

two more, the earl of Kildare of three and Sir William Sarsfield was patron of the other: the incumbents were all preachers except one minister presented by Kildare and Sarsfield's benefice, which was then vacant. The archbishop of Dublin had also presented preachers to four lesser prebends of which he was patron. In Meath diocese, however, the bishop was patron of only four of the richest 33 livings, with the king patron of five and the archbishop of Armagh patron of two more. The patrons of the remaining 22 livings were Old English nobles and gentry, many of whom were Catholic recusants. This created a much less satisfactory situation. The 33 livings supported only eight preachers (one of them able to preach in Irish), of whom one was non-resident and one resident on one of the two livings for which he was dispensed; three more were described as able to teach (one in both English and Irish, and one in Irish). All but one of the preachers was English-born, but among the teachers and reading ministers there was a slight preponderance of local men.

Overall, therefore, the contrast between Dublin and Meath dioceses suggests that, even where, exceptionally, the church's endowment was anyway adequate, unsympathetic patrons were still sometimes able to thwart the reform campaign by presenting ill-qualified ministers to livings. Elsewhere, however, the chances of attracting qualified clergy were even less. The *Valor* shows that in those 22 dioceses[53] for which the valuations were chiefly made between 1584 and 1630 only 19 benefices, including nine bishoprics, were returned as worth £30 or more per annum. Together with the Henrician returns, these figures suggest that the number of Church of Ireland livings which were suitable for resident preachers may by 1603 have been little more than a hundred. Subsequently, of course, conditions improved somewhat. With the restoration of peace, the profits of glebe land, tithes and other church dues attached to benefices increased, and piecemeal attempts were made to recover church property which had been alienated or illegally detained.[54] These factors swelled the value of many livings, and so alleviated the lot of particular ministers. For the most part, however, the only way of providing ministers with an adequate income was to license pluralism on a substantial scale by uniting two or three benefices: in other words, the Church opted for quality rather than quantity. The net result of these changes was a creditable 21 per cent increase in the number of clergy in the south and west between the two royal visitations of 1615 and 1634, made up of a 61 per cent increase in the number of preachers and a 44 per cent decline in the number of reading ministers. In Ulster the position was even better, but mainly because the authorities took advantage of the plantation to effect a substantial re-endowment of church livings there. Even so, correlation of the incomplete returns for the visitations of 1615

[53] This figure includes half of Armagh and Limerick and counts separately some dioceses, such as Down and Connor, which had long been united.

[54] Ford, op. cit. ch. iv, on which also the following calculations are based.

and 1622 suggests that, in 1615, the Church of Ireland had around 800 clergy to serve 2,492 parishes; and even in 1622 there were still only 380 preachers, more than a third of them in Ulster. In view of the pitifully inadequate endowment of the Tudor Church, the subsequent creation of a qualified preaching ministry was a signal achievement. Yet the paucity of ministers, and particularly preachers, meant that in many parts of the country the Church of Ireland simply lacked an effective presence.

Overall, therefore, the evidence concerning both the distribution of ecclesiastical wealth in pre-Reformation Ireland and its appropriation or redistribution by the Tudor government suggests that these matters were of fundamental importance in determining the impact of the government's campaign for reform in the parishes. Broadly, the evidence indicates that the Irish Church had only two dioceses – Dublin and Meath – in which its financial resources were in any way adequate to mount the sort of campaign contemplated in England. It also reveals that these two dioceses suffered disproportionately from the monastic dissolutions. Finally, it suggests that, even allowing for these factors, the ecclesiastical authorities still failed to make the best use of available resources. Lay impropriators were permitted to strip the Church further of its wealth or to promote inadequately trained curates to serve livings, so that far too few preachers were available for the intended campaign of conversion. Of course it does not necessarily follow that a plentiful and qualified preaching ministry would have created a Protestant Ireland. But without the resources to support one, the Church of Ireland's prospects were bleak indeed. And such evidence as exists does suggest that, where the Irish Church enjoyed the services of highly educated, able and committed preachers – such as briefly with Bishop John Bale in Kilkenny (1552–3), and for much of the period in Dublin – it did make progress.[55]

## IV

Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to argue that the outcome of the reform movement in Ireland was chiefly determined by the comparative poverty of Irish benefices. If this were the case, then the result would simply have been to slow the progress of reform, as happened in other Tudor borderlands, without altering the eventual outcome. To an extent, of course, the task was a more manageable one under Henry VIII. The Henrician Reformation was a far less radical departure from late medieval Christianity than the Elizabethan settlement; indeed, particularly in its association of the Crown with ecclesiastical reform, it was a logical continuation of developments in the pre-Reformation Church in Ireland.[56] It was also largely confined to the English parts of the country,

[55] S. G. Ellis, 'John Bale, bishop of Ossory, 1552–3', *Journal of the Butler Society* ii/3 (1984), 283–93; Canny, 'Why the Reformation failed', 431–2.

[56] Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, ch. vii, esp. pp. 192–3.

where the government could appeal to the traditions of loyalty and deference to authority in support of its campaign.[57] Yet, even in England, the conversion of a reluctant population depended [redacted] mobilisation of the official machinery of Church and [redacted] enforce but increasingly also on private initiatives. The founding of grammar schools and Puritan lectureships are major examples of this. Conversely, unsympathetic Catholic nobles and gentry on the commissions of the peace, on ecclesiastical commissions, acting as [redacted], or even simply by maintaining recusant priests for themselves and their tenants, could do much to hinder the progress of the Reformation.[58] It is here, I believe, that the crucial differences lay.

In Ireland, given the very inadequate resources and machinery available to Church and State for enforcing ecclesiastical change, the attitude of local nobles and gentry in determining the eventual response to the Tudor Reformation was correspondingly more vital. And, undoubtedly, political relations between the Dublin administration and the Englishry of Ireland grew increasingly strained after mid-century, and this in turn reduced the level of local co-operation and support for the government's ecclesiastical policies. The central importance of this development in determining the definitive local response to the Tudor Reformation may be gauged from the particular pattern of Catholic recusancy in Ireland. In view of the fact that the Church of Ireland faced far more serious problems in operating in Gaelic Ireland, and that the reform campaign there was closely associated with military conquest, it might be expected that the Counter-Reformation movement would find a very receptive audience in Gaelic Ireland. Paradoxically, however, the evidence available at present suggests that post-Tridentine Catholicism was established more firmly and at an earlier date in the English Pale and towns which had traditionally provided the backbone of English rule in Ireland. Its chief supporters were the Old English merchants, nobles and gentry of these regions.[59] Indeed, it is sometimes possible to show that the children and grandchildren of those nobles, gentry and merchants who had supported and profited from the Henrician Reformation, were under Elizabeth accounted leading Catholic recusants, most notably Viscount Baltinglass.[60]

At first glance this paradox seems not simply to highlight the gross inadequacy of the resources of Church and State for enforcing change in English Ireland but even to suggest its total irrelevance to the problem, for the Church in Gaelic Ireland was poorer still. At the risk of offering a truism, however, it probably underlines the fact that the Reformation struggle for the hearts and minds of men was not simply determined by

[57] For a convenient summary, ibid. 192–205.

[58] Haigh, 'Recent historiography', lists and summarises the more important works on these developments.

[59] See Lennon, 'Counter-Reformation', 75–92, esp. p. 91.

[60] Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 142, 281; Colm Lennon, 'Recusancy and the Dublin Stanihursts', *Arch. Hib.* xxxiii (1975), 101–10; idem, 'Counter-Reformation', 84–5.

the will of princes, even though this was the normal pattern on the Continent. Rather, it depended on the overall balance of pressures, both official and informal, which each side could bring to bear. And in Ireland, where the channels of government control and influence were more attenuated than elsewhere in the Tudor territories, private pressures and resources were correspondingly more important. Thus, even though English Ireland was more susceptible to government pressure than Gaelic Ireland, and the Church much richer, it may well be that the political community there could, for its own reasons, exert sufficient countervailing pressures to negate the advantage. A brief comparative survey of the progress of the Reformation in English Ireland and Wales may best illustrate this point.

The fact that Ireland eventually became a bastion of Counter-Reformation Catholicism, while Wales developed into a stronghold of Protestant non-conformity with the Methodist revival in the eighteenth century, might seem to render such comparisons worthless. Yet, in the problems which they presented for the advocates of the Tudor Reformation, the two regions were remarkably similar. Both were borderlands of the Tudor state, in which English colonists and structures of government had been imposed on a native population and culture which were Celtic and followed similar customs, patterns of settlement and landholding. For instance, the same problems of clerical marriage and dynasties troubled the Church, and gentlemen-priests were frequently the subject of praise poems by the bards.[61] Glanmor Williams's research on the advance of the Reformation in Wales suggests that, overall, some progress was made among the Welsh gentry, but little elsewhere. For Elizabeth's reign alarming reports survive of the activities of recusant priests, which the authorities were barely able to control. And, more generally, Catholic practices were widespread among the laity and lower clergy. Despite much evidence of Puritanism in the seventeenth century, it was only in the eighteenth century that the generality of the laity became enthusiastic Protestants.[62]

In assessing the reasons for this slow progress, Williams notes in particular the poverty of the livings and the large upland parishes, with sparse and scattered settlements, so that the machinery for enforcement of change was far weaker than in most of England. He also draws attention to the low levels of literacy and learning. Since the acceptance of the Reformation involved a shift from a visual presentation of religion, centred on the miracle of the mass, to a bibliocentric presentation, based on Bible-reading and sermons, the basic impact of the Protestant message was much blunted among the lower non-literate orders of society. Thus

[61] Williams, *Welsh Church*, 284, 339–46; K. W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages*, Dublin 1972, 91–101; C. Mooney, *The Church in Gaelic Ireland Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, Dublin 1969, 53–60; Bradshaw, *Dissolution*, ch. i.

[62] Williams, *Essays*, esp. ch. i. See now also idem, *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation: Wales* c. *1415–1642*, Oxford 1987, chs v, xii–xiii.

the popular Reformation was largely delayed until the eighteenth-century Methodist revival. Finally, in a society which was only partially English-speaking, the Protestant emphasis on sermons and vernacular services also posed major problems: separate provision had to be made for worship in Welsh, although the bishops at least were often monoglot Englishmen.[63]

Since all these arguments also applied, to a greater or lesser degree, in English Ireland[64] why was it that the local response to the Tudor Reformation there was so different? It might well be expected that, in Ireland, too, the pattern of grudging conformity and declining Catholic survivalism would be repeated, followed two or three centuries later by a popular Reformation feeding on rising levels of literacy. The traditional explanation for the failure of such a pattern to emerge is, of course, the impact of the Counter-Reformation. Yet this only prompts the further question of why the Dublin administration was unable, unlike the Tudor administration in Wales, to keep the movement under control. And, as has been seen, the existence of an independent Gaelic Ireland beyond the government's control is at best only a partial answer. Clearly, the urgent political need to reduce Gaelic Ireland distracted the Dublin administration from the task of enforcing religious conformity in the English parts, but this does little to explain why the Old English merchants and gentry were the earliest champions of post-Tridentine Catholicism in Ireland. Arguably, the key to the peculiar response of English Ireland may be found in the different political environment and, paradoxically, its more Anglicised structure of society.

In both Wales and English Ireland, opponents of change sought to portray the Tudor Reformation not simply as a novelty but as an English and foreign implant on Celtic Christianity.[65] The charge was potentially more damaging in Wales, where many of the gentry were native Welsh rather than a colonial aristocracy. Perhaps partly for this reason there was from the outset a much more vigorous campaign to make service books available in Welsh and to provide the state Church there with a respectable Celtic ancestry.[66] Moreover, although Elizabeth might claim to be 'mere English', Welshmen were keenly aware of the Tudors' Welsh origins, whereas in Ireland the native culture was identified by the government with resistance to English rule. For example, by 1552 at least six books had appeared in Welsh, including translations of the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Epistles and Gospels for the Book of Common Prayer. Translations of the Book of Common Prayer itself and the New Testament followed in 1567, and thereafter a very

[63] Ibid. [64] Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, ch. vii, and the references there cited.

[65] Williams, *Essays*, 14, 18, 207–19; P. R. Roberts, 'The union with England and the identity of Anglican Wales', *TRHS*, 5th ser. xxii (1972), 63–70; Canny, 'Why the Reformation failed', 438–9; Ford, 'Protestant Reformation', 51, 64–6; Ellis, op. cit. 218–19.

[66] Roberts, art. cit. 63–70; Williams, op. cit. 183–5, 207–19; idem, *Recovery*, 290–2, 295–9, 314–15, 322–5, 331.

respectable output of devotional literature in Welsh appeared from the presses.[67] Most of the necessary works for monoglot Welsh Protestants had appeared before the Gaelic translation of Knox's Liturgy in 1567 (which in any case was for Scottish Protestants), the catechism of 1571 and the New Testament of 1603.[68] In consequence, the growth of a substantial native Protestant tradition in Wales quickly turned the jibe of a *cwndid* of Mary's reign that Protestantism was 'ffydd Sayson',[69] whereas in Ireland the identification stuck of English and Protestant, exemplified even in the Gaelic word for both, *Sasanach*. By contrast, the Englishry of Ireland found themselves increasingly excluded under Elizabeth from positions of influence in the Dublin administration in favour of adventurers from England who questioned their credentials as Englishmen and their ability, as cultural degenerates, to promote true religion and English civility among the natives. Even the Church increasingly acquired a colonial appearance, whereas in Wales thirteen of the sixteen bishops appointed by Elizabeth were Welshmen, an unprecedented proportion.[70] In these circumstances, co-operation and support in Ireland for the government's Anglicising policies were withdrawn.

The thrust of Elizabethan policy in Ireland tended to generate local opposition, not only among the intended victims of that policy – the independent Gaelic chiefs – but also among the traditional upholders of English values, the colonial aristocracy. Yet the Englishry of Ireland were in a much stronger position to oppose these developments in Tudor policy than were their counterparts in Wales. In the absence of the nobility – Englishmen with estates in both England and Wales – the leadership of Welsh society rested with the gentry. And, as Williams has shown, whereas many Welsh gentry opposed the religious changes, very few had the resources or inclination to harbour recusant priests as household chaplains. Wales produced many seminary priests, but few of them returned to Wales.[71] In the longer term, however, Catholic chaplains proved the only reliable bulwark against the creeping pressures for conformity, as the traditional Catholic priesthood died out and was replaced in the parishes by committed Protestants. By and large, the later pattern of Counter-Reformation Catholicism in England, too, mirrored not so much those areas in which traditional Catholicism had been particularly vigorous before the Reformation, but those parts in which Catholic nobles and gentry were prepared to maintain recusant priests in their households for themselves and their tenants.[72] And in the English

[67] Roberts, art. cit. 49–51; Williams, *Essays*, 24, 191–205; idem, *Recovery*, 295–9, 314–15, 322–5.

[68] Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 218, 220.

[69] Williams, op. cit. 13–14, 18.

[70] N. P. Canny, *The Formation of the Old English Elite in Ireland*, Dublin 1975, passim; Williams, *Recovery*, 307; Ford, 'Protestant Reformation', 50–74.

[71] Williams, *Essays*, 25–7, 55–8; idem, *Welsh Church*, 271; idem, *Recovery*, 316–21.

[72] See especially Christopher Haigh, 'From monopoly to minority: Catholicism in early modern England', *TRHS*, 5th ser. xxxi (1981), 129–47.

Pale in Ireland, where the aristocracy was comparatively prosperous, this phenomenon of gentry-based recusancy seems to have emerged fairly early in Elizabeth's reign.[73]

A second major difference between Ireland and Wales was the comparative importance and vitality of the towns in Ireland and their absence from Wales. The significance of the urban factor in the context of the Reformation is twofold. First, with their large populations, accumulations of wealth and higher levels of literacy, they exercised a major force in moulding national public opinion. One Tudor official had described them as 'the sheet anchors of the state'.[74] None the less Irish, towns were particularly open to outside influences since most were seaports, and many of them were also badly hit in the later sixteenth century by the disruption and insecurity stemming from the Tudor conquest.[75] In Scotland, it is noticeable that the earliest strongholds of Protestantism were the east-coast ports which traded with Denmark and north Germany.[76] In Ireland, however, many of the seaport towns had strong trading links with the Iberian peninsula.[77] And like the Pale gentry, the leading merchant families of the towns could well afford to support Catholic priests. Already by the mid-1560s, the leading merchants of Waterford were sending relatives abroad for training in Continental seminaries.[78] Finally, and quite unaccountably, the authorities in Ireland neglected to secure the passage in the parliament there of an Irish counterpart to the act dissolving the chantries. In terms of revenue, this was probably not a very costly omission. The medieval guilds and chantries were apparently concentrated mainly in the towns.[79] In theory, the omission simply meant that the endowments of these foundations should have been diverted to some other charitable purpose since, by the Elizabethan act of uniformity, private masses and conventicles were still illegal. In practice, some, at least, of these endowments continued to be

[73] Lennon, 'Counter-Reformation', 83–4, 88–9; Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 215–16.

[74] Quoted in J. F. Lydon, *The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages*, Dublin 1972, 241. On the towns, see now also Brendan Bradshaw, 'The Reformation in the towns: Cork, Limerick and Galway', in John Bradley (ed.), *The Medieval City*, Dublin 1989, 220–52.

[75] A good general survey is Anthony Sheehan, 'Irish towns in a period of change, 1558–1625', in Brady and Gillespie, *Natives and Newcomers*, 93–119.

[76] I. B. Cowan, *Regional Aspects of the Scottish Reformation*, London 1978.

[77] T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (eds), *A New History of Ireland*, III: *Early modern Ireland 1534–1691*, Oxford 1976, ch. i.

[78] Helga Hammerstein, 'Aspects of the Continental education of Irish students in the reign of Elizabeth I', *Historical Studies* viii (1971), 137–53; Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 222; Lennon, 'Counter-Reformation', 83.

[79] I am grateful to Dr Colm Lennon for drawing my attention to the significance of the chantries in the maintenance of urban Catholicism. See in general ibid. 78, 84; M. V. Ronan, 'Religious customs of Dublin medieval gilds', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 5th ser. xxvi (July–Dec. 1925), 228–30; J. J. Webb, *The Guilds of Dublin*, Dublin 1929; Gearóid Mac Niocaill 'A register of St. Saviour's priory, Waterford', *Anal. Hib.* xxiii (1966), 135–224. Many of the surviving records of Dublin guilds were published by H. F. Berry in successive issues of the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* between the years 1900 and 1918.

used for the maintenance of Catholic priests and services.[80] Thus in the towns of Elizabethan Ireland one of the chief institutions underpinning the faith of the late medieval urban laity remained *in situ*.

Overall, therefore, this brief survey of the similarities and differences between the problems of the Reformation in Ireland and Wales would seem to point to the colonial aristocracy and the towns as the decisive influences in the outcome of the Irish Reformation. The fact is that, given the pitifully inadequate endowment of the Church of Ireland and the growing alienation from government of a majority of the Old English political community, leading merchants and gentry could collectively marshal the necessary resources to thwart the government's campaign. Arguably, by 1603 this setback was not just temporary but decisive. It is true that, in the later sixteenth century, the Dublin administration was distracted from the enforcement of religious uniformity by the political problems leading to military conquest and that, after 1603, the path lay open to a complete Anglicisation of the country. Yet, by then, the nature and scale of the problem had grown far beyond the capacity of an early Stuart government to resolve. Among the Old English, grudging conformity and Church-papism had by then long given way to outright recusancy.[81] And given that this response was so general, and that there had developed in official circles in England a tacit acceptance of private freedom of conscience, full-scale coercion of recusants would have required a substantial standing army and was politically unacceptable anyway. James I had neither sufficient sustained interest in the Irish problem to countenance such a policy nor the resources to pay for the army it required.[82] The only other alternative was the wholesale re-endowment of

[80] The clearest indication of this is the case of the guild of St Anne in St Audoen's parish, Dublin, which supported six chantry priests. The guild's property and lands were rented to Catholics, and the profits presumably supported the priests. The arrangement went undetected until 1611, when court proceedings commenced against the guild and also St Sythe's Gild. In 1634 a commission of inquiry reported that the guild's annual rents were worth £289 1*s*. 7*d*., but the guild was not finally suppressed until 1740. See Colm Lennon, 'Civic life and religion in early seventeenth century Dublin', *Arch. Hib.* xxxviii (1983), 114–25; Ronan, art. cit. 379–85; H. F. Berry, 'History of the religious guild of St. Anne', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* xxv (1904), sect. C, 21–106. For indications of a trade guild continuing to support Catholicism, see especially Webb, op. cit. 85–6 (payments for a priest, a wake, and tolling bells at a month's mind).

[81] Lennon, 'Counter-Reformation', 79–90; Bottigheimer, 'Failure', 196–207.

[82] Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, ch. iii. As this paper was being written, a review article appeared by Professor Canny, in which he restated some of his arguments about the Reformation, 'Protestants, planters and apartheid in early modern Ireland', *IHS* xxv (1986–7), 105–15. Canny remains unconvinced by Ford's findings and argues that his primary purpose was to undertake 'the task of supplying supporting evidence for the theory first propounded by his mentor', Dr Bradshaw (p. 107). In the face of Ford's evidence, Canny asks us to believe that the 'Irish protestant leaders of the seventeenth century' ought to be regarded as 'the most reform-minded group in Europe with the possible exception of the catholic reformers in the Austrian Habsburg lands': ibid. 109–10. Perhaps I may also be permitted here to record my disagreement with the purported summary of my views about the significance of the Reformation's failure in Professor

the Church of Ireland, so as to rebuild the parish churches and staff them with a plentiful and well-educated preaching ministry, recruited and trained through a national system of diocesan schools and an adequately endowed Dublin university. Again, the Crown could not afford such a programme. What remains is the classic Tudor strategy for the enforcement of religious change, a gradualist approach encouraging local support and manipulating habits of loyalty to harness private resources to the machinery of Church and State.

If, after 1547, the government had retained the local co-operation or acquiescence of the Englishry in the Henrician Reformation, there was no reason why an officially inspired Reformation should not gradually have spread from the Pale and major towns to all parts of Ireland as an integral part of the Anglicising process. It may be that, as Canny has argued, Bradshaw's survey of developments pre-dates the general emergence of Old English Catholic recusancy by two or three decades. Yet the conclusions of this paper would seem to support his main contention that mid-Tudor developments were central in shaping the eventual outcome of the Tudor Reformation in Ireland. The possibility of a rapid, officially orchestrated Protestant breakthrough in Ireland was effectively ruled out by the poverty of the ecclesiastical endowment and the inadequacies of government control. And in these circumstances the attitude of the Old English community was particularly crucial. Their growing political alienation from government after 1547 provided the agents of the Counter-Reformation with a receptive and influential base from which to organise. This did not, of course, mean the immediate failure of the Reformation. For one thing, the Englishry initially saw political and religious developments as separate grievances, and the identification of the two did not generally occur before *c.* 1580.[83] Moreover, the government could – though with increasing difficulty – have reversed its policy of increasing reliance on New English officials. In the event, it did not, and for this reason historians are, on the evidence now available, justified in viewing mid-Tudor developments as central to the failure of the Reformation in Ireland.

This article should not, however, end on a note of confident assertion about the reasons for failure. Current research barely scratches the surface: the fact that Irish Reformation historiography has not yet come to grips with basic sources like the *Valor* speaks eloquently about the

Canny's latest synthesis, *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic world, 1560–1800*, Baltimore 1988. I regard the failure of the Irish Reformation as a consequence of the weakness of Tudor government in Ireland and of the strained relations between Crown and community. I do not see it as 'the factor that most contributed to the disequilibrium between state and society from which stemmed the bitter antagonisms that makes [*sic*] the political history of Ireland in the late Elizabethan period so different from that of England': ibid. 9.

[83] Ciaran Brady, 'Conservative subversives: the community of the Pale and the Dublin administration, 1556–1586', in P. J. Corish (ed.), *Radicals, Rebels and Establishments: Historical Studies XV*, Belfast 1985, 11–32.

provisional nature of present conclusions. Very probably more such sources remain to be explored. And even though the evidence concerning the impact of the Tudor Reformation in Ireland is much less rich than for England, English historiography suggests a number of promising lines of inquiry which might usefully be pursued.