

The Jesuit mission in early modern Ireland, 1560–1760. Edited by Mary Ann Lyons and Brian Mac Cuarta. Pp. 269 incl. 5 ills. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2022. £50. 978 1 80151 025 7

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Publication: *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*

Publisher: Cambridge University Press

Date: Dec 20, 2023

Publisher's version available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046923001513>

Review

Most of the research in this interesting new collection is based entirely or in part on the epistolary archives of the Irish Jesuit mission, which comprise the Society's *ex officio* correspondence (Moynes, ed., 2017) and the annual letters sent to the superior general in Rome (Moynes, ed., 2019). These archival series reflect aspects of the Jesuit ministry in Ireland ranging from the interaction between missionaries and local communities, Jesuit culture and institutions. In the introduction, the editors Mary Ann Lyons and Brian Mac Cuarta outline the scholarly context behind the conception of this collection, which both stands as the last instalment of an ambitious archival and publication project, as it aims to represent a bridge onto further research.

The two essays opening the collection examine the second and the third Irish Jesuit mission respectively. Through the correspondence of William Good SJ, Alexander G. DeWitt and Thomas M. McCoog explore the challenges and dangers connected with establishing schools and making the mission grow in the unresponsive to openly hostile context of the mid- to late 1560s. Starting from Good's fragmentary letters, the authors restore an unforgettable picture of this pioneering enterprise and the toll it had on Good and his companions. The context of the third mission is explored by Colm Lennon, who illuminates the manifold forms of interaction between urban communities and the missionaries. The support that the Jesuits, often of Irish origin, enjoyed from urban and familiar networks in the Post-Tridentine context was unprecedented, but as it entailed the domestication of worship it also posed challenges to their identity as missionaries.

The next essay moves to the sources with Jason Harris' skilful analysis of the Latin style of the Irish annual letters. Grounded on a careful reconstruction of the "Jesuit approach to Latin style" (65), and using Christopher Holywood's letters as a case study, Harris shows that an appreciation of their language and rhetoric is key to a better understanding of these texts as documents.

Preaching was another key activity for the Jesuit missionaries, the effectiveness of which was naturally often advertised in annual letters. Though preaching in opposition to the state Church required extreme caution, Bernadette Cunningham argues that the Jesuits' interactions with the local communities and clergy were extensive and proficuous, and that preaching was in fact one of the channels contributing to the long-term impact of the counter-Reformation in early modern Ireland. Focussing on women's engagement with the Society, Mary Ann Lyons explores a largely uncharted dimension of the interaction between the missionaries and local communities. The patronage of Elizabeth FitzGerald discussed in the first part of the essay provides evidence of specific ways in which women of high-standing supported the mission, but, as shown by Lyons, engagement extended to women's involvement in catechising activities and to Jesuit support of domestic life, child bearing and child rearing.

Jesuit culture is at the core of the next pair of essays. Raymond Gillespie sheds light on the role of music in the Irish Jesuit mission, arguing through suggestive evidence that, contrary to our current understanding, the musical experience of Jesuit Ireland was rich and nuanced, although the clandestine nature of worship in this context might have hampered some developments and experiences. Brian Jackson studies religious controversy using it also as a lens for the exploration of the dynamics between centre and periphery within the Society as an institution. Taking the writings of the Irish Jesuit Henry Fitzsimon as a case study, Jackson situates his disputes with James Ussher, Meredith Hanmer and John Rider within the developments of Catholic controversial writing in English. Focussing on a fascinating manuscript that Fitzsimon prepared for publication, he explains how Jesuits working in England and Ireland pursued common goals though they may appear “to be pulling in different directions” (139).

Through an exceptionally well-documented case of a family of the colonial elite, Brian Mac Cuarta examines in compelling detail the dynamics of Jesuit conversions in Caroline Ireland. Conversions could involve extended family networks and belie tensions within the New English Community more at large. Mac Cuarta’s study reveals not just the limits of religious toleration in Caroline England, but also the role of the Jesuit missionaries in supporting and guiding conversions, and how men and women were differently affected by their dynamics and consequences. Another form of engagement of the missionaries with local lay communities was through exorcisms, an important part of the evangelical mission, duly recorded in the annual letters. Alma O’Donnell examines this evidence illuminating surprising trends and astutely situating them in context. Her close analysis of some reports highlights the role of Jesuits not just as exorcists and promoters of conversions, but also as ‘healers’ mitigating the emotional and psychic pain of the victims of ‘demonic’ attacks.

The two essays closing the collection focus on Jesuit educational institutions. Martin Foerster lucid and engaging study charts the establishment of Jesuit schools in Ireland after the restoration of Charles II and explores the conditions that made it possible for them to thrive. The evidence of the annual letters throws light on unexpected stories of cooperation between Jesuits and Irish Protestants. As an ideal conclusion to the collection, Liam Chambers’s updated history of the Irish college in Poitiers highlights the role of the college in assuring the continuation of the Irish mission. Founded in 1674-76 in the context of the deterioration of the conditions for Jesuits in Ireland, the college functioned in fact as a shelter for Irish Jesuits after the defeat of Irish Catholics in 1691 and until the suppression of the order in 1773.

This is an extremely rich and informative collection that succeeds in enhancing the potential of the Jesuit epistolary archives as much as the role of committed scholarship in bringing them to life. The editors’ careful work highlights the threads that connect the various studies published here, as well directions for further research. Compelling aspects such as the role of the Jesuits in fostering close cultural ties between Ireland and the Continent, their interaction with local Protestants, and women’s engagement are deserving of further study, as they contribute to restore a nuanced picture of the mission in the “exceptionally disturbed” Irish context (22).