

'New wine in old bottles': implementing Trent in early modern Ireland¹

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Aodh Mac Aingil, an Irish Franciscan scholar of St Anthony's College, Louvain, in the introduction to *Sgáthán Shacramuinte na hAithridhe* (1618), his work on the Sacrament of Penance, explained that his aim was not to present any new teaching to the reader but, instead, something that was already long-established and needed to be recalled:

I do not give you new teaching but (instead) the old tune of repentance that Patrick played and that came before to saints in our land with deed and word; this is (the tune) I play.²

The position taken by Mac Aingil was not unique. Those whose onerous task it was to implement the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–63) did not regard themselves as innovators. Rather, they adopted the role of defenders and promoters of a traditional set of beliefs that had become all but forgotten in popular consciousness or, alternatively, had suffered scathing attacks from reformist doctrines. The catechizing movement of Trent, according to John Bossy, 'did not require much new legislation but called for a decidedly new attitude to old legislation'.³ Whether the implementation of the reforms of the Council of Trent in late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe can be termed successful or not has been a point of debate among scholars for many years, with some emphasizing the persistence of popular religious mentalities in spite of the encroachment of Trent's moralistic and centralizing programme of orthodoxy, and others highlighting a renewed vibrancy at the popular level in the wake of the local adoption of its guidelines.⁴ In many ways, however, much of this debate arises from differing

¹ I wish to acknowledge the support of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, under whose Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme of 2003–5 I completed this article. ² Aodh Mac Aingil, *Sgáthán Shacramuinte na hAithridhe*, ed. Caimneach Ó Maonaigh (Dublin, 1952), p. 5 (my translation). ³ John Bossy, 'The Counter-Reformation and the people of Catholic Europe', *Past and Present*, 47 (1970), 53. ⁴ See, for example, Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire* (Paris, 1977); Bossy, 'The Counter-Reformation', 51–70; Roger Muchembled, *Popular culture and élite culture in France, 1400–1750* (Baton Rouge, 1985; French ed., 1978); Robert Briggs, *Communities of belief:*

answers to two key questions: what is meant by Tridentine reform and what did those responsible for the reform hope to achieve? There is little doubt that many of the aims of the reformers of the Catholic Church in seventeenth-century-Ireland were quite modest indeed. As a result, developments in the area of catechesis or popular practice that might appear relatively minor to later historians were, in fact, considered to be considerable successes by contemporaries. The main concern of many Catholic reformers revolved around the return of their flocks to sacramental practice first and to an understanding of the sacraments later. The reasons behind the modest expectations of those who wished to implement reform, moreover, cannot merely be attributed to the difficult circumstances in which the seventeenth-century Catholic Church in Ireland found itself. A convincing argument can be made that Catholic reformers in the seventeenth century were not merely being expedient when promoting a brand of religion that had many similarities with that which preceded it but that, instead, they themselves were convinced of its merit. The particular kind of Tridentine reform that was implemented in Ireland, which exhibited a clergy that continued to be more than a little smitten with medieval religion, is examined here under three headings: concessions, continuities and contradictions.

CONCESSIONS

In a study of the career of the nuncio to the confederate Catholics of Ireland, GianBattista Rinuccini, from 1645 to 1649 and its significance for the Catholic Reformation in Ireland, Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin argues that the impact of Trent in seventeenth-century Ireland has been underestimated, yet tempers his conclusions by clarifying what its contemporary architects viewed as 'success', demonstrating that their expectations were evidently considerably lower than those of some modern historians.⁵ This is an important observation. While Ó hAnnracháin mentions some noteworthy achievements such as the successful establishment of episcopal organization,⁶ the first hierarchy

cultural and social tensions in early modern France (Oxford, 1989); Marc Forster, *The Counter-Reformation in the villages: religion and reform in the bishopric of Speyer, 1560–1720* (Ithaca, 1992); idem, *Catholic revival in the age of the Baroque: religious identity in southwest Germany 1550–1750* (Cambridge, 2001); Trevor Johnson, 'The recatholicisation of the Upper Palatinate, 1621–circa 1700' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1991); Philip Soergel, *Wondrous in his saints: Counter-Reformation propaganda in Bavaria* (Berkeley, 1993); David Gentilcore, "'Adapt yourselves to the peoples' capabilities": missionary strategies, methods and impact in the Kingdom of Naples, 1600–1800', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 45 (1994), 269–96; Salvador Ryan, 'Popular religion in Gaelic Ireland, 1445–1645', 2 vols (PhD, NUIM, 2002). ⁵ Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Reformation in Ireland: the mission of Rinuccini, 1645–1649* (Oxford, 2002), pp 9–10. ⁶ See D.F. Cregan, 'The social and cultural background of a Counter-Reformation episcopate,

in Europe that was wholly seminary-trained, he also refers to what may first appear as more mundane triumphs, such as are found in the observations of Dionysio Massari, future secretary of Propaganda Fide, while visiting the diocese of Ardfert in 1645: 'It is certainly an astonishing thing [...] I saw the knowledge of the holy Catholic faith flourish so much that there was not a man or woman or any little boy who could not recite the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and the Precepts of the Holy Church'.⁷ It is important to note that this record, preserved in a letter to Rinuccini's brother in Florence, comprises the view of an individual thoroughly immersed in the Tridentine enterprise. He professes astonishment at the level of popular knowledge of the Church's most basic prayers, citing this as evidence of the 'flourishing' of the faith.

There may appear to be nothing particularly remarkable about this discovery; yet, knowledge of these fundamentals of the faith was viewed as crucial by seventeenth-century Catholic reformers simply because these elements provided the key required for admission to the sacraments. The 1614 synod of Dublin, for instance, forbade entrance to confession without knowledge of them and the 1614 synod of Armagh, the 1624 synod of Kilkenny and 1631 synod of Tuam followed suit, with some minor additions.⁸ This, incidentally, was not a wholly new development. The Sarum liturgy, which was in regular use in Ireland until the seventeenth century, stipulated that during the baptismal rite, godparents were required to stand and pray, without assistance, the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and Creed, to ensure that they were capable of passing on the faith to their charges.⁹ Because this rule was probably rarely, if ever, observed, on account of the popular practice of baptizing children at home, often without the aid of a priest, reformers in the Tridentine mould evidently thought that there was a need for its reinforcement.¹⁰

Although the early-seventeenth-century Irish synods, in the spirit of the Council of Trent, placed emphasis on the importance of catechesis, requesting that priests possess a catechism text and that they explain some point of doctrine on Sundays and feast days while also attending to the instruction of children by question and answer format, their expectations were often quite modest.¹¹ It appears that those responsible for implementing the decrees of Trent in Ireland were willing to cut their cloth according to their (or at least the people's) measure. Often what was considered to be the ideal was sacrificed on the altar of practicality. This approach was not uncommon among reformers elsewhere. Indeed, in 1596, the Jesuit Robert Persons, while laying down on paper a blueprint for the conversion of

1618-60' in Art Cosgrove & Donal MacCartney (eds), *Studies in Irish history presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin, 1979), pp 85-117. ⁷ Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Reformation*, p. 63. ⁸ Alison Forrestal, *Catholic synods in Ireland, 1600-1690* (Dublin, 1998), p. 68. ⁹ E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the baptismal liturgy* (London, 1970), p. 251. ¹⁰ For baptismal practices in late medieval Ireland see Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 1, pp 295-311. ¹¹ Forrestal, *Catholic synods*, pp 63-70.

England, stated that by way of general concession to a corrupt age, the Council Fathers had been obliged to compromise and omit many points of rigour necessary to purge Christianity of the creeping malaise by which it had been overtaken.¹² The attitude of 'why feed meat to babies who are only capable of ingesting milk?' had a role to play here.

The fact that many advocates of the Tridentine reform were happy to simultaneously promote pre-Reformation devotion betrays an added motivation. The Catholic programme for religious reformation, which began at Trent, can be said to have had two, sometimes conflicting, aims. The first was to defend and re-affirm what was under attack by Protestant reformers of various hues (this might be properly termed the 'Counter-Reformation') and the second was to get its own house in order (what might be termed the 'Catholic Reformation'). Sometimes the reaffirmation (and indeed reinvention) of contested subjects such as the Sacrament of Penance, the role of relics and the veneration of Mary and the saints, overshadowed efforts to bring these into line with what might be considered appropriate by a reforming council. More crucially, perhaps, it must be remembered that many of the proponents of Tridentine reform, educated on the Continent, had themselves been raised in a particular devotional environment that was steeped in the world of medieval piety. It was not uncommon to find, therefore, that behind many a Tridentine reformer was a traditionalist heart.

Late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Ireland presented a number of problems for those entrusted with the implementation of church reform. Chief among these was the lack of basic catechetical knowledge among people living in areas deprived of suitably qualified clergy for many years. Numerous examples of the poor state of Christian doctrine are documented in the records of the early-seventeenth-century Jesuit mission. Thomas Mulkerrin, a Galway Jesuit travelling in Ireland in 1610, found people who knew nothing about the Holy Trinity, recounting that in some places there had not been a sermon preached for over fifty years.¹³ The unwillingness of priests to provide the Sacrament of Penance to their people, according to Mulkerrin's account, went hand in hand with a failure to preach and instruct. Consequently, the seventeenth-century synods went to great lengths to copper-fasten the connection between instruction and Confession. However, what was expected of people varied according to their capabilities and the opportunity for instruction available to their catechists. This is particularly evident in the catechism of the Irish Franciscan, Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa, published at Antwerp in 1611 and reprinted at Louvain in 1614, which was designed to be accessed at different levels:

¹² Alexandra Walsham, 'Translating Trent? English Catholicism and the Counter-reformation: some reflections on recent research', *Historical Research*, 78:201 (August, 2005), 288-310. ¹³ Fergus O'Donoghue, 'The Jesuit mission in Ireland, 1598-1651' (PhD, Catholic University of America, 1982), p. 82.

It is enquired here whether every Christian is obliged under pain of their salvation to believe all these things. The answer is that every learned person and every person who has the responsibility of catechizing the people is obliged to believe all the articles of the Creed clearly and have knowledge of them. The ignorant, however, who had a barbarous upbringing and did not hear discussion of the articles of the faith often are not obliged under pain of their salvation to have knowledge of them all, but they are obliged to clearly believe the most important articles which they have most frequently heard discussion of, that is, to believe that there is only one God, that there are three persons in the Trinity, that Christ came in a human body, that He suffered the Passion etc. They are obliged moreover to be ready to believe all the things that the Church considers fitting to believe.¹⁴

Allowance for 'the ignorant' and 'those who had a barbarous upbringing', who were not obliged to learn all the articles of the faith, indicates a certain resignation to the realities of seventeenth-century Ireland. Willingness to believe 'all the things that the Church considers fitting to believe' was considered to be of more immediate importance than actually 'knowing' them. In an age of confessionalization, it was considered vital that Irish Catholics were ready to profess obedience to the teaching authority of a Church whose doctrines they may never have had the opportunity to properly learn. To declare oneself a 'believer of what the Church believes' was the first step of what was seen as a long process.

The exhortation to 'believe as the Church believes', of course, was not new. In a fifteenth-century English manual based on John Pecham's tract on the instruction of the laity entitled *Ignorantia Sacerdotum*, promulgated in 1281, we find a statement on the teaching of the mystery of the Holy Trinity which was surely similarly applied in Ireland: 'Ther shal no creature discusse or studie hou that God may be thre and oon but fully bileeue as al Hooli Chirche bileeueeth'.¹⁵ The emphasis here was on inculcating people with a kind of faith that was in no hurry to understand. In late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Ireland, as elsewhere, this approach took on a new importance. At a time when the Catholic laity was perceived to be in danger of succumbing to the influence of reformist doctrines it was deemed safer that people profess allegiance to their Church rather than attempt to probe the rationale behind

¹⁴ Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa, *An Teagasg Críosaíde*, ed. Anselm Ó Fachtna (Dublin, 1976), p. 32 (my translation). For discussion of this text see Salvador Ryan, 'Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa's *An Teagasg Críosaíde*: a reassessment of its audience and use', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 58 (2004), 259–67. ¹⁵ Bodleian Library Ms. Eng. Th. c 57. See Phyllis Hodgson, 'Ignorantia Sacerdotum: a fifteenth-century discourse on the Lambeth constitutions', *Review of English Studies*, 24:93 (Jan. 1948), 6.

its teachings.¹⁶ The Irish Franciscan friar, Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire, whose devotional work *Desiderius*, published at Louvain in 1616, included a long insertion on matters of faith and authority in early-seventeenth-century Ireland, advised his audience to avoid disputation with heretics, especially when they used the authority of Scripture in their arguments:

Let nothing that you hear lead you to the slightest doubt regarding the articles of your faith; and if an angel were to come from Heaven to preach against them (as Paul says), dismiss his sermon.¹⁷

Five synods between 1614 and 1632 also explicitly forbade disputes with heretics and the reading of heretical material.¹⁸

In cases like these, it was deemed far better that Catholics unsure of their catechism should express themselves like Wexford boatman, Matthew Lamport, who, when questioned in the wake of the Baltinglass rising of 1580, replied to his inquisitors: 'I do not know how to debate these things with you. I only know that I am a Catholic and that I believe in the faith of my holy mother, the Catholic Church.'¹⁹ In a sense, while the general absence of a literate and catechized laity presented a challenge to the exponents of Tridentine reform, paradoxically, it also shielded many from exposure to the arguments of reformers. Never was 'a little knowledge' considered a more 'dangerous thing' by Tridentine advocates than in the heady days of post-Reformation Europe. Ó hAnnracháin illustrates this view well when he remarks that, in contemporary Catholic terms, 'the peasant who could just about mumble his *Credo*, *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster* and who made his Easter confession and communion was still safer from hellfire than a bishop of the Church of England'.²⁰ The promotion of a fideistic approach to basic doctrine among the unlearned is probably best exemplified in the circular argument provided by Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa in his *An Teagasg Críosaíde* for the existence of only one God:

There are not three gods but one God in three persons. Therefore, it is stated in the Creed: 'I believe in God', for, if there were more than one God, it would be stated 'I believe in the gods.'²¹

¹⁶ See, for instance, the declaration of permission for the printing of *An Teagasg Críosaíde* dated 20 June 1611: Brendan Jennings & Cathaldus Giblin (eds), *Louvain papers, 1606–1827* (Dublin, 1968), pp 32–3; also Ryan, 'Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa's *An Teagasg Críosaíde*', p. 263. ¹⁷ Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire, *Desiderius: otherwise called Sgáthán an Chrábhaidh*, ed. T.F. O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1975), p. 155 (my translation). ¹⁸ Forrestal, *Catholic synods*, p. 41. ¹⁹ Raymond Gillespie, *Devoted people: belief and religion in early modern Ireland* (Manchester, 1997), p. 26. ²⁰ Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Reformation*, pp 65–6. ²¹ Ó hEoghusa, *An Teagasg Críosaíde*, p. 12 (my translation).

Clearly, therefore, there was more to the policy of generally teaching only the most basic requirements than mere concession to the practical realities of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Ireland.

That very simple programmes of belief were encouraged and, indeed, received, is evidenced by a catechetical formula found in a poem by Diarmuid Mac an Bhaird (*fl.* 1600), entitled *Fada atá tú i n-aghaidh mh'anma*: 'Believe sincerely that God was born and that he went under the tomb; to swear by the blood of Mary's Son is to wound him.'²² In this short formula, the Incarnation, Passion and Death of Christ and an exhortation to right moral living, which eschews the practice of swearing, are all contained. Bardic poetry was frequently used as a vehicle for catechesis as early as the fifteenth century.²³ The importance of including these elements in a fundamental programme of reform is illustrated by their frequent appearance elsewhere. Jesuit accounts of ministry in sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Ireland refer many times to efforts directed towards dissuading the Irish from swearing.²⁴ Diarmuid Mac an Bhaird's admonition of those who swore by the blood of Christ is supported by an explicit reference to this practice by Aodh Mac Aingil in his 1618 tract on the Sacrament of Penance, when he asks, as part of an examination of conscience, 'Did you take the blood or the limbs of God [in vain], whether sincerely or not?'²⁵

Mac an Bhaird's inclusion of the Incarnation and Passion and Death of Christ in his catechetical formula, apart from reflecting attention to the most central doctrines of the faith, also adhered to the requirements of the synods of Dublin and Armagh (1614) laid down for those who wished to be admitted to the Sacrament of Penance.²⁶ These also turn up as the most important elements of belief, which are required of learned and unlearned alike, in Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa's summary of the articles of the Creed in his 1611 catechism.²⁷ The link between the elements to be known by all, prescribed by Mac an Bhaird, Ó hEoghusa and others, and the requirements for admission to the Sacrament of Penance set by the synods, suggests that the practical implementation of Trent in Ireland aimed, in the short term, not so much at achieving a catechized laity as a sacramentalized one. Concessions made in order that Irish Catholics might fulfil their sacramental obligations included one by Pope Paul V in 1607 that made provision for paschal reception of the Eucharist any time between Ash Wednesday and Ascension Thursday rather than within the standard two-week period on account of the scarcity of clergy and the persecution under which the Irish lived.²⁸

²² Lambert McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim dána*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1939-40), p. 56, v. 24.

²³ See Salvador Ryan, *Popular religion in Gaelic Ireland, c.1450-c.1650* (forthcoming).

²⁴ For a more detailed discussion of swearing, see Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 2, pp. 210-14.

²⁵ Mac Aingil, *Sgathán*, p. 100 (my translation). ²⁶ Forrestal, *Catholic synods*, p. 68. ²⁷ Ó hEoghusa, *An Teagasg Críostaidhe*, p. 32. ²⁸ P.F. Moran (ed.), *History of the Catholic archbishops of Dublin since the Reformation* (Dublin, 1864), p. 270.

The relationship between catechesis and reception of the sacraments in the Tridentine programme of reform was geared towards providing the laity with a gateway to Penance and the Eucharist. Adequate numbers of trained personnel were simply not available for anything more ambitious. While visiting Rome in 1610, the Jesuit, Walter Wale, renowned as a preacher in south Tipperary, sought advice regarding certain aspects of church practice in circumstances that were peculiarly Irish. One of the concessions alluded to by four theologians of the Roman college was that general absolution could be administered if the number of people seeking confession at any one time was impossible to accommodate.²⁹ In cases such as these, it is to be presumed that many who had not even a grasp of the most basic essentials of the faith were re-admitted to the sacraments. It may be surmised that this option was employed from time to time. If the reports of Jesuits Nicholas Leynich and Andrew Mulrone, who worked in Munster in 1605, are anything to go by, there was certainly a case to be made for the use of general absolution. On one occasion, they informed their superior, Christopher Holywood, that they heard so many confessions that 'they could hardly breathe'.³⁰

Some of the concessions that were made in an effort to speedily make the sacraments available to people and to instruct seem, at first, to contravene rather than support the ideals of the Council of Trent. For instance, as noted by Alexandra Walsham, the official attitude of Trent to household religion was one of suspicion, such gatherings being dismissed as 'seedbeds of subversion' and in which the role of private chaplain was viewed as compromising a clergyman's independence; yet it is precisely in communities such as these, located in the households of learned recusants in Ireland and England, that the greatest opportunities lay for the implementation of Tridentine ideals such as frequent reception of the sacraments and reception of satisfactory catechesis.³¹ These recusant communities became almost quasi-parochial in character and were supported rather than suppressed by the synods of Dublin in 1614 and Tuam in 1631, which encouraged house catechesis when priests were obliged to stay the night.³² Although the ideal location for the celebration of the Eucharist, according to Trent, was a church building situated within a well-organized parochial and diocesan administration, this was seldom practically attainable in early-seventeenth-century Ireland. The synod of Dublin in 1614, therefore, allowed for the celebration of mass in profane places because of 'the calamity of the times'.³³ Walsham describes how the casuistry studied by English clerical students on the Continent allowed for a number of deviations from prescribed practice. In recognition of the extraordinary conditions with which missionaries were faced, these deviations included omitting to recite the Divine Office, the lack of proper sacred

²⁹ O'Donoghue, 'The Jesuit mission in Ireland', p. 86. ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40. ³¹ Walsham, 'Translating Trent'. ³² Forrestal, *Catholic synods*, p. 64. ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

vestments, recourse to medieval liturgical books rather than the revised Roman breviary and missal and the celebration of mass on unconsecrated portable altars.³⁴ Similar allowances were made for the Irish situation. The archbishop of Cashel, David Kearney, tells of administering the sacrament of Confirmation to at least ten thousand people in the open fields in 1609.³⁵ Aodh Mac Aingil records how sacramental administration was common in the woods, mountains and private houses in the dioceses of Armagh, Kilmore, Tuam, Ossory, Killaloe, Clonfert, Ardfert and Aghadoe and Cashel.³⁶ Many tower houses had private chapels and it is likely that the sacraments were administered in these locations also. Furthermore, the synod of Armagh in 1614 allowed for ceremonies in the diocese to continue using aspects of the Sarum rite rather than the revised liturgy, owing to their local persistence.³⁷ In 1617, faculties were granted to Ross MacGeoghegan the superior of the Dominican order in Ireland, which included the following:

[...] to substitute the rosary, other prayers or the psalms known by heart in those circumstances where it would not be possible to carry the breviary or perilous to recite the divine office.³⁸

Expediency clearly prompted other allowances such as the employment of regular clergy to aid parish priests and give spiritual instruction owing to the secular clergy's lack of expertise, advocated by both the synods of Dublin in 1614 and Armagh in 1618.³⁹ Aodh Mac Aingil went one step further in his tract on penance when he advised his audience that if educated and skilled spiritual directors could not be found it was far better to follow the advice of a good layperson than an ignorant clergyman.⁴⁰ The employment of the laity as catechists through the establishment of sodalities and the provision of educated individuals with catechetical texts highlights not only the dire shortage of suitably qualified clergy but also what could actually be achieved in their absence. The practice of pragmatic Tridentine clergy prescribing the teaching of catechism to educated penitents, both men and women, in seventeenth-century Ireland, is well attested as is the role printed texts played in the work of Catholic reform.⁴¹

34 Walsham, 'Translating Trent'. See also *Elizabethan casuistry*, ed. P.J. Holmes, Catholic Record Society, 67 (London, 1981). 35 Moran, *History of the Catholic archbishops*, p. 236. 36 Forrester, *Catholic synods*, p. 145. 37 *Ibid.*, p. 58. 38 T.S. Flynn, *The Irish Dominicans 1536-1641* (Dublin, 1993), p. 140. 39 Forrester, *Catholic synods*, p. 52. 40 Mac Aingil, *Sgathán*, p. 70. 41 See Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 1, pp 266-7; Alexandra Walsham, "'Domme preachers?'" Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the culture of print', *Past and Present*, 168 (Aug. 2000), 72-123.

CONTINUITIES

The implementation of Tridentine legislation did not necessarily involve a break with pre-Reformation ideas and practice. There are many reasons why this was so. Firstly, the reactionary element within the Tridentine movement (the 'Counter-Reformation') was primarily concerned with defending and, therefore, highlighting, the parts of medieval Catholicism that were most under attack. Filippo Sega, bishop of the diocese of Piacenza in northern Italy (1587-96), who enjoyed a successful diplomatic career outside Italy and was instrumental in formulating the constitutions of the diocesan synod of 1589, insisted that preachers go out of their way to highlight aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice that were disputed by Protestants, including such matters as Purgatory and the cult of the saints (including their images and relics).⁴² Secondly, many of the reforms of Trent had been attempted in a more modest and local fashion previously and although their implementation was now approached in a far more systematic way, they were not wholly unfamiliar. Thirdly, one of the most successful achievements of the Tridentine enterprise was to present older-style devotions in new packaging, with a greater emphasis on clerical control. Linked to this, of course, was the lingering fondness that many Catholic reformers held for the devotional world of their youth, which would not dissipate easily.

The approach advocated by Sega and others is to be clearly found in the Gaelic Irish catechisms and other devotional tracts that emerged from St Anthony's College, Louvain (and similarly in their prototype, the *Roman Catechism*), most notably in the significant importance given to the question of whether it is right to honour statues of the Virgin and the saints and the subsequent clarification that statues are honoured as representations of a heavenly figure and not as the heavenly figure itself.⁴³ It is also to be found in the treatment of subjects such as indulgences, the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist and the emphasis given to the importance of tradition as the comrade of scripture and, likewise, work as the comrade of faith. The catechism, then, equipped the pupil not only with the fundamentals of the faith, but also with arguments against the most common objections likely to be raised by a would-be Protestant reformer. Generally, the 'pupils' addressed were priests or educated lay people who were expected to pass on such teachings in simpler form. The unlearned, as noted above, were dissuaded from entering into disputation with reformers. When discussing the first of

42 Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, sanctity and history in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the preservation of the particular* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 77. Patrick Corish, commenting on Catholic identity in early-seventeenth-century Ireland, notes that 'to be a Catholic now was to know why one was not a Protestant' (*The Irish Catholic experience: a historical survey* (Dublin, 1985), p. 105). 43 See Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 2, pp 48-9.

the Ten Commandments, Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa explained that this did not forbid the honour given to saints and angels and their images, contending that their veneration had always been approved in the tradition of the Church, in Scripture and by the Councils and Fathers of the Church.⁴⁴ Traditional ways of expressing divine mysteries were rarely jettisoned by the compilers of local Tridentine catechisms. The image of a sunbeam passing through glass, for instance, which was commonly used from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries to convey the concept of Christ passing into Mary's womb at the Incarnation, appears in both Ó hEoghusa's catechism and the *Catechismus* of Cashel diocesan priest, Theobald Stapleton, compiled in 1639.⁴⁵

Instructions on how one should prepare for and confess sin during the Sacrament of Penance were common in Tridentine texts. Ó hEoghusa's catechism recommended his audience to relate their sins to the priest with shame and contrition, without adding or deducting anything from them, without lying or blaming anyone else for them, without offering any excuse or withholding any sin out of shame and without relating the sins of another person.⁴⁶ Theobald Stapleton's 1639 catechism likewise advocated that the confession of sins should be in full, without hiding any, and without proffering any excuse or wandering from the subject matter.⁴⁷ Geoffrey Keating's *Tri bior-ghaoithe an bháis* contains similar advice, identifying three types of people who confess neglectfully: those who hide their own sins and reveal the sins of others, those who speak only of their own holiness and innocence and the penitents who relate details that have no relevance to the subject matter of the confession itself.⁴⁸ Aodh Mac Aingil complains of similar behaviour, remarking that people often seem more interested in telling other people's sins, recounting their own good deeds or indeed spending time storytelling without any regard for details relevant to the subject.⁴⁹

Such recommendations cannot be labelled exclusively Tridentine. They feature in well-known works such as the *Confessionale-Defecerunt* of Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459) where 'sixteen conditions for a good confession' were sometimes listed. These usually followed something akin to the following formula: 'let the confession be simple, humble, pure, faithful, and frequent, unadorned, discreet, willing, ashamed, whole, secret, tearful, prompt, strong and reproachful and showing willingness to obey'.⁵⁰ Two

44 Ó hEoghusa, *An Teagas Críosaíde*, p. 56. 45 Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 2, pp 42–3, 66; for a study of this motif, see Andrew Breeze, 'The Blessed Virgin and the sunbeam through glass', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 19–29. 46 Ó hEoghusa, *An Teagas Críosaíde*, pp 84–5. 47 *The 'Catechismus' of Theobald Stapleton*, ed. J.F. O'Doherty (Dublin, 1945), p. 117. 48 Geoffrey Keating, *Tri bior-ghaoithe an bháis*, ed. Osborn Bergin (Dublin, 1931), pp 281–3. 49 Mac Aingil, *Sgáthán*, p. 61. Such an approach to confession during the late medieval period is well documented: see John Bossy, 'The social history of confession in the age of Reformation', *TRHS*, 25 (1975), 22–4. 50 T.N. Tentler, *Sin and confession on the eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977), pp 106–7.

fifteenth-century Irish Franciscan manuscripts from houses in Cork and Clare contain the list, which suggests that it was used widely as a practical tool for instructing penitents.⁵¹ It also appears in a book of piety compiled for Donegal noblewoman, Máire Ní Mháille, in 1513. Irish versions of Antoninus' list contain a fuller commentary, in which the penitent was urged to be simple and humble in the presentation of his sins, without holding any sin back from the priest. He was also advised not to include a list of his good deeds in the confession in an attempt to shift the focus from his misdemeanours. Furthermore, he was to have trust that his sins would be forgiven, expressing confidence in the mercy of God.⁵² Tracts such as these demonstrate that efforts to reform the practice of confessing sin long predated the Council of Trent and that many of the earlier prescriptions were adopted and continued to be promoted in its aftermath. Other innovations, such as the confession box, had little relevance in the Irish situation. The manner in which Aodh Mac Aingil describes how a person should approach the priest's chair, with reverence and honour, and without looking from side to side, suggests that the sacrament he envisaged more closely resembled pre-Reformation practice than its Tridentine successor.⁵³ Likewise, John Bossy's argument that the Ten Commandments formula largely replaced the earlier Seven Deadly Sins as the preferred method of examining one's conscience does not hold true in post-conciliar Irish catechetical literature.⁵⁴

In many respects, the rehabilitation and reinvention of sacramentals by Tridentine clergy more closely indicates continuity than reform. While certain abuses of relics and images were clearly identified and condemned by the architects of reform, public enthusiasm for such objects was certainly recognized and harnessed. A number of reports from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries attest to the fervour with which sacramentals were worn. In 1579 the Protestant bishop of Waterford, Marmaduke Middleton, complained of people gathering at street corners and wearing rosary beads in public.⁵⁵ The Spanish captain, Francisco de Cuellar, who was shipwrecked off the Irish coast in 1588 describes being robbed by a seventy-year-old 'savage' and his young female 'savage' companion, who took some relics of great value from him, which the female hung around her neck, indicating that she wanted to keep them and explaining that she was a Christian.⁵⁶ Luke Gernon,

51 Gérard Dottin, 'Notice du manuscrit irlandais de la bibliothèque de Rennes', *Revue Celtique*, 15 (1894), 79–91; C.N. Ó Clabaigh, *The Franciscans in Ireland, 1400–1534* (Dublin, 2002), pp 122–3. 52 Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 1, p. 328. 53 Mac Aingil, *Sgáthán*, p. 105. 54 John Bossy, 'Moral arithmetic: seven sins into ten commandments' in Edmund Leites (ed.), *Conscience and casuistry in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1988), 214–34; Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 1, pp 320–7. 55 Diarmuid Ó Laoghaire, 'An aspect of Irish spirituality – the Rosary' *Doctrine and Life*, 5 (May/June, 1982), 277–86, at 280. 56 Francisco de Cuellar, 'Letter from one who sailed with the Spanish Armada and tells the story of the enterprise of England' (prepared by D.W. Cruickshank & Patrick Gallagher) in

appointee to the office of Second Justice of the province of Munster in 1619, describes the widespread practice among women in the Thomond region of wearing crucifixes.⁵⁷

The value placed on the wearing of sacramentals was not lost on Jesuit missionaries. A letter written by one Jesuit, Andrew Leynich to his superior, Claudio Aquaviva, included a request for beads, medals and relics, which he described as being 'greatly revered by the people'.⁵⁸ Although abuses, such as the carrying of relics by those collecting alms, were condemned by the synod of Armagh in 1614, large quantities of 'approved' sacramentals were smuggled into Ireland and England for controlled use among the faithful.⁵⁹ The most favoured sacramental of the Jesuits was undoubtedly the *agnus dei*, a wax medallion bearing a picture of the Lamb of God. In many respects, 'official' use of these objects differed little from how similar items were employed by the laity throughout the medieval period. In a letter from Henry Fitzsimon to General Aquaviva, the Irish Jesuit rejoices in another success story attributed to the use of the *Agnus Dei*:

How many and how great miracles are worked by Agnus Deis can hardly be fully told. In the beginning of this Lent an elderly lady was, for three days, at death's door, deprived of voice and memory. An Agnus Dei was hung round her neck and that instant she recovered her voice and memory, and the following day she was perfectly cured. It was refreshing to see the confusion of her heirs who, having prematurely taken away her goods, were forced to bring them back.⁶⁰

While the synods of Dublin and Armagh prohibited lay exorcisms with relics dipped in water, this did not discourage Jesuits such as Thomas Mulkerrin and Andrew Mulronev from happily reporting from Connacht in 1614 that a former student of the Jesuits in Douai had succeeded in exorcizing a possessed lady with the aid of a relic.⁶¹ In another case, a statue of St Ignatius was held over a woman in labour and an exorcism performed in Spanish, the language the demon spoke.⁶² The replacement of 'dubious' sacramentals by those of 'official' status, which often differed little in their devotional appeal and use, is examined more fully elsewhere.⁶³ It might be

Patrick Gallagher & D.W. Cruickshank (eds), *God's obvious design: papers for the Spanish Armada symposium, Sligo, 1988* (London, 1990), pp 232-3. ⁵⁷ *Illustrations of Irish history and topography mainly of the seventeenth century*, ed. Caesar Litton Falkiner (London, 1904), p. 321. ⁵⁸ J.J. Corboy, 'The Jesuit mission to Ireland, 1596-1626' (MA, UCD, 1941), p. 163. ⁵⁹ Forrester, *Catholic synods*, p. 41. ⁶⁰ Edmund Hogan (ed.), *Distinguished Irishmen of the sixteenth century* (London, 1894), p. 262. ⁶¹ O'Donoghue, 'The Jesuit mission in Ireland', p. 81. ⁶² *Ibid.* See also Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 2, pp 235-7. ⁶³ Trevor Johnson, 'Blood, tears and Xavier-water: Jesuit missionaries and popular religion in the 18th century Upper Palatinate' in Bob Scribner & Trevor Johnson (eds), *Popular religion in Germany and Central Europe, 1400-1800* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp 183-202.

claimed (borrowing a term used by the reformed archbishop of Dublin, Adam Loftus, to describe beneficed clergy who clung to old liturgical practice) that much of the Tridentine programme implemented by Irish clergy 'on the ground' constituted no more than 'new wine in old bottles'.⁶⁴

Many of the continuities with 'old religion', however, cannot simply be attributed to pragmatism, difficult circumstances or even defence of what was under attack. It should not be forgotten that the most erudite advocates of Trent also had their favourite devotions and practices, many of which flourished in the medieval period. In 1599, one such figure, the learned Scots Jesuit, James Gordon Huntley, who was a philosopher and theologian of note, in addition to being a Hebrew scholar, arrived in Ireland as apostolic nuncio. On arrival, he went on pilgrimage to the tomb of St Patrick in Down and took away some earth from the grave, which he found to have miraculous effects.⁶⁵ Although the cult of the saints and the composition of their lives had come under particular scrutiny from the late sixteenth century onwards, the most ardent of Tridentine proponents continued to perceive saints as worldly avengers of grievance. One Irish Jesuit was quite happy to tell the tale of the Protestant carpenter who chose to work on the feast of St Catherine whereupon he cut off his foot with an axe and died soon after.⁶⁶ Sometimes both new elements and revised and updated older elements appear in early modern saints' lives. A good example is the life of St Senan compiled by French hagiographer, Albert le Grand, in 1629. While Senan is portrayed as a good and conscientious Tridentine cleric, he also betrays a darker side when he appears before a would-be Protestant reformer and beats him to a pulp with his crosier.⁶⁷ Traditional perceptions, it seems, did not disappear overnight.

CONTRADICTIONS

Perhaps 'contradiction' is too strong a term to describe the variety of approaches adopted by those interested in implementing Catholic reform. However, there is little doubt that individuals and groups disagreed on just what was the best way forward for the reform of the Irish Church in the early seventeenth century. The Irish language catechisms of Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire (1593) and Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa (1611 and 1614), who

⁶⁴ For the context of Loftus' quote, see E.P. Shirley, *Original letters and papers illustrative of the history of the church of Ireland during the reigns of Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth* (London, 1851), p. 275. ⁶⁵ Hogan, *Distinguished Irishmen*, pp 326-7. ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 481. ⁶⁷ Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 2, pp 190-1. For reconstructed saints' lives see Salvador Ryan, 'Steadfast saints or malleable models: seventeenth-century Irish hagiography revisited', *Catholic Historical Review*, 91:2 (April, 2005), 251-78.

would later become confreres, diverged on what was required of their recipients. Ó Maolchonaire takes a more strict line than Ó hEoghusa, stating that unless one understands all that is contained therein, one cannot fulfil its requirements. The latter allows for 'believing as the Church believes' as the most basic level. Theobald Stapleton explicitly rejects this lowering of the standard in his 1639 catechism when he states that it is not enough to 'believe as the Church believes'.⁶⁸ However, in another area, that of the Sacrament of Penance, Ó hEoghusa takes a tougher line than the 1614 synod of Armagh. This synod allowed for attrition (a penitent's fear of going to hell) as sufficient motive to acquire absolution whereas Ó hEoghusa regarded this as deficient, stating that contrition (sorrow for having offended God) was also necessary.⁶⁹ Later, divergence appears between Ó hEoghusa and Theobald Stapleton on the question of when Christ would return in judgment. While the Franciscan uses the medieval 'fifteen signs before judgment' formula as a hint to when this might occur, the secular clergyman, Stapleton, opts for the more biblically based answer of 'no one knows' (Matthew 24:36).⁷⁰ When, in 1626, the office of Propaganda Fide criticized the acceptance of pigs, sheep and lambs by religious orders in Ireland, which were used to fund the continental Irish colleges, the Franciscan friar Aodh Mac Aingil rushed to the defence of the Irish practice. The holding of lavish celebrations in religious houses on feast days was also criticized by both Propaganda Fide and the 1618 synod of Kilkenny. Again, however, Mac Aingil defended the custom as causing no harm.⁷¹

Although those who worked to implement Tridentine reform in Ireland allowed for a certain degree of continuity with the past, they also attempted to introduce new approaches. In his tract on penance, Aodh Mac Aingil argued that tears were not a prerequisite for true contrition, a reminder that significantly departed from the general thrust of most exempla used by medieval preachers, which frequently related how the effects of sin melted away at the first teardrops of the penitent.⁷² Mac Aingil also attempted to put sacramentals in their proper context by asking whether it was better to possess an indulgenced medal, cross or crucifix or to be part of a spiritual confraternity. He opts decisively for the latter. Part of the ministry of the Capuchin Order in Ireland from 1615 onwards was teaching the correct use of medals and relics and the obtaining of indulgences and frequent communion.⁷³ Sacramentals without the sacraments and cures without catechesis were simply not deemed good enough anymore.

Understanding exactly what is meant by such an elusive term as 'Tridentine reform' is far from straightforward. 'Trent' was, in fact, a multi-

68 Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 2, pp 31, 60. 69 Ibid., pp 56-7; also Forrestal, *Catholic synods*, p. 66. 70 Ryan, 'Popular religion', vol. 2, p. 69. 71 Ibid., pp 243-4. 72 Ibid., p. 142. 73 Ibid., pp 234-5.

faceted phenomenon with frequently conflicting ideals. It represented a vigorous re-affirmation of what had gone before while at the same time criticizing many aspects of that same tradition. It might be claimed that the movement often had to straddle the divide between two worlds. However, to argue for the existence of two distinct and neatly divided religious worlds, one predating the Council and the other following it, would be to forget that human beings do not come in neat categories. The earliest exponents of the Council of Trent in Ireland were complex individuals with a variety of backgrounds – familial, educational and professional – who brought their own ideas, hopes and prejudices to the task. What many of these reformers hoped to achieve was quite modest, as is evident from the tenor of their reports of success. In assessing the impact of Trent on seventeenth-century-Ireland, this element of the enterprise – the realistic expectations of its architects – must, above all else, be kept in mind.