

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Murray, James. Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland:  
Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of  
Dublin, 1534–1590**

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Volume 36, Number 1, Winter 2013

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1091191ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i1.20036>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Falconer, J. (2013). Review of [Murray, James. Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534–1590]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 36(1), 187–188. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i1.20036>

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**Murray, James.**

***Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland: Clerical Resistance and Political Conflict in the Diocese of Dublin, 1534–1590.***

Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi, 353. ISBN 978-0-521-77038-5 (hardcover)\$120.

In *Enforcing the English Reformation* in Ireland, James Murray engages with the current debate over the failure of the English to implement and enforce Reformation in Ireland. He demonstrates that the revival and revitalization of pre-Reformation Catholicism was crucial to the old religion's survival there; ultimately, it proved the reason behind the English Reformation's failure to take root in the English Pale. One of the strengths of this book is the substantial overview of the historiography. Murray argues that the Bradshaw-Canny debate—prompted by the use of confessional models to interpret the religious conservatism of clergy within the English Pale—has been the impetus behind most of the academic inquiries into this subject over the past 30 years. But while a number of scholars have contributed greatly to our understanding of resistance to reform in Ireland under the Tudors, scholarship in this area has yet to produce any “definitive answers” (12). With that in mind, Murray employs an approach to the subject matter that scholars of the English Reformation have found fruitful: uncovering the processes of Reformation at the local level. Using the archdiocese of Dublin as the site of negotiation, Murray examines the struggle for power between the Archbishops Browne, Curwen, and Loftus, their “indigenous clerical elite”, (19) and the Tudor viceroys sent to implement royal policy. But while this book succeeds in teasing out the high politics of Reformation in Dublin and, to some extent, the Pale, Murray acknowledges that the paucity of sources makes it impossible to identify any response on the ground to the initiatives of the reformed clergy or representatives of the Crown.

*Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland* takes as its focus the nature of the response of the English Irish community to the Reformation. At the heart of the English cathedral clergy's resistance to reform was the use of canon law to bolster their power. Using papal bulls like *laudabiliter* as their guide, the English in Ireland continued to see themselves as the protectors of Irish Christianity, saving the Irish church from the barbarism of the Gael. Murray's work makes clear that what guided the seemingly conservative English clergy in Ireland was not a united mission with the Gaelic Irish to fend off the Protestant threat, but

“a desire to preserve an ethos in which English cultural values and canonically orthodox Catholicism were inextricably bound together” (318). Murray provides a more nuanced approach to the activities of men like Browne, Curwen, and Viceroy St. Leger, all of whom brought a conciliatory approach to extending royal government, instituting, to some extent, a nominal conforming to the religious settlement. In contrast to such an approach was a stronger push to “protestantise Dublin” (Chapter 8) under men like Archbishop Loftus, who succeeded Curwen early in Elizabeth’s reign, and later under Lord Chancellor Sidney. Arguing that the government’s firm policy of enforcement in the 1570s and 1580s ultimately alienated the Pale community, Murray concludes that the more Protestant the approach to reform, the less likely it was to succeed. But failure was not entirely inevitable. Under the governance of Lord Chancellor Weston, Loftus’s program of reform was imbued with “the kind of legitimating canonical credentials” (267, 320) so favoured by the conservative clergy. It was not until the death of Weston, and the growing impatience of his replacement Sidney, that Loftus adopted a more coercive approach to enforcing the Reformation in Ireland. It was at this point, Murray argues, that the program completely fell apart.

*Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland* is a must read for any student of early modern Irish history in general, and of its religious history in particular. Its subtle, nuanced approach to the subject matter takes the debate over English reform within the Pale in a new direction, not least because it is a local study, and begins the process of answering some of the questions Murray suggests have been left unanswered in previous accounts. Like any study, it is not without its limitations. While Murray argues that the efforts to reform the Irish church need to be considered alongside other international Protestant movements, the discussion never turns to situating reform in Ireland in that broader context. As well, anyone looking for insights into the doctrinal concerns of the chief players cast in Murray’s drama, or of the “conservative clergy” who worked to undermine reform efforts, will likely be dissatisfied with the lack of engagement with that subject. Regardless, Murray should be commended for his mastery of the subject matter and for his valiant engagement with the complex issues surrounding the Reformation in Ireland.

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