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## BOOK REVIEW:

*JAMES USSHER: THEOLOGY, HISTORY, AND POLITICS IN EARLY-MODERN IRELAND AND ENGLAND* BY ALAN FORD XI, + 315 PP. OXFORD; NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2007.

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In *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England*, Alan Ford writes a book that brings to light the various religious and political contexts that shaped the life and work of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of the Church of Ireland. The book is divided into two sections, the first (and much larger) dealing with Ussher's life in Ireland, and the second covering his time in exile in England during the last years of his life. Right from the introduction, Ford stresses Ussher's personal characteristics of gentleness, caution, diplomacy, and sensitivity to conflicting opinions as they are revealed in Ussher's own writings. As well, he highlights the observations of people around Ussher, as Ussher navigated the tumultuous waters of religion and politics in two countries over several decades. However, it is easy to lose sight of the subject of Ussher as the book develops, as Ford at times concentrates more on the

political and historical contexts of Ireland and England rather than focusing squarely on James Ussher himself.

The book starts off by giving a general history of the tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland during the second half of the sixteenth century. It sets the stage for the entrance of James Ussher into the public eye with his participation in a formal debate with the Jesuit Henry Fitzsimon in the year 1600. Ford takes care to contrast the strength and self-confidence of the Catholics in Ireland at this time against the small and unsupported Protestant minority, from among which this student not yet twenty years old was the only Protestant willing to take up Fitzsimon's challenge of a public debate. By the end of the section on Ireland some two hundred pages later, Ford has traced the development of the Protestant minority in Ireland from a period of timidity and uncertain doctrine to a

strong, solidly Calvinist, and self-reliant Protestant Church of Ireland supported by the faculty and graduates of Trinity College in Dublin.

Ford stresses three aspects that define Irish Protestantism: it was strongly Calvinist, it was an imported reform of the existing church, and it was very late in developing in comparison to other European reformations (p. 57). He also demonstrates how being a minority within a hostile Catholic majority caused the Protestant community to approach issues of reform with a much greater sense of urgency than their English counterparts. Throughout this section, Ford illustrates this sense of urgency by bringing to light an interesting contrast in Ussher's thought: while Ford repeatedly refers to Ussher's gentleness and sensitivity, as well as his willingness to practice tolerance towards non-conformist Protestant clergy, by the end of the book Ford has also demonstrated Ussher's apocalyptic mentality and his conviction that the Pope was the Antichrist, along with "Ussher's role in developing a strongly sectarian protestant mindset" (p. 273). Ford does an excellent job of balancing these two seemingly opposite developments in Ussher's thought and approach, showing how this unique mix in a man so thoroughly involved in the religious and political leadership of the day affected the development of Catholic-Protestant

and English-Irish relations in the first half of the seventeenth century.

That the Reformation was imported to Ireland from England also strongly affected Ussher, a native-born Irishman of Anglo-Norman descent who spent a considerable effort in maintaining that the earliest Irish Christianity was "Protestant" in its beliefs and structure. He was also insistent that the Church of Ireland was more of a sister to the Church of England than a daughter, and should therefore retain a certain measure of independence from England with regard to specific theological points and its internal governance. The issue of internal governance came to the forefront in the 1620s and 1630s, when Ussher, as Primate of the Church of Ireland, battled the twin threats of English Arminianism and Scottish Presbyterianism, while at the same time retaining the Irish Church's pragmatic policy of tolerance towards the more "non-conformist" clergy in Ireland. Ultimately, his mission to keep the Irish Church distinct from the English collapsed during the wars and rebellions in the 1640s in both countries.

Ford organizes much of the section on Ussher in Ireland into different theological topics, such as the Irish Articles of 1615 and the defense of Calvinism in the Irish Church against pressure from England for the Church to conform to a more English standard of belief and liturgy. While this has the advantage of separating

sixty years of Ussher's life into topically digestible parts, it also has the unfortunate drawback of letting the focus slip from Ussher himself to surrounding historical events and concerns. Throughout the section on Ireland, I found myself having to search for Ussher's role in whatever fascinating and thoroughly well-researched topic Ford was covering at the moment. While his work is certainly informative, Ford could have taken more care to focus more closely on James Ussher, rather than writing a general history of the rise of Protestantism in Ireland in which a character named Ussher makes cameo appearances alongside multiple other key players.

The second, and much shorter, section on Ussher's time in England from 1640 until his death there in 1656 does a better job of keeping the focus on Ussher while describing to some extent how the historical and political events of that period affected his life and actions. Indeed, it seems as though Ford goes from one extreme of assuming that his readers know nothing about the Irish context of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to assuming that his readers are intimately acquainted with the history of England during that time. Where his initial fault is in giving far too much background, his later approach is wanting because it doesn't give

enough background information for Ussher's actions and interactions during his time in England.

Ford has produced a very interesting piece of work that sheds light on a key player in the development of a unique Irish-Protestant identity at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The footnotes and bibliography provide an excellent resource for any student covering the social, political, or religious history of this time period. However, Ford the historian does tend to get carried away with the context surrounding James Ussher, rather than letting the history shine through the events and actions in Ussher's own life. Despite this one rather distracting element, which is admittedly much less apparent in the English section of the book, this work accomplishes the great task of offering a multidimensional look at the history and politics of two different kingdoms during a tumultuous time in political and religious history.

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