

Plan for a book of essays on the life and contribution of a former Archbishop of Armagh to the civilisation of Western Europe.

AODH MAC AINGIL
1571 - 1626

From Pedagogue to Primate.

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CHAPTER 1

Sixteenth Century Ireland

Aodh Mac Aingil in his historical setting

by Séamus de Napier

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The Ireland into which Aodh Mac Aingil was born was a very different place from the Ireland we know today.

For one thing the physical appearance of the land was completely different. The lakes and wet areas were very much larger than they are today and the extensive land drainage schemes of the 18th and 19th centuries had yet to take place. The bogs are trackless wastes, places to which the junior members of the family migrated in summer for *booleying* [*bualaiócht*], for summer grazing, and the cutting and drying of winter fuel.

The forest which had covered Ireland from the end of the last Ice Age stood intact over vast areas of the country providing food and shelter to large numbers of the poor and the dispossessed, as well as recreation for the nobles of Gaelic and Anglo-Irish descent.

Roads were few and poorly maintained. Their Irish name, [*bóthar*], aptly described them, as a track with sufficient space for two cows to pass. The main means of transport and travel were the rivers and the seas. The climate in the latter half of the 16th century was colder than at present, at least in the winter. The Annals of the Four Masters record the freezing over of Loughs Erne and Neagh at this time.

The houses of the nobility outside the Pale gave considerable comfort, like the stone castle in which Francisco de Cuellar, a ship-wrecked Spanish captain from the ill-fated Armada, stayed in the west at Lough Melvin as guest of McGlanachey, the local chieftain. The lodges or cabins of the common folk were made of more perishable materials, timber, adobe or turf, roofed with thatch. Even in the cities few could afford to built in stone or brick.

The Normans after they arrived in the 12th century had divided the country up for administrative purposes into baronies, roughly co-terminus with the areas controlled by the larger Gaelic families. They had established their administrative centre in Dublin, and created an enclosed area immediately around the old city which remained under their control at all times and was known as "the Pale". Any inroads which the English government had made in those early centuries into the

area outside of the Pale became lost to the domination of the Gaelic families and the Old English families, now thoroughly gaelicised, by the end of the War of the Roses, when in 1485 Henry VII came to the throne of England as its monarch.

And monarch [sole and absolute ruler] he, and each of his successors, was until with the Act of Settlement of 1688 when James II was dethroned and constitutional government established in England, Wales and Scotland.

During the next 115 years, to the Tudor monarchs, Henry VII, his son Henry VIII, his grand-son Edward VI and his two grand-daughters, Mary and Elizabeth I, Ireland was a place from which timber, fish, cattle and their by-products, mercenaries and minerals could be obtained in exchange for cloth, wine and luxury goods. Their main interest in the early years was in mercenaries needed to fight their wars on the continent of Europe or in Scotland, and the Gaelic Irish proved most willing and successful for this purpose.

But the rank and file of the commoners in England and Wales knew something about Ireland, mostly from popular songs brought over by traders, and the dependence on the Irish markets for foodstuffs of the general populace. Shakespeare quotes a few bars from *Cailín ó Chois tSiúire mé* in his play Henry V¹, [Act iv Scene 4], when he puts into the mouth of Pistol, replying to a French soldier's challenge *Quality? Calen o custure me! Art thou a gentleman?* implying that the tune was widely known in the early 1600's, and may even have been the equivalent of a hit today on *Top of the Pops*. It is not the only Irish Air which can be identified in the plays of Shakespeare. He reminds us that wolves, then on the verge of extinction in England and Wales, are still to be heard howling at nights in Ireland where they roam the fens and forests still. He is familiar with the belief in Ireland that the writing of satirical poetry could banish rats². He refers to the *uilleann* pipes as the *woollen bag-pipes* in the Merchant of Venice. He jokes at the expense of the Irish in other of his plays, but the existence of these references in popular plays shows that the general public in the South-East of England at any rate were aware of the state of affairs in Ireland.

In Ireland the heroic traditions of Homer, the Táin, Fionn and the Fianna and the Roman epics lived vividly in the minds of all. Storytelling here as in England was the main source of information, propaganda and news. No indigenous theatre established itself in Gaelic Ireland during this time, but the travelling bards and musicians brought news and fresh tales from place to place. The O'Byrnes in Glenmalure like many of the Gaelic lords beyond the Pale maintained poets to sing of their prowess, and the beauty of their ladies³.

War was as pleasant and lucrative a profession as any other and infinitely more attractive to the youth of 16th century Ireland than farming or stock-raising. That left only medicine, the law, poetry, music and the Church as available professions to the literate classes. Schools, once sustained by a rich Church were now conducted in barns and hedges, because the monasteries

had been disestablished and the monks and teachers hunted from the fortified towns and villages controlled by the English. Those centuries of Norman and English incursion into Gaelic Ireland had spawned feuds and alliances, turning *brother against brother*, creating *scores to be settled*, which gave the necessary impetus to any young blade who wanted adventure to take on some neighbouring family in another *merry war*.

With the establishment of a unified monarchy in England on the accession of Henry VII, law and order returned to England and Wales, and organised civil administration regained its role. Feudal lords and magistrates administered local law-courts and the King's judges travelled the country on assize to bring the benefits of the King's justice to the British nation. In Ireland, however, the extension of civil administration required the re-conquest of many of the areas which had returned to the brehon law and local overlord control during the previous century.

Dublin remained the administrative centre of English rule. The King appointed a Lord Deputy to rule Ireland on his behalf. In the counties where *the King's peace* was established, civilian officials such as sheriffs were appointed and the assize judges travelled. In those areas where *the peace* was not yet established, military commanders, called seneschals, were appointed, each with, usually, full powers of martial law. These areas were in general the areas governed under the brehon law by the local Gaelic chieftains. The *commission to administer martial law* to the commander authorised him to do all that he required, including executing without trial, arson and ethnic cleansing. In theory landowners of more than 40 shillings annual value were excluded, save in the emergency of any situation, but in reality few could expect to escape if they defied the will of the seneschal. Women, children and non-combatants were no longer considered a special case⁴, and many of the reports back to the Castle record on any particular expedition out of the Pale more women and children killed and maimed than fighting men captured or slain.

In areas of the midlands and north of the country no real effort was made to do other than to maintain the *status quo* for most of this century. Areas around the Pale which were peaceful were organised into counties, administered by a sheriff and civil justices, travelling on assize as in England and Wales. Taxes were levied and there was a requirement on landowners to provide men at arms from time to time as required by the administration in Dublin for defensive purposes. That included the right of the government in Dublin to billet soldiers on certain areas as necessity required.

One aspect of life in 16th century Ireland often overlooked is the dependence of the authorities on the holding - and slaughter, if need be - of hostages to guarantee the peaceful conduct of the local chieftains. Dublin Castle held a compliment of noble youths, who were locked up each evening, yet otherwise free to roam about the Castle, enjoying each other's company and living a life of leisure. Their only restraints were on their liberty, and the cloud that hung over each of

their heads - or more properly, their necks - of summary execution if the long-distant relatives, the party they stood hostage for, broke their guarantees of good conduct.

The Reformation began in Europe in the early Sixteenth Century, 1520 onwards, with the spread of the ideas of Martin Luther among princes anxious to find a cause with which to advance their own economic interests.

In England Henry VIII saw a way out of his personal marriage and financial difficulties and, embracing some only of the ideas generated in Europe, in 1537 asserted his authority over that of the Pope as Head of the Church in England, and then proceeded to confiscate the lands and assets of the monasteries.

With the Reformation in England a new dimension had entered into Irish life. Extermination of Catholics was added to the list of aims of the military commanders, and the hunting of priests and religious added to the list of *game* open to Anglo-Irish overlords to hunt. The leasing of the confiscated monastery lands became a prize for the King's champions.

The Roman Church reacted with the Counter-Reformation and reluctantly the convening by Pope Paul III of the Council of Trent in 1545. That Council ran on until 1563. Perhaps the Church failed to see the huge economic motive which was the impetus for the adoption of the New Religion.

From 1571, the year of Aodh's birth, until after the defeat of the Gael at the Battle of Kinsale in the autumn of 1601, we know that Ulster, excepting the coastal strip of Antrim from Carrickfergus to Larne and parts of south Down, remained in the control of the local chieftains. Francisco de Cuellar travelled extensively from Sligo and Leitrim to Fair Head through modern Tyrone, South Derry and north Antrim in 1588 and 1589 and reports the occasional passage of armies along the main highways which connected pockets of English habitation around crucial crossing points on rivers and to and from the castles defending same. Otherwise it is the Gaelic chieftains who control the land. Thus when Feagh McHugh O'Byrne [Fiachaidh Mac Aodha Ó Broin], who lived within 25 miles of the Capital, boasted⁵ that he could safely conduct the fugitive Red Hugh O'Donnell [Aodh Rua Ó Domhnaill], on his escape from Dublin Castle, from Glenmalur back to Tír Chonaill in 1592, he was secure in the knowledge of the no-go areas in the midlands and in Ulster through which his men could move with impunity.

Domestic difficulties in England during the reign of Elizabeth I frustrated the authorities in their attempts to control events in Ireland. Succeeding to the throne bloodied by her sister Mary in her attempts to enforce a return to the Old Religion, Elizabeth was subjected to a series of problems in England. She was in May 1568 suddenly in charge of her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, who had fled Scotland's Puritans for her own safety into the care of Elizabeth. As a Catholic of the Old Faith, Mary could not avoid becoming a standard to which the disaffected English rallied. In the event of Elizabeth's death, was Mary not the next in line to succeed to the throne of England? For

the next 19 years Elizabeth was more concerned at protecting her own person against plots and terrorist attacks.

No sooner had she decided to execute Mary Queen of Scots in 1587 than Philip II of Spain unleashed his Armada, sailing in the autumn of 1588 against her. She had little time to concern herself with events in Ireland.

Regarded by the authorities in Dublin as a bandit, Feagh was an up-and-coming leader of a strong sept of the O'Byrnes [Síol Bhroin], the Gabhal Raghnaill, who might in a Gaelic Ireland have striven to become the dominant sept of the O'Byrnes, with Feagh as its Rí. At times he could muster 600 men and horse, and on 25 August 1580 he inflicted on the Lord Deputy Grey one of the most damaging defeats which the English ever suffered in Gaelic Ireland. For this he would eventually pay with his life.

The proper means of conduct of martial law in Ireland had no boundaries. In those areas outside of the Queen's Peace results were the only guide of what was right. Defending himself in his conduct as Lord Deputy to the Privy Council⁶, Sir John Perrott refers to his failed attempts to poison Feagh McHugh O'Byrne when the hard-pressed government could not afford to give him a large enough army to defeat him militarily. He referred to the Earl of Sussex's attempts on the life of Shane O'Neill in Tyrone by poison, which also failed, yet had earned Sussex the Queen's favour.

Things must be done, he said, according to time place and occasion.... in the like cause, before my time, the late Earl of Sussex being Governor of this Realm as well as I, caused Thomas Smith, apothecary, now mayor of Dublin, to deliver to a servant of the said Earl's called John Smythe, otherwise called Bottle Smythe, certain poisons which were delivered in a double drinking bottle which he gave to Shane O'Neill who escaped, very hardily, after the receipt of it.

This Ireland was a land of extremes, of war and peace, of luxury and grinding poverty. Today's traveller would have noticed most the utter brutality of life, with respect for human rights at an all-time low. War and reprisal, religion and irreligion, conciliation and massacre, trust and betrayal are the pairs of apocalyptic horsemen who cross this land. But outside the walls of the Pale and of the castles, a rich culture, in music and story, history and genealogy lies deep in the Irish countryside. This is no moribund culture in the throes of demise. No, it is a vibrant live culture, adapting at that very time to the European craze in formal dance which Ireland was moulding to its own music.

The City of Down had been fortified by the English when they had defeated the High King, Brian O'Neill and his allies in 1260 at the Battle of Downpatrick. The O'Neills recovered the castle and the town⁷

passed through many turmoils, invaded and pillaged by

Scotch and English, and suffering the like fate from the Irish themselves.

At various times the town was held by the English, at others re-taken by the Uí Néill. In 1539 it was held by the O'Neills until Lord Deputy Grey took it back for the Crown and held it for 12 years. Among other things he burnt the cathedral, an act well in keeping with the ideas of the New Religion. But his possession of the town ended with the assault by Con O'Neill.

Three years after it met a like fate from Con's son, Shane the Proud, who destroyed its gates and rampart.

Downpatrick, if not wholly in the possession of O'Neill and his followers was overawed by them, but in June 1600, it was captured by Sir Richard Morison, an officer of Lord Mountjoy, who had been sent by Queen Elizabeth to quell the rebellion.⁸

The town was granted to the Fitzgerald family, the Earls of Kildare in 1558 by Queen Mary, Elizabeth's "bloody sister". Their enjoyment of the holding has been rudely interrupted from time to time. On the demise of the last of the line of the 11th earl, the town passed through a number of hands and ultimately to Edward Baron Cromwell, a great grandson of Thomas Cromwell the Earl of Essex. Cromwell was appointed governor of Lecale in 1605 in succession to Sir Richard Morison. The town was to remain in government hands save for a short period in November 1641 when it was captured by the Irish and Cromwell's castle burnt.

This is the town into which Aodh Mac Aingil was born in 1571. It is against this background that he obtained his primary education and learned his religion at his mother's knee. From there he went to secondary school in the Isle of Man, 35 miles across the sea from the mouth of Strangford Lough, an easier and a shorter journey than that to Irish schools which existed in the remoter areas of Ulster, far from the gaze of the administrators in Dublin. Indeed these administrators were sufficiently concerned at the absence of education facilities for the education of candidates to the ministry that they persuaded Elizabeth I to establish Trinity College, Dublin in 1592 for the education of ministers in the New Religion.

The Isle of Lecale, as the peninsula was then known in English [*Mag-inis*, then *Leath Chathail*, in Irish], was peaceful from 1571 until the outbreak of the Nine Years War, the rebellion which ended in 1601 with the defeat at Kinsale. Aodh Mac Aingil was 17 when the ill-fated Armada sailed for England, only to lose so many of its ships on Ireland's western seaboard. Interestingly, that great event passed un-noticed in East Ulster. Writing his great epic *History of Ireland, Comhrac na nGael agus na nGall le chéile*,⁹ based on his own traditional view of Irish history, Art Mac Bionaid ignored the Spanish Armada completely. It was of no relevance in East Ulster, and the year 1588 did not stand out for him as of significance.

O'Laverty¹⁰ quotes a number of contemporary descriptions of

Lecale

Sir Thomas Cusake, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, writing to the Duke of Northumberland, 8th of May, 1552, says:- "The next country to the same eastwards is Lecaille, where Mr M'Brerton is farmer and captain, which is a handsome plain, and champion country of 10 miles long and 5 miles breadth, without any wood growing thereon. The sea doth ebb and flow round that country, so as in full waters no man may enter therein upon dry land but in the one way, which is less than two miles in length". - *Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts*. Marshal Bagenel's Description of Ulster, written in 1586, says:- "Lecahahull is the inheritance of the Earl of Kildare, given to his father and his mother by Quene Marie; it is almost an island and without wood. In hit is the Bishop's Sea called Downs, first built and enhabited by one Sir John Coursie, who brought thither with him sondrie English gentlemen and planted them in this countrey, where some of them yet remayne, though somewhat degenerate and in poore estate; yet they holde stil their freeholdes.

His childhood and youth as a middle-class citizen of Down in a peaceful community meant that he was well-educated, and may indeed have been involved in education before he was engaged by the Earl of Tyrone. Aodh was single and teaching in Dungannon when the Nine Years War broke out.

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CHAPTER 6

6 - Alt ar Aodh Mac Aingil [Hugh Mac Caughwell], scolaire, oide & údar.

Gabh mo theagasc in am uaim -
Ní feas cá huair 'thig an t-éag;
San aimsir nach smaointear sin
'Na fhoghláí chugainn 'thig sé.

*Take my words in time from me -
One knows not when death will come
At a time you don't expect
That's when it comes like a thief.*

[Aodh Mac Aingil: "*Ceann Aodh Ó Néill*"]

How prophetic these lines of Hugh Mac Caughwell were to prove in respect of his

own life, ended by an illness when he was at the height of his powers!

Hugh Mac Caughwell (or as he is usually known in Irish, Aodh Mac Aingil) was no mean scholar, despite his own description of himself in another poem as "bráithrín bocht ó Dhún" [a poor little brother from Down(patrick)]. It is accurate, no doubt, in that it refers to his life lived according to a vow of poverty, as befitted a true son of St Francis; but it by no means should make him out to be a piteous, pathetic figure, since rather did he prove himself a fine, competent scholar of language, philosophy and theology during his relatively short life.

He was born in 1571, during the reign of Elizabeth I, who was intent on outwitting the Great O'Neill, arch-enemy of the Gall. We are unsure where exactly Hugh was born: this is usually taken to be Lecale, more precisely Downpatrick. We do not even know the identity of his father and mother. Some say that since he possessed a Tyrone surname, and became tutor to Hugh O'Neill's sons, that we should look to East or South Tyrone for his place of birth. All his biographers and contemporaries point to Downpatrick, however. It should be noted, moreover, that a branch of the Tyrone Mac Caughwells [Campbells] were to be found in Down at this period: they were related to the McGuinnesses and were lords of Lecale. Finally on this point, we must add that two of Mac Caughwell's former students, Anthony Hickey OFM and Bonaventure McGuinness OFM, state quite categorically that their illustrious master first saw the light of day in Downpatrick (cf BBD, page 65, note 9).

Turning to the matter of Hugh's own education, we can only assume that this commenced locally - under the "care and eyes of his parents", according to Vernulaeus, one of his early biographers (cf BBD, page 65, note 3). In Martin & Byrne *A new history of Ireland*, Vol III (Oxford, 1973) page 563, Fr Benignus Millet suggests that his primary education was followed by a spell at a traditional "bardic" school, of which many still existed in Ulster at that time:

For the rest of the sixteenth century, in those Irish districts where the royal power did not extend, the traditional schools of Gaelic culture continued and in some places flourished. We find them in many places, even in Leinster but especially in Ulster. A typical product was the Gaelic poet, Aodh Mac Aingil (Hugh Mac Caughwell) - [emphasis mine]

Vernulaeus also tells us that Mac Caughwell next went to further his studies in the Isle of Man, which had very close links with Co. Down in this era as earlier. One author goes so far as to suggest which academy Hugh attended, namely Rushen Abbey. (cf Tomás Ó Cléirigh, *Aodh Mac Aingil agus an scoil NuaGhaeilge i Lóbháin*, Dublin 1935, pp 50-1).

We might conjecture that Hugh Mac Caughwell's "bardic" school days were 1586-89, and his period in the academy on the Isle of Man 1589-92, but it must be stressed that such dates are mere guesses.

Having returned to Ireland on the completion of his secondary education, Hugh's reputation must have preceded him, since Hugh O'Neill soon came to hear of him (possibly from Mac Caughwell's relatives in Tyrone?), and soon sought his services as tutor to his two young sons Henry and Hugh, whom he wished to educate to the same high standard as he himself attained, courtesy of the English court.

He also appointed Fr. Peter Nangle, OFM, as tutor, both men taking up their duties in O'Neill's castle or keep in Dungannon. Dr P Rogers was of the opinion that neither the era nor the location were conducive to a good education for the boys:

The last decade of the sixteenth century in Ireland was not a time favourable to the growth of scholarship, neither was the old keep at Dungannon the most suitable spot for an academy of *belle lettres*.- (*Cavellus of Saul*, in Down & Connor Historical Society's Journal, Vol. V, 1933, p.4)

Be that as it may, however, we are afforded a most interesting picture of the Great O'Neill's family circle towards the end of Mac Caughwell's tenure of office in an account written by an Englishman, Sir William Harrington, on the occasion of a visit to O'Neill's castle by Sir William Warren and himself in October 1599:

Posing his two sons in their learning and their tutors, which were one Father Nangle, Franciscan, *and a younger scholar whose name I know not*, and finding the children of good, towardly spirit, their age between 13 and 15, in English clothes, like a nobleman's sons, with velvet jerkins and gold lace, of good and cheerful aspect, freckle-faced, not tall of stature, but strong and well set, both of them speaking the English tongue, I gave them (not without the advice of Sir William Warren) my English translation of Ariosto, which I got at Dublin, which their teacher took very thankfully and soon after shewed the Earl, who called to see it openly, and would needs hear some part of it read, I turned (as it had been by chance) to the beginning of the 45th *canto* and some other passages of the book. -(Harrington, *Nugae Antiquae*, ed. Park, emphasis mine)

Around about this time, Sir William Russell, Elizabeth I's deputy in Ireland was anxious to have Hugh O'Neill send his sons to the newly-founded Trinity College in Dublin, in order to assure their continued education according to English lights. O'Neill, however, wished his sons rather to be educated in a Catholic *milieu* on the Continent, safely distanced from English influence.

Since he and the other Gaelic leaders were planning an insurrection against English rule, with the assistance, they hoped, of the King of Spain, Hugh O'Neill devised a clever plan to further both his aims. He invited Hugh Mac Caughwell to go on an embassy to Philip III of Spain while at the same time accompanying his elder son, Henry, to a Spanish university. Since the royal court was at that time in session in Salamanca, and since that city had one of Europe's oldest and most illustrious universities, that was the destination of Hugh Mac Caughwell and the young Henry O'Neill, a mere teenager, when they embarked in April 1600, escorted by Don Martin de la Cerda whom Philip had sent to conduct them safely to Spain. On arrival in Salamanca, they took up their lodgings in the convent of Franciscan Observantines, while both men enrolled in the university as students of philosophy, theology and law.

Young Henry O'Neill was very taken by the Franciscan way of life and soon sought to join the order, but was prevented from so doing by the Spanish authorities, fearing the possible reactions of his father at such a move. As a result Henry and his mentor Hugh were forced to go to alternate lodgings in the city.

Eventually Henry grew disillusioned with the academic life, especially in the wake of the terrible defeat at Kinsale, and so, in 1603, he left university and enlisted in the Spanish army. Hugh, on the other hand, was very much in his element in a university noted for its expertise in the philosophy of the medieval Irish scholar, Duns Scotus, in which he immersed himself. His return to lodge with the Observantines no doubt influenced his decision to join the order, date unsure. He went on to take a degree, and then a doctorate, in theology

In April 1607 a new Irish college, St Anthony's, was founded in the university city of Louvain, in the Spanish Netherlands, and in May of that same year Hugh Mac Caughwell was appointed its first professor of philosophy and divinity. In 1609, on the departure of its first guardian, Fr. Denis Mooney, Hugh was given this extra duty. As well as his administrative and lecturing duties, he also began to write. In 1610, St Anthony's acquired a printing press for use in the effort to counteract English endeavours to attract Irish converts to Protestantism through the medium of the Irish language, using Elizabeth I's printing press that she had sent over to Trinity College for that purpose some years earlier. Hugh's own treatise on penance *Scáthán Shacramuinte na hAithrí* (Mirror of the Sacrament of Penance) appeared from the Louvain press in 1618. All the Louvain press books share a similar beauty and simplicity of language, rare at the time, but which befits their aim to provide instruction for the Irish in their own current, spoken language. In the foreword to his work, Mac Caughwell addresses these words to his reader:

Guím thú, a léitheoir chroí Chaitlicigh, ná tabhradh simplíocht ná droch-

scríbhneoireacht an leabhráin ort gan mórmheas a bheith agat ar léann leighis d'anama atá ann

I pray you, dear Catholic reader, do not let the simplicity or bad writing of this little book lead you to have a low opinion of the instruction which is in it for the healing of your soul.

As well as his Irish treatise, which is original, Hugh published between the years 1620 and 1622 some five original works in Latin on philosophy and theology, as well as editing at least ten of the works of Duns Scotus, some of which were not published until long after his death.

Meanwhile Hugh Mac Caughwell continued to progress in the Franciscan Order. At the general chapter held in Segovia in May 1621, he was appointed *definitor general* of the order, and in 1623, he was appointed professor of theology in the Convent of Ara Coeli in Rome, which meant a fond farewell to his beloved Louvain. He held his post in Ara Coeli until his appointment as Archbishop of Armagh, in succession to Peter Lombard, in 1626. He proposed to see the academic year out before travelling to Ireland, but sadly he died of fever, three months after his appointment, on 22 September 1626.

It is sad that the life of this brilliant scholar and teacher should have ended so abruptly. Who knows what further accomplishments would have been his had he been spared to lead the Irish Church at such a difficult time? *Go raibh luach a shaothair á fháil sna Flaithis aige!*

Anraí Mac Giolla Comhail, An Lúb, Co. Doire Nollaig 1998

NB BBD, Anraí Mac Giolla Comhail, *Bráithrín Bocht ó Dhún; Aodh Mac Aingil*, Dublin 1985]

Chapter 7.

The little brother from Down - Aodh Mac Aingil as a good Franciscan - Patrick Conlon OFM

How did Aodh Mac Aingil become a Franciscan? God works in mysterious ways inviting a person to enter religious life. A loud voice does not thunder from a cloud or a quiet whisper come from a tabernacle. There are hints in the daily routine of living which suggest that the Lord is pointing someone in a certain direction. They accept God's challenge to try it and see. Conviction about the right course grows with experience.

Aodh was born around 1570 just as three and a half centuries of Franciscan history in Downpatrick were ending. Three friars from the community were killed by English forces under John Britton. Father John O'Lochran was hanged near where the angel appeared to Saint Patrick. Fathers Edmund Fitzsimon and Donough O'Rourke were hanged from a tree in the friary garden when they refused to hand over four silver chalices. The other friars fled into hiding. Aodh was reared with the memory of these brave men before him. Little matter that they were Conventual rather than Observant. The Franciscan order had split in two in 1517. People regarded both as followers of Francis of Assisi.

Another influence on young Aodh was the belief that the great Franciscan theologian, Blessed John Duns Scotus, was from Downpatrick. The locals must have been proud of their famous son. We now know that he was from Scotland, but the Irish Franciscans of the sixteenth and seventeenth century did not realise this.

Aodh left home for an education in Irish bardic lore. He finished it on the Isle of Man. The Irish friary there had been suppressed but the Franciscan charism was alive. Aodh was appointed assistant tutor at Dungannon castle to the sons of Hugh

O'Neill, created Earl of Tyrone in 1587. Again he came in contact with the followers of Francis. The tutor was a pious Observant Franciscan, Peter Nagle, sometime guardian of the friary of Armagh, famed for fasting and spending long periods in prayer. He died on bended knees, with hands joined and eyes raised to heaven, in 1604. The Armagh community was dispersed by persecution in 1587. Friars remained in the area under O'Neill protection. The Franciscan Third Order Regular had a house near Dungannon, founded by Con O'Neill and providing a quiet area for prayer and education. Both Armagh and Dungannon were later combined as one First Order community.

Ulster was then a land of war. It was decided that Henry, son of Hugh O'Neill, should go to Spain. Aodh went as personal envoy from the Earl of Tyrone to Philip III of Spain. They probably met the Franciscan Archbishop of Dublin, Mathew of Ovideo, before leaving. Don Martin, Philip's personal envoy to Tyrone, travelled with them. Going via Compostella they came to the royal court at Salamanca. Henry and Aodh took up residence at the convent of the Observant Franciscans. Both enrolled in the university. Both considered becoming friars. Aodh's regular contact with followers of the saint of Assisi would bear fruit. Henry was discouraged from such a vocation because of his future role in the O'Neill dynasty. He joined the Spanish army and later commanded his own battalion. Aodh was free to decide his future.

Among the friars in Salamanca was Florence Conry. Born near Elphin in or about 1560, he learned the family profession of "filíocht" [*poetic composition*] and "seanchas" [*traditional history/story-telling*] before joining the Franciscans. He studied at Salamanca and returned to Ireland in 1601 as spiritual adviser to Don Juan del Aguila, commander of the Spanish forces at Kinsale. Conry fled Ireland, became "anamchara" [*adviser*] to Red Hugh O'Donnell and was with him as he lay dying at Simancas in September 1602. We can imagine the powerful influence that he must have had on Aodh, ten years his junior. Both were rooted in Irish culture and committed Catholics.

Aodh had now made the vital decision. The dead friars of Downpatrick, the living example of Peter Nagle and possibly the dedication of Conry led him to try his vocation with the Franciscans. Some time before the summer of 1604, as the saintly Peter Nagle was dying in Ireland, Aodh became a novice in the Franciscan Observant Province of Saint James. There were no special novitiates then, so he may have remained at Salamanca under the guidance of a particular friar. Probably on account of his previous studies, he was professed and ordained within two years.

The Province of Saint James was the oldest Spanish unit in the Order, proud of its traditions and aware of its place as a leader within the ultramontane family of the

Observants. The order was divided into cismontane and ultramontane provinces, i.e. those south of the mountains (Italy and Eastern Europe) and beyond the mountains (Western and Central Europe). Both had different laws and traditions. Nationalism was increasingly important. Provinces were gathering into linguistic units such as the German-Belgian Nation. Reform movements, often centred on special houses of prayer, were growing. These were known as the Recollects (mainly in France), Reformed (in Italy) or Discalced (in Spain). By 1640 the friars in Ireland were officially known as the Irish Franciscan Recollect Province of the Observants of the German-Belgian Nation!

Aodh became a friar when the reforms of the Council of Trent, with their stress on poverty and prayer, had taken root. He was in contact with a Spanish Franciscanism which was intrigued by the inner experiences of mysticism and liked to practice a certain noble austerity which, while occasionally extreme, was never anti-social or selfish. This dovetailed neatly with his witness of the prayers of Peter Nagle and the commitment of the friars of Downpatrick. It was also in line with a Celtic background which saw the hand of God everywhere and believed in mortifying the body.

By 1605 Aodh was a chaplain with the Regiment of Henry O'Neill, his old pupil, in the Spanish Lowlands. Florence Conry attended the general chapter of the Franciscans at Toledo in 1606 and was nominated Irish minister provincial. His target was to pull the friars together after decades of persecution and instil in them the spirit of the Council of Trent. Aware that the proper training of candidates had to be his first priority, he immediately applied for the foundation of an Irish Franciscan College in Leuven, then in Spanish Flanders, now Belgium. He attended its opening in May 1607, met the Ulster Earls there following their flight from Ireland and went with them on their journey to Rome. Appointed Archbishop of Tuam in 1609, he later lived with the Franciscans in Madrid where he died in 1629.

Pope Paul V issued a Bull of Foundation for the College of Saint Anthony in Leuven on 3 April 1607. Donagh Mooney was appointed superior. The community lived in a house at the back of the church of Saint Anthony. Florence Conry wanted to turn Saint Anthony's into a proper college to train young friars. At the end of November he appointed Aodh to teach theology and philosophy there, not only with learning but also with wisdom and piety. Conry granted him the privileges of a lecturer within the order and nominated him to run the college in the absence of the superior. Aodh had been in Leuven since June and was already teaching theology. It would seem that he and other Irish members of the Province of Saint James were incorporated into the Irish Province on 14 December 1608.

The size of the community at Leuven increased. The house became a full canonical foundation on 23 November 1607. Donagh Mooney, now guardian, probably returned to Ireland at the provincial chapter of 1609. He was elected vice-provincial in 1611, provincial in 1615 and died in Drogheda in 1624. Aodh, already assistant superior, took charge when Mooney left and faced the difficulty of finding a proper building while promoting the spiritual lives of the friars. The house near Saint Anthony's church was too small. The friars moved to one near the church of Saint James. They got a permanent site in 1616.

Building had already begun when Albert and Isabella laid the foundation stone of the new premises on 9 May 1617. Income just covered expenses. The community grew to about fifty. With so many men keen to join the friars, Aodh revived a system of distributing Irish clerics among other provinces of the order. Thus in 1619 an agreement was reached with the Province of Cologne that three or four Irish theological students as well as four students of philosophy would be accepted in German colleges. Also in 1619 the Irish requested that the Belgian friars would admit six clerics into their colleges. French Franciscans were reluctant to allow other provinces open a house in Paris and blocked Irish efforts in 1617. Using his international influence, Aodh got the superiors of the French Province of Saint Denis to allow a house for four Irishmen in 1622. The community came from Leuven. This first Paris house closed in 1627. By then a second Irish Franciscan college, that of Saint Isidore in Rome, had opened. Again Aodh, by now a key person at the general curia of the order, played a crucial role during the negotiations. Other colleges followed in Prague and Capranica. By then Aodh was dead.

The friars retained the name of Saint Anthony for their new building at Leuven both because of the first church which they had used and as a reflection of that saint's effort to build up a proper system for training young friars. Aodh was aware that the primary aim of Saint Anthony's college was educating priests who would return to Ireland and promote catholicism. Faith and fatherland were two themes which became intertwined in late sixteenth century Ireland. Others could deal with questions of fatherland. Aodh kept his mind firmly on the faith and quality of the young priests in his care. The course of studies normally took four years after the completion of the novitiate.

The guardian of Saint Anthony's was elected at the provincial chapter. He was responsible to the Irish provincial and also to commissaries who represented the minister general. As guardian, Aodh had quasi-provincial powers. Nearly independent for routine administration, he could grant travel permits and receive novices in the name of the Irish province.

The daily routine at Saint Anthony's under Aodh was strict. The friars rose at 6.00

a.m. and devoted two hours to meditation, recitation of Matins and Lauds and community mass. After a light breakfast, there was a lecture in philosophy and another in theology, each followed by a repetition or discussion. Then there was study until the midday meal, which was followed by a break to enable the community to relax together. The Small Hours were recited, followed by another session of lectures and study. Vespers and Compline were recited after the evening meal, followed by another period of meditation in common. The students made up about half of the community and were confined to their own part of the house, the lecture hall, library and choir. Once a week the lectures were replaced by public disputations and the solution of practical cases. Lecturers could claim privileges such as exemption from community exercises or extra private rooms. There is no evidence that Aodh did so.

We must not forget that Aodh was a theologian in his own right. He lectured in theology at the college in Leuven and in later years at Ara Coeli in Rome, where he became director of studies. Going back to his roots in Downpatrick, he followed the teachings of Blessed John Duns Scotus, the Subtle Doctor. Aodh was among the first who sprang to the defence of Scotus when he was attacked by the Polish Dominican, Abraham Bzowski. Later editors of the works of Scotus regarded Aodh as a key writer on the Subtle Doctor.

I believe that no true Franciscan can limit himself to just research. The followers of Francis have a hunger for people and a desire to help them. Even such a great theologian as Saint Bonaventure got involved in pastoral practice. So with Aodh. He began his priestly ministry among Irish soldiers in Flanders. He saw the pastoral need for spiritual books in Irish. The first work in Irish by a member of the community, a catechism, was published while he was guardian in 1611. A printing press installed in the college while he was in charge was used to edit pastoral works. In the words of Aodh himself "nach do mhúnadh Gaoidhilgi sgriobhmaoid achd do mhúnadh na haithridhe" (*we wrote, not to impart Irish, but to teach sorrow for sin*). Further on he asks the reader not to be distracted by the apparent simplicity of his book or questions of style but to concentrate on the healing for the soul that it offers. Aodh launched his "Scáthán Shacramuinte na hAithridhe" in 1618.

Scotland was another area of pastoral concern for Aodh. Scottish friars who had lived in Leuven sent back reports after returning home. The papal nuncio at Brussels became interested. Pressure mounted on the Irish Franciscans to send missionaries to the Highlands. Aodh strongly supported the call and found two volunteers, Patrick Brady and Edmund McCann, who went there in 1619. Others joined them. Lack of funds forced the friars out in 1637. Their efforts had already made Catholicism a vibrant force again in the Highlands and the Isles.

Saint Anthony's became famous for research on Irish history and hagiography. This began when two friars, Patrick Fleming and Hugh Ward, met in Paris in 1623. Fleming was on his way to Rome with Aodh in connection with affairs of the order. Ward was a companion to Father Francis de Arriba, confessor to the Queen of France. Thomas Messingham, rector of the Irish College in Paris, was finalising a book on Irish saints. The friars agreed to forward material on condition that he publish it. Aodh witnessed the agreement. Messingham published his book in 1624 without acknowledging the friars' work. Both Fleming and Ward felt free to do their own research on Irish hagiography. Fleming went on to found the College of the Immaculate Conception in Prague. Ward returned to Leuven and began research which led to the work of the Four Masters. By then Aodh was dead.

Aodh became involved at higher administrative levels. The order is governed by the minister general, elected at the general chapter held every six years. General definitors now make up a permanent council which helps the general run the order. Then they formed a steering committee who helped the general organise the chapter. They assisted the general outside of the chapter only if requested by him. A general congregation met between general chapters. It concerned itself with necessary legislation rather than elections.

The young Ulster friar must have made an impression on those who met him. Aodh attended a general chapter just seven years after his profession in the order. It met during the Feast of Pentecost in 1612 at the friary of Ara Coeli in Rome. We don't know why Aodh was there but on the Feast of Saint Anthony, he presided over the public defence of theological theses by another Irish friar, Anthony Hickey, who had been a student under Aodh in Leuven. The general chapter made a number of decisions regarding the Irish Province, in particular about the incorporation into the province of Irishmen who had joined elsewhere. Aodh was elected *custos* in 1614 to replace the Irish minister provincial while he attended the general congregation.

The next general chapter met at Salamanca in 1618. Aodh was there as *custos* of *custodes*, i.e. the other Irish delegate at the chapter along with the minister provincial. Benignus of Genoa was elected minister general and would prove to be a good friend of the Irish. The next meeting was the general congregation at Segovia in Spain. The main item on the agenda was updating general legislation. Statutes were approved for the Ultramontane family, updating the Statutes of Barcelona. Aodh was in the midst of the debates, having been elected a definator general. Afterwards he visited Spanish provinces on behalf of the minister general. The following year he travelled to Paris with Benignus of Genoa in an attempt to solve problems occurring in the Province of Aquitaine.

The next general chapter took place in Rome in May 1625. Aodh was almost certainly there. Some Spanish friars set up a friary in Rome dedicated to Saint Isidore. The minister general, Benignus of Genoa, had to take over the building just before the general chapter because the Spaniards had got into debt. Aodh, still definitor general, helped Benignus persuade another Irish friar, Luke Wadding, to take over the friary after the chapter. It became the Irish Franciscan College of Saint Isidore in June.

Peter Lombard, Archbishop of Armagh, died in Rome on 5th September 1625. Aodh emerged as the successor favoured by the Irish, particularly because he would understand the people in his spiritual care. Archbishop Lombard had lived in exile in Rome for a quarter of a century. It was presumed that Aodh would want to live among his people. A little of his personality emerges from evidence presented to promote his appointment. He is shown as a man of piety and wisdom with an excellent foundation in theology. He is seen as someone capable of dealing with people of all classes. While having that typical Franciscan hunger for people, he also showed a practical wisdom by which he, like the saint of Assisi, could enable them to find the Father through Christ.

Aodh's spirituality is best seen through his poems. In several places he describes himself as the "Bráithrín Bocht ó Dhún", *the Little Poor Friar from Downpatrick*, an interesting and revealing translation of *the Friar Minor from Down*. He is not satisfied with calling himself *poor* or *little*, each capable of translating *minor*, but used both! One of the poems, "Seanchas na Mionúr" (*Minor Lore*), presents the life of Francis in poetic form. It starts with a typical medieval theme as Christ on the Cross presents Francis with a way of life. In an almost modern terminology, Aodh speaks of the Franciscan Rule as being the very words of Christ and points out that it can be summarised simply as living the Gospel. Other themes given special attention include the dedication of the saint of Assisi to the papacy and the mystical experiences of Francis on Mount Alverna. This would cover Aodh's known aversion to heresy and his inclination towards the higher levels of prayer.

Another poem paraphrases the Promises of Francis ("Geallúint San Froinsiais") as found in the *Second Life* by Thomas of Celano: we have promised great things, greater still are promised to us; let us keep the former and seek the latter; pleasure is short, punishment eternal; suffering is brief, glory without measure; many are called, few are chosen, retribution will be made to all. Aodh goes on to show that we can be deceived by the way of the world. We should abandon it and walk in the steps of our poor father Francis by following the living God who can lead us to the highest form of love. Aodh ends by reminding us of the humble Francis. Anyone who thinks that he is important can't be following that saint to the Father through Christ.

Aodh takes up the Franciscan theme of the crib in a poem dedicated to the Infant Jesus ("Íosagán"). He greets the poor Jesus in the manger. As God, he had neither father on earth nor mother in heaven - an interesting reference to the Trinity - but was now spending his first night as a man. Aodh imagined himself taking the place of ass and ox beside the crib, so that he could protect the infant Jesus. He would be glad to wash the clothes from that baby and would love if Mary gave him permission to wrap the infant in the rags from his own back. He would bring in fresh water and warm the infant with the fire burning in his heart. Aodh's interest in Irish culture is shown in a reference to a famous Irish relic, the Staff of Jesus ("Bachal Íosa"). The poem shows the human side of Aodh and presents us with a softer image than that of a famous theologian and administrator.

Aodh became Archbishop of Armagh in April 1626 but died in September before he could return to Ireland and achieve his full potential as a follower of the saint of Assisi. The little brother from Down emerges as a man of profound faith as shown by his learning and dedication. He was a man of deep prayer, perhaps picked up from the saintly Peter Nagle and clarified during his years in Spain. There are indications that there was a mystical dimension in his life. It seems that he followed the Spanish tradition of austerity, which corresponded well with his Celtic desire for mortification. He was not afraid to get his hands dirty in getting any job done. His wisdom was based on his religious insight and on his practical experiences of life. His role in forming good Irish Franciscan priests was much appreciated. His years in Leuven indicated that he was also good at facilitating the growth of community. He had the vision to see the need for more Irish colleges and the energy to help bring these into existence. A competent administrator on many levels, he never lost contact with his Irish roots and culture. In the last analysis, Aodh was a simple follower of Francis who grew into a deep love of the Father through Christ and who wanted to help as many as possible to discover and reflect God's tremendous love.

CHAPTER 8

THE SCHOOLS OF ST MARY'S CHAPEL – the schoolhouse of Aodh Mac Aingil? – Séamus de Napier

It is generally recognised that Aodh Mac Cathmhaoil, or Aodh Mac Aingil as he is better known, (1571 – 1626), Archbishop of Armagh, was one of the finest scholars of theology in his day. But less well appreciated is the pioneering work which he did in the area of prose and poetic literature in Irish, the full effects of which are still being felt today. It is little wonder that the people of his native Downpatrick rightly feel proud of this *Poor Little Brother from Down*, as he called himself.

They can be proud of the environment from which he grew, and of the basic education which he and his likes received in Downpatrick at the end of the 16th Century. For Downpatrick was held by the O'Neills since they had burnt the town in 1551, and was to remain in their possession or under their influence until the English recaptured the town in 1600.

The Fitzgeralds, the Earls of Kildare, were landlords of the town and the lands around from 1558, when Mary, the Queen of England, gave it to the 11th Earl.

Aodh's biographer, Vernulaeus, tells us that, when he was not able to continue his education because of the local difficulties, he went from his parents' house over to the Isle of Man, which is near to Ireland [*it is 31 nautical miles from Lecale to Port Erin*] so that he might pursue his studies more deeply into the humanities.

The application of the various statutes of Henry VIII establishing the King's Supremacy and the disestablishment of the monasteries commenced in the Isle of Man with an arbitrary Act of Henry VIII in 1540.

The third Earl of Derby, the then owner of the island, appears to have obtained the building known as St Mary's Chapel, situate by the seashore in Castletown, in the confiscation of the monastic lands, and to have presented it to his wife.

By the time thirty years had elapsed she in turn, in an era which saw the growth of interest in the foundation of diocesan schools to fill the void in education which the loss of the monastic schools obviously created had dedicated this building to educational purposes. We read, displayed in the building today:-

The first reference to the schools of St Mary's Chapel occurs in 1570 in Lady Elizabeth Derby's part of the manorial Records and refers, in Latin, to "... the chamber of the Blessed Mary called scolehouse".

This was the era in which all the great public schools in England were founded, the time when the *Diocesan Schools (Ireland) Act 1570* was passed by the Irish Parliament, the age in which Queen Elizabeth I sought to find a suitable place in Ireland for the foundation of a university and eventually in 1592 founded Trinity College in Dublin. We can assume that the nature of the education provided was more than what would pass today as Primary Education, but was the successor to the monastic traditional education in the liberal arts, in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, music and philosophy. The only difference might have been, in keeping with the thinking of the Reformation, that the medium of instruction was in the English language, rather than Manx. We can see some support for this hypothesis when we read there:-

The free Grammar School was established in 1666 by Bishop Barrow and was housed in the chapel. It finally closed in 1930. – Plans for the building of a separate academy at Rushen Abbey fell through and by 1681 the Academic Scholars were also receiving instruction in the Chapel.

There is a large chappel in ye town and a school at the west end thereof. The schoolmaster has £60 a year sallary allowed by ye Earl of Darby for reading prayers each morning at 11 of ye clock and teaching a grammar school and for reading logick and phylosophy to four accademick scholars who are habitted in black wide sleeved gowns and square caps and have lodging in the castle and a sallary of £10 a year a piece by a new foundation of ye present Earl and Lord of Man. [A description of the Isle of Man with its Customs: 1861: manuscript by Thomas Denton.]

The notice in the building goes on:-

The licence granted to John Waterson by Bishop Wilson in 1698 also places the Petty School in “.... the old chappel.” The work carried out between 1698 and 1704 when the building was converted to serve exclusively as a schoolhouse included the provision of separate rooms for “...ye petty school ... with a seat... for ye master and formers round...” How far this school remained in the building is uncertain but it may have moved out a few years later. Bishop Wilson records in a memorandum of 17th August 1708 two payments to tradesmen “... to repurchase the Petty School House in Castletown which was sold when the old chapel was turned into a school.. for altering the Free School in Castletown etc...”

With the opening of King William’s [IV] College in 1833 the school was run solely as a grammar school until closed in 1930.

That it was to this school that Aodh Mac Aingil came, sometime about 1585, may be the explanation for a number of aspects of his conduct which were out of keeping with the thinking of the times.

The Isle of Man is by reason of its proximity to that part of County Down a place well known to farmers, fishermen and seafarers, and one whose mountains are seen in fair weather from many high places around about. The language then spoken was very similar to the Irish of Eastern Ulster spoken in Downpatrick.

Aodh’s education in the liberal arts is beyond doubt! Where exactly it took place on Man is in doubt. However, he was always conscious of his lack of formal education in the Irish Tradition, in poetry and the learning of the Irish

Schools. He tells us that he relied heavily on his friend, An tAth. Bonaventura ó hEodhasa, whose knowledge of the native tradition was legendary.

Aodh's ecumenical views were well in advance of the era and his understanding of the Reformation, of the status of King James I & VI as the king divinely appointed to rule over the English, Irish, Welsh and Scots, as a king who accepted the rulings of the first four Great Councils of the Church, all support the suggestion that Aodh was possibly educated in the Reformed Tradition, even, perhaps, through the medium of English, although there is no real evidence to support this. He did moreover speak good English. Manx, which was clearly comprehensible to a speaker of Eastern Ulster Irish, might equally have been the medium of instruction.

In order to test this theory in the summer of 2001 I myself stood and viewed the ruins of Rushen Abbey, near Castletown, and appreciated that the lands and books of the monks must have been dissipated very rapidly among the followers of the Earl. The buildings were rapidly demolished and the stone re-used in building less formal dwellings. Even allowing for the tradition that the Earl of Derby was less than enthusiastic in the promotion of the Reformation in his domain, one is tempted to dismiss the suggestion of An tAth. Anraí Mac Giolla Comhaill in *Bráithrín Bocht ó Dhún – Aodh Mac Aingil* [An Clóchomhar Tta, 1985] that perhaps the school at Rushen Abbey continued to operate *fo hallow* into the last decade of the 16th century and that that is the place of education of Aodh.

But the island is a small, gossipy place, very parochial. The area around Rushen Abbey and Castletown is very flat, open country. It is quite unlikely that any school in the former tradition could have existed near here or indeed anywhere on the island without word of it reaching the ministers and bishops of the Church of England on the island.

At that point my attention was drawn to the Old Grammar School at Castletown. There I learned the history of the school and saw the building in which it was housed.

Personally, after viewing the relics on the ground, the chapel school and the monastery ruins, I am inclined to the view that not only did Aodh attend the school at Castletown, but that he may even have lodged in the Castle, with the sons of other middle class merchants or nobles, a small band of scholars pursuing their education in the Reformed Tradition, but remaining as Catholic as Henry VIII did and as true to their "*old faith*" as the politics of the island allowed.

THE LATIN WORKS OF AOGH MAC AINGIL¹

An tAth. Anraí Mac Giolla Comhail.

Aodh Mac Aingil was outstanding in the realms of philosophy and theology. It is widely acknowledged that he was the best and most comprehensive theologian whom the Irish nation ever gave to the Church.

We can look at his works in two separate sections: the work in the Irish language which we have already examined . . . and his works in Latin which concerned theology, principally Scotism. In this chapter we will look briefly at these latter works.

As we have seen when we looked at Aodh's life in Salamanca, . . . Aodh was not long at the University until he began to show an especial interest in the works of the Subtle Teacher, Johannes Duns Scotus.

Scotus was reputed at that time to be an Irishman from Aodh's home town. (Since then scholars have shown that he was born and bred near Roxborough in Scotland). About the year 1265 Johannes was born, he took the habit of St. Francis in Dumfries about the year 1280; he pursued his University education in Oxford; and was ordained a priest on 17th May 1291. He went to Paris then to pursue a post-graduate degree and lectured on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (not the man who was subsequently Archbishop of Armagh but the great Italian theologian who lived from 1100 to 1160), initially at the University of Cambridge (1297 – 1300) and then at Oxford University (1300 – 2 and 1303 – 4); thereafter at the University of Paris (1302 – 3 and 1304). It was on the contents of those lectures that Scotus based his major work, *A Commentary on the Sentences*.

The main difference between the teaching of Scotus and that of St Thomas Aquinas (who died in the year 1274) is this: in Thomas' system of philosophy the principle place is given to Knowledge and Reason: to Love and the Will Scotus gives primacy. On this account Scotus says that the Natural Law is completely dependent on the Will of God, and not, as per Aquinas, on the Intellect of God, and as a consequence the Natural Law is not completely immutable.

¹ This is a translation of a contribution to his splendid work *Bráithrín Bocht ó Dhún, An Clóchomhar Tta.*, 1985.

While this is not the place, I feel, to go into all the differences between these two great systems of thought in Europe – Scotism and Thomism – it is sufficient to say here that the Order of St. Francis adopted Scotism as their system of philosophy, and as a result it is not surprising for us to find that Aodh Mac Aingil looks on it with great respect as a philosophical system and tries to advance it in all his lectures and writings. Scotism was much more common in the Middle Ages than it is now: a great germination and growth of Thomism since the Counter-Reformation occurred at the same time as a corresponding decline in the system of John Duns Scotus as Thomism is now considered *par excellence* as the system of philosophical thought of the Catholic Church. To quote Fr Benignus Millet, “... from 1350 to 1650, Scotism claimed more followers in the schools than Thomism”².

Scotism suffered a significant revival, however, in the Seventeenth Century as a result of the work of Mac Aingil and Luke Wadding. Mac Aingil produced scholarly editions of the works of Scotus, and Wadding used these for the publication of his great edition of the complete works of Scotus in 1639. This interaction between Mac Aingil and Wadding is described by Fr Benignus Millet in his Study of Scotism

The remarkable development and popularity of Scotism in the seventeenth century was due in no small measure to the writings and teachings of the Irish Franciscans. It was one of their outstanding contributions to religious culture in that age. It may be said to have begun with the erudite Ulster poet-friar Aodh Mac Aingil or Hugh Mac Caughwell, who later became archbishop of Armagh. Mac Caughwell was the first really bright star shining in the Irish theological sky for more than a hundred years, since the death of Maurice O’Fihilly in 1513. He provided scholars with satisfactory editions of some of the works of John Duns Scotus, and these were used by Luke Wadding and his collaborators who prepared and published in 1639 the first critical edition of the *opera omnia* of the “subtle doctor”³.

Not only did Aodh Mac Aingil advance Scotism in the 17th Century through his writings, but also through his teaching. In the fourteen years which he spent as a lecturer in Louvain, for example, more than a hundred students studied under him, not to mention those students who came under his influence in Salamanca before that and in Rome after 1623. A substantial number of those students went on to advance Scotism in their turn: some wrote books defending Scotism and explaining his work, people like Bonaventure Mac Aongusa who published a

² *Irish Literature in Latin 1550 - 1700*, in Moody, Martin & Byrne, *A New History of Ireland*, Vol III, Oxford 1976, p. 575.

³ Millet, *op.cit*

book in Paris in 1625 defending Scotus against his detractors⁴ and Anthony O’Hickey who published a book similarly defending him in Lyon in 1627⁵.

A large number of Mac Aingil’s past pupils went out to lecture in philosophy and theology throughout Europe and thus spread the gospel of Scotism in the same manner as their beloved master had, pupils like Thomas Fleming who was a lecturer in philosophy in Aachen and in Cologne, Patrick Fleming who began as a lecturer in St Isidore’s College in Rome, returned to Louvain, and then went on to Prague: Didacus Gray who was professor in Cologne; and the person who of them all was the most influential and ablest of them, Anthony O’Hickey was lecturer in Louvain, in Aachen, in Cologne and then eventually a professor in theology in St Isidore’s College in Rome.

Mac Aingil’s writings in theology surprise us in their extent – the amount that a simple man like Aodh, who had also such an amount of teaching and administration to do, was able to effect in the course of those relatively short years given to him in this world. In the short period between 1620 and 1625 he published the following basic works.

1. *Scoti commentarii quattuor Libros Sententiarum cum annotationibus marginalibus*, Antwerp (1620) – two large volumes in *folio* containing two appendices together with basic discussion of the work of Scotus; i) the biography of Scotus and ii) the work entitled *Rosarium Beatae Mariae Virginis*
2. *Appendix diffusa ad quaestionem primam distinctionis tertiae libri tertii positam in calce ejusdem libri, pro asserenda Immaculata Conceptione Virginis Mariae*, Antwerp (1620) – a work in which Aodh proves that Scotus was not the first person to advance the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, but that Scotus made a major contribution to the dissemination of the dogma.
3. *Apologia pro Johanne Duns Scoto, adversus Abraham Bzovium Ordinis Praedictorum*, Antwerp (1620)
4. *Tractatuli duo*: Paris (1622)
5. *Responsio ad quoddam scriptum anonimum*: Paris (1622)

⁴ *Apologia apologiae pro Johanne Duns Scoto*. It is not certain that Mac Aingil himself was not the author of this book. – see Fr Cathalodus Giblin *Hugh Mac Caughwell OFM and Scotism at St Anthony’s College Louvain in De doctrina Ioannis Duns Scotti*, Rome 1968.

⁵ *Nitela Franciscanae Religionis*.

A work entitled *Conclusiones ex universa Doctoris Subtilis theologia* was ready for publication by him early in the year 1612, when he went off to Rome to the General Chapter (Anthony O’Hickey was his companion on that occasion). But the supporters of Aquinas objected so strongly to the proposed publication that it was never published as far as we can ascertain.

In addition to all these, Aodh Mac Aingil edited ten of the works of **Scotus**: of the following list, the first was published in Paris in the year 1620, nos. 2 – 8 in Venice in the year 1625⁶, and nos. 9 – 10 in Cologne in the year 1635, when Mac Aingil was dead nine years.

1. *Quaestiones in libros Sententiarum*:
2. *De primo rerum omnium principio*:
3. *Quaestiones super libros Aristotelis De Anima*:
4. *Theoremata*:
5. *Collationes seu disputationes subtilissimae*:
6. *In XII libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*:
7. *Conclusiones metaphysicae*:
8. *Quaestiones subtilissimae in Metaphysicam Aristotelis*:
9. *Reportata Parisiensia*:
10. *Quaestiones quodlibetales*:

As we said above, Wadding published a new edition of the complete works of Scotus in Rome in the year 1639, drawing liberally from the work of Mac Aingil: in every volume of the twelve volumes of the *Opera Omnia Scoti*, Mac Aingil’s work appears. Mac Aingil never received proper recognition of his work during his lifetime (as often happens), though Wadding had the greatest respect for him as a scholar of Scotus.

Mac Aingil was not without his faults as an editor – the usual faults of his period. Critical analysis of texts did not come into being until long after Mac Aingil’s day, of course: accordingly he did not make a critical comparison of the various manuscripts like a modern editor would. He changes the texts frequently without giving any warning. He takes pieces out of the text and puts other in as and when he seen the necessity. Of course, he was no different than any of his contemporaries in all that: this is how Fr. Cathaldus Giblin describes the methods of editing texts at that time:

Editors of the time made changes and deletions in the original text without any scruple; whatever appeared to be erroneous was silently

⁶ One of them, I am unable to ascertain which, was published in Cologne!

corrected; there was little or no cognizance taken of other manuscripts of the same work. In making emendations, the editor was guided rather by his own fancy than by fidelity to the original manuscript.

But in spite of all the errors one could attribute to the work of Aodh Mac Aingil from the view-point of today, one cannot say that he was in any way lazy or careless in his work. Fr Giblin says that if anything he was too scrupulous in trying to explain to his readers the complexity of Scotus, and it is interesting to read how Fr Giblin describes one of his works:

He went to great pains, especially in his edition of *Opus Oxoniense*, to help the student to understand Scotus more easily. Much of what he did in this respect deserves the highest commendation, and must have caused him very many hours of exacting work. Before each *Quaestio* he cites the places in which other theologians treated of the same subject: at the beginning of the *Quaestiones* and often in the margins he referred the reader to those places in which Scotus dealt with a matter of a similar kind; he divided up the text and inserted summaries in italics of the matter immediately following; he had the scriptural references cited by Scotus printed in a type different from that in the text; he compiled exhaustive indexes of matters of note, of scriptural references, of the distinctions, and of the principal controversies treated of by Scotus.

1.. See *Links between Ireland and Shakespeare*, by
Sir D

Plunket Barton, Maunsell & Co, Dublin, 1919.

2.. *As you like it*, Act III Scene 2.

3.. See *An Leabhar Branach*, ed. Seán Mac Airt, Dublin 1949.

4.. Under the *brehon Cáin Ádhamhnáin* women, children and clerics had been considered outside the arena of military affairs from the 8th Century.

5.. See *Feagh McHugh O'Byrne*, Rathdrum Historical Society, 1997

6.. PRO London SP 12/233 No. 85, inclosure i - 3 October 1590: I have modernised the spelling.

7.. *The City of Downe from its Earliest Days*, Edward Parkinson, N/ards Chronicle re-print 1977, P.29

8.. Ibid.

9.. *Láimhscríbhinn Staire an Bhionadaigh*, ed. Réamonn Ó Muirí,
Éigse Oiriaila, 1994.

10.. Diocese of Down & Connor, Dublin, 1878 Vol I