

# MEMORIAL DISCOURSE

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**Archbishop Adam Loftus**

**The First Provost of Trinity College, Dublin**

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When the Fellow of this College generously established what they intended to be the most prestigious, internationally attractive postgraduate research studentship some years ago, they decided to call it after Adam Loftus. In the light of the first provost's somewhat tarnished reputation among students and staff of this university, I was a little puzzled by this choice of name for the studentship. What were the Fellows signalling?

Despite the fact that more recent historians have qualified and toned down Loftus's misdemeanours, J.P. Mahaffy, the author of the early history of the College, published at the beginning of this century, is still the supreme opinion-leader. Mahaffy's observations on Loftus range freely through a whole catalogue of negatives. Here are some examples:

*Loftus, far from being the founder of Trinity College... was rather the chief obstacle that delayed its foundation till the golden opportunity had been lost.*

Mahaffy was referring to Loftus's quarrel with Sir John Perrott about the transformation of St. Patrick's Cathedral into an Irish university in the 1580s. On Loftus's role in the eventual establishment of Trinity College on the present site, Mahaffy commented as follows:

*Archbishop Loftus helped by making speeches and gave the dignity of his name to the College by posing as its first Provost, but he neither actually governed the society nor contributed more than a decent thank offering (£100) for the profits he had retained in St. Patrick's.*

Mahaffy not only peremptorily dismissed Loftus's entitlement to be regarded as anything more than the nominal first provost of Trinity College, Dublin; he also ultimately denied that Loftus had any influence on the Dublin Corporation, in persuading its members to offer the site:

*His influence was very strong negatively, in resisting another scheme, he deserves no further credit in the matter.*

Mahaffy's judgement seems unassailable, since it is obviously derived from a reading of the primary sources, which he allows to speak for themselves. However, that is part of the problem: such sources cannot speak for themselves, they need to be contextually interpreted. Take the pronouncements of two of Loftus's contemporaries which are of direct relevance to our evaluation of Loftus as the first provost of Trinity College, Dublin: the first concerns Loftus's vision of politics and the second concerns his religious persuasion. The first of these contemporaries is the pamphleteer Barnaby Rich, who called himself a "soldier of the pen". He supplemented his Irish military pension by informing on the leading officials in Ireland. The Queen's Privy Councillors paid a great deal of attention to such reports when it suited them. Rich accused Adam Loftus, the Irish Lord Chancellor and Archbishop of Dublin of tolerating that "detested Jesuitical generation of the pope's riff raff, who are the cause of the Dublin citizen's pervasive addiction to popery". In a satirical fable of 1593, Rich drew the following pen-portrait of Loftus:

*I could tell you the tale of an ass, who, leaving the place where he first foaled, fortun'd to stray into a strange forest, and finding the beasts of that desert to be but simple... this paltry ass... found means to wrap himself in a lion's skin, and then, with proud looks and lofty countenance, ranging among the herds, he would stretch out his filthy throat, bellowing and braying (as nature taught him) with so hideous and horrible a noise, that the poor beasts that were within his hearing began already to tremble and shake for fear... in the end he became a notable sheepbiter, worrying and devouring whole flocks of sheep, that happened within his precincts and jurisdiction.*

According to Rich as a contemporary witness, Loftus performed his ecclesiastical and secular duties and assignments in Ireland by resorting to trickery, deception and intimidation, untroubled by any scruples of conscience.

The second contemporary witness is Meredith Hanmer, a cleric, not a government agent. For purposes of private study he drew up a list of those whom he suspected of upholding Puritanism in Ireland. Adam Loftus is not only at the top of that list, but as Archbishop of Dublin he is represented as the man who attracted other Puritans to Dublin to serve under him. Hanmer therefore placed Loftus firmly on the "radical wing" of Anglicanism in Ireland, among those Anglicans who were most strongly drawn to the doctrines of John Calvin.

Our question is *not*, who is right: Rich or Hanmer? Rather, what do these accounts and others tell us about Elizabethan society in Ireland, about conditions under which government

officials like Loftus operated, and, more specifically, about the circumstances in which Trinity College, Dublin was established?

So what is *my* account of the man who was nominated in the English Queen's Charter of March 1592 as the first provost of Trinity College, Dublin? The following facts are non-controversial. He had come to Ireland in May 1560 as the private chaplain of the Lord Deputy, the Earl of Sussex. A Yorkshireman, educated at Cambridge, a protégé of the Queen's leading minister, William Cecil, a learned man with staunchly Protestant credentials, Loftus was given the most prestigious ecclesiastical offices in rapid succession; i.e. he was made the Dean of St. Patrick's (1561), Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland (1563) and Archbishop of Dublin (1567); the latter was the ecclesiastical appointment which he retained until his death in 1605. He certainly recommended himself as a fervent preacher, eager to release those in Ireland who were destined to be saved from the darkness of idolatry into the full light of glory of the gospel. In 1567 the Lord Deputy, Sir Henry Sidney, hailed Loftus's accession to the archsee of Dublin as announcing "the hour of reformation" which had now come.

For the English government as well as for Loftus in Ireland, the founding of a local university was the absolutely indispensable cornerstone of such a reformation. All other measures of reform would come to grief or would not even get off the ground, if such a foundation could not be brought about. A university had been on the agenda of Tudor policy since the reign of King Henry VII. He had realised that the integrity of his English kingdom depended on the quiet Tudor rule over Ireland. A local university was considered the crucial instrument to inculcate a constructive ethos among a law-abiding state-supporting elite, long before the reformation of religion made the promotion of such a scheme even more urgently necessary.

There were, albeit intermittently pursued, comprehensive reforming strategies for Tudor Ireland, especially under Queen Elizabeth. However, all English government officials soon learned that local conditions were not favourable to a systematic implementation of any policy designed in England, unaware of circumstances in Ireland. Not only did government officials in Ireland find themselves improvising and compromising on the spot, they also found their work frequently hampered by the adverse effect of informers, like Barnaby Rich, reporting against them to members of the English Privy Council. To cope with this dilemma, the government officials in Ireland were forced to develop complex survival strategies.

Adam Loftus proved a supreme adept at the art of survival in Ireland. In addition to his ecclesiastical appointments which yielded far too little in material terms, he was given high secular posts. He was made one of the two Lord Justices on several occasions, running the country during the absences of the respective Lord Deputies. From August 1581 he was also appointed Lord Chancellor of Ireland, a position he filled – relatively unhampered by various accusations of misconduct – until his death in 1605. An additional feature of his survival strategy was the constant support and patronage of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, which he was fortunate enough to retain until the latter's death in 1598. There was also the crucial support of an influential Puritan friendship network which had formed around Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham, in London.

In Ireland Adam Loftus *survived* politically and exercised his influence effectively through developing a highly successful networking strategy of his own. He established himself at the centre of a substantial circle comprising many of the leading Anglo-Irish families in Dublin, in the Pale and further afield by forging lasting kinship ties through an effective marriage policy. What made this possible for him was the following highly gratifying fact: he had been supremely successful at fulfilling God's commandment to be fruitful and multiply. He had twenty children, twelve of them survived into adulthood, and only one of these did not marry. Such abundance of offspring was not only to be accounted as evidence of divine election in a general sense; it was a specific talent, he might say, given to him by God to employ in his survival strategy. Four sons and seven daughters made highly advantageous marriages which provided the necessary, psychologically reassuring, protective support structures of the prolific father. When accused of misappropriating funds and ecclesiastical benefices in the construction of his enviable network, he succeeded in clearing his name without difficulty. He was able to prove, to the satisfaction of his friends in England and his supporters among the members of the English Privy Council, that his secular posts had quite legitimately yielded the required resources. While other English Protestant clergy refused to settle in Ireland with their families, Loftus made a virtue of necessity and by doing so rendered himself relatively assailable.

I have represented Adam Loftus as a *survivor*, because he saw *opportunities* and used them as God-given signs which also confirmed his sense of divine election. This marks him out as a thoroughgoing Puritan. But is such an interpretation sustainable in the light of the conventional view that Loftus was an unprincipled, avaricious, time-serving creature of the English government? Can he really be credited with sincere, consistently practised religious conviction? How Puritan was Loftus? (It should be noted that historians tend to refer to "Puritanism" already in connection with the early Elizabethan period, anticipating by more than a decade the first appearance of the term in the primary sources.)

I wish to argue that Loftus's Puritanism was at the heart of his survival strategy. I am also convinced that his Puritanism helps to make sense of his actions in, on the one hand, allegedly delaying the early foundation of an Irish university by resisting the conversion of St. Patrick's Cathedral as well as, on the other hand, promoting the establishment of Trinity College, Dublin and giving it its distinctively Puritan orientation. While it would be impossible to prove that the Puritan ethos (whatever that really was) lay like bedrock under all his actions and decisions, one can without much difficulty make out some projecting features of a coherent Puritan approach to public affairs.

The first thing to note –as Patrick Collinson has urged– is the fact that the reformation of religion was not some legislative and administrative transaction tidily concluded by the religious settlement of 1559 in England and 1560 in Ireland once and for all. The reformation involved a profound cultural revolution which individuals and groups were constantly at pains to refine in order to arrive at a *puriter*, more authentic practise of faith. One can draw up a catalogue of distinctive Puritan convictions and attitudes, but one must be careful not to use it inappropriately. There are many marked characteristics which may be absent from the spiritual formation of some perfectly genuine Puritans, while others may feature more

prominently. In fact the touchstone of Puritanism – the exclusive acceptance of the primacy of grace offered in the word of salvation – was the common property of all Protestants, albeit with different practical consequences. In the case of Puritans, it was inextricably bound up with a commitment to Calvin’s doctrine of double predestination: of the elect to salvation from the beginning, of the non-elect to damnation from the beginning. This manifested itself in the desire to build a godly community of true believers and, by implication, to exclude those who, as reprobates, fell short of the required standards. Applied to the situation in Ireland such a vision could provide fervent Puritans with a ready-made model to explain the manifest inability of the religious policy, established by law in 1560, to persuade most of the Irish to be “saved” by it. No assessment of possible reasons for failure was undertaken; it was clearly not a question of failure at all, for there was the predestined scheme that had made some Irish “irredeemable from the beginning.”

In practice Puritanism took shape along the lines of the secular authority’s willingness or ability to enforce conformity to the letter of the law. From the start, the Anglican Church in Ireland, although allegedly independent, adopted the same principles of conformity as the Anglican Church in England. However, the Church of Ireland did not possess the same instruments and facilitating conditions that existed in England to enforce conformity. The situation could be used to the advantage of “dissenters”. From the time of the arrival of Adam Loftus in Dublin in May 1560, there were within the Church of Ireland far greater opportunities to accommodate and even incorporate Puritan features, and these opportunities grew as the century progressed. Adam Loftus was at the centre of this accommodation of and with Puritanism.

What then is to be made of the accusation by modern critics that Loftus discarded his Puritan convictions and attitudes in the late 1580s and early 1590s in order to placate the English Queen and her Privy Council and thus to ensure his survival in Ireland? The available evidence, closely read, is capable of quite a different construction.

Loftus’s original commitment to further reformation is clearly enunciated in a letter which he wrote to his patron, William Cecil, in July 1565. To mark the final stage of the Vestments Controversy, the English government had removed from office those clerics who refused to wear the traditional surplice when celebrating communion. Loftus fervently urged the reinstatement of the “many learned preachers” whom he characterised as having been expelled from their benefices merely on account of their “detestation of those popish rags”. Loftus even threatened Cecil, very much in the manner of an Old Testament prophet, with the destruction of his person and his whole household, if he failed to follow the whisperings of his evangelical conscience. He ended his letter, revealing his deep commitment to Puritanism, with the following phrases:

*But I know your zeal and godly mind, and how careful you are to restore again the true and sincere ministry of the Church of Christ, which is mine opinion you shall never do, unless you remove and take away all the monuments, tokens and*

leavings of papistry; *for as long as any of them remain, there remains also occasion of relapses into the abolished superstition of the Antichrist.*

The passage contains all the key Puritan concepts: zeal, godly mind, sincere ministry, tokens and leavings of papistry and the pope as Antichrist.

Twelve years later, in March 1577, Loftus wrote to Burghley:

*Some little inkling has been given me (whether truly or no, God knows) that her Majesty has been informed that I am a Puritan, and a favourer of Mr. Cartwright and his doctrine. Truly Sir, I am utterly ignorant of what the term and accusation of Puritan meaneth.*

What is one to make of this? Is it not evident that Loftus was only too ready to abandon principle and old friends just to save his skin? Thomas Cartwright and Christopher Goodman had both been “like-minded” friends of Loftus in Dublin in the 1560s; they had even been proposed as suitable archbishops of Armagh and Dublin at the time, because, it was stressed, they were such excellent preachers of the gospel. However, by 1577 things had changed fundamentally. *Presbyterianism* has suggested itself as a means of enshrining Puritanism in a more appropriate form of church government, challenging the basic principles of the Anglican settlement. The word *Puritan* gained only then wider currency and, more importantly, it designated a specific religious party that explicitly rejected accommodation within the Anglican episcopal system. Loftus as Archbishop of Dublin found the Presbyterian position utterly detestable, as it engendered schism within the *one Anglican Church* that needed to muster all its Puritan strength to withstand the assault of the abolished, but still active, superstition of the Antichrist. Loftus’s utterances in the late 1580s certainly suggest that he considered the established Anglican Church perfectly capable of beneficially serving the purpose of further reformation in the Puritan manner he knew from the 1560s.

When the Presbyterian Movement in England was finally dismantled by royal command and intervention in 1586/7. Adam Loftus enthusiastically agreed with those who separated Puritan convictions and fervour from exclusive advocacy of Presbyterian church discipline; the Puritan sentiments must be retained and put to good use within the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian church discipline must be consigned to the rubbish tip of history.

Adam Loftus in Dublin read the dismantling of the Presbyterian Movement in England as a God-given sign denoting the appropriate time to found a university in Ireland. Such an Irish university had always been understood as the means to inculcate *civility* and a deep appreciation of established law and order. There were now “unemployed” learned men in England, Cambridgemen, dedicated teachers and preachers who were willing and able to fill these ideals with vigorous life. These men had to be rescued from England and absorbed into the Church of Ireland which was better suited to accommodating Puritan sentiments. A few of the best of them could educate the next generation of leading Protestants in Ireland, while

combining teaching with preaching and being materially provided for out of the benefices of St. Patrick's. This was the moment, Loftus argued, for which St. Patrick's Cathedral had been preserved. All this would, of course, only work out, if the godly learned men truly discarded the loathsome Presbyterian discipline.

What I have just argued is largely surmise. I now wish to test out my assertion by a close reading of the relevant government correspondence and the much-quoted Loftus speeches before and after the foundation of Trinity College, Dublin.

When highly qualified staff, combining teaching with preaching in the desired fashion, was theoretically plentiful, there still remained the problem of the site for the appropriate location of the university. Loftus had preserved the integrity of St. Patrick's Cathedral for the "preaching clergy". Even if this had been a spurious argument, his defence had been accepted, also by the Queen who had originally given quite contrary instructions. The "appropriate site" was eventually donated by the Dublin Corporation; and Loftus undoubtedly helped. In later years he certainly kept reminding the College community that it owed its existence to Dubliners, enjoining them never to forget that the structure had been raised "out of the bowels of the city's bounty". However in addressing the Corporation, Loftus could not count on "like-mindedness" in matters of Puritan convictions. He appealed instead to the civic pride of its members and to their commercial interests. There was nothing unprincipled in such an appeal. No university founded in the early modern period could ignore the commercial interests of the towns which agreed to the establishment of a university, insisted that the educational institution thus promoted must benefit society directly and serve it in the long run by demonstrating its practical usefulness. Incidentally, that was not reassuring enough for Brussels in the 1580s. The burgesses of Brussels refused to permit the founding of a university in their midst for fear of student unruliness and the menace which the presence of an excessive number of young men presented for the daughters of good families.

In the case of the Dublin Corporation, it is evident that the patricians were ultimately motivated by the sense that founding a university provided them with an opportunity to make a last-ditch effort to give their loyalty to the English crown an anchor that would hold. The issue, as it presented itself in the early 1590s, was to provide for the education of the future elite *at home*. The consensus between the Dublin Corporation and the Loftus circle was established on the notion of and commitment to *civility*. In the early 1590s this meant support for established *law and order* in the face of plots and threats inspired by Jesuit missionaries trained and directed *from abroad*. While most members of the Dublin Corporation might not have cared much for Puritanism (had they known what it meant at all), they were at that time still largely indifferent to the finer nuances of religious beliefs. Only a small band of Dublin patriciate – all connected in extended kinships groups with Adam Loftus – were actively committed to a decidedly more Puritan orientation for the new university as the indispensable condition of bringing *civility* to the country.

True, when the College was first established there were no religious tests at matriculation; but that was surely a case of translating principle into pragmatic practice. There was clearly no

point in introducing a religious test, when the correct appreciation of religious truth had yet to be instilled. Mere outward conformity was no longer satisfactory: *conviction* had to be nurtured. And Adam Loftus as the first provost did take an active interest in giving the new university not only a religious but also the commensurate academic profile; there is no doubt that he championed the adoption of the working norms of certain Cambridge colleges.

One can catch illuminating glimpses of Loftus's vision of the university in his Latin resignation speech. He shows himself supremely committed to sound foundational studies, useful to officials in state and church. Young men must be trained in the approved method of letter-writing, and in organising their thoughts for effective public speaking. Loftus specifically mentions Politian's method as the sure way to overcome "the barbaric Roman style". In the epistolary endeavours, the lead of Erasmian humanism should be followed. Furthermore, the thorough study of texts and scholarly exercises in the humanist mode is recommended by Loftus, also a basis for theological training. He argues that since people are no longer instructed by Christ directly, they have to be persuaded to rely on the purest texts of his teaching. The aim of studying in this manner is the uncluttered, simple communication of God's truth, adopting indeed the simplicity of the first apostles who were fishermen. All these instructions and guidelines contain Erasmian insights and sentiments echoing earlier Cambridge influences.

Enforcement of moral discipline among scholars – as indicated in their dress and haircut – is perceived as necessary for the sake of social harmony within the university. The religion to be practised in the institution is described as *reformed Catholico-Anglicanism*. Such a construction denotes a search for stability, since the exercise of true religion is shown merely to involve a rekindling of the purer ways that allegedly existed in early days, but that had been overlaid by man-made inventions and accretions. All magisterial reformers anywhere in Europe adopted such a stance. All changes, even radical breaks within the past, were introduced, in tune with contemporary thought and expression, as *reform*, as a reshaping of something that had been ideal before. Innovation was considered a total anathema; the work of the devil.

Loftus, far from discarding his principles here, showed himself a totally committed reformer. He never abandoned his Puritan convictions. Rather, it was precisely in the interest of Puritanism that he stressed the need for stability. Stability was the outward condition to ensure the progress of the pure gospel as a matter of conviction. It is possible to demonstrate that his Puritan views expressed themselves more and more in endeavours to inculcate conviction in others, especially in the young, through "sound" education. Loftus became less and less persuaded that coercion in matters of religion could achieve anything good or sustainable.

Loftus's Puritan convictions which informed his vision of the university are most evidently revealed in that seemingly bizarre speech he made in 1594 when Walter Travers had been elected provost of Trinity College, Dublin as his successor. The speech is one long stern admonition. Such admonition, far from being perceived as tactless or generally tedious – as it surely would be, were it to be made nowadays – was recognised in Puritan circles at the time

as the well-established practice of early Christians when the occasion demanded it. The case of Walter Travers certainly called for admonition in the biblically enjoined and sanctioned sense.

Walter Travers, a Cambridgeman, had been one of the foremost leaders of the recently dismantled Presbyterian Movement. In 1586 Travers had been charged before the Ecclesiastical High Commissioners in London with being “the author or at least the finisher” of the Presbyterian *Book of Discipline*. However, nothing could be proved. Yet Travers was without doubt one of the two principal “ideologues” of the English Presbyterian Movement. Twelve years earlier he had composed the most authoritative English account of the Calvinist scheme of church order, the *Ecclesiasticae Disciplinae... explicatio*, translated into English by Thomas Cartwright, the other “ideologue”, as *A full and plaine declaration*. (This is sometimes confused with the *Book of Discipline* of the 1580s.) On the other hand, Travers was also renowned as an exquisitely learned teacher and preacher. He had been acclaimed, as Loftus put it, for the “laborious search he... made into the depth of such learning as may make him *useful* to our society”. The separation of his deepseated Presbyterianism from his useful Puritan learning was obviously not going to be easy; it was certainly more difficult than in the case of a mere fellow-traveller. However, Adam Loftus the Puritan, was prepared to attempt such a beneficial separation in the name of the pure gospel by admonition. He was all the more convinced of the acceptability of such an attempt, since he had also received encouragement from England, from those who wished to rescue Puritanism from the damnable Presbyterian discipline. In his speech before the assembled College community Loftus stressed the need for the provost to set the leading example. Addressing Travers directly he insisted:

*You shall now have the greatest influence on the regulation of the behaviour of those whom you govern, both in doctrine, discipline and moral course of life, for your actions are the transcript of your doctrine.*

As far as moral discipline was concerned, he warned Travers not to admit “those who in their blooming youth have been pre-contracted to vicious habits”. Is this an instance of the application of the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination, in the sense that such youngsters might be irredeemable? Strict moral discipline must be practised, Loftus repeated, since “one ill member in the College is like a perished tooth, which is apt to corrupt its fellows”. This observation in fact expressed a deep conviction on which all well-regulated communities were organised, from Calvinist Geneva to Jesuit Salamanca.

Furthermore, Loftus enjoined upon Travers the promotion of “good letters”, so as to rekindle and recapture the “ancient learning and piety”. To achieve the aim of engendering a thirst for knowledge and understanding, Travers was instructed to begin with basics: younger students were to be catechised. The older ones were to be taught from a catalogue of approved books to be read as foundational learning both human and divine, “either to their own good or to the salvation of others”. Loftus reminded Travers sternly that the university was not a place for controversy of any kind. On the contrary the university’s activities must be embedded in

peace, which is represented as the only promoter of true religion based on learning and sound understanding. Controversy, on the other hand, was deemed to lead to discord and rash actions, such as the premature forcible removal of idols from the uncomprehending idol-worshippers. It was the common conviction of all magisterial Protestant that such injudicious expressions of religious civil wars in France and the Netherlands, it led to the most disgusting rites of violence. The university must promote learning and understanding, Trinity-trained preachers had better refrain from becoming iconoclasts.

In a letter to Lord Burghley, Walter Travers confirmed that he had understood the admonition in the spirit in which it had been made. He agreed:

*My chief care shall be in the maintenance of godly peace to perform with quietness the things that belong to my service, without just cause of offence to any, and with as much fruit to all.*

What conclusion can one draw from all this about the first provost of Trinity College, Dublin and his role in shaping its foundation and early scholarly orientation? Mahaffy's negative verdict is surely invalid. He let the sources speak for themselves, but in fact, they spoke only to his early twentieth century prejudices; and he discovered much that he found utterly distasteful. A late twentieth century inspection of the evidence might easily fall into a similar trap, not from ignoring the distinctively different thoughtworld and language of the sixteenth century, but from a desire to make the foundation of Trinity College, Dublin acceptable to the more ecumenically minded or even secular-minded Irish society of today. That is indeed the error of conciliatory blandness which has not always been avoided in recent celebratory statements. There is no concealing the fact that Adam Loftus and Walter Travers and all the early seventeenth century provosts that followed presided over a decidedly Puritan institution. Trinity College, Dublin was indeed the ideological counterpart of the Irish colleges abroad, especially the Irish college in Salamanca, founded by the Jesuits in the same year, 1592. Universities in the confessionally divided Europe of the early modern period were established as rival fortresses in the wars of religion which were to rage for another century. They served their respective societies in the only manner they could. However, religious conflict forms only one part of the history of the foundation of the university. The academic requirements which Adam Loftus set down for the teaching in the College, drew upon a common European cultural heritage which survived the wars of religion. The legacy of this common European culture we still cherish in our Library, and its values and norms continue to influence our basic concepts of study today.

So what were the Fellows signalling when they established the most prestigious postgraduate research studentship and named it after Adam Loftus? I like to think that they meant to indicate their acceptance of the burden of history; and in doing so they surely acted honourably as well as generously towards present and future generations of Adam Loftus scholars.