

Marie Therese Flanagan, *The transformation of the Irish Church in the twelfth century* (Studies in Celtic History XXIX (Boydell Press, Woodbridge) Paperback ed. 2013 Price: \$45

This is the paperback edition of a book originally published in 2010. The opening sentence encapsulates its aims: "This study offers an account of the Irish church during the twelfth century, a time of institutional restructuring and religious renewal associated with a reform movement that was a regional manifestation of a much wider European phenomenon." This emphasis on a European background distinguishes the book from the monographs on the high-medieval Irish church produced by J.A. Watt, namely *The Church and the two nations in medieval Ireland* (Cambridge 1970) and *The Church in medieval Ireland* (Dublin 1971, reprint 1998). Looking at these now, these latter books, in their focus on ethnicity and relationships between incomer and native, are clearly marked by the political circumstances of the era in which they were written. Flanagan's book, in contrast, belongs to the historiographical tradition of Aubrey Gwynn and Maurice Sheehy and views the twelfth century very much from the standpoint of local participation and involvement in an international movement.

The book is divided into three major sections together with an introductory section on sources. The first of these is on bishops and dioceses. There were two major synods in Ireland in the twelfth century: the synod of Ráth Breassail in 1111 and the synod of Kells in 1152. Together these created the basics of an Irish diocesan structure which is still visible in the modern era. There is a strong and long-lasting tradition of viewing these twelfth-century synods as creating the modern diocesan arrangements from an almost entirely blank canvas. Studies by scholars such as Adrian Empey and Katherine Simms make it clear that the territorial remit of many dioceses have alternated over time since the twelfth century while Richard Sharpe and Colmán Etchingham, in studies produced since the mid 1980s, have done much to outline the varied possibilities subsumed within the role of bishops in the pre-twelfth-century Irish church and the extent to which they might (or might not) have exercised a consistent territorial authority. Work by these researchers has been important in providing a more detailed context for the twelfth-century episcopal 'reforms' in Ireland ; one of the many advantages of Flanagan's book is that it provides an alternative pole of attraction for a generation whose ideas have been shaped by this emphasis on incremental change and long-standing continuity. The contrast in attitudes and perspectives will help students of the future to calibrate new positions on the pendulum of scholarly analysis.

One particular area where Flanagan's work provides an important corrective to the conclusions of more recent studies is in the emphasis she places on the 'long twelfth century' as a period in which the creation of local parish churches was the European norm. In the oft-quoted observation by the medieval churchman Radulfus Glauber: "one would have said that the world itself was casting aside its old age and clothing itself anew in a white mantle of churches". The impact of this concern for a localised provision of Christian sacraments is graphically illustrated in Ireland by the work of Gillebertus of Limerick (otherwise known as Bishop Gille) who produced a treatise on ecclesiastical grades at the beginning of the twelfth century. Flanagan devotes thirty pages to her discussion of this treatise and concludes that it was a practical manual which, while delineating all seven

ecclesiastical grades, was focussed most particularly on the parish priest (p.80) and the episcopal responsibility for such men. Her discussion of Irish bishops concludes with a fascinating investigation of the idealised portraits of bishops as provided in lives of saints such as St Flannán of Killaloe and Bernard of Clairvaux's portrayal of the perfect Cistercian bishop as represented by Máel Máedóc Ua Morgair or St Malachy of Armagh. Cistercian intellectuals wrote much about apostolic models of authority in the tradition of the fourth-century monk and bishop St Martin of Tours. St Martin had, however, been a revered figure in the Irish church since at least the sixth century and the extent, therefore, to which Bernard's life represents innovative twelfth-century attitudes amongst Irish bishops is a matter for scholarly debate. Flanagan's discussion places more emphasis on the contemporary and international influences on that life but perhaps the popularity and success of St Malachy as a bishop in Ireland was due to the extent to which his life and actions chimed with much older ideas concerning ideal episcopal lifestyles.

The second section of the book deals with the new monastic orders introduced into Ireland. Flanagan's expertise as a scholar of Norman Europe results in a rather more detailed picture of both the French and English involvement in such orders than in previous monographs on the Irish church. She is also influenced by the emphasis on the long organisational evolution of such orders produced by figures such as Constance Berman. Thirdly, she places far more emphasis than many previous scholars on the contemporary Irish evidence for what she terms the "established monasticism" of contemporary twelfth-century Ireland. The picture of the new orders which she provides is thus far less monolithic than that found in previous monographs while their impact is seen in rather more nuanced terms. Overall, the result is to create a lively impression of Irish churchmen engaged in discussion and debate as well as decision-making. Older models tend to reflect very much the views of European reformers in seeing the Irish church as an inherently backward place being dragged forcibly into the enlightened world of contemporary Europe; Flanagan's depiction is certainly of a largely conservative and localised Irish church on the eve of the twelfth-century 'reforms' but no more so, apparently, than that of the established churches of Britain or Normandy.

The third section of the book deals with the impact of the Church as an institution on secular Irish Christians in the areas of war, marriage, ecclesiastical patronage and lay piety and devotion. Clerical peace-making, while a long-standing preoccupation of churchmen, received new impetus under the Continental *treuga Dei* or the "Truce of God" (p.171-84) and Flanagan highlights the appearance of vocabulary relating to such movements in Irish saints' lives (many of which, admittedly, have been transmitted down to us through Continental manuscripts and collections.) As part of the new emphasis on local provision and increased Church presence in community life, international leaders of the reform movement sought to expand Christian control over marriage and sexual practices, both lay and clerical: it is not clear that they were particularly successful in either arena in twelfth-century Ireland. With regard to ecclesiastical patronage, however, the existence of European style charters as well as new trends in annalistic coverage allows us to see these processes in operation and it is clear that Irish royalty played a substantial part in fostering the development of the new orders. They also played a crucial role in endorsing Church teaching on charity, support of the sick, educational provision and the importance of

pilgrimage. Again, these were aspects of Church life which, while not new in the period of the reforms, yet were receiving new and increased priority in the writings of the day and Flanagan provides an extensive catalogue of specific twelfth-century references to such activities by Irish aristocrats.

Throughout her career, Marie Therese Flanagan's priority as a scholar has been to investigate and celebrate Ireland's history and Irish phenomena in the context of European trends and institutions. Most of her publications have been concentrated on the twelfth century which she has studied from a wide variety of angles. The wide coverage of ecclesiastical culture provided in this book highlights (for this reviewer) the still outstanding gap in coverage of eleventh-century church history in Ireland which would allow us to evaluate more precisely how many of the topics which she discusses were seen as novel developments of the twelfth century. At the same time, the great value of the book lies in the more holistic and wide-ranging discussion of Irish church "reform" than has hitherto been available in the established literature.

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