Introduction: Religious Acculturation and Affiliation in Early Modern Gaelic Scotland, Gaelic Ireland, Wales and Cornwall.

The period 1500-1800 was one of markedly increased political integration within Britain and Ireland. At the beginning of this timeframe, the two kingdoms of England and Scotland were not merely habitually at war but neither exercised anything close to secure control throughout the lands over which they claimed dominion. The kingdom of England was by far the most centralised political unit in the islands but had been racked by a series of ruinous civil wars, the last of which had recently brought a usurper to the throne through a rebellion drawing substantially on Welsh support. The English kings held the title of Lord of Ireland but most of the island lay outside their control in the hands of the king’s “Irish enemies”, the same ethnic/linguistic population which dominated the Highlands and islands of Scotland and over which the influence of the Kings of Scots was at best limited. The Welsh Act of Union of 1536, the Irish kingship act of 1541, which recognized the entire population of that island as the king’s subjects, and then the Union of the Crowns of England and Scotland 1603 were major milestones in the establishment of one, largely uncontested, monarchical authority throughout the archipelago. In the 1650s the successful English rebels of the Interregnum through military conquest of the Three Kingdoms and Wales created for the first time a unitary parliamentary institution for the two islands. Although this was dissolved with the royal restoration of 1660, the process was eventually replicated with the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707 and the Irish Act of Union in 1801.[[1]](#footnote-1) These processes of political integration created an unstoppable momentum of Anglicisation.[[2]](#footnote-2) While in 1500 the majority of the land surface of both Scotland and Ireland harboured Gaelic-speaking societies, Welsh dominated the territory of modern Wales, and even in England itself the Celtic vernacular of Cornish still marked off the extreme south-west of the kingdom as a foreign country, by 1800 English was the dominant language of the social elite everywhere in the archipelago, an indispensable medium of communication in the fields of politics, commerce and law, and the stage was set for the precipitous decline of the remaining three Celtic vernaculars over the next century.

Ironically, however, these conjoint currents of Anglicisation and political centralisation were paralleled not by the disappearance but by the proliferation of religious heterogeneity throughout the two islands. In 1500, with the exception of a small population of Lollards scattered through several English regions and in south-west Scotland and a tiny Jewish presence in London, the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of both islands were members of the same church. It is true that in 1500 the clerical establishments of both the Scottish Lowlands and the English Pale in Ireland looked with disfavour at the religious practice of the Gaelic world yet religion actually formed something of a bridge between these culturally disparate peoples, centred on a common liturgical language, a shared conception of sin and the means of acquiring grace, seven recognised sacraments and an acknowledgement of papal and episcopal authority. In Ireland, for instance, despite spanning both the English Pale and the lordship of the O’Neills, the institutions of the archbishopric of Armagh managed to provide a functioning and variegated ministry across the ethnic divide.[[3]](#footnote-3) By 1800 even in centralised England much of the population did not conform to the established state-supported church which actually differed markedly from the recognised state church to the north in Scotland. In Ireland the Anglican church faced a significant rival in terms of numbers of adherents from dissenters, particularly presbyterians in the north, and even together the various Protestant denominations in the island amounted to barely a quarter of the population. In Wales also the stage had been set for the spectacular growth in non-conformity during the nineteenth century.

In the era of *cuius regio, eius religio* this marked the archipelago off as unusual. It differed not merely from monarchies such as France and the Scandinavian Lutheran kingdoms but also the Habsburg multiple monarchy of Spain where Catholicism assumed a position of unchallengeable dominance through its far-flung European territories in Castile, Aragon, Granada, Naples and Milan. Even in the Habsburg multiple monarchy of Austria, repeatedly threatened by invasion both from the north and the south, the confession patronised by the rulers had emerged as the majority religion of the inhabitants of the empire’s three chief constituent components by the end of the eighteenth century.

It has been the goal of the Insular Christianity project, of which this book is the second publication, to investigate these complex patterns of religious change in early modern Britain and Ireland. The focus of the current volume is on the religious culture of the speakers of Celtic languages within the archipelago. Its objective is not to try to isolate some putatively ‘Celtic’ Christianity nor does it imagine that any such essentialist construct existed. Rather late medieval Christianity was deeply rooted in four areas within the archipelago where Celtic vernaculars held sway. While certain institutions and practices can be seen as common across these societies, most notably expanding kin lineages imposing downward social mobility on more marginal groupings, chiefly because of relaxed attitudes towards sexuality and extra-marital illegitimacy, and the ubiquitous presence of a bardic caste, there was no unified ‘Celtic’ world.[[4]](#footnote-4) Indeed, ironically one of the factors which was to confer a certain unity on these Celtic societies in the early modern period was their common interaction with a much more centralised ‘English’ culture whose elites tended to regard all manifestations of Celtic difference as evidence of barbarism. The scope of this chapter is to sketch some areas of contrast and similarity in the common, but not necessarily shared, experience of Gaelic Ireland, Gaelic Scotland, Wales and Cornwall in participating in the acute religious changes of the early modern period.

In 1500 the Gaelic world stretched from the outer Hebrides in the north to the extreme south-west of Ireland. Two powerful currents of religious reform, one Calvinist and centred in Scotland and the other Catholic and primarily Irish, occurred within this area during the course of the early modern period. The geographical fault line between these movements still exists today in the Scottish Hebrides. Three factors, however, have conspired to reduce not only the visibility of the actual processes of change but, in particular, their cognate elements on both sides of the narrow sea. First, the movements of reform, while significant, suffered certain limitations and were also notably affected by later disruptions. In Ireland, for instance, the demographic and political impact of the Cromwellian conquest played particular havoc with the institutional structures of the Catholic church and greatly eroded the progress of the previous decades.[[5]](#footnote-5) Second, both Scottish Gaelic Calvinism and Irish Gaelic Catholicism developed at a time of equally rapid religious change within the English and Scots-speaking populations of both kingdoms. In each instance, the English/Scots version of religious change was in many respects closer to contemporaneous European developments and thus there has been a tendency to see Gaelic reform movements as merely an attenuated and incomplete version of what was happening in the more “mainstream” Anglo-Scots populations.[[6]](#footnote-6) Such a historiographical tendency has arguably been influenced by, and somewhat uncritically reflects, the assumptions of early modern English and Scots religious reformers. Both Lowland Scots Calvinists and Old English Catholics in Ireland were convinced of their own community’s greater civility vis-à-vis their Gaelic co-religionists and naturally assumed that their version of a new religious culture was inherently superior to that which obtained in Gaelic-speaking areas.[[7]](#footnote-7) Third, as Stephen Ellis has noted, the early modern period also witnessed an increasing bifurcation of the Gàidhealtachd/Gaedhealtacht into separate Irish and Scottish spheres, a process accentuated by the different currents of religious change which created new bridges and possibilities of shared identity between the Gaedhil and Gaill of both kingdoms while interposing confessional barriers between Scottish and Irish Gaeldom.[[8]](#footnote-8) Given the importance of religion in underpinning group identities throughout early modern Europe this had enormous implications for the cultural unity of the Gaelic world. Thus while in 1450 it is possible (with certain reservations)[[9]](#footnote-9) to speak of an established body of political and cultural assumptions uniting the Irishand Scottish Gàidhealtachd/Gaedhealtacht, the confessional divisions of the Gaelic population into substantially Calvinist in Scotland and overwhelmingly Catholic in Ireland gradually eroded the latter in a manner similar to how the expanding power of the English and Scottish state(s) undermined the distinctiveness of the former.[[10]](#footnote-10) Already by the early seventeenth century, the Irish Franciscan leadership in Louvain were reluctant to take on the task of spear-heading Catholic revival in the western highlands and only after sharp prompting from Rome did they eventually undertake the mission which brought the *modus operandi* of the Gaelic counter-reformation to a portion of Gaelic Scotland. [[11]](#footnote-11)

A natural result of this national contextualisation has been to orientate the study of religious change in the Gaelic world within the confines of the individual historiographies of Scotland and Ireland rather than attempting a composite investigation of the Gàidhealtachd/Gaedhealtacht as a whole. The lack of a wider international perspective has also contributed to this narrowing of focus. The Gaelic-speaking population of the archipelago were by no means unique in producing very different currents of religious reform during the early modern period. The German-speaking peoples of Europe, for instance, gave birth to a great variety of reforming impulses and, heavily influenced by geographical and geo-political factors, ultimately adopted very different confessional positions in different parts of the continent, as for instance in Brandenburg and Bavaria.[[12]](#footnote-12) Speakers of Hungarian, also, diverged sharply in the course of the post-Reformation period, with particularly strong Calvinist and Catholic tendencies ultimately emerging, both of which attempted to present themselves as the authentic vehicle of the ancient *Magyar* identity.[[13]](#footnote-13) But while an international perspective has sometimes been brought to bear in attempts to explore the linkages between Scottish and European Calvinism and Irish and European Catholicism,[[14]](#footnote-14) there has been much less emphasis on comparison between the two processes of religious change in a similar cultural and linguistic milieu.

The withering of Scottish Catholicism in the course of the later sixteenth-century was a remarkable phenomenon and created notable challenges as well as opportunities for the nascent Kirk. In particular the Scottish Highlands and islands, with their principally Gaelic-speaking population and large rural and frequently geographically inaccessible parishes, represented potentially difficult terrain for the Reformed faith, lacking as they did the burghs and craft incorporations which provided much of the initial support and enthusiasm for Protestantism in lowland Scotland.[[15]](#footnote-15) Six of Scotland’s eleven mainland dioceses contained large swathes of highland territory although only Argyll effectively lacked a lowland portion.[[16]](#footnote-16) Yet the surviving evidence suggests significant success on the part of the Kirk in creating a framework of reformed ministry across a Scottish Gàidhealtachd which spanned practically the entire western half of the country, with the exception of parts of Mar, Moray and Caithness, within a remarkably short space of time. This was as evident in dioceses such as Ross where the see was held by catholic sympathisers as in dioceses such as Caithness where Bishop Robert Stewart helped to patronise the movement of reform. Within a decade of the Reformation nearly all the parishes of Caithness were hosting the services of the reformed church[[17]](#footnote-17) while in Ross three ministers and nineteen exhorters and readers shared the work of thirty-five parishes, under the direction of a Gaelic commissioner who seems to have known little or no Scots, and despite an official policy of not filling parishes if no satisfactory candidates were available. By 1574 the commissioner in Ross could count on the support of eight ministers and twenty-five readers, while his counterpart in Caithness had eight ministers and sixteen readers for twenty-four parishes.[[18]](#footnote-18) A similar pattern obtained in Moray and in the highland portions of the dioceses of Dunkeld and Dunblane. Within these five dioceses it has been estimated that by 1574 sixty-five ministers and 158 readers were serving a combined total of 215 parishes, figures which compared not unfavourably to Scotland as a whole (although of course Highland parishes were generally much larger and more difficult to service adequately). Moreover, it is by no means self-evident that the Kirk’s supply of Gaelic-speaking clergy in these early years was greatly lower than its Scots-speaking equivalent.[[19]](#footnote-19) By the early seventeenth-century the majority of parishes in the highlands were occupied by ministers who were university-trained in the lowlands but who generally were able to discharge their pastoral responsibilities in the Gaelic language and to use it as the medium of religious instruction.[[20]](#footnote-20) Although such precise figures relating to the provision of ministers in the early Reformation are not available for the entirely Gaelic dioceses of Argyll and the Isles, there is reason to believe that the former at least was a significant focus for the inculcation of a Gaelic Reformation rather than a tardy outlier in the process. In 1574 it appears that every parish in Lorne, central Argyll and Cowal had the services of stipendiary reformed clergy, whether ministers or readers, and by the early seventeenth-century, the forty-four parishes of the diocese were serviced by 32 ministers.[[21]](#footnote-21) Argyll was also the operational centre of John Carswell (Seón/Eòin Carsuel/Carsuail) a pivotal figure in the early Gaelic Reformation.[[22]](#footnote-22) Carswell served as Superintendent of Argyll with responsibility also for Kintyre, Lorne, Lochaber and the Southern isles. In 1565 his appointment as Bishop of the Isles further widened the extent of his influence. While Carswell clearly took his administrative responsibilities as superintendent seriously, his career is most striking as the author of the first printed Gaelic text, *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh*, a version of the *Book of Common Order* which went significantly beyond a literal translation but which looked also to the Latin version of the original Geneva book, and incorporated parts of Calvin’s little Catechism, catechetical passages of his own composition, and some traditional prayers.[[23]](#footnote-23) While it is difficult to estimate the actual impact on the ground of this text, composed not in the vernacular but in Classical common Gaelic, which presumably meant that it required a degree of mediation by literate ministers to make it entirely comprehensible to the mass of the people,[[24]](#footnote-24) it is noteworthy that by 1574 all the parishes in Argyll inspected by the sixth earl in a chief’s circuit apparently possessed a copy of the text, and were making use of it both for worship and for discipline.[[25]](#footnote-25) Perhaps more significantly, the production of the text itself testified to the cultural confidence in the Gaelic milieu around Argyll which was to be central to the wider project of both adapting the Reformation to the Gaelic culture and Gaelic culture to the new religious sensibility of Protestantism.

Carswell’s career also neatly encapsulated what were to be two central elements in the adaptation of Protestantism to highland culture, namely the importance of the Gaelic learned classes, on the one hand, and the aristocracy, on the other, in leading and diffusing the new religious attitudes and practices. Carswell himself was evidently not entirely untrained in the composition of Gaelic poetry although he deplored contemporary poetic preoccupations with mythical stories from the Gaelic past rather than a concentration of their talents on the word of God.[[26]](#footnote-26) The success of the Scottish reformation in harnessing the talents of the traditional learned families with a tradition of clerical service within the ministry of the new church was to be of critical importance to its success.[[27]](#footnote-27) Carswell’s own career was also critically defined by his relationship with his patron, the fifth earl of Argyll, Archibald (Gilleasbuig ) Campbell. Argyll had been brought up a convinced Protestant and proved to be an extraordinarily influential individual in terms of spearheading the entrance of Protestantism into Gaelic Scotland. The Campbells were the most important clan in Western Scotland and, with the exception of the seventh earl who converted to Catholicism, the leading branch of the family proved to be committed and vital supporters of the new religion over the course of a century. The sheer extent of Campbell power and their control of religious patronage meant that their confessional alignment was of profound significance but their role as patrons and facilitators of reform was mirrored also by other kindreds such as the MacKenzies, the Rosses, the Munros, the MacLeans of Duart and the MacLeods of Harris and Skye.[[28]](#footnote-28) (By contrast, in those areas where Catholicism was able to acquire something of a foothold within Gaelic Scotland the support of native aristocrats was also crucial, in particular Clanranald in South Uist and Glengarry and the McNeills of Barra, and to a degree the confessional alignment of these clans was influenced by their hostility to Campbell power).[[29]](#footnote-29) The commitment of these two essential groupings within the native elite to the reformed religion in their role as ‘multipliers” was an essential ingredient in its success,[[30]](#footnote-30) a process further consolidated by the emergence of cadet branches of leading clans such as the Campbells, MacGregors and MacLeans as important sources of ministers within the Highland reformation.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Catholic renewal in Ireland operated in a different institutional environment, and according to a very different conception of its relationship with pre-Reformation church structures, but some critical similarities with the success of Gaelic Calvinism are markedly evident. Once again the role of the learned orders was central. Although plantation Ulster indicated, for instance, that many members of traditional clerical families were prepared to conform to the Established church when it established an institutional presence in the province,[[32]](#footnote-32) in sharp contrast to Scotland where MacPhails, Omeys, MacLachlans, MacEwans, MacKinnons, MacKinnons and MacQueens, helped to staff the seventeenth-century ministry, this momentum was not maintained.[[33]](#footnote-33) In Ireland, on the contrary, it was overwhelmingly the Catholic church which proved able to draw on clerical and other branches of the traditional learned classes to staff the mission of counter-reformation. Figures such as Bonaventure O’Hussey (Giolla Bríghde Ó hEoghusa), Hugh Ward (Aodh Mac an Bhaird) and Florence Conry (Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire) symbolised a creative engagement between the cadres of traditional learning and a new catholic religious culture which revolutionised the Irish Gaedhealtachtat the turn of the seventeenth century.[[34]](#footnote-34) In a cognate fashion to Carswell these figures deplored some features of the bardic elite’s ancient preoccupations while maintaining a healthy respect for their learning. The role of the aristocracy in promoting Catholic reform in Gaelic Ireland was also significant although the effects of the Tudor conquest undermined much of the independent power of the Gaelic dynasts. In late sixteenth century Ulster, however, the quasi-independent lordships of the North-West played an important part in maintaining a continuity of episcopal succession in the island[[35]](#footnote-35) and at the dawn of the seventeenth-century there was already evidence of significant hostility to the established church among the Gaelic nobility.[[36]](#footnote-36) Post 1603 the wealthy Gaelic elite in the localities patronised the mission of the Catholic church in Irish-speaking areas and were particularly important in providing safe havens and residences for the resident episcopacy after its re-establishment in 1618. As in Scotland, branches of the Gaelic aristocracy also colonised the structures of the new church most notably in the case of bishops such as Archbishop Hugh O’Reilly of Armagh and Edmund O’Dempsey of Leighlin.[[37]](#footnote-37) The preservation of continuities with aspects of traditional practice undoubtedly contributed to the success of the movement of Gaelic reform. The renowned sixteenth-century preacher Eoghan Ó Dubhthaigh, for instance, had the custom of providing a poetic summary of the main points of his sermons to assist his audience in remembering them, a practice of which Bonaventura O’Hussey also made use in his published catechism. Confession was both a formidable tool of a new conception of Catholicism and a bridge to the traditional configuration of seven sacraments. Denied by Protestants and requiring a priest for its ministration, it neatly foregrounded the differences between the confessions while offering enormous spiritual rewards. Gaelic anti-protestant polemic drew also on a traditional respect for asceticism of life within the Gaelic world and produced a picture of the chief reformers as greedy and carnal men.[[38]](#footnote-38)

If strong structural similarities are detectible between the different currents of religious reform in Early modern Scotland and Ireland then the remarkably different outcomes in both areas become even more striking. In this regard the political context of Protestant reform in sixteenth-century Ireland is of inescapable importance. From 1534 to the end of Elizabeth’s reign the expansion of the Tudor state in Ireland was marked by an escalating series of confrontations with the power of the Gaelic and Gaelicised lordships. Not only did this erode native sympathy with all aspects of Tudor innovation in government, including religious reform, but the government’s financial difficulties in the face of endemic rebellion leached away the resources necessary to underpin any significant evangelisation of the native population. The first printed text for use in protestant worship was not produced in Ireland until 1571 and may have been partially motivated by the need to forestall Carswell’s *Foirm*, which he had clearly intended for use in Ireland as well as Gaelic Scotland.[[39]](#footnote-39) A Book of Common Prayer and New Testament did not follow until the early seventeenth century and there is little evidence that they enjoyed much currency. Indeed, a telling indication of the lack of traction which such texts produced was the apparent complete lack of concern on the part of Irish Catholic exiles to produce a Catholic version of the scriptures. In much of northern Europe, the impulse to produce catholic vernacular bibles essentially derived from the need to prevent the faithful from turning to protestant editions but the significant literary and printing endeavours of continentally-based Irish catholics in the course of the seventeenth century were orientated towards hagiography, catechesis and devotional works rather than towards the production of a Gaelic catholic bible, which was only finally produced in the wake of the second Vatican council.

Even more critical than the provision of texts was the lack of Gaelic graduate ministry. The failure to found a Dublin university in the early years of Elisabeth’s reign meant that decades were squandered before the final establishment of Trinity in 1592 when it immediately faced competition from Catholic continental colleges. While Trinity was somewhat more successful in attracting Gaelic than Old English students in its early years,[[40]](#footnote-40) the pronounced Anglo-centric bias of the established church undermined the provision of effective Gaelic ministry. Despite the efforts of isolated figures like the Caroline bishop of Kilmore, William Bedell, who railed against the prevailing tendency to assume that Gaelic parishes were *sine cura* for Protestant clerics and for whom the Pauline dictate to “rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I should teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” should form the basis of ministry, preaching ability in Irish was given scant attention in the assignment of parishes with Gaelic populations. [[41]](#footnote-41) This was in marked contrast to Scotland where the need to create an effective preaching ministry became a hallmark of the Kirk’s endeavours in the Highlands as well as in the Lowlands. Intrinsic to this process was the successful forging of linkages between lowland universities and Gaelic speaking clerics who returned to parishes in the Highlands with both the doctrinal training and linguistic competence necessary to discharge their ministry.[[42]](#footnote-42)

The lack of magnate support also undermined the progress of the Irish Gaelic reformation. While this is probably less surprising in the case of purely Gaelic clans such as the O’Neills, O’Donnells, or MacCarthys, who arguably lacked a sophisticated understanding of the working of the English governmental system in Ireland, or the wider FitzGerald factional alliance which ultimately engaged in ruinous confrontation with the crown and thus naturally gravitated towards the rhetoric and practice of catholic resistance, the strangely passive role of the Butler affinity is of interest. Similarly to the Campbells of Argyll in Scotland, the Butlers of Ormond straddled the two worlds of sixteenth-century Ireland as both English magnates and a traditional power within the feuding universe of Gaelic lordships. Yet even Black Tom of Ormond, Elizabeth’s cousin and favourite, proved a cautious accommodator with the new religion rather than a figure who detected advantages in vigorously establishing it in his domains in the manner of some Scottish magnates.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The significance of the Franciscan order must also be assessed in considering the different outcomes of reform in both Scotland and Ireland. In Ireland the order undoubtedly played a role of profound importance in terms of the stabilization and elaboration of a Gaelic catholic identity. As Raymond Gillespie notes in his chapter, the fifteenth-century witnessed a dramatic expansion and efflorescence of the mendicant orders in Ireland. Over forty houses of the Franciscan Third Order Regular were established in the island in the late medieval period, [[44]](#footnote-44) which also witnessed the establishment of numerous independent observant congregations as well as the frequent acceptance of a stricter interpretation of the rule by older houses. This process was most marked in the Gaelic and Gaelicised areas of the island where the friars also dominated the study of theology. [[45]](#footnote-45) The friars rapidly emerged as key opponents of the Irish Reformations, as Carswell himself noted in a prefatory poem to the *Foirm*.[[46]](#footnote-46) It was Gaelic Franciscans who were to be at the centre of the catholic literary activity in the Irish language in the seventeenth century, particularly centred on St Anthony’s college in Louvain. In terms of numbers they dwarfed all other orders at work in early modern Ireland. In 1618 Donncha Ó Maonaigh counted the numbers of Irish Franciscans at 160, but by the 1640s the papal envoy Carlo Invernizzi believed that the order had a thousand members in Ireland.[[47]](#footnote-47) The Franciscans do not appear to have anything close to the same salience in late medieval Scotland[[48]](#footnote-48) and the lack of a vigorous movement of observant reform may help explain the receptivity of Gaelic Scotland to the reform movement, in particular when the reformed Kirk set itself to provide services in areas where previously so much of the parochial revenues had been leeched off to support the higher clergy.[[49]](#footnote-49) Significantly it was to be Irish Franciscans who enjoyed most success as catholic missionaries in Scotland in the course of the seventeenth century but, despite the cultural intelligibility of their endeavours, their achievements were limited by lack of numbers and finance.

Yet although the Franciscans proved hugely important actors within Gaelic Catholicism, it is important to stress that ultimately the organisation of the catholic church within Gaelic Ireland continued to revolve around a diocesan system in which the lead organisational role was played by ordinary ecclesiastical authority rather than the religious orders. From the early seventeenth-century Rome re-organised the Irish church, first instituting a system of vicars apostolic and then after 1618 moving to create a resident Episcopal hierarchy. Contrary to sometimes received wisdom, the majority of these bishops operating in Gaelic areas were not regular clergy although the conflict between the bishops and the regulars seems to have been less pronounced in the Gaedhealtacht areas.[[50]](#footnote-50) By 1641 this model had become entrenched throughout the island. In the predominantly Gaelic diocese of Artfert and Achadoe, for instance, during the 1630s it was reported, there were 52 secular priests of whom nine held doctorates in theology or canon law, and 31 friars with a solid basis of learning.[[51]](#footnote-51) In similarly Gaelic Elphin the (Franciscan) bishop reported that the number of priests had grown from thirteen parish priests in 1625 to 42 in 1637 and he reported a weekly practice of catechesis and provision of sacraments throughout the diocese.[[52]](#footnote-52) In Gaelic Ireland, therefore, like Gaelic Scotland, a key element in entrenching the culture of religious reform was the creation of functioning structures of authority, visitation and oversight within a national church structure which united both English or Scots-speaking and Gaelic populations of the two kingdoms.

If the commonality of language and culture between the two areas makes more urgent the need to explicate the differences between Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland then it is the commonality of the English state as patrons of religious reform which renders the comparison between Wales and Ireland particularly interesting. The failure of the Catholic church in Wales to mount an effective Counter-reformation mission was not necessarily because of a deep popular attachment to the new Faith. Rather, religious conservatism remained a substantial barrier to the embedding of new beliefs and practice in Wales, as recent scholarship has demonstrated was the case in England as well. In her incisive contribution to the current volume, Katherine Olson also argues cogently the new religious dispensation which emerged in Wales for much of the population was the product of a complex pattern of negotiation between the traditional and the new, in which reverence for saints, for the sacred landscape and popular belief in spirits continued to figure, rather than a clear victory of a new and sharply-defined Protestantism. Nevertheless, the contrast between the fate of the Established church in Ireland and Wales, two areas of the archipelago which largely lacked any indigenous impulse towards reform, remains significant. In essence, the majority of the Welsh population conformed to the Elizabethan settlement while only a tiny minority of the existing Old English and Gaelic populations did so in Ireland.

In this regard, despite significant English prejudices against the Welsh language and an aspiration to see the principality Anglicised the Tudor church showed a much greater willingness to countenance the use of the vernacular in Wales than in Ireland, a development in which figures such as William Salesbury, Richard Davies and William Morgan played a key role. Wales’s relative political quiescence was presumably a factor in this turn of events. The comparatively limited area of Ireland under the direct control of the English state in the early Reformation period was naturally the part of the island where the English language exercised most sway. Even after the kingship act of 1541 turned the King’s Irish enemies into subjects, it was clear that much of the Gaelic-speaking population simply lay outside the borders of the English state. Evangelisation was a distant priority behind the achievement of effective political and military measures to allow for the absorption of the outlying lordships. In Wales on the other hand, from the beginning of the Reformation it was evident that, however barbarous their tongue, the great mass of the Welsh population were natural subjects of their (Welsh) royal house.[[53]](#footnote-53) Moreover, there was no substantial English-speaking population which offered itself as a potential nucleus for a new Anglicised and protestant identity. The status of the Tudors as a Welsh dynasty has also been taken as factor in ensuring the loyal conformity of the Principality’s population towards the new religious dispensation. Certainly the Welsh character of the Tudor dynasty was a theme much emphasised by Elizabethan Welsh writers.[[54]](#footnote-54) Yet the parallel process of Gaelic enthusiasm for the house of Stuart in both Scotland and Ireland suggests that dynastic attachment did not necessarily equate to religious fidelity. Irish poetic enthusiasm for James VI and I’s Gaelic origins was certainly a feature of the political culture of the early seventeenth-century Ireland and may, for instance, have contributed to Aodh Mac Aingil’s remarkable presentation of the king as practically a Catholic but it did little to create momentum for the acceptance of the state religion.[[55]](#footnote-55) In Gaelic Scotland, also, the strong pull of the dynasty was evident throughout the crises of the seventeenth-century but this was a politically rather than a religiously inflected royalism. More significantly perhaps than emotional identification with the dynasty in Tudor Wales, the political control exerted by the crown helped convince that Welsh gentry that rich dividends would be available from the process of religious change and the cooperation of the local elite immeasurably strengthened the movement of reform.[[56]](#footnote-56) This local participation also contributed to the higher priority eventually accorded to evangelisation in the vernacular of the people. In 1547 the first printed book in Welsh appeared. By 1567 a Welsh prayer-book and new testament were both available, a complete bible was published in the year of the Armada, followed by a book of homilies in 1606 and a translation of the authorised version of the bible duly made its entrance in 1620. [[57]](#footnote-57) No fewer than four additional versions of the prayer book had appeared by 1630 at which time the momentous step of an affordable five shilling version of the complete bible in Welsh also occurred. The following year saw a metrical translation of the Psalms, a telling indication of the embedding of a wider Protestant culture.[[58]](#footnote-58) From the 1590s such core texts were supplemented by a growing literature of devotional and improving works, much of it translated from English. While popular adherence to the new religion was slower to develop, the work of these scholars and antiquaries played a vital function in securing its ultimate reception.[[59]](#footnote-59) The embedding of the Established church as the majority confession in Wales was also promoted by the advancement of Welshmen to Welsh bishoprics. Thirteen of the sixteen Elizabethan bishops were natives of the principality and the notion that Welsh-speaking clergy were a fundamental necessity to serve the *cura animarum* of the Welsh populace became steadily embedded in the fabric of the church.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Wales was arguably the least rebellious part of the entire archipelago during the early modern period and this further allowed for the consolidation of the ministry of the established church. In addition, the short-comings of its Catholic rival was a factor. Neither the Henrician nor Edwardian Reformation had benefitted from much popular support. While the religious conservatism of the principality should have offered rich material for the missionaries of the counter-reformation church in the latter part of Elizabeth’s reign- the evidence of bardic poetry, for instance, suggests a continued lack of enthusiasm for religious change-[[61]](#footnote-61) it seems that relatively greater resources were devoted to the less promising south and east of England than to Wales or to Yorkshire. By 1603 only 803 avowed recusants were discovered in a survey of Wales’s four dioceses.[[62]](#footnote-62)As Katherine Olsen’s article demonstrates, these figures can mask as much as they reveal about the true state of religious conviction and belief within the general population but again the contrast with Ireland, where the 1590s were a decade of major advances for the Catholic church and where a distinct hardening against conformity was witnessed, is striking. The bishop of Cork, William Lyon, for instance noted in 1596 that where previously five hundred had been willing to take communion in the church now there were not three who would come forward and not a single woman would appear either for divine service or communion. A measure of Catholic decline in Wales is also given by the fact that in the diocese of Llanduff, for example, the four decades after Elizabeth’s death saw barely a quarter of the ordinations to the priesthood which had occurred during her reign. [[63]](#footnote-63)

As Lloyd Bowen demonstrates convincingly in his chapter in this volume, Welsh Protestantism also managed to craft a potent narrative of an imagined historical past which allowed the reformed religion to be presented as the rediscovery of an original pristine faith and the new vernacular Welsh scriptures as the recovery of the ancestral inheritance of the Welsh church. Scots reformers also found a newly usable past in the history of the ancient Celtic church as different and purer than the corrupted Roman confession[[64]](#footnote-64) but in Wales this took on an even more central role. The contrast with Ireland is again instructive. William Daniel’s preface to the Irish translation of the Book of Common Prayer, for instance, represented a particularly creative attempt on the part of a deeply committed Gaelic reformer to present the Irish as a decayed civility fallen from fallen glories, which included the gift of letters to the Anglo-Saxons, through the corruption of Rome, which now had the opportunity of sharing in a common Protestant renewal. In contradistinction to Wales, however, the social and political conditions were not such as to create a receptive environment either within the established church or among the general populace for such notions and ultimately conceptions of the glories of the Gaelic past proved of far greater utility to Catholic reformers than to figures such as Daniel. [[65]](#footnote-65)

By the mid-sixteenth century Cornish was incomparably the weakest of the Celtic vernaculars and in a similar fashion to the Gaelic of the Isle of Man,[[66]](#footnote-66) the language did not serve as a comprehensive vehicle for the embedding of the acute religious changes of the early modern period in the extreme south-west of England. However, as Alex Walsham demonstrates in her brilliant chapter, the part often assumed to have been played by the Reformation in helping to extinguish the language is not necessarily so self-evident. Aspects of the new religion were undoubtedly disseminated orally in Cornish for those who knew no English and a certain amount of scribally-written texts in Cornish have also survived. Ultimately, however, it seems to have been the local gentry’s disinterest in maintaining the language which ensured that the new religious culture did not take on fully Cornish habilitments. As Walsham argues, nonetheless, a sense of nostalgia for a lost past and transmutated memory of sacred personages and landscapes continued to inflect aspects of the new religious culture which spread into the area in the wake of the Reformation, although such a particular Cornish micro-Christendom does not equate necessarily to a ethnically distinctive religious culture.

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If even the English state, the most centralised political unit in the archipelago, failed to adopt a consistent policy towards the use of Celtic vernaculars in worship in the areas under its dominion, it is no surprise that there was no consistency of response throughout Gaelic Ireland, Gaelic Scotland, Wales and Cornwall to the period of intense religious ferment which characterised the late medieval and early modern period. In Gaelic Scotland it was the presbyteries of the Kirk which played a critical role in adapting the religious traditions of the Highlands and the islands to a new culture of the sacred. In Wales the same function was to be served by the peculiar, in European terms, church of the Elizabethan settlement while in Ireland it was to be post-tridentine Catholicism which acted as the principal agent of change within the devotional practices and beliefs of the Gaelic population. As the essays of this book demonstrate certain themes certainly resonated in more than one area of the archipelago. The concern to validate and legitimise the identity of their linguistic community through readings of the past, the importance of local elite engagement to the process of religious affiliation, and the negotiated and permeable religious identities which developed were not confined to one community of speakers of a Celtic language. Ultimately, however, this is testimony much less to shared ethnic identity traits than to the common participation of these linguistic communities in a wider European process of religious ferment and development at the dawn of the modern era.

1. John Morrill, ‘The Fashioning of Britain’ in Steven Ellis and Sarah Barber (eds) *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British state 1485-1725* (Harlow, 1995), pp. 8-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Felicity Heal, ‘Mediating the Word: Language and Dialects in the British and Irish Reformations’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 56 (2005), 261-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. J.A. Watt, ‘The Church and the Two Nations in Late Medieval Armagh’, *Studies in Church History* 25 (1989), 37-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Kenneth Nicholls, ‘Celtic Contrasts: Ireland and Scotland’, *History Ireland*, 7:3 (1999), 22-6; *idem*, ‘Worlds Apart? The Ellis two-nation theory on late medieval Ireland, *History Ireland*, 7:2 (1999), 22-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Patrick Corish, ‘The Cromwellian Regime, 1650-60’ in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (eds), *A New History of Ireland III,* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 375-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See for example Brian Mac Cuarta, *Catholic Revival in the North of Ireland 1603-41*(Dublin, 2007); for Scotland see Jane Dawson, ‘Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd in Scotland’ in Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke and Gillian Lewis (eds), *Calvinism in Europe 1540-1620* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 231-53, at 232-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Note for instance John Roche’s rather patronising description of the Gaelic bishops, all of whom were seminary-trained on the continent, who were appointed to Gaelic sees during the 1620s in P. Corish (ed.), ‘Two Reports on the catholic church in Ireland in the Early Seventeenth century’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 22 (1959), 146; for Scotland see Dawson, ‘Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd’, p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Steven Ellis, ‘The Collapse of the Gaelic World, 1450-1650’, *Irish Historical Studies,* 31 (1999), 449-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The emphasis on the differences between the Scottish and Irish portions of the Gaelic world has tended to be most marked in Scotland: see in particular Wilson McLeod, *Divided Gaels: Scottish Cultural Identities in Scotland and Ireland c. 1200-c.1650* (Oxford, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Marc Caball, Bardic poetry & the analysis of Gaelic mentalities’, *History Ireland* 2 (1994), 46-50, at 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cathaldus Giblin (ed.), *Irish Franciscan Mission to Scotland, 1619-46* (Dublin, 1964). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See for example, Philip Soergel, *Wondrous in his Saints: Counter-Reformation Propaganda in Bavaria* (Berkeley, 1993); Bodo Nischan, ‘Confessionalism and Absolutism: the case of Brandenburg’ in Pettegree, Duke and Lewis (eds), *Calvinism in Europe,* pp. 181-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Peter Schimert, ‘Péter Pázmány and the Reconstitution of the Catholic Aristocracy in Habsburg Hungary, 1600-1650’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1989); David P. Daniel, ‘Calvinism in Hungary: the theological and ecclesiastical transition to the Reformed Faith’ in Pettegree, Duke and Lewis (eds), *Calvinism in Europe,* pp. 205-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See for instance Thomas O’Connor, *Irish Jansenists 1600-70: religion and politics in Flanders, France, Ireland and Rome* (Dublin, 2008); Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, ‘The consolidation of Irish Catholicism within a hostile Imperial framework: A comparative study of Early Modern Hungary and Ireland’ in Hilary Carey (ed.), *Empires of Religion* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 25-42; Pettegree, Duke and Lewis (eds), *Calvinism in Europe*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. James Kirk, ‘John Carswell, Superintendent of Argyll’ in James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation Kirk* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 280-304, at 281-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. James Kirk, ‘The Kirk and the Highlands at the Reformation’ in Kirk, *Patterns of Reform*, pp. 305-333, at 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Ibid.* p. 314. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Ibid. p.* 322-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. James Kirk, ‘The Jacobean Church in the Highlands, 1567-1625’ in Kirk, *Patterns of Reform,* pp. 449-87, at 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Ibid,* p. *.*487. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Ibid*., p. 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See the article by Martin MacGregor in the current volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Kirk, ‘Highlands and the Reformation’, pp. 301-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Donald Meek, ‘The Gaelic Bible’ in D. F. Wright (ed.), *The Bible in Scottish Life* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 9-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Dawson, ‘Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd’, p. 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. John Carswell, *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh: John Carswell’s Gaelic Translation of the Book of Common Order*, ed. R. L. Thomson (Edinburgh, 1970), pp.179-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Dawson, ‘Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd’, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See the essay by Martin MacGregor in the current volume; Dawson, ‘Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd’, p. 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. R. Scott Spurlock, ‘The Laity and the Structure of the Catholic Church in early modern Scotland’ in Robert Armstrong and Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin (eds), *Insular Christianity: alternative models of the Church in Britain and Ireland* *c. 1570–c. 1700* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2013), pp. 231-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Karl Bottigheimer and Ute Lotz-Heumann, ‘The Irish Reformation in European Perspective,’ *Archive for Reformation History,* 89 (1998), 313-353. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Dawson, ‘Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd’, p. 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Mac Cuarta, *Catholic Revival*, pp. 37-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Dawson, ‘Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd’, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See the essays by Bernadette Cunningham and Salvador Ryan in the current volume; see also Marc Caball, ‘Articulating Irish identity in early seventeenth-century Europe: the case of Giolla Bríghde Ó hEódhusa (c.1570-1614), *Archivium Hibernicum* 62 (2009), 271-93; Salvador Ryan, ‘A slighted source: rehabilitating Irish bardic religious poetry in historical discourse’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 48 (2004), 75-99; Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar: na Stíobhartaigh agus an tAos Léinn 1603-1788*  (Baile Átha Cliath, 1996). Mícheál Mac Craith, ‘The Gaelic Reaction to the Reformation’ in Ellis and Barber (eds), *Conquest and Union*, pp. 139-161; Nollaig Ó Muraáile, *Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, His Associates and St Anthony’s College Louvain* (Dublin, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, ‘An Alternative Establishment: The Evolution of the Irish Catholic Hierarchy, 1600-1649’ in Armstrong and Ó hAnnracháin (eds), *Alternative models of the Church*, pp. 190-206. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Mac Cuarta, *Catholic Revival*, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. D. F. Cregan, ‘The social and cultural background of a counter-reformation episcopate, 1618–60’ in A. Cosgrove and D. McCartney (eds), *Studies in Irish history presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin, 1979), pp. 85–117. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Mícheál Mac Craith, ‘Collegium S. Antonii Lovanii, quod Collegium est unicum remedium ad conservandam Provinciam’ in Edel Bhreathnach, Joseph MacMahon, John McCafferty(eds), *The Irish Franciscans, 1534-1990* (Dublin, 2009), pp. 233-59, at 248-9; see also the essays by Bernadette Cunningham and Salvador Ryan in the current volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Jane Dawson, ‘Anglo-Scottish Protestant Culture and Integration in Sixteenth-Century Britain’ in Ellis and Barber (eds), *Conquest and Union*, pp. 87-114, at 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Alan Ford, ‘Who went to Trinity? The early students of Dublin university’ in Helga Robinson-Hammerstein (ed.), *European Universities in the Age of Reformation and Counter Reformation* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 53-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. I Cor 14: 19; see E. Shuckburgh, *Two biographies of William Bedell, Bishop of Kilmore: with a selection of his letters and an unpublished treatise* (Cambridge, 1902), pp. 40-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Kirk, ‘The Jacobean Church in the Highlands’, p. 487. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Dave Edwards, *The Ormond Lordship in County Kilkenny, 1515-1642: The Rise and fall of Butler feudal power* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003); significant branches of the O’Brien family factionally linked to the Butlers including the holders of the earldom did conform to the established church but this served rather to isolate them from the wider clan than to serve as the bridgehead to more conversions. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Patrick Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: a historical survey* (Dublin, 1985), p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Steven G. Ellis, *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors 1447-1603: English expansion and the End of Gaelic Rule* (London, 1998)*,* pp*.* 196-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Carswell, *Foirm*, p. 13; see also the essay by Raymond Gillespie in the current volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Reformation in Ireland: The Mission of Rinuccini, 1645-49* (Oxford, 2002), p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. In this regard see the essay by John MacConald in the current volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Brendan Bradshaw has previously argued that the role of the Observants was a critical distinction between the Tudor reformations in Ireland and Wales: see Brendan Bradshaw, ‘The English Reformation and Identity formation in England and Wales’ in Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (eds), *British consciousness and identity: the making of Britain, 1533-1707I* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 43-111, esp. 44-6, 72-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Patrick Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Dublin, 1981), p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide, ‘Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali’ 140, ff. 69r-77r; Brendan Jennings, “Miscellaneous documents II 1625-40” *Archivium Hibernicum,* 14 (1949), no. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide, ‘Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali’ 140., ff. 351r-352v. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. P.R. Roberts, ‘The Union with England and the Identity of Anglican Wales’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, 22 (1972), 49-70, at 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *Ibid*., 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Mícheál Mac Craith, ‘The political and religious thought of Florence Conry and Hugh McCaughwell’ in Alan Ford and John McCafferty (eds), *The Origins of Sectarianism in Early Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2005) , pp. 183-202, at 194-202; see also Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar*, pp. 1-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation* (Cardiff, 1997); Brendan Bradshaw, ‘Revisionism and the Irish Reformation: A rejoinder’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (2000), 587-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Glanmor Williams, ‘Some Protestant Views of the Early British Church’ in Glanmor Williams, *Welsh Reformation Essays* (Cardiff, 1967), pp. 207-19; Peter Roberts, ‘Tudor Wales, National Identity and the British Inheritance’ in Peter Roberts and Brendan Bradshaw (eds), *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533-1707* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 8-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Glanmor William, *Renewal and Reformation: Wales c. 1415-1642* (Oxford, 1993), p. 476. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Roberts, ‘Union with England’, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Philip Jenkins, ‘The Anglican Church and the unity of Britain: the Welsh experience, 1560-1714’ in Ellis and Barber (eds), *Conquest and Union*, pp. 115-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Williams, *Wales and the Reformation*, *passim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Glanmor Williams, *Recovery, reorientation and Reformation: Wales c. 1415-1642* (Cardiff, 1987), p. 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Williams, *Renewal and Reformation,* p. 478. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. See the essay by Martin MacGregor in this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *Leabhar na nurnaightheadh gcomhcoidchiond agus mheinisdraldachdha na sacrameinteacbh, maille le gnathaighthibh agus le hordaighehibh oile, do réir eaglaise na Sagsan. Ata so ar na chur a gclo a Mbaile atha Cliath, a dtigh Sheon Francke alias Francton, Priontóir an Ríog an Eirin*, Dublin,Seón Francke, 1608. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Heal, ‘Mediating the word’, 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)