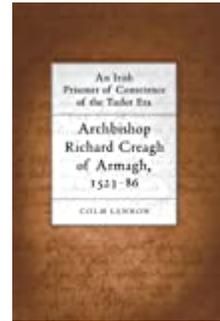


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Colm Lennon. *Archbishop Richard Creagh of Armagh, 1523-1586: An Irish Prisoner Of Conscience of the Tudor Era.* Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000. 166 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85182-473-1.



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Studies of the Protestant and Catholic reformations in Ireland are rarely incorporated into the broader narrative of European religious change in the early modern era. The seminal work of Bob Scribner, Roy Porter, and Mikuláš Teich, ed., *The Reformation in National Context* (1994) did not even include an Irish chapter, while the significant book by Thomas A. Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, James D. Tracy, ed., *Handbook of European History 1400-1600*, vol. 1 (1994) barely mentioned the island in this context. This neglect has been somewhat understandable in that, with the exception of the work of Alan Ford and the combined efforts of Karl Bottigheimer and Ute Lotz-Heumann, there has been a lack of recent accessible studies of the Protestant or Catholic reform phenomenon in Ireland. Colm Lennon's study of the life and times of the hitherto obscure sixteenth century archbishop of Armagh Richard Creagh will substantially help in advancing our understanding of the emerging Catholic mission in Ireland and the state's efforts to suppress it. Lennon sets out in this study through the medium of biography to interweave Creagh's personal odyssey with the social and cultural strands of what he refers to as the "new" Irish reformation history. The fact that he succeeds admirably is largely because he eschews narrow debate and instead concentrates on telling a lively and engaging personal story while at the same time illuminating the social and religious context in which his sub-

ject operated.

The success of this approach is obvious from the start with the chapter "Richard Creagh's Limerick." Lennon not only explores the patrician and mercantile milieu in which Creagh grew up, but also provides the reader with a captivating image of a city and its people on the eve of and then in the midst of the first efforts at state sponsored religious reform. What we find is a provincial English-Irish city with a self-confident elite who were able to adapt by and large to the spasmodic efforts on the part of the crown administration to enforce religious change. Through the lens of Creagh's youth we gain insight into a community that educated many of its youth in English, Latin, and even the commercially useful French. Creagh, like many of his fellow citizens, was also fluent in Gaelic, the language of the majority of the inhabitants of the island of Ireland. Creagh was enamored enough of the language that later in life he would write a humanist "scientific" study of its origins and development. But this was to be in the future. His early years suggested a typical career path of one of the merchant class; he was apprenticed at an early age, and at age twenty-five sworn in as a member of the merchant guild. This was the point at which Creagh swore an oath of fealty to the English sovereign, an oath to which he attempted to be scrupulously faithful despite the horrors inflicted on him in the

name of the same monarch. The author approaches the development of Creagh's sudden priestly vocation with some caution, appreciating as he does throughout the book that so much of our information on the future archbishop and martyr derives from polemic and Catholic reform hagiography. Lennon is always judicious in his analysis of these sources yet in such a manner that the dramatic story of Creagh's life is allowed to unfold in a lively and uncluttered manner.

Creagh's new direction in life took him to Louvain, to academic study and eventual ordination in a university increasingly imbued with the doctrines of the Council of Trent. Creagh was at home in this environment and became a life-long advocate of Tridentine reform even when this was not to his political advantage as was to be the case in Gaelic Ulster. There is no other scholar of early modern Irish history today that is as knowledgeable as Lennon about the world of European Catholic reform and the Irish exile contribution to it. The author wonderfully reconstructs Creagh's time in Louvain and, later, Rome and places his advancement in the church in the context of broader post-Tridentine developments. The Limerick cleric's continental contacts would include important figures such as Ignatius of Loyola, Reginald Pole, Peter Canisius, and John Clement. Despite being close to the Society of Jesus, and to Loyola himself, Creagh seems to have hankered for the contemplative life.

This was, of course, not to be and after a brief assignment as a teacher in Limerick, Creagh was called to Rome to await further appointment. Notwithstanding the brevity of his stay in his hometown, this was a very productive time in his life. The cleric established a grammar school that attempted to inculcate the values of the Catholic reform movement in his students. There is also evidence that he began writing a catechism of the Catholic faith in both English and Gaelic and the treatise on the Gaelic language previously noted. Both these works suggest Creagh's intellectual ability but also his commitment to the English-Irish humanist-inspired effort to reclaim Gaelic Ireland through conciliation and education. Creagh's departure from Limerick in 1562 was to mark the end of whatever hope he may have had of a scholarly or contemplative life, as in March 1564 he was appointed archbishop of Armagh, a posting to a hostile and disorganized mission field. Regardless of Creagh's personal belief in the possibility of loyalty to the monarch and Catholic adherence, he was to be a marked man for the rest of his life. Arrested in Ireland on his way to his diocese, Creagh began the first of his many incarcerations in the name of conscience. Eventually sent to

the Tower, he was variously interrogated by the earl of Leicester, Sir Henry Sidney, the earl of Sussex, and Sir William Cecil. The archbishop adamantly professed his loyalty to Queen Elizabeth and pleaded for religious toleration in Ireland. In a subsequent letter to the earl of Leicester he argued for an apolitical Catholic episcopacy in Ireland, for the possibility of rendering "to Caesar his own and to God his own."

Contemporary biographers interpreted Creagh's subsequent amazing escape from the Tower as a sign of the archbishop's sanctity. Lennon, of necessity, relies on these accounts as his basic source but very carefully peels away what we would call the "hype" to uncover the basic "facts" of the archbishop's career. This is not as easy a task as it might appear at first glance since Creagh's life story becomes increasingly dramatic and to an extent almost unbelievable. His eventual escape from London to Flanders was followed by an effort to reach Ireland where he was betrayed by his crew and nearly died from premeditated poisoning. When he finally reached his mission field in Ulster in late 1566 he fell foul of his putative patron, the great Gaelic lord, Shane O'Neill. O'Neill would later profess to hate Creagh as much as Queen Elizabeth for his refusal to countenance all out war on the English. The archbishop subsequently excommunicated O'Neill for burning the Armagh cathedral, the archbishop's principal diocesan church. This was hardly a good start to a mission to bring reform Catholicism to Gaelic Ulster.

In truth Creagh failed miserably in Ulster and yet, despite O'Neill's animosity to him, was compromised politically from then on in the eyes of the authorities as complicitous in the Gaelic potentate's war against the crown. Concerned for the future of his mission and on the point of withdrawal, Creagh was betrayed, and, once again, captured by the authorities. Starting in April 1567, the archbishop began a sometimes-horrific twenty years imprisonment in various English and Irish jails. Shuttled between Dublin and London, Creagh became the focus of repeated efforts on the part of Philip II of Spain and his ambassadors for the archbishop's release. All of these were to no avail. He was frequently held under the most brutal of conditions including being shackled for eight years and at times kept in a darkened cell. Yet the archbishop refused to accept offers of release if he would consecrate bishops in the established church. Nor surprisingly did he waver in his loyalty to Elizabeth. Creagh refused to be involved in any plotting against the queen and remained adamant in his stance of the possibility of Catholic practice and loyalty to the monarch. His reputa-

tion as a holy man and a loyalist prisoner of conscience grew and, combined with an abhorrence for the conditions under which he was held, caused him to become the focus for religious resistance to the Elizabethan regime in Dublin. He was in fact acquitted of charges of treason at his trial in 1570, eventually becoming such a folk hero and potent symbol that Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam was forced to send him back to London in 1575.

Regarded as an enemy of the state by no lesser figures than Burghley, Walsingham, and Leicester, Creagh spent his last years in the Tower as the focus of a small evangelical prison mission. The authorities assumed that by his assassination in late 1586 (the spy Robert Poley administered poisoned cheese) they could rid themselves of a palpable thorn in their side, however, like many repressive regimes in the past and the present, they were only partially correct. Creagh as a murdered prisoner of conscience went on to become an icon of a developing Catholic reform martyrological tradition and by the 1620s had become the unlikely hero of an Irish Catholic "faith and fatherland" struggle.

Colm Lennon is at pains, however, to avoid an interpretation of Creagh as a proto-nationalist activist. For the author the archbishop's origins in the English-Irish patrician world determined his loyalty to the crown, a loyalty

that from a modern perspective seems illogical given his treatment at the hands of the Elizabethan regime. Attempting to avoid contemporary historical controversy, Lennon concentrates on enriching our understanding of the world of Catholic reform and its early introduction to Ireland. Yet he acknowledges that Creagh's life and his awful treatment at the hands of the crown became the focus for developing religious resistance on the part of the English-Irish in the Pale. There is a real paradox here in that this loyalist scion of a Limerick English-Irish family ultimately contributed to the alienation of many of his compatriots from the crown he professed to obey.

Historical ironies aside, it is the quality of Lennon's research work and his unrivalled command of the Latin sources in Rome and elsewhere that allow for the richness of this short study. In sum this book is a wonderful introduction to the origins of the Catholic reform mission in Ireland, the nature of the early English and Irish ex-patriate Continental community, and also to the disturbing world of the Tudor prison. It is also an ideal introduction to the "new" Irish Reformation scholarship. European and North American scholars of the Protestant and Catholic movements are unlikely to find as comprehensible an introduction to the sixteenth century Irish reform experience as this.

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