of *Ireland* ends with the undermining of Laudian reform—a teleological nicety that neatly rounds off its narrative. But readers are provided with much greater detail on the elaboration of that reconstruction than on its eventual overturning.

These are minor blemishes in this unrivalled account of the complexities, opportunities, and frustrations of the advancing of Laudian reform in Ireland. *The Reconstruction of the Church of Ireland* represents a significant step forward in our understanding of the events leading up to the British crises of the mid-seventeenth century.

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James Simpson

Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents

Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. Pp. vii, 346

The story of the struggle to introduce the vernacular Bible to England from 1525 to 1547 is often depicted as heroic, and as foundational for the liberal tradition. The popularity of such a perspective, however, has not prevented James Simpson, the Douglas P. and Katherine B. Loker Professor of English at Harvard University, from reminding liberals of the dark violence that was very much part of the early modern Bible-reading culture. Admittedly a liberal himself, Simpson is fully aware of the anachronistic dangers that come with applying a twentieth-century term such as “fundamentalism” to a study of the early modern period. Regardless, Simpson maintains that the dominance of reading practices stemming from Protestant modernity is particularly relevant to our current world. These hermeneutics produced various kinds of textual violence that previous scholarship has largely overlooked.

Simpson seeks to correct what he perceives to be the neglect of the role of early modern reading by recent revisionists such as John Scarisbrick, Christopher Haigh, and Eamon Duffy. He argues that there were multiple ways in which the Biblical text unleashed different forms of violence. The main content of the book is drawn together and contextualized in light of the polemical debates over the nature of Biblical interpretation and authority between William Tyndale and Thomas More. Simpson challenges the more convenient interpretations of the Tyndale-More confrontation in terms of simple opposition between evangelical and Catholic. Highly critical of the “strident nationalism and unexamined imperialism” in David Daniell’s interpretation of Tyndale, he suggests that evangelical reading practices

did not produce readerly freedom from institutional restraint, but rather manifested a kind of psychological violence on the evangelical readers themselves.

While Simpson has organized his study into eight chapters, the book reads more like a long essay with several overlapping themes. Chapters one and two sketch out the context of Bible reading in early modern Western Europe. They suggest that the new forms of Protestant evangelical reading practices produced violence in Western Europe between 1517 and 1700. Moreover, the heroic story of how the evangelical Bible was disseminated under dangerous circumstances is summarized. For Simpson, the Biblical story of King Josiah's reforms and renewal of the covenant from 2 Kings 23 is an exemplary moment in the history of reading that is paralleled many centuries later by Protestant reading practices during the English Reformation. Josiah's rediscovery of the written law was capable of legitimating powerful violence against all those who fell beyond it. Thus, when influential Protestants like Thomas Cranmer and John Foxe labelled the boy king Edward VI as the "new Josiah," they consequently opened the door to authorized violence in the name of the Protestant Gospel.

Chapters three and four examine what Simpson believes are the inherent paradoxes in the evangelical doctrine of salvation. This involves two central claims and one additional one. First, Simpson suggests that a paradox exists in Protestant thinking where the soteriological value of works is rejected and at the same time works are embraced as a means to recognize divine approval. Even if Lutheran and Calvinist works do not contribute to salvation in any way, good works are nevertheless a sign of God's election. Secondly, there is a paradox of reading in Protestant thought where one embraces the work of reading Scripture, not to save oneself, but to scrutinize one's divine election. Finally, evangelicals insisted that Scripture is unambiguous and open to all people, yet in practice they began their reading only by recognizing textual ambiguity.

Chapters five and six follow through on the social consequences of evangelical literalism. Simpson maintains that such a reading climate drove evangelicals towards paranoia, isolation, and an unyielding demand for inward authentication of the teachings of Scripture. What is more, Simpson argues that evangelicals sought to preserve both the exact integrity of the Biblical text, and its pertinence to modern readers. They could only have it both ways, he maintains, by replacing the historical relation between the Old and New Testaments with an emotional dialectic of fear and gratitude for individual readers.

In the final two chapters Simpson contrasts the reading approach of Thomas More with the "fundamentalism" of Tyndale. Simpson shows how More was a

textual pragmatist who presupposed the limitations of the literal sense and held a consensual and historically grounded account of reading. While More held that the authority of the church councils and the collective decisions of the church across time had the power to restrain the unwritten authority of the church, his polemical engagements with evangelical literalists had a contagious effect upon him. More's own involvement in the violent persecution of heretics is not denied. However, Simpson argues that More's persecuting activities were not the product of his own reading approach. Instead, More and his evangelical opponents alike became entangled in an immensely demanding and punishing textual culture marked by the impersonality of literalism.

This book is well written and the author uses his primary sources persuasively even if he is occasionally guilty of anachronism. Since many evangelicals saw the Radical Reformation as a misguided movement and reacted against it, some discussion of radical hermeneutics might have strengthened Simpson's summary of early modern political violence. Furthermore, Simpson's analysis requires more theological nuance in places. For Luther and many of his followers, for instance, Holy Scripture principally meant the Old Testament, and the good news of Christ was not to be understood as something that supersedes this. For evangelicals the good news was a reality that should not be understood chiefly as something written, but as the self-utterance of the living Christ who brings the Scriptures to life. Holding to such assumptions, evangelicals were always able to find Christ in the Old Testament. Despite some minor interpretive issues, Simpson's reappraisal of early modern reading has offered a fresh perspective on an important topic. It deserves to be widely read and responded to.

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Bridget Heal

The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Early Modern Germany: Protestant and Catholic Piety, 1500–1648

Past and Present Publications. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Pp. xvi, 341

This volume springs from Heal's University of London doctoral dissertation, and its association with the late Bob Scribner surely generates heightened expectations. Heal rises to the occasion wonderfully—she deftly guides us through this complex and fascinating subject, overturning or updating conventional wisdom as she goes,