

The End of the Beginning?

Victor Houliston

Research Professor, English Department, University of the Free State, Nelson Mandela Drive, Bloemfontein, South Africa.
Email: HoulistonVH@ufs.ac.za

The Oxford History of British & Irish Catholicism. Vol. I: Endings and New Beginnings, 1530–1640. Ed. James E. Kelly & John McCafferty. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xxv + 325. ISBN 978-0-19-884380-1.

Twenty-one years ago Thomas F. Mayer stood up at a meeting of the Sixteenth Century Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and declared to a room full of attentive scholars that early modern Catholic studies was the place to be.¹ Ten years later Eamon Duffy was honoured at Ushaw College at a conference entitled ‘What is Early Modern Catholicism’, which was effectively the launch of the Reformation era programme of the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University.² In 2015, *Recusant History* was reinvented as *British Catholic History* under the editorship of Anne Dillon. With the publication of the five-volume *Oxford History of British & Irish Catholicism*, the modern study of British and Irish Catholicism can indeed be said to have reached maturity.³ It is testimony to the energy of the general editors, James E. Kelly and John McCafferty, that the series has been brought to completion in such a short space of time. For the first volume, they have assembled a formidable cast of scholars. It is an embarrassment of riches, because the Oxford History makes its appearance only a year after Brill’s hefty *Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland: From Reformation to Emancipation*,⁴ edited by Robert E. Scully, SJ and containing chapters by several of the same authors. Together, they allow us to take stock of the progress that has been made in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

¹ Mayer was the first general editor of the series *Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700*, formerly published by Ashgate and now by Routledge.

² Selected papers from this conference were published as James E. Kelly and Susan Royal, eds. *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2017) and in ‘Panic, Plots, and Polemic: the Jesuits and the early modern English mission’, James E. Kelly, ed. special issue of *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 1 (2014): 511–606.

³ Francis Young, ‘Surveying a field come of age’ (review of the work cited in n. 4), *British Catholic History* 36: 2 (2022): 204–221.

⁴ Robert E. Scully, SJ, with Angela Ellis, eds. *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland: From Reformation to Emancipation*, Brill’s Companion to the Christian Tradition 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

The two volumes complement each other well: although their timescales are different, a closer look at the contents reveals the common themes of historical narrative, tensions within and without, relations with the state, Catholic culture and practice, exile and hostility. The Oxford History is compact and brisk in comparison, with an efficient manner of presenting the current state of thinking. The title, 'Endings and New Beginnings, 1530–1640', may be more purposefully suggestive than at first appears. It prompts us to think of one world dying and another struggling to be born. As with W.B. Yeats's interpenetrating gyres, the world of Irish and British Catholicism in the Reformation era presented in this volume is one where opposites are constantly in motion: continuity and change, mission and church, recusancy and conformity, home and abroad, Latin and vernacular, controversy and devotion, manuscript and print, secular and regular, court and country, seigneurial and popular, plainsong and polyphony, and (most enduringly) resistance and compromise.⁵ In another sense, the title advertises a historiographical new beginning: not only the swallowing up of recusant history into early modern Catholic studies, but also the combining of Irish and British research enterprises into one complex undertaking. The book is not divided into sections, but in what follows, I shall analyse in turn each grouping of chapters as I understand them, make some suggestions about what is missing or needful, and finally consider what the future might hold.

Ireland and Britain in combination

The bold decision to put Catholic history of Britain and Ireland together while devoting only one separate chapter (on Scotland) to a country on its own elicits diverse approaches in the individual chapters. In some cases, co-authorship allows a division of labour, with more or less comparative framing: Caroline Bowden and Bronagh Ann McShane (more) and Alan Ford teaming up with Peter Lake and Michael Questier (less). Susannah Monta and Salvador Ryan, in their treatment of written cultures, experiment with laying the two traditions side by side within their discussion of each genre. Some authors, notably Peter Marshall and Katy Gibbons, weave the strands together. Most chapters, however, contain separate sections for Ireland, so that if we extracted all the Irish material it would be possible to assemble a history of Irish Catholicism that might not be much different from an autonomous work. This is only to observe that the integration is partial, and the approach runs the risk of merely fragmenting the

⁵ Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

treatment of Irish Catholicism. It becomes readily apparent that the difference between Ireland, with its majority Catholic population, and Britain, which was turning Protestant, is so significant that the approach adopted by Robert Scully in the Brill Companion, to have a substantial consolidated chapter on Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, arguably enables readers to make more considered comparisons. In that chapter, John McCafferty observes: ‘projects to fold Ireland into composite narratives of the islands of Britain and Ireland ... have made little significant impact on research’.⁶ He cites Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland*,⁷ surely one of the models for this Oxford History, which seeks to give that project new impetus, not folding Ireland in but interlacing the Irish and British experiences.

The themed chapters can be more readily separated into parts and then synthesized. It is in the narrative chapters that the problem of integrated historiography is most acute. The structure of these five chapters is curious, but highly effective in alerting us to the differences and similarities across the four regions while charting the progress, if that is what it can be called, of the Catholic communities over the century and a bit to 1640. Up to 1558, the combined story is told by Peter Marshall on the Henrician period and John Edwards on the reign of Mary Tudor; for the rest of the sixteenth century, the Scots split away into their own chapter by R. Scott Spurlock, while Katy Gibbons deals with Ireland alongside Wales and England. At first sight, this division is surprising, given the Scottish queen’s captivity in England for almost twenty years. The organization of Tadhg Ó hAnnrícháin’s treatment of the early seventeenth century is even more counter-intuitive. The logic of the title, ‘The Early Stuarts’, foregrounds the accession of James VI of Scotland to the throne of England and the consequent shifts in religious policy throughout his realms. Instead, the chapter begins with the end of the Nine Years War, coincident with the end of the Tudor dynasty in England. The reader is jolted into seeing events in Britain in a new light. And so it should be, because the seventeenth century entailed major international reconfigurations: peace with Spain, rivalry with the Dutch, the Thirty Years’ War, the English Civil War, the interregnum, Cromwell’s invasion of Ireland, the colonization of North America, and more.

Given the unenviable task of managing the Irish, the Welsh and the English together as common subjects of Elizabeth I, Katy Gibbons tackles it in a way that makes hers arguably the defining chapter of the

⁶ John McCafferty, ‘Becoming Irish Catholics: Ireland 1534–1690’, in Scully with Ellis, eds. *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland*, 228–275, at pp. 230–231; see also the chapters by Jane Stevenson, ‘Catholics in Scotland: Overview and Literary Culture’ and Hannah Thomas, ‘Catholics in Wales’, 276–302, 339–367.

⁷ Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

volume's endeavour to combine the Irish and British interests. Drawing on Alec Ryrie's characterization of the Reformation's advance by conversion in England and conquest in Wales and Ireland,⁸ she describes how the three Catholic communities, differing from each other, became unambiguously distinct from the Protestant establishment by the beginning of the seventeenth century, and began to move in two directions: towards sectarianism in Ireland and denominationalism in Britain (though these are not the terms she uses and should be treated with caution). Her argument implies a reason why Scotland should be treated separately that is deeper than the mere fact that it was ruled by Mary Stuart or James VI or by regents when required. That reason is made plain in R. Scott Spurlock's chapter on Scotland to 1603, which emphasizes the distinct nature of the Kirk as representing the Commonweal, the independent authority of the magnates in their traditional territories, and the disproportionate allied role of the small number of influential Jesuits. Tadhg Ó hAnnricháin, in turn, foregrounds the special case of Ireland, shaped by the impact of better educated clergy drawn from the Irish colleges on the continent. Whatever the state of political power under successive governors, and whatever attempts were being made at coercion, the Irish became increasingly settled in their Catholic identity. It was clear, despite O'Neill's defeat at Kinsale, that the Protestant reformation was going to have limited success. The role of women under these conditions, Ó hAnnricháin observes, has yet to receive the sustained attention it has in England, where women were relied on to safeguard the contraband religion.⁹

Of Jesuits, heroes and martyrs

There was a time when readers of Catholic reformation history might have been excused for thinking that the story of the Jesuit English mission *was* the story of English Catholicism, and were invited to see the English Catholic community through the eyes, if not of Evelyn Waugh, of Philip Caraman, SJ.¹⁰ Thomas M. McCoog, SJ, whose three-volume history of the Jesuits in Ireland, Scotland and England (including Wales) offers guidance for the Oxford History's wide

⁸ Alec Ryrie, *The Age of Reformation: The Tudor and Stewart Realms, 1485–1603* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2009), 290.

⁹ Cf. Mary Ann Lyons, 'Women and Jesuit Ministry in Ireland, c.1600–c.1670', in Mary Ann Lyons and Brian Mac Cuarta, SJ, eds. *The Jesuit Mission in Early Modern Ireland, 1560–1670* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2022), 101–122.

¹⁰ See especially Philip Caraman, SJ, *The Other Face: Catholic Life under Elizabeth I* (London: Longmans, Green, 1960). Evelyn Waugh's *Edmund Campion* (1935), which was written to raise funds for the building of Campion Hall, Oxford, has most recently been edited by Gerard Kilroy for the new Oxford edition of Waugh's works (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

ambit,¹¹ invites us to re-assess the centrality of the role of the Jesuits in British and Irish Catholic history, especially in the wake of the celebrations of the 400th anniversary of the establishment of the English (later British) Province of the Society of Jesus in 1623.¹² He asks the question, ‘Mission or Church?’, probing the relationship between the English missions (of the seminary priests and the Jesuits) and the emerging movement towards re-establishing a traditional church hierarchy that would not threaten the state. This was a tension which the archpriest controversy brought into sharper focus at the end of Elizabeth’s reign.

As the seventeenth century wore on, and Catholics became accustomed to new ecclesiastical structures, the international organization of the Society of Jesus, the largest and arguably most visible of Catholic religious orders, took on new significance. In England, there was the English Mission, then a prefecture and a vice-province, institutionally falling under the German Assistancy, a department of the central Jesuit curia that advised the superior general on matters in northern Europe. For lay Catholics under Jesuit spiritual direction—and they were many and influential—these developments complicated their sense of identity. They were subjects, willing or not, of the English and Scottish monarchs, with Ireland in rebellion for significant periods. They observed the hierarchy of the Church of Rome, under the headship of the pope, and undergoing repair in Ireland and Britain, and they also had some sense of belonging to Jesuit structures worldwide. Provincial status did not make British Jesuits more independent; it cemented them more securely into a system where the world was their house.¹³

Thomas McCoog’s question does not require an answer, but for those who would vote for ‘Church’, the Elizabethan Jesuits, and Robert Persons in particular, were wrong, and the martyrs mistaken. Even so, the study of Catholics under Protestant rule cannot avoid dealing with persecution. The Oxford History discreetly excludes the term from the index, and distributes its treatment into two chapters: Michael Questier on the penal laws and Clodagh Tait on martyrdom itself. These chapters, together with the later treatment of various aspects of everyday Catholic life, integrate the ‘troubles of our Catholic forefathers’ into a more complex pattern of ecclesiastical

¹¹ Thomas M. McCoog, SJ, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England* [Vol. 1] 1541–1588: ‘Our Way of Proceeding?’ (Leiden: Brill, 1996), [Vol. 2] 1589–97: *Building the Faith of Saint Peter upon the King of Spain’s Monarchy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), [Vol. 3] 1598–1606: ‘Lest Our Lamp Be Entirely Extinguished’ (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

¹² ‘The Jesuits in Britain: Celebrating 400 Years’, *Campion Hall*, Oxford, 25–28 September 2023.

¹³ Cf. James E. Kelly and Hannah Thomas, eds. *Jesuit Intellectual and Physical Exchange between England and Mainland Europe, c.1580-1789: ‘The World Is Our House?’* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

developments, legal ambiguities and social survival, at the cost of obscuring the protests memorably conveyed in Robert Persons's *De persecutione Anglicana* (1581, etc.) and the *Concertatio Ecclesiae Catholicae in Anglia* (1588, etc.).¹⁴ It is a very different picture that Questier paints, demonstrating how the enforcement of the penalties was patchy at best. His analysis of official records is cautionary: if you read local records, anti-recusant action was chaotic; if you read the documents at the centre of power, all was proceeding in due order. In Ireland prosecution was lax, though pressures on Catholics were still high; in Scotland the nature of recusancy was inflected by the character of the Kirk and the dominance of the lairds. In short, it was not necessary to be a hero to survive as a Catholic.

Questier has canvassed the question of Catholic resistance and persecution extensively in *Catholics and Treason*, the subject of a review article by Thomas S. Freeman in the most recent issue of this journal. We are reminded that the *corpus* (if one may be allowed the word) of English Catholic martyr narratives is still substantially that assembled by Richard Challoner in *Memoirs of Missionary Priests* (1741), 'the golden bough which Questier uses as a passport into the Tartarus of early modern martyrdom'.¹⁵ Anyone who has a use for a handy prospectus of the features of these narratives, which have had incalculable influence, need look no further than the Dickensian analytical index to J.H. Pollen's edition of Challoner,¹⁶ especially 'Searches, Arrests, Prisons', and going on to 'Their Trials': 'Prisoner attacked by ministers... refuses to plead... shackles fall off in court... blessing asked of ...' or 'Jury boggle at sentence... forced to give verdict... objects to sentence... over-awed... refused... forgiven... people annoyed at injustice of ...'

However much martyrdom may be an embarrassment to the curators of exhibitions on More or Becket at the British Museum and elsewhere, it is no longer a neglected area of modern research, to the point where, as Freeman describes it, we are in danger of being overwhelmed in a paper or digital avalanche. The tropes of

¹⁴ Robert Persons, SJ, *De persecutione Anglicana, epistola. Qua explicantur afflictiones, aerumnas & calamitates gravissimae, cruciatus etiam & tormenta, & acerbissima martyria, quae Catholici nunc Angli, ob fidem patiuntur* (Rouen: George L'Oselet and George Flinton, 1582; revised editions Paris, Rome, Ingolstadt 1582; French, English and Italian translations, 1582); John Gibbons, SJ, *Concertatio ecclesiae Anglicanae in Anglia* (Trier: Bock, 1588, etc.). Cf. John Morris, SJ, *The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers Related by Themselves*, 3 vols (London: Burns and Oates, 1872–1877).

¹⁵ Thomas S. Freeman, 'Memory, myth and memorialization: Catholic martyrs and martyrologies in early modern England', *British Catholic History* 36.4 (2023): 431–454, at p. 438; Michael C. Questier, *Catholics and Treason: Martyrology, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

¹⁶ Richard Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests as Well Secular as Regular and of Other Catholics of Both Sexes, That Have Suffered Death in England on Religious Accounts from the Year of Our Lord, 1577 to 1684*, new edition, revised and corrected by John Hungerford Pollen (London, Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1924).

martyrology and the topics related are by now familiar: the contestation over pseudo-martyrs, the disputes over treason, the propaganda value for both sides, the celebration of martyrs in word and image, the printing and distribution of martyrologies, the hunting of relics, the ‘bloody shirt’ appeal to the European powers, the alignment with early Christian martyrs, the politicization and subsequent secularization of martyrdom. Clodagh Tait, refusing to be buried under the avalanche, provides a conspectus of procedures and connotations across Ireland and Britain, a corrective to the prevailing perception that the English martyrs, especially under Elizabeth, monopolized continental attention. She adds an account of the unpredictable afterlife of the martyrs, ‘Vagaries of Veneration’, noting that they continue to witness, not only to the faith they professed but to the (often quite different) faith of those who have revered them.¹⁷

Being Catholic in Ireland, Britain and exile

With the title of John Bossy’s *The English Catholic Community* as guide, and Michael Questier’s *Catholicism and Community* a model study of a Catholic house, with its lay and clerical networks,¹⁸ ‘community’ (no longer defined as ‘persecuted’) is the watchword. The book that has done most to change the shape of the study of this community, by making it more inclusive, is Alexandra Walsham’s *Church Papists*, which is cited repeatedly in both the Oxford History and the Brill Companion.¹⁹ Recusants and church papists were to be found on a continuum rather than facing each other across a divide, and the same can be said for compromise and resistance, devotion and debate, prayer and polemic. In this journal, Simon Ditchfield has appealed for a convincing ‘study of what it was like to *be, think and feel* Roman Catholic in the period after Trent’.²⁰ The Oxford History goes some way towards reaching this goal with its chapters on material culture, local interactions, music, writing, translation and hate speech. For its part, the Brill Companion omits music but includes a chapter by Lisa McClain on clandestine prayer and

¹⁷ Cf. Anne Dillon, ‘Martyrdom and the Catholic Community’, in Scully with Ellis, eds. *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland*, 451–506.

¹⁸ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975); Michael C. Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁹ Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1993).

²⁰ Simon Ditchfield, review of Ulrich L. Lehner, *The Inner Life of Catholic Reform: From the Council of Trent to the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), in *British Catholic History* 36.4 (2023): 471–474.

devotion.²¹ From several chapters, the reader can piece together a picture of how Catholics practised their faith in the face of greater or less adversity, in regions more or less hostile to papistry, under circumstances of increasing political pressure or greater ease.

The sustaining of the faith by devotional objects, household prayers and music in place of sacramental observance, has become a commonplace. Material culture is extensively documented by Alexandra Walsham in this volume, complementing the more technical expertise and intensive treatment by Janet Graffius (for England and Wales) and Peter Davidson and David Walker (for Scotland) in the *Brill Companion*.²² Walsham's chapter exhibits her characteristic blend of varied detail and crisp analysis, showing how lay Catholics' attachment to holy things not only renewed their connection with the recent, lamented past and sustained the faith in adversity, but acquired new character as a sign of resistance. Holy places often became sites of contestation rather than refuge and solace, and women, especially, were creative in their repurposing of the material heritage. Needles by their stitching pursued the war away from the front line. Andrew Cichy's chapter on music ranges from music in the home to performance in the continental seminaries, where local dignitaries and their retainers came in numbers to hear the students (some of them mere boys) sing or perform plays with music and dance. Cichy emphasizes the quality of bespoke music, music designed for specific occasions, places and purposes. He details the influence of continental modes, but resists the demand to identify British and Irish Catholic composers with particular schools or movements. The best-known Catholic musician of the period, William Byrd, had no predecessors and no followers. Closely allied with music, architecture performed a limited role in Catholic life in Britain and Ireland in the reformation era, but Catholics abroad, whether travellers or exiles, were experiencing at first hand the art and architecture of the Catholic reformation. In the *Brill Companion*, Adam Morton points out that English gentlemen, even those who were anti-Catholic in one part of their being, improved their credentials as men of the world by absorbing Catholic high culture on their travels.²³

The *Oxford History's* treatment of the community in exile is limited to the fruits of two big research projects completed in the last fifteen

²¹ Lisa McClain, 'Underground Devotions: The Day-to-Day Challenges of Practicing an Illegal Faith', in Scully with Ellis, eds. *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland*, 588–607.

²² Peter Davidson and David W. Walker, 'Scottish Catholic Material Culture', and Janet Graffius, 'English Catholic Material Culture, 1558–1688', in Scully with Ellis, eds. *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland*, 303–338, 549–587.

²³ Adam Morton, 'Anti-Catholicism: Catholics, Protestants, and the "Popery" Problem', in Scully with Ellis, eds. *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland*, 410–448.

years: *Who Were The Nuns? and Monks in Motion*.²⁴ The volume's title, 'Ends and New Beginnings', applies particularly well here. Bronagh Ann McShane memorably records 'the complete eradication of medieval female monasticism in Ireland' under Henry VIII (p. 232), and the English, as Caroline Bowden shows, fared little better. Only the Bridgettines were able to maintain meaningful continuity, their wanderings leading them finally to Lisbon in 1594. Mary Percy founded the first of several English convents in the Low Countries and France at the turn of the century, but the Irish had to wait until 1639 for the first dedicated Irish convent, also in Lisbon. This is the best-illustrated chapter in the collection, with a map and personal photographs of convents in Brussels and Lisbon—a testimony to the quiet heroism, the sacrifice, hardship and perseverance of the nuns.

For the men, the situation was more complicated. Dissolution took place in stages, and martyrdom followed for some recalcitrant monks and friars, including the last abbot of Glastonbury. The Welsh (together with the English), the Irish and Scots succeeded in founding national colleges on the continent, occasioning tension between nations—the Welsh and the English in Rome, for instance—and religious orders, especially the Jesuits and Benedictines. For the Irish, the Franciscans stand out, with Luke Wadding, OFM founding St Isidore's, the Irish friary-college in Rome in 1625. The murals at St Isidore's, celebrating the island of saints, can be contrasted with those at the English College, which depict the martyrs in stomach-turning detail.²⁵ The new colleges and fraternities were nodes of intellectual creativity and brought new ideas and fresh vigour to the church and mission field. The English College in Rome was commissioned to set the world on fire, but, perhaps because it evolved out of the English hospice, it is given little space here; instead, Thomas O'Connor singles out the English Jesuits' seminary for boys at St-Omer, whose pupils often continued to Douai or Rome or Valladolid or Seville (p. 209).

What then of the scholars who flocked to Louvain, the English nation in Paris and Rome, the pensioners of King Philip II in Spain and the Spanish Netherlands, the volunteers in the army of Flanders? Were they not part of the Irish and British Catholic community? It is not for lack of recent research that they appear to have been

²⁴ *Who Were the Nuns?* Database Online <https://www.wtn.history.qmul> Accessed 12 February 2024; *Monks in Motion* database Online <https://durham.ac.uk/mim> Accessed 12 February 2024. See also Caroline Bowden, ed. *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012–2013).

²⁵ John McCafferty, 'Recycling an Island's Past for a Global Catholicism: Irish Franciscans in the Seventeenth Century', in Cormac Begadon and James E. Kelly, eds. *British and Irish Religious Orders in Europe, 1560–1800: Conventuals, Mendicants, and Monastics in Motion* (Durham: Durham University IMEMS Press, 2022), 101–120.

overlooked here, leaving the field to ‘The Long Wait of Lay Catholic Exiles’ by Anne Throckmorton in the Brill Companion.²⁶

The power of words

The last three chapters in the Oxford History have to do with books, writing and propaganda. At the 2013 conference in Durham, Susannah Monta commented wryly on the ambiguous status of literary scholars in a field that offers such wide scope for inter-disciplinarity. Her own chapter, carefully crafted with Salvador Ryan to provide a unified account, is strangely muted in its treatment of the more properly literary elements in Catholic written culture, even as it pays due attention to Robert Southwell, SJ. There is a great gulf between this volume and Lowell Gallagher’s *Redrawing the Map of Early Modern English Catholicism* (2012), the title of which raises expectations of a similar survey.²⁷ Gallagher’s collection is dominated by literary scholars engaged in an imaginative recreation of the early modern English literary scene, but the heyday of the religious turn in literary studies has passed, to be replaced by sober, historically-informed critical judgement. Monta and Ryan guide us through devotional prose and poetry, works of pastoral aid, biography and historiography. Jaime Goodrich surveys the role of printed translations in Catholic culture, raising awareness of Gaelic and Welsh authors, texts and translations. She notes the shift from controversy, which dominated the first decade of Elizabeth’s reign, to works of devotion. Her analysis is supported by the *terminus ad quem* of A.C. Southern’s *Elizabethan Recusant Prose, 1559–1582*, with its intensive review of the Jewel-Harding controversy of the 1560s.²⁸

The volume concludes with a characteristically lively and thought-provoking chapter on anti-popery by Peter Lake and Michael Questier, yoked with a section on Ireland by Alan Ford.²⁹ Ford’s is

²⁶ Anne R. Throckmorton, “‘When Time Should Serve’: The Long Wait of Lay Catholic Exiles”, in Scully with Ellis, eds. *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland*, 199–227. See Albert J. Loomie, SJ, *The Spanish Elizabethans* (London: Burns & Oates, 1965); Katy Gibbons, *English Catholic Exiles in Late Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 2011); Liesbeth Corens, *Confessional Mobility and English Catholics in Counter-Reformation Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Frederick E. Smith, *Transnational Catholicism in Tudor England: Mobility, Exile and Counter-Reformation, 1530–1580* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

²⁷ Lowell Gallagher, ed. *Redrawing the Map of Early Modern English Catholicism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); for another collection of literary approaches, see Ronald Corthell, Frances E. Dolan, Christopher Highley and Arthur Marotti, eds. *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

²⁸ A.C. Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose, 1559–1582: A Historical and Critical Account of the Books of the Catholic Refugees Printed and Published Abroad and at Secret Presses in England, Together with an Annotated Bibliography of the Same* (London: Sands, 1950).

²⁹ Cf. Arthur F. Marotti, ed. *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

a model of lucid, sequacious analysis in a similar manner to Adam Morton's comprehensive account in the Brill Companion. Lake and Questier are bolder: they ask, not just what English people said (and possibly thought) when they abused things Catholic, but whether this can tell us anything useful about Catholics themselves. It is not a forensic question, whether there can be smoke without fire, but an occasional or causal one, what was it that prompted such utterances, and made them swell or subside? It emerges from the treatment of anti-Catholicism in both volumes, that antipathy was the exception rather than the rule, and that Reformation-era Protestants and Catholics were not only entangled with each other, often belonging to the same families and entourages, but were more alike than they were different.

Beyond anti-popery, the volume shows limited interest in religious controversy, something that (like persecution) may be thought best to keep out of sight. Developments in book history are not fully reflected: in studies of book-smuggling and distribution,³⁰ printing practices, authorship, sponsorship and literary sparring, scholars have built on the legacy of Allison and Rogers, whose bibliographies have provided the stimulus for so much research into Catholic authorship and publication.³¹ These researches give a clearer indication how the books that came off Catholic presses actually infiltrated the lives of ordinary people, fleshing out the depiction of *The Inner Life of Catholic Reform* in Ulrich Lehner's anatomy of Catholic works of instruction and guidance.³² Again, the rapid growth of manuscript-driven research has brought the relationship between manuscript and print to the fore.³³ A welcome addition to this volume would have been a guide to manuscript sources, as smaller archives are being integrated into scholarly networks. This development is set to reinvent, if not transform, our understanding of the lived experience and intercourse of the Catholic community.

The linguistic divide between Latin and the vernacular, English and Gaelic, adds to the complexity of internal and external relationships. Surprisingly, the Oxford History contains little discussion of the wealth of Latin productions of British and Irish Catholics, chiefly in controversy. The Latin works in the libraries of authors both

³⁰ Earle Havens and Elizabeth Patton, 'Underground Networks, Prisons and the Circulation of Counter-Reformation Books in Elizabethan England', in Kelly and Royal, eds. *Early Modern English Catholicism*, 165–188.

³¹ A.F. Allison, D. M. Rogers, and W. Lottes, *The Contemporary Printed Literature of the English Counter-Reformation between 1558 and 1640: An Annotated Catalogue*, 2 vols (Aldershot: Scolar, 1989–1994); Earle Havens and Mark Rankin are currently preparing a collection entitled *The Elizabethan Catholic Underground: Clandestine Book Culture and Scribal Subversion in the English Counter-Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

³² See n. 20 above.

³³ For a discussion, see Peter Lake and Michael C. Questier, *All Hail to the Archpriest: Confessional Conflict, Toleration, and the Politics of Publicity in Post-Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), esp. ch. 6.

Protestant and Catholic completely overshadowed those in English.³⁴ Texts by Thomas Stapleton, Nicholas Sanders, Thomas Harding, Nicholas Harpsfield and others helped to define virtual Catholic encounters with Protestants, in Britain, Ireland and the continent, and strengthened the alliance with Catholic intellectual traditions abroad, with authors such as Robert Bellarmine, Francisco Suarez and Cesare Baronio, who was a candidate for appointment as Cardinal Vice-Protector to the English College in Rome.³⁵ These exchanges were limited to the few, but they occupied a larger place in the consciousness of leading Catholics. They also played a part in reinforcing the continental view of the Catholic community in Britain and Ireland, renowned for martyrdom, as well as contributing to lay Catholics' sense of pride. The work of translating these Latin texts into English has only just begun.³⁶

Recusant history, then and now

What, then, does the Oxford History suggest about the state of research? In the recent advances, something has been lost, and something more has yet to be gained. The strength of recusant history, as it was once called, was in its regional base, drawing on the researches of local Catholic record societies, engaged in identifying recusant networks and detailing the households of Catholic gentry. In England, books on Catholicism in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Sussex, East Anglia and elsewhere have made the regional differences plain.³⁷ In Scotland, the influence of the Catholic magnates, the earls, Huntly, Erroll and Hay amongst others, and the clans, is crucial in understanding local religious dynamics. William Sheils, who provides the initial overview in the Brill Companion, works in miniature here in his chapter on Catholics and their Protestant neighbours, showing us what a difference it made whether you were living in East Anglia, where Protestants were active and energetic, or in Sussex, where Catholic networks were strong. In the volume as a whole, however, the broad-brush approach necessitated by the brevity of the chapters runs the risk

³⁴ See, for example, the discussion of books in Robert Persons's library in Valladolid by Teófanés Egido López, 'The Books of "P. Robertus Personius"', in Javier Burrieza Sánchez and Peter Harris, eds. *Robert Persons Mission: An English Jesuit in the Old Court of Valladolid*, (Valladolid: English College, 2010), 107–115. Grateful thanks to Fr Peter Harris for further information.

³⁵ Michael E. Williams, *The Venerable English College Rome: A History 1579–1979* (London: Associated Catholic Publications, 1979), 9, 27.

³⁶ Amongst others, there are plans for translations of Nicholas Sanders, *De schismate Anglicano* and Robert Persons's *Philopater*. Robert Maryks is the editor of a series of Jesuit neo-Latin texts, published by Brill.

³⁷ Sheils cites, inter alia, works by Roger B. Manning and Eamon Duffy on Sussex, Christopher Haigh on Lancashire, Aveling on the north riding of Yorkshire, and Diarmaid MacCulloch on Suffolk.

of flattening regional differences by drawing similar examples from multiple areas and sources. The index lists Scotland, Ireland and Wales, as well as individual counties of England (a telling fact in itself), but they are subsumed under the heading ‘Protestant[s], Catholic relations with’, so that almost all the references are to Sheils’s chapter. This impedes the gathering of information on particular areas and suggests the need for a further collections of essays on the various regions, including the exiles in the Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy and the Baltic. Thomas O’Connor, for instance, alerts us to the importance of the college in Braniewo, reminding us that for Scotland, the Baltic was a natural point of contact with Europe. Sweden came close to restoring the link with Rome in the 1580s, on terms that would have appealed to James VI,³⁸ and English works found their way to Lithuania and Poland.³⁹

If we go even further back from *Recusant History*, we reach *Biographical Studies*, the original title of this journal. With the emphasis on community, biography has been superseded by analysis and theme, except for tracking down nuns and monks and individual histories on a small scale. Even William Cardinal Allen, surely the biggest name in the period covered by this volume, has been reduced from the subject of an effusive biography by Dom Bede Camm, OSB, a classic of its type, to a modest and sober article by Eamon Duffy.⁴⁰ There are notable exceptions, like Gerard Kilroy’s *Edmund Campion*,⁴¹ and new work on the Arundels, Philip and Anne Howard (as well as Dorothy Arundell)—and there must be more I’m not yet aware of—but Luke (Francis) Wadding, OFM, William (Gabriel) Gifford, OSB, Owen Lewis, Morys Clynnog, Gregory Martin, Lucy Knatchbull, Mary Percy and Augustine Baker, OSB—to name just a few—deserve substantial biographies. Studies of Catholic households like the Petres of Ingatestone Hall, or William Byrd’s place in the household of Thomas Lord Paget, and his exchanges with Henry Garnet,⁴² are crucial for an understanding of how lay Catholics, great and small, heroic and everyday, lived their lives of faith.⁴³

³⁸ Oskar Garstein, *Rome and the Counter-Reformation in Scandinavia: Until the Establishment of the S. Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in 1622*, 2 vols (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1963), 1: 89–257. Several English, Welsh and Scottish priests worked in Sweden, Lithuania, Poland and Bohemia, including Nicholas Sanders, Edmund Campion, SJ, William Good, SJ and James Bosgrave, SJ.

³⁹ Teresa Bela, Clarinda Calma, and Jolanta Rzegocka, eds. *Publishing Subversive Texts in Elizabethan England and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

⁴⁰ Bede Camm, OSB, *William Cardinal Allen: Founder of the Seminaries* (London: Macdonald and Evans, 1908), Eamon Duffy, ‘William, Cardinal Allen, 1532–1594’, *Recusant history* 22.3 (1995): 265–290.

⁴¹ Kilroy, Gerard, *Edmund Campion: A Scholarly Life* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

⁴² Philip Caraman, SJ, *Henry Garnet 1555–1606 and the Gunpowder Plot* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1964), 33, 34, 317.

⁴³ Cf. Augustus Jessopp, *One Generation of a Norfolk House: A Contribution to Elizabethan History*, 2nd edn (London: Burns & Oates, 1879) on the Walpoles; Godfrey Anstruther, *Vaux*

No place like Rome

Rome and the Counter-Reformation in England is the title of a fine book by Philip Hughes, written over eighty years ago.⁴⁴ The series of which this volume is the first is avowedly not a history of Rome and the Catholics of Britain and Ireland. In the roundtable discussion of the Oxford History series published as a conversation in *British Catholic History*, the editors justified their decision not to use the term ‘Roman Catholicism’, or to use it sparingly or parenthetically, by explaining that it has little meaning outside of Anglican contexts,⁴⁵ where the established church has not only laid claim to the word ‘Catholic’, as all the reformers did, but given it semi-official status as ‘Anglo-Catholic’, or, as the first anti-apartheid archbishop of Cape Town, Geoffrey Clayton, preferring not to belong to an oil company, put it, ‘Anglican Catholic’. The editors’ point is well taken. ‘Roman Catholicism’ would look strange in the title and in my experience is used less and less in everyday speech. All the same, the question is worth asking: just how important is Rome in the story?

Peter Marshall’s chapter on ‘The Break with Rome’ begins with a thoughtful assessment of the attachment of Catholic clergy and laity to the papacy at the time of the Henrician reformation. He suggests that the papal connection was so much taken for granted that few had given much thought to whether it was dispensable or not. In the event, ‘Catholicism without the pope’, or Caesaropapism, fizzled out at the end of Henry’s reign, and loyalty to Rome became a clear signifier of allegiance and an opportunity to assert Catholic identity. Who was your preferred saint: St George or St Thomas of Canterbury (pp. 18–19)? Thomas More himself, who tended towards conciliarism, became increasingly papalist as his fortunes played out. Marshall concludes: ‘For humble parishioners, as well as intellectuals like More and Pole, it had perhaps begun to seem that communion with Rome might, after all, prove the most reliable guarantor of right faith and traditional ways’ (p. 25).

In the Brill Companion, Sheils cites Marshall in taking another, equally tentative view of the Henrician state of the case, questioning whether those who died in opposition to Henry thought they were upholding papal claims.⁴⁶ The Elizabethan martyrs paid with their

of Harrowden: A Recusant Family (Newport, Monmouthshire: R.H. Johns, 1953). Questier’s *Catholicism and Community* focuses on the Brownes (Montagues) of Cowdrey.

⁴⁴ Philip Hughes, *Rome and the Counter-Reformation in England* (London: Burns Oates, 1942).

⁴⁵ ‘Roundtable discussion: The History of British and Irish Catholicism: Past, Present and Future’, *British Catholic History* 36.3 (2023): 255–279, at pp. 268–270.

⁴⁶ William J. Sheils, ‘Historical Overview, ca. 1530–1829’, in Scully with Ellis, eds. *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland*, 28–55, citing Peter Marshall, ‘Is the Pope Catholic? Henry VIII and the Semantics of Schism,’ in *Catholics and*

lives for their link with the papacy, the authorities applying the ‘bloody question’: what would you do if the pope sent an army to restore the Roman faith in England? The new oath of allegiance following the Gunpowder Plot required the subjects of James VI and I to renounce the papal deposing power. Priests were treated as if they were secret agents of a foreign prince,⁴⁷ but the martyrs themselves believed they were dying, not for the pope but for the faith of which the pope was a guarantor.

In 1954 C.S. Lewis, renowned for his assault on verbicide (by which a word like ‘gentleman’ has come to signify nothing more than vague approval), contended that to reserve the word ‘Catholic’ for adherents of the church of Rome was to foreclose on the dispute. ‘Roman Catholic’ would do the same, so he opted for ‘papist’, which he believed to be neutral and unambiguous.⁴⁸ His solution was eccentric. Nevertheless, the editorial decision invites protest, which might have been anticipated and averted by including a chapter on Anglican Catholicism. Not only the contest over nomenclature is of interest, but the attachment which led John Donne to write, in his best known meditation, ‘The church is Catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that body which is my head too, and ingrafted into that body whereof I am a member’.⁴⁹ Nor was the claim restricted to Arminians or anti-Puritans. The period covered by this volume was too early for ecumenism in our modern sense, but it is noteworthy that Edmund Campion (as Persons reported) imagined Sir Philip Sidney was ‘fully persuaded’ and likely to convert, when in fact he was displaying ‘Philippism’, adherence to the irenic doctrine of Philip Melanchthon.⁵⁰ The phenomenon of serial conversion and apostasy indicates how many Catholics were uncertain whether the only kind of Catholicism was Roman.

By the time we reach the late Elizabethan period, the assumption that England had cut herself and her dominions off from the breath of spiritual life became a mark of the more militant papalists such as William Allen and Robert Persons. It is a matter of degree. There is no Catholicism described or analysed in this volume that is not

the ‘Protestant nation’: Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England, ed. Ethan Shagan (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005), 22–48.

⁴⁷ Cf. Alice Hogge, *God’s Secret Agents: Queen Elizabeth’s Forbidden Priests and the Hatching of the Gunpowder Plot* (London: HarperCollins, 2005).

⁴⁸ C.S. Lewis, *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century. Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

⁴⁹ John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, no. xviii.

⁵⁰ Robert Persons, *Life of Campion*, ABSI, *Coll P I* 99, discussed by Katherine Duncan-Jones, ‘Sir Philip Sidney’s Debt to Campion’, in Thomas M. McCoog, SJ, ed. *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1996), pp. 85–102. Cf. Robert E. Stillman, *Christian Identity, Piety, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021), pp. 230–231.

inextricably bound to Rome, if not indisputably dependent on the holy see. That is what got Catholics into trouble, and it is what they clung to, laity, secular clergy and religious. Whether this was to be a mission, seeking to reconvert an apostate land, or a church trying to find stability under a Protestant dispensation, the hierarchy and the devotion and the practice of the faith were all papally sanctioned. The Oxford History begins and ends with chapters on the break from Rome and anti-pope, yet not one pope is named in the (admittedly scanty) index: not Paul IV, Reginald Pole's antagonist, nor Pius V, who excommunicated Elizabeth, nor Gregory XIII, who sponsored the English mission, nor Sixtus V, who supported the Spanish Armada, nor Paul V, a previous Cardinal Vice-Protector of England, who involved himself in the debate over the Jacobean oath of allegiance. The Gregorian calendar does not get a mention, though it left British and Irish Catholics (except those in Ulster) ten days behind their co-religionists on the continent. The Archivio Apostolico Vaticano is missing from the list of archives, as if Britain and Ireland were of no interest to the papal secretary of state. To see Britain and Ireland with Roman eyes might usefully complement the vision of Rome from London, Edinburgh and Dublin.

Reflections

To return to the Oxford History as it is, not as it might be, there can be no doubt that this is an authoritative and important book, marking a sense of arrival. It has its limitations, mostly a function of multiple authorship. There are signs of haste, uneven writing, opportunities missed, gaps in the story. In some cases, as with religious controversy, Scully's companion *supplet*. The volume may appear slighter than one expects of an Oxford or Cambridge History,⁵¹ but it is not a mere primer, although sixth formers and undergraduates would find it a handy introduction to the field, with digestible chapters and useful reading lists. Even specialists in the field will find something new or intriguing, according to the range of their own expertise, especially if they are unfamiliar with the Irish or British wing. Scholars predominantly concerned with Protestant reformation history or secular history of one kind or another will recognize the need for a relatively new field of historiographical enquiry to present itself to the wider academic community in consolidated surveys such as this.⁵² That need has now been doubly satisfied. With dedicated journals, regular conferences, research centres, grants and major projects, this area of enquiry has proved its credentials and established its bases of operations.

⁵¹ Cf. Anthony Milton, ed. *The Oxford History of Anglicanism. Volume 1, Reformation and Identity c.1520–1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 500 pages. The volume reviewed here is 325 pages.

⁵² Young, 'Surveying a field come of age', 204.

The editors have good reason to claim that ‘a growing number of scholars have recognized the importance of the subject to both national and global history’ (p. xxi), but the question still remains, what difference is the expansion of activity in this field making in historical and cultural studies generally? This volume will not provide the answer to that question, though it will help to raise awareness among specialists in related fields, and invite more comprehensive conversations.

The Oxford History of British & Irish Catholicism does not pretend to be the last word on the subject, but functions rather as an opportunity to review and look forward, as St Ignatius himself would have counselled. It is evident, from the large agreement between the Oxford History and the Brill Companion, that the community of accomplished scholars working in early modern Catholic studies is coherent and collaborative. Although, as we have seen, perceptions have shifted significantly over the past few decades, they have, on the whole, shifted in unison; currently, interpretations tend to be tweaked rather than overthrown or hotly contested. Early modern Catholic studies, in other words, is a good place to be, but it is also a place to proceed from. From my reading of this volume, several areas of potential growth have emerged. The archival base is expanding, with the opening up and professionalization of institutional archives, which guarantees a steady flow of new and pertinent information. Although I have suggested that the fit between British and Irish Catholic history is still an uneasy one, the comparisons and interconnections are sure to develop and become more sophisticated. The European and global dimensions will contribute more strongly to the understanding of reformation history in Ireland and Britain. This means trawling more archives in Europe, probing papal records, translating Latin texts, reading more of continental literature, Catholic and Protestant. Work is already well advanced on relations with France, Belgium, Spain, Poland and elsewhere. More contact with continental scholars and their scholarship will very likely lead to a questioning of assumptions. And the multi-lingual extension of research into primary sources will generate new syntheses and debates. Harmony is almost certain to be disrupted.

There is, nevertheless, a certain excitement about the lifting of horizons. Apart from enlargement of its own historical sphere, early modern Catholic studies will surely be affected by closer association with later periods. It is an extraordinary achievement that all five volumes of the Oxford History of British and Irish Catholic History have appeared simultaneously, and this will augment the seventeenth-century turn in the early modern period. Another term for early modern might be post-medieval, a perspective that we should not lose. Ends are just as interesting as new beginnings.