Book Reviews

Eamon Duffy and David Loades (eds.), The Church of Mary Tudor (Catholic Christendom 1300-1700), Ashgate: Aldershot 2005, xxxii + 348 pp., £50.00. ISBN 0 7546 3070 6 (hbk).


The history of the Church in England under Mary Tudor has long been defined by the Protestant Settlements of Edward VI and Elizabeth I which preceded and followed Mary’s reintroduction of papal allegiance and traditional religious practices (which for simplicity’s sake will here be referred to as Catholicism), and in particular by the vivid accounts of the persecution of Protestants given in Foxe’s Book of Martyrs. As the increasing complexity of the history of the Reformation – and indeed of Catholic Reform – has begun to be appreciated, it has, however, become clear that the history of the years 1553-1558 also needed to be more carefully investigated. Fifteen years ago, in 1992, Eamon Duffy noted in The Stripping of the Altars that ‘a convincing account of the religious history of Mary’s reign has yet to be written’. These two volumes offer an important contribution to filling that gap.

The Church of Mary Tudor, edited by Eamon Duffy and David Loades, brings together a collection of eleven essays gathered into three sections considering the process of reintroducing Catholicism to England, the role of Reginald Pole, and the culture of the Marian Church. The editors’ introduction offers a useful summary of current historiography, and in a separate introduction David Loades sets the scene with a discussion of ‘the personal religion of Mary I’. Loades highlights ‘the intensity of her devotion to the sacrament of the altar, and the learned and reflective humanism in which she had been reared’ (p. 25), which gave her the courage to maintain her convictions, both against the liturgical and ecclesiastical reforms under her brother Edward VI and also when it came to conflicts with the Pope, but which also inspired her to become ‘the most ruthless persecutor in English history’ (p. 28) in her
vicious treatment of those whose religious views did not coincide with her own. Loades concludes that Mary’s faith made her ‘quite incapable of treating heresy – and particularly sacramental heresy – as a political problem’ (p. 29). It was this combination of enlightened, well-read and yet utterly unbending faith which defined the Catholicism which Mary sought through Pole and others to (re-)introduce into England. It is thus evident that the Catholicism of Mary’s Church was by no means simply a return to the Church before the break from Rome.

The initial group of four essays offer reflections on aspects of the process by which the papal allegiance and traditional practices were restored and renewed. David Loades considers the Marian Episcopate, noting the strong record of theological learning amongst the bishops appointed under Mary, and the conspicuous lack of lawyers and diplomats. He remarks that although in 1553 Letters Patent had been abolished and the *congé d’elire* restored, Mary nonetheless exercised powers of appointment. (Here it might be noted that she behaved in a way very similar to other contemporary Catholic rulers, notably in Spain and France.) Additionally, she sought to return bishops to their previous status, returning episcopal lands where possible and forgiving debts; nonetheless, as under Edward VI, her bishops did not generally exercise secular functions. The expectation of both Mary and Pole was that the bishops must be the key in the task of restoring the church, but Loades suggests that initially the episcopate was burdened by too many who lacked the necessary ‘zeal and commitment’, and that this was only corrected in the second half of Mary’s reign (p. 55).

Considering the English Universities 1553-1558, Claire Cross examines the eradication of Protestantism, involving the expulsion of foreign scholars such as Peter Martyr Vermigli and the voluntary exile of significant numbers of English Protestants, and the introduction of Catholic humanism by means of judicious appointments of Catholic scholars, a number of whom came from Spain, allied with Pole’s visitations in 1556. The success of this strategy can be seen in the even larger number of scholars who went into exile, particularly from Oxford, in 1558. Cross concludes that ‘the form of humanism fostered by Pole might well have put down lasting roots in the universities had the queen secured a Catholic succession’ (p. 76).

Mary’s care for diocesan and university structures was mirrored by her efforts to restore monastic communities in England, which had been an important aspect, not only of medieval devotional life, but also of the structures of social care. Her efforts were largely frustrated by the unwillingness of those who had benefited from the dissolution of the monasteries to give up the