

3-1-2009

The Reconstruction of the Church of Ireland: Bishop Bramhall and the Laudian Reforms, 1633-1641, by John McCafferty

William M. Abbott
Fairfield University, wmabbott@fairfield.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/history-facultypubs>

© 2009 by Cambridge University Press. Original published version can be found at DOI:
10.1017/S0009640709000262

Peer Reviewed

Repository Citation

Abbott, William M., "The Reconstruction of the Church of Ireland: Bishop Bramhall and the Laudian Reforms, 1633-1641, by John McCafferty" (2009). *History Faculty Publications*. 4.
<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/history-facultypubs/4>

Published Citation

Abbott, William. "The Reconstruction of the Church of Ireland: Bishop Bramhall and the Laudian Reforms, 1633-1641, by John McCafferty." *Church History* 78.1 (Mar 2009): 206-208.

This item has been accepted for inclusion in DigitalCommons@Fairfield by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It is brought to you by DigitalCommons@Fairfield with permission from the rights-holder(s) and is protected by copyright and/or related rights. You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@fairfield.edu.

went on. But it is clear that Moore has made a significant and important contribution to our understanding of Preston and English Calvinism in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Dewey D. Wallace, Jr.
George Washington University

doi:10.1017/S0009640709000262

***The Reconstruction of the Church of Ireland: Bishop Bramhall and the Laudian Reforms, 1633–1641.* By John McCafferty.**

Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2007. xiv + 275 pp. \$99.00 cloth.

This study of the attempt by William Laud, Thomas Wentworth, and John Bramhall to “reconstruct” the Church of Ireland during the 1630s adds new and useful perspectives to the longstanding historical debates over the ecclesiastical history of Charles I’s Personal Rule. Arguing that this reconstruction effort failed “because it was a variant of the reconstruction of the Church of England” (223), McCafferty examines not simply the issues of Laudianism-versus-puritanism and Protestantism-versus-recusancy but also Irish ecclesiastical independence versus congruity with the Church of England, church property resumption versus lay attempts to keep impropriations, and local independence versus central control. Readers may at times be confused when McCafferty jumbles these issues together, but they are inherently difficult to disentangle. One should read the concluding summary in chapter 7 before starting the book.

Arguing that the reconstruction effort “can only really be judged in the context of that decade” (152), McCafferty defends the logic behind that effort while showing that, though Bramhall, Wentworth, and Laud were effective in carrying it out, they alienated powerful lay and clerical interests with their overdependence on prerogative, their strategy of putting off the problem of recusancy while reconstruction proceeded, and their inability to see many of the difficulties in “Anglicizing” the Irish Church. Wentworth’s hard-working “plenipotentiary,” Bishop John Bramhall of Derry, often comes across as more pragmatic than the deputy but as one whose effectiveness depended on the latter’s power, and who, for all his political skill, possessed the same weaknesses of judgment. By concentrating on this earlier and more administrative stage of Bramhall’s career, McCafferty’s book complements Jack Cunningham’s *James Ussher and John Bramhall* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2007) and Nicholas D. Jackson’s *Hobbes, Bramhall, and the*

Politics of Liberty and Necessity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

The book's most valuable contribution is its detailed analysis of the cooperation between Bramhall, Wentworth, and Laud as seen in their 1630s correspondence. It is doubtful that McCafferty has missed any extant letters in his examination of collections at Dublin, Belfast, Edinburgh, London, Oxford, Cambridge, Sheffield, and the Huntingdon Library, together with the published collections of works by these men and other figures such as James Ussher. Similarly exhaustive is McCafferty's use of act books, state papers, visitation records, parliamentary accounts, and convocation records. He is meticulous in his interpretation of documents, frequently noting when there is a paucity of extant records. He uses more than 70 seventeenth-century tracts and more than 400 secondary sources, including recent work by Nicholas Canny, Aidan Clarke, Kenneth Fincham, Alan Ford, Felicity Heal, Brian Jackson, Colm Lennon, Patrick Little, Anthony Milton, Jane Ohlmeyer, Clodagh Tait, and Nicholas Tyacke.

In the first chapter McCafferty explains that the Old English and Gaelic Irish were still solidly Catholic in the early seventeenth century because the very conditions that had worked for Protestant reformation in England worked against it in Ireland. In the second chapter he concludes that, prior to the arrival of Wentworth and Bramhall in 1633, there were reform plans aplenty for the Church of Ireland, but consistent application was lacking. This chapter continues with a brief biography of Bramhall and a description of his and Wentworth's efforts to restore impropriations and church property through high-profile prosecutions.

The third chapter compares the canons produced by the 1634 Irish convocation with English canons and articles, and also with the Irish convocation articles of 1613–1615. In this chapter especially the writing style can be unclear, and McCafferty's themes occasionally lack coherency amid the mass of detail, but there are many issues to weave together. We see the differences with Archbishop James Ussher primarily through Bramhall's perspective, with the Primate often appearing jealous of his prerogatives. McCafferty does well, however, to counter the traditional view of Ussher as an otherworldly scholar and ecumenist by showing him as a Jacobean churchman with a limited willingness to overlook nonconformity and as a politician capable of looking after his own interests. For a more sympathetic and nuanced view of Ussher vis-à-vis Bramhall, see Jack Cunningham's abovementioned *James Ussher and John Bramhall*.

In chapters 4 and 5 McCafferty examines the Bramhall-Wentworth effort to reform Irish ecclesiastical jurisdiction and rejects many of the negative, post-1640 views of that effort. A strong clericalist, Bramhall nevertheless sought

to restrict some episcopal powers in order to eliminate ecclesiastical court abuses and to prevent bishops from alienating episcopal property. Far from being originally designed to suppress puritan nonconformity, the Irish High Commission was intended to assist with all of the moral, legal, and economic parts of reconstruction and also to “bring recusants into line with the official church courts” (158–159). Although the policy toward recusants and the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Ireland was one of tactical toleration until the Church of Ireland could be reconstructed, Wentworth and Bramhall were willing to foment division among the Catholics and seize their financial resources (174–175). The nonconformist myth of a puritan-friendly Ulster Church of Ireland “strangled” by the 1634 convocation and Wentworth’s Black Oath founders upon closer examination, with McCafferty suggesting that no Church of Ireland bishop of any stripe was willing to permit preaching against the Church’s “English constitution or its [Prayer] book” (181, 185). Bramhall’s association of puritan nonconformity with the plundering of church property, however, together with his failure to see puritan opposition as heartfelt or principled, led to overconfidence and stubbornness (187–188, 194, 197).

Chapter 6 is a detailed narrative of the dismantling of the reconstruction program in 1640–1641, as opponents simultaneously complained that promised reforms had not been made and that the methods used to implement reforms had been arbitrary and tyrannical. For McCafferty this dismantling owed much to the economic interests of the Irish Protestant gentry and to the personal and structural weaknesses of the Bramhall-Wentworth team, but there is also a sense of the injustice with which opponents misunderstood or misrepresented these men’s goals, some of which, under different circumstances, would have had puritan support.

William M. Abbott
Fairfield University

doi:10.1017/S0009640709000274

Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan: Buddhism, Anti-Christianity, and the Danka System. By Nam-lin Hur. Harvard East Asian Monographs 282. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007. xvi + 566 pp. \$55.00 cloth.

In Tokugawa Japan (1600–1868), Buddhism held an anomalous position. It was not formally a state religion, it played no part in government rituals, and