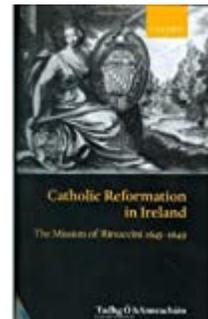




**Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin.** *Catholic reformation in Ireland: The mission of Rinuccini, 1645 - 1649.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 324 S. \$74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-820891-4.



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The title alone will indicate the importance of this book since Ireland is one of those few countries in Europe where Catholicism prevailed as the majority religion despite repeated efforts of the authorities during the early modern centuries to suppress it. The significance of the subject is also evident because loyalty to Catholicism in today's Ireland (both north and south of the twentieth-century political border) exceeds that in most other European societies which, in former centuries, were closely identified with Catholicism. Moreover the demands of Catholicism, especially as these were articulated by the ultra-montane church of earlier centuries, continue to exercise considerable, albeit declining, influence on political choices in Ireland.

Despite the apparent importance of Catholicism in Irish life in past centuries, the subject of the Counter Reformation in Ireland (or Catholic Reformation as it is called here) has received but limited scholarly attention through the centuries. Moreover Archbishop Gian Battista Rinuccini, Papal nuncio (1645-49) to the Catholic Confederation in Ireland, and the main protagonist in this volume, has earned but scant sympathy from Irish scholars and commentators, even when these have been committed Catholics and admirers of the Papacy.

These neglects can be explained by several factors. First the study of the Counter Reformation in Ireland,

as opposed to the study of that movement in countries where Catholicism was the official religion of the state, has been hindered because scarcely any records of Irish Catholic parishes survive from any date previous to the late eighteenth century. Potential work on the Counter Reformation in Ireland has also been frustrated because the body of surviving Catholic sermons, reform literature, and catechetical texts is small, and relatively few Catholic bishops and priests from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have left personal papers of consequence. Where Rinuccini is concerned, it goes without saying, historians of Protestant or secular disposition have had little interest in this agent of the Papacy other than to condemn him. At the same time Catholic writers, whether of nationalist or liberal inclinations, have portrayed him, however anachronistically, as an ultra-montane meddler with little understanding of the society which he aspired to mold to an alien pre-determined model.

In the light of such neglect Dr. Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin is to be commended not only for his choice of subject but for his persistence in seeking to extract meaning on the Counter Reformation in Ireland from most unpromising sources. These include official documents from English, French, Spanish, and Vatican archives and the texts composed by Rinuccini during his lifetime. The out-

come from = hAnnrach=in's investigation is an original and, in several respects, a startling book. His crowning achievement is his convincing reconstruction of the mental world of Archbishop Rinuccini based on the combination of a reading of Rinuccini's surviving writings, on the close study of Rinuccini's conduct as a reforming prelate in the Archdiocese of Fermo before he was appointed to Ireland, and on an appraisal of his actions in Ireland during the years of his nunciature. The portrait that emerges is of an austere, intelligent, learned, and rigidly disciplined individual who was unrelenting in his loyalty to Pope Innocent X and who comprehended his responsibilities in Ireland in the light of the broader involvement of the Papacy in European affairs, and especially in the context of the negotiations being conducted at Münster that would lead to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. To this degree Rinuccini had a clearer understanding of what would be a satisfactory outcome of his involvement with Ireland than did most of his associates or opponents.

= hAnnrach=in explains that Rinuccini appreciated from the outset that any likely outcome from his Irish mission would fall short of the ideal since it would, in all likelihood, result in the Catholics of Ireland being subjected to a Protestant monarch. Lest this should occasion scandal that could weaken the Catholic demands at the negotiating tables of Münster or Osnabrück, Rinuccini made it clear that any such flawed settlement would require the assurance that the monarch's viceroy in Ireland would henceforth be a Catholic, the guarantee that Catholicism in Ireland would be re-invested as a legally recognized public religion in Ireland, and the certainty that an episcopally controlled Catholic church in Ireland would enjoy an appropriate endowment which would ensure that it would not suffer interference from secular authority, whether of the state or of Catholic proprietors.

One of the more surprising findings of this book is that most bishops who had served in Ireland before Rinuccini's arrival there had reached much the same conclusion concerning the ideal conditions that would en-

able Catholicism to survive under the rule of a Protestant prince. On reflection this becomes comprehensible because all Irish bishops had been trained in seminaries on the Continent and some had spent time in ministry in Catholic societies before taking up appointment in Ireland. These, however, had previously kept their counsel largely to themselves because they had been reliant upon Catholic landowners—frequently their own kinsmen—to provide them with shelter and patronage as they attempted to minister surreptitiously against the wishes of potentially hostile state authorities. Rinuccini was not compromised as these Irish bishops had been, first because he was a stranger in Ireland with no countervailing loyalties besides those he owed to the Papacy, second because he served in Ireland during an interlude when Protestant state authority had been displaced by Catholic interests in those parts of the country in which he functioned, and third—and perhaps most critically—because he enjoyed financial independence from the Catholic community in Ireland thanks to the liberal subventions he had been accorded by the Pope.

Much of this book is devoted to the re-enactment of the tensions between the lay and clerical leaders of the Catholic Confederacy during the years of its existence. This sad tale has often been told, but where previous authors have attributed the ensuing political paralysis to Rinuccini, = hAnnrach=in attaches as much blame to “the peace party”—a group of Old English lawyers and landowners who, as he demonstrates, proved “duplicitous” in their dealings with Rinuccini whose money they coveted more than his counsel. The book hints that the Confederacy might have achieved more if it had followed Rinuccini's preferred policy of a coherent military policy in pursuit of clearly defined Catholic objectives. The pursuit of such a policy would, however, have meant offering the hypothetical crown of Ireland to a Catholic monarch on the Continent, in preference to King Charles I. Nobody seems seriously to have canvassed that option, and if they had done so they would probably not have found any monarch interested in being so honored.

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