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John Ireland and the Transformation of Scotist Theology

Simon J. G. Burton

Abstract

John Ireland was the most distinguished Scottish theologian of the fifteenth century. Significantly, his own theology was deeply impacted by that of John Duns Scotus, whom he was proud to acknowledge a fellow countryman. This chapter discusses Ireland's theology, focussing on his transformation of key Scotist motifs. It reveals Ireland's profound debt to a Scotistic pattern of perfect-being theology, both directly and indirectly through the mediation of Ramon de Sabunde, the controversial fifteenth-century member of the school of Ramon Lull. It also positions his complex discussion of grace and free will as a pastoral *via media* between an Augustinian-Scotist and Ockhamist account of predestination. Overall, Ireland's distinctive theological synthesis represents a creative response to some of the key debates of late medieval theology, and one whose influence was felt on the next generation of Scottish theologians.

Keywords: John Ireland; John Duns Scotus; Ramon de Sabunde; William of Ockham; Perfect-being theology; grace; predestination

1. Introduction

John Ireland, the most distinguished Scottish theologian of the fifteenth century, was in his day a "scholar of international repute" (Macpherson, "Introduction", in *Meroure*, I p. xv). His debt to Scotus has already been the topic of some important discussion, most notably by Alexander Broadie in his fascinating *Shadow of Scotus* (Broadie, 1995). In this and other works Broadie has sought to place Ireland within the broader context of late medieval Scottish philosophy, showing the continuity of important Scotistic themes from the fourteenth-century Nominalist thinker Lawrence of Lindores through Ireland to John Mair and his Circle in the early sixteenth century (Broadie, 1995; 2012). Other scholars such as Bonaventure Miner, James Burns, Roger Mason, Sally Mapstone and Craig Macdonald have highlighted different aspects of Ireland's thought, shedding important light on his wider debt to late medieval Nominalism and Augustinianism, to Conciliarism, and to contemporary humanism and poetry.

Over time we have therefore gained a picture of a creative and fascinating theologian and a true light of late medieval Scottish intellectual culture. Yet, as Broadie himself points out, a great deal of work remains to be done on Ireland (Broadie 1995, 55), especially in placing him in the broader context of late medieval intellectual and scholastic culture. An important aspect of this, highlighted by both Burns and Broadie, is Ireland's notable debt to John Duns Scotus and the Scotist theological movement inspired by him (Burns 1996, 24-5; Broadie 1995, 56). Building especially the work of these two scholars, I will hope to reveal something of Ireland's place in the wider Scotist tradition of the fifteenth

century. I will also hint at Ireland's possible legacy in sixteenth-century Scottish theology. The focus of this chapter will be on Ireland's perfect-being theology and his reflections on predestination, grace and freedom.

Before proceeding to a discussion of these two topics it will be important to give an overview of Ireland's life and his principal works, as a way of providing some context for his intellectual and theological endeavours.[1] Ireland was born around 1435 apparently in St Andrews. He received his early training as a scholastic philosopher at the Faculty of Arts at the University of St Andrews, where he determined (i.e. matriculated) in 1455. However, following a dispute with another student he left without a degree around 1458 and moved to the University of Paris, where he became a Bachelor in 1459 and Licentiate in 1460. By 1466 he had become Master of Arts and was appointed chaplain to the German Nation in Paris. During this time Ireland was also studying theology and in 1469 he became a Bachelor in that subject.

As a philosophy lecturer we know that Ireland taught according to the (Nominalist) *via moderna*, specifically following the teaching of William of Ockham. It is therefore no surprise to find him in the early 1470s becoming embroiled in the ongoing Realist-Nominalist disputes at Paris. While the disputes between Realists and Nominalists had had their beginnings in the fourteenth century as a philosophical conflict over the theory of universals, by the fifteenth century they had spilled over into a whole range of theological, ecclesiological and political issues, causing open division in universities across Europe (Hoenen 2003, 9-26). This was especially true in Paris, where lobbying by Realists led Louis XI to impose a celebrated ban on Nominalist texts in 1474. Significantly, Ireland was one of the professors chosen as part of a delegation opposing this royal ban, indicating his contemporary prominence. Certainly this did no harm to his reputation, as a year later, in 1475, he was appointed a doctor of theology.

The ban was repealed in 1481 and Burns suggests it was probably around this time that Ireland completed his theological *magnum opus*, his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (Burns 1955, 82). Books three and four of this are fortunately still extant in the University of Aberdeen library as MS 264, but we know that Ireland commented extensively on all four books – something rather unusual by the late fifteenth century (Hobbins 2003, 1315-16). So far there has been scarcely any research on this commentary, which presents prodigious palaeographical challenges to its reader. However, what we know of Ireland's theological stance, and can infer from his other works, suggests that he drew on an impressive array of authorities from right across the theological spectrum. In particular, despite his allegiance to the "new doctours" of the *via moderna* he clearly had a deep appreciation for the "old doctours" of the *via antiqua* (Ireland, *Meroure*, II p. 145). In this regard his commentary might reflect

[1] The brief account of Ireland's life and works here is drawn from Burns 1955 and Quinn, "Introduction", in *Meroure* II pp. xii-xviii.

something of the encyclopaedic tradition of the fifteenth century, and perhaps shows an attempt to transcend the divisiveness of the schools – an impulse also evident in other theologians of the late fifteenth century, including Gabriel Biel (Rosemann 2007, 161-70). Apart from Scotus, whom he refers to as "doctor subtilis that was a gret clerk of paris and borne of this land" (*Meroure*, II p. 106), Ireland was clearly deeply indebted to Ockham, the great Parisian Nominalists Pierre d'Ailly and Jean Gerson, and the late medieval Augustinian theologians Thomas Bradwardine and Gregory of Rimini (*Meroure*, I p. 48; II p. 145). As we shall see, Ireland was at his most creative theologically in his quest to reconcile these divergent traditions.

In 1469 Ireland served as Rector of the University of Paris and his prominence in university politics from this point onwards may well have brought him to the attention of Louis XI. Whatever the reason it is clear that in the 1470s Ireland became an intimate adviser of the King of France serving on a number of important diplomatic missions for him. Clearly he attracted the regard of James III who was himself deeply interested in theology. In the early 1480s Ireland wrote two theological treatises on the immaculate conception and on the doctrine of grace at the request of James III and by 1483, following the death of Louis XI, he had returned to Scotland as the King's chaplain and confessor. From this point on he became involved in the intricate web of Scottish politics, and his close relationship with the King seems to have earned him the bitter enmity of Archbishop William Scheves. However, while he must have grieved the death of his royal master at Sauchieburn in 1488, this did not prevent him from continuing as chaplain, at least for a time, to James IV. Yet his influence undoubtedly waned and he seems to have lived out the rest of his days as a simple priest in the Borders.

Following his return to Scotland, Ireland seems to have become increasingly concerned about the moral and spiritual tone of the court and country. He therefore set himself to preaching and writing vernacular treatises, the most famous of which, completed in 1490, was the *Meroure of Wyssdome*, written for the instruction of the young James IV. Conforming in part to the traditional "Mirror of Princes" genre, Ireland also chose to distil into it important material from his *Sentences* commentary. Addressed to the King he also hoped it would benefit the Scottish nobility, clergy and nation, serving as an antidote to immorality and the heretical teachings of the Wyclifites and Lollards (Burns 1955, 88). Its seven books thus provided in-depth exposition of the Lord's Prayer, the *Ave Maria* and the Apostles' Creed – together referred to by Ireland as the "ABC of cristianite" (*Meroure*, I p. 14) – as well as a reasoned defence of Christianity, a treatise on grace and predestination, a treatise on the sacraments and important reflections on ethics and politics. James IV seems to have politely ignored it, but for us it offers both a unique vantage-point on Scottish theological culture at the end of the fifteenth century and an insight into the complex interaction of Scottish and European, scholastic and vernacular currents of thought. It also gives us a vital index into Scotus' influence in his native land at the end of the Middle Ages and in the decades before the Scottish Reformation, much of which remains uncharted theological territory.

2. Perfect-Being Theology

Book four of Ireland's *Meroure* sets out to offer a defence according to "natural reason and persuasion" of all the articles of faith – something he rightly says is "na litle thing" (*Meroure*, II p. 81). It therefore belongs within the tradition of natural theology, which in the fifteenth century was undergoing a series of important, and controversial, developments. As we shall see, Ireland was at the forefront of this movement and any stereotypical expectations we might have that Ireland as a fifteenth-century Nominalist would want to drive a wedge between faith and reason are rudely shattered on reading the *Meroure*. In fact, his concern to harmonise faith and reason goes considerably beyond Aquinas or even Scotus, and reaches back to an even earlier medieval tradition, represented especially by Anselm of Canterbury and William of Auxerre, whose "noble buk and some of theologie" he cites at the beginning of book four as an important source, together with Augustine, for his reflections (*Meroure*, II p. 81). Nevertheless, the method which he employs in this book is manifestly indebted to Scotus and thus reveals the profoundly Scotist character of his theological reasoning.

Ireland's starting point is a distinction between "natural" and "probable" reasons. This he immediately glosses with the standard scholastic distinction between a priori and a posteriori demonstrations – namely between those which reason deductively from a cause to an effect, or from a first principle to a conclusion, and those which reason from an effect back to its cause (*Meroure*, II pp. 81-3) . While this distinction provides a basic dividing structure for book four, with chapters two to four handling a priori proofs in-depth and chapter five giving a brief summary of a posteriori arguments, Ireland significantly chooses to overlay it with a more complex threefold division drawn from an Aristotelian account of mental operations. Thus in chapter two he focusses on what Aristotle had called the "intelligence of simples", in chapter three on the operation of "composition and division", and in chapter four on "discurs and argumentacioun" (*Meroure*, II pp. 91-2, 95-6). Throughout all these chapters Ireland is careful to avoid *a posteriori* arguments from Christian authorities , although this does not prevent him, on occasion, from seeking to justify his general approach from Scripture and the Church Fathers – perhaps to disguise the truly radical nature of what he is actually attempting.

Sounding a distinctively Renaissance theme, Ireland opens his discussion of a priori demonstrations by signalling his desire to reveal the "dignite of man" (*Meroure*, II p. 84). Axiomatic to him is the human mirroring of the divine, leading him to explore the human mind as a crucial site for a priori reflection on the nature of God. Ireland reasons that, as creatures, humans must be dependent on one greater than them, namely God, for all their characteristics. For him this means that humans cannot think in their minds something greater than God. Yet since he holds that the thought, intelligence and desire of man "may grow evir mar and mar infynitlie" it follows that God is actually infinite. Notably, from this chain of reasoning Ireland derives what he calls "a reule to pruf all maner of perfeccioun conuenient that may be fundin in god". In essence, this is simply Anselm's famous principle in the *Proslogion* that

"God is [that] than which nothing greater or better is able to be thought" and its corollary that "God is whatever it is better to be than not to be" (Anselm 1998, 87-9; cf. *Meroure*, II pp. 84-8). Yet Ireland's version of Anselm's famous ontological argument comes with a twist, for his own emphasis is not on the primary distinction between existence in reality and existence in the mind, but rather on the difference between the potential infinity of the human mind and the actual infinity of the divine mind. In other words he seeks to root the ontological argument not in abstract reasoning but in the definite context of human nature – a crucial point we shall return to below.

In fact, we can see from the remainder of book four that what Ireland is interested in is not Anselm's ontological argument per se but rather the whole method of perfect-being theology which developed out of it. In this he can be connected not only to Anselm himself and early scholastic theologians, like Auxerre, who were indebted to Anselm, but also to an important fourteenth-century tradition, represented especially by Scotus, his followers and Bradwardine (Auxerre 1980, 21-35; Scotus 1949, 77-81; Bradwardine 1618, I c. 1). While his desire to develop a priori arguments for all the articles of faith goes well beyond Scotus – not to mention Aquinas! – his reasoning, nevertheless, shows important Scotistic distinctives (cf. Cross 2007, 127-30). Thus, for example, Ireland's proof of the Trinity from the infinite perfection of production within the Godhead, and his further identification of two kinds of production "by mode of nature and [by mode] of will" (*Meroure*, II pp. 88-9), signals a clear debt to Scotist Trinitarian theology, even though Scotus himself denied the strictly a priori character of this argument. In particular, the emphasis that the generation of the Son is "by mode of nature", and not simply by mode of intellect, is a hallmark of the Franciscan and Scotist approach (cf. Scotus 2004, 385-404).[2]

The same is emphatically true of Ireland's position that the Son of God would have become incarnate even if humans had never sinned. For from the principle that "in temporal things there is nothing greater than that God was made man", Ireland argues, following Scotus, that sin cannot possibly be considered the principal cause for the incarnation (*Meroure*, I pp. 68-71; cf. Scotus 2003, 213). Like Scotus, Ireland also extrapolates the reasoning of perfect-being theology into his Mariology, arguing that Christ could not be considered the perfect son if he had not preserved his mother from the original sin she would have been liable to (*Meroure*, I p. 101; cf. Scotus 2003, 123). Indeed, in his *Tractatus de Immaculata Conceptione Virginis Mariae*, dedicated to Louis XI, he tells us that it was the writings of his fellow Scot which inspired him to write a defence of the immaculate conception (Miner 1966, 24). While it is true that Ireland's insistence on the necessity of Christ's satisfaction for sin is emphatically not Scotist (cf. Scotus 2004, 51-2), it is worth noting that even this is not untouched by Scotist logic. In fact, as his much-discussed dialogue of the "four daughters of God" illustrates – in which divine truth, justice, mercy and peace agree on the incarnation and passion as the best mode of salvation – he clearly desires

[2] Importantly such reasoning can also be found in Sabunde 1501, c. 51. See below for the significance of Sabunde.

to place salvation in a covenantal framework – evidence of a characteristic Scotist and late medieval concern (*Meroure*, I pp. 90-3, 106-25; II p. 109; cf. Courtenay 1984, 26-58). Importantly, the same emphasis on divine covenanting comes through in his theology of creation and certainly he never loses sight of Scotus' teaching of the radical contingency of the world (*Meroure*, II pp. 109, 115).

While Ireland's natural theology and his perfect-being thought has deep affinities with Anselm, Auxerre and especially Scotus, none of these theologians are in fact its proximate source. Rather, almost the whole of book four of the *Meroure*, as well as much of books five and six, appears to be drawn, unacknowledged, from the controversial *Theologia Naturalis* of Ramon de Sabunde, a fifteenth-century French philosopher and theologian. In this work, completed around 1434 Sabunde famously sought to show the complete harmony of the "Two Books" of nature and Scripture. In doing so he made extensive use of the Anselmic-Scotist pattern of perfect-being theology in order to prove all the articles of faith (Sabunde 1501, "*Prologus*"; c. 64). At the same, however, as Jean Probst has demonstrated, Sabunde also made tacit use of the Trinitarian and encyclopaedic *Ars* of Ramon Lull, which Lull had developed in order to prove the doctrines of the Christian faith to Jews, Muslims and all unbelievers (Probst 1912). Yet what was most distinctive about Sabunde's method, and here we may see the obvious link with Ireland's exposition, was his concern to root all his arguments in human nature itself, and especially in what was best for humanity (Sabunde 1501, c. 1, 64-8). In him, as in Ireland who follows him, we may therefore see a marked anthropological – and ultimately Christological – shift in theological methodology. Indeed, Ireland's Scotistic view on the Incarnation means that all human existence is oriented towards its fulfilment in Christ, a perspective which comes through especially clearly in his Sabundian account of the sacraments in book six (*Meroure*, III pp. 19-43; cf. Sabunde 1501, c. 286-92).

To show the impressive extent of Ireland's borrowings from Sabunde would take us much too far afield. For it seems that nearly all of chapters two to four of book four and chapters one to three of book five are composed of a skilful pastiche of sections from Sabunde's *Theologia Naturalis*. Apart from the definite anthropological shift in articulating perfect-being theology, the most distinctive features of Sabunde's influence on Ireland are his assertion of the (potential) infinity of human nature, his attention to perfect-will theology – in other words his attempt to reveal the nature and character of God from the structure of human will and desire –and his insistence that human nature (i.e. humanity *qua* humanity) can be regarded as the metaphysical measure of all reality (*Meroure*, II pp. 84-8, 91-4, 113, 119-22; cf. Sabunde 1501, c. 1, 6, 65, 82). Drawing on Scotist perfect-being theology Sabunde had adapted Lull's *Ars* into a new science of theological reasoning and Ireland takes this method up wholesale. According to this any theological proposition can be judged to be true or false by comparing it and its negation together and then judging which of these achieves the best for human nature (*Meroure*, II pp. 91-4, 113; cf. Sabunde 1501, c. 65, 68). Importantly, this led to a definite "moralising" of Ireland's own scholastic logic and may also be seen to fit into his wider interest, conspicuous in the *Meroure*, in the ethical and rhetorical patterns of humanist argument. This is fully in evidence in chapter five, where his distinctive

concern to harmonise scholastic and humanist sources led to him a fusing of a posteriori arguments drawn on the one hand from Scotus and on the other hand from the topical tradition of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian (*Meroure*, II pp. 106-12). In this, as much as in his anthropological drive, Ireland proves himself to be a true man of the fifteenth century.

3. Predestination, Grace and Freedom

In turning to Ireland's view of predestination, grace and freedom, expounded in book five of the *Meroure*, we are confronting one of the most divisive issues in late medieval theology. For, as is well known, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw an important confrontation between the doctrine of grace put forward by Ockham and his school and the resurgent Augustinianism of Thomas Bradwardine and Gregory of Rimini. For, despite important philosophical and theological differences between them, Bradwardine and Rimini were united in opposing the covenantal soteriology espoused by Ockham and his followers, upholding an Augustinian account of prevenient grace against the so-called "modern Pelagians" (cf. Rimini 1980, 58-60). For good reason Ireland has often been thought of as a champion of this broad-based late medieval Augustinian movement (Broadie 1990, 69-72; Burns 1996, 22-3), yet as we shall see his own approach to these issues is both subtle and complex. In fact, it seems that Ireland was self-consciously trying to find a middle, reconciling, way between these two positions.

In approaching these complex issues an important starting point is Ireland's discussion of freedom and contingency. Before Scotus, the prevailing, Aristotelian understanding of contingency was couched in terms of temporal succession. Freedom was therefore understood as openness to the future, meaning that the present moment was always considered entirely necessary. By contrast, Scotus put forward a radical new understanding of synchronic contingency (Knuuttila 1981, 163-258). This defined contingency not as a function of time, but in terms of a simultaneous power towards opposites "without succession". Thus, for example – to cite a celebrated example – a hypothetical will existing only for a single instant of time could still be considered free and meritorious, due to its power, in that very same instant, to will the opposite of what it actually did will (Scotus 2008, 476-7).

Ireland's own possible debt to Scotus' principle of synchronic contingency has already been touched on by Broadie, who remarks in his *Shadow of Scotus* that "the concept of free will that Ireland appears to have in mind is that developed by Duns Scotus, according to whom to be free is simultaneously to be able to produce opposite effects" (Broadie 1995, 56). Certainly, it is unquestionably true that Ireland was profoundly influenced by the contingency revolution inaugurated by Scotus. Thus, where thirteenth-century theologians would generally argue for the necessity of the divine knowledge, Ireland is at one with Scotus and the broader tradition of late medieval theology in holding that the prescience of God is "nocht presciens be necessite, bot be fredome and contingence" (*Meroure*, I p. 72; cf. Scotus 2008, 467-70). Likewise, Ireland's view of the human will clearly has strong affinities with the Scotist view of will as a self-moving power capable of freely determining itself towards opposites without the

need for any external actualisation, including by God himself (*Meroure*, II pp. 113-118, 140; cf. Frank 1992).

Yet whether Ireland would subscribe to Scotus' precise account of synchronic contingency is a rather different question. For there are some clear signs that Ireland's reasoning in these matters derives not from Scotus but rather from his opponents Ockham and Rimini, who strongly criticised the concept of synchronic contingency even as they affirmed, like Scotus, the radical contingency of the created order and of the divine intellect and will (Ockham 1983, 71-6; Rimini 1984, 258-71). It is notable, for example, that Ireland does not make use of Scotus' characteristic language of "instants of nature" which he often employed to analyse the logical structure of a temporal moment or an instant of eternity and which his Nominalist opponents entirely rejected (cf. Ockham 1983, 87). While the objection that we would not expect to find such technical language in the *Meroure* is reasonable and carries some weight, it is worth noting that elsewhere Ireland does not hesitate to use highly sophisticated scholastic concepts.

Even more significant is the fact that Ireland's distinctive analysis of future contingent propositions suggests a strong Nominalist bias. In a number of places in the *Meroure* Ireland insists that a future contingent proposition may be true, and known eternally by God as true, yet, due to the action of human free will, it is possible that it may be false and may have been eternally false – for example, God may know eternally that John Ireland will sin at a certain time tomorrow but it is possible that he chooses not to sin. In this case, he argues, the future contingent proposition "John Ireland will sin at a certain time tomorrow" will be false and will be known by God as such from eternity. As Ireland pithily expressed this, "happin it that god knew eternaly it is yit in my power to do sua that god knew it nivir" (*Meroure*, II pp. 135-40). Strikingly such reasoning precisely mirrors that offered by Ockham in his celebrated *Treatise on Predestination* and his *Ordinatio*, which held that God has certain and determinate knowledge of future contingents yet their present truth is settled only in the moment of their actualisation. Like Ockham, Ireland also grounds contingency explicitly on the free outcome of a successive sequence of temporal events. Thus future contingent propositions always remain open to change until their very moment of actualisation (*Meroure*, I pp. 72-3; Ockham 1983, 78-9). Importantly, Ireland's implied position also differs markedly from Scotus, whose account of synchronic contingency led him to argue that the divine will eternally and immutably determines the truth-value of every future contingent proposition (Scotus 2008, 457-60).

In light of this clear debt to an Ockhamist account of future contingents it is important to ask whether Ireland's account of predestination reflects that offered by Ockham himself. Certainly, Ireland opens his discussion of predestination with a profoundly Ockhamist move, namely by grounding it in a discussion of divine foreknowledge. Indeed, Ireland's considered opinion is that the spiritual eye of God eternally sees every creature which will ever be made, electing those who make good use of their free will and God's gifts and reprobating those who persist in making evil use of these (*Meroure*, II pp.

143-6). Moreover, Ireland also seems highly sympathetic with the kind of account of general election favoured by Ockham, which held that God wills to save all, but finally only predestines those who do not provide an obstacle to his universal offer of grace. Drawing on one of Ockham's favourite illustrations for this, Ireland describes God's grace as being like light which is continually shining on the chamber of the human soul but which is obstructed by closed shutters. It is only when the will flings wide the shutters of the soul that the light of God's grace is able to flood in. Like Ockham, Ireland therefore affirms that "god gevis help and suple sufficient to all be his grace", notably through the preached Word and sacraments, so that if someone is not saved it is entirely their own fault and cannot be imputed to the divine will (*Meroure*, II pp. 133-4; cf. Halverson 1995).

Yet there are a number of points which may militate against a purely Ockhamist interpretation of Ireland's doctrine of predestination. For Ireland actually positions his own solution to the causal ground of predestination as a kind of *via media* between what may be identified as clear Ockhamist and Scotist-Augustinian views. Thus while Ireland does accept Ockham's position that propositions concerning creatures can be the logical, not ontological, cause of divine action – such that, for example, God's decision to reprobate Antichrist is dependent on his foreknowledge of the proposition "The Antichrist will finally persist in sin" – he is very careful to qualify this. In particular, he argues that such propositions must be "formyt of the termes in divinitie and nocht of the creaturis precise" (*Meroure*, II pp. 145-9). What exactly Ireland means by this is left rather opaque, and perhaps purposely so, but it seems likely that he is concerned not to separate too sharply God's foreknowledge from his causal initiative or will. Certainly, in presenting God as calling down to his creatures from the "high tower" of eternity, he is clearly seeking to integrate God's grace and the human response to this into his intellectualist or intuitionist account of divine foreknowledge (*Meroure*, II p. 143). Ireland may well have borrowed this Boethian imagery from Aquinas, suggesting a further demarcation between his views on time and eternity and those of Scotus (Aquinas 1948a, 83).

Despite his caveats, Ireland's account of predestination remains extremely puzzling in a theologian who otherwise prides himself as an ardent opponent of Pelagianism and a follower of the late medieval Augustinians. For the kind of Ockhamist account of general election that he offers was one that was vehemently opposed by Bradwardine and Rimini. Indeed, the Augustinian account of the "special help" (*auxilium speciale*) of grace that they developed, was explicitly developed in opposition to the view of election on the basis of foreknowledge (Zumkeller 1983, 6). This view was championed by Ireland in his *Sentences* and *Meroure* and he felt so strongly about this issue that he even wrote a whole book on the topic, sadly no longer extant, at the request of James III (*Meroure*, I p. 48; II pp. 130-4). Given his explicit adherence to Rimini and Bradwardine, how may we reconcile this with his pronounced Ockhamist tendencies? At this stage, before a detailed analysis of relevant passages in the *Sentences* commentary, it would be premature to pronounce on this issue. Instead, I will simply summarise the key points and suggest, very tentatively, a possible resolution.

Ireland is emphatic that the "singulare and speciale help of grace" is necessary to avoid sin, to do good works and to merit glory. He also attacks the view, affirmed by Ockham among others, that man "by virtue of free choice is able to merit from pure naturals" as the Pelagian heresy. In all this he clearly and explicitly aligns himself with Aquinas and the late medieval Augustinian theologians (*Meroure*, I p. 48; II p. 131). However, like Scotus and Ockham and in this following a broader fifteenth-century trend, Ireland also seeks to place the action of grace within a covenantal framework. As he says:

> Sene I have fre arbiter and help of him my repentance and remissioun of my syn and my salvacions standis in my self in my will and fre arbiter for and I do my part that I may do god falyeis nocht to me and he prevenis me and helpis me thar to ... for his grace evir strikis one the saule and gif thou will nocht opin the will and consent to him wyt thai self ... and thou hauld thi window stekit that thi chamber be myrk and nocht licht it is nocht the falt of the sone bot of thi self. (*Meroure*, II p. 73)

Once again we see Ireland trying to engage in a very delicate balancing act between an Ockhamist and Augustinian doctrine of grace. Ireland's account is further complicated by the fact that he never clearly distinguishes the special help of grace from the universal offer of sufficient grace in the sacraments. Nevertheless, as this quote suggests, he did want to retain within his covenantal framework some kind of notion of prevenient or operative grace. As he expresses this in the *Sentences* commentary, God is always "moving the soul by knocking on it and exciting it to grace and good works through good motions and special help" and the soul "follows close after by consenting to these good works" (Aberdeen MS 264 fol. 64v; cited from Burns 1996, 23, trans. Burton). In this sense he might perhaps be seen as holding, like the mature Aquinas, that all preparation for grace itself comes under grace (Aquinas 1948b, 1141).

Significantly, it seems likely that it his understanding of Scotus that is able to hold together these two conflicting strands of his theology. For it is notable that Ireland's account of *auxilium speciale* draws on the Augustinian and Scotist understanding that grace operates by drawing a soul freely to God through the working of its own desires (*Meroure*, II pp. 131-2). From this, and also from his clear division in the above quote between the soul's part and God's part, we may suspect that Ireland is drawing implicitly on Scotus' account of partial causation (cf. Frank 1992), which was favoured strongly by Rimini.[3] Adapting this Scotistic device, which itself had deep roots in Augustine, enabled Rimini to argue that God's grace is necessary for every good and salvific action while safeguarding the freedom of the human will, and such a position would seem to fit Ireland rather nicely (Rimini 1984, 485-7). It is also just possible that this focus on concausation might explain Ireland's important, but rather mysterious, modification of Ockham's account of predestination. If so then it may well be that

[3] Significantly, the Scotist doctrine of partial causation was entirely foreign to Bradwardine's theological metaphysics (Bradwardine 1618, III c. 1-2). However, investigation of Ireland's *Sentences* commentary would be necessary to confirm the precise influence of Rimini and Bradwardine on his doctrine of *auxilium speciale*.

Ireland is using Scotistic tools to forge a new kind of Augustinian and pastoral theology, in which divine initiative and human response are placed in a definite reciprocal and covenantal relationship.

4. Conclusion

Like John Mair and his Circle, Ireland was certainly not a slavish adherent of Scotus' theology. Yet the influence of Scotus on him is undeniable. Indeed, Ireland had an undoubted pride in the British tradition of theology, and in his *Meroure* he is always careful to indicate whether a theologian comes from England or Scotland (*Meroure*, I p. 48; II pp. 104, 106, 131). Thus his concern to crush the Pelagian movement was partly motivated by an awareness that the heresy had a British origin (*Meroure*, I p. 48), although it is ironic that he seems to have been blind to the new Pelagianism that many, including his own hero Rimini, found in the theology of Ockham and others of the "*britannici*". It therefore seems right to see Ireland's theology of grace as an ongoing phase of the dispute over the "modern Pelagians" showing its important Scottish as well as English and European valence. At the same time it is notable that Ireland positioned his own Scotistic perfect-being theology as an antidote to another English example of deviant theology: the claim of Robert Holcot that theology must abandon ordinary logic in favour of a supernatural logic derived from Scripture (*Meroure*, II p. 104; cf. Holcot 1967, 1 q. 5 ad. 5). In fact, Ireland's own recourse to Sabunde could well be seen in this light as marking his own attempt to construct an alternative "logic of faith". Remembering that the desire for a logic of Scripture was also one of the hallmarks of the Wyclifite and Lollard movements (Levy 2003, 81-122), it may well be that his recourse to Scotus marked an attempt to head off this heretical threat from England, and thus maintain the purity of the Scottish Church.

Given the particularly British, and indeed Scottish, character of Ireland's theology we are justified in asking about his influence on his native land. While the *Meroure* sadly seems to have languished and have become forgotten, the *Sentences* commentary – perhaps stripped of its more speculative first two books – was purchased by Bishop William Elphinstone for his new foundation of the University of Aberdeen. Leslie Macfarlane points out that Elphinstone may have known Ireland in Paris and certainly came to know and respect him later during his time in Scotland. For this reason, and bearing in mind Ireland's "distinguished reputation", he suggests that it would have been natural for him to authorise the teaching of his *Sentences* commentary at his new Theology Faculty in Aberdeen. Certainly we have good evidence that Hector Boece, the first principal of Elphinstone's new foundation, used Ireland's commentary as a textbook in his teaching of theology (Macfarlane 1994, 71-2). One can easily imagine too that Ireland's "balanced Augustinianism", his humanism and his Christological focus on "conformity to Christ" would have appealed to the reforming bishop, who was strongly influenced by the currents of the *devotio moderna* (Holmes 2015, 138). Elphinstone's desire was to establish a distinctive Scottish Church with its own ecclesiological and liturgical identity (Macfarlane 1995, 231-

46). It therefore made perfect sense to equip his new, flagship university with a theological training programme offering the very best of contemporary Scottish theology.

The presence of Ireland's work on the syllabus at Aberdeen also suggests the probability that he could have had an influence on some of the first generations of Aberdeen theology students, including John Adamson, who later became vicar general of the Scottish Dominican province. In this light is interesting to note that the library catalogues of sixteenth-century Scottish Dominicans show a definite interest in Scotus (Foggie 2003, 112, 259, 270). Even more interesting is the fact that in a copy of Pierre d'Ailly's *Sentences* commentary owned by Ireland's arch-rival Archbishop Scheves, and later passed on to St Leonard's, we find layers of annotations which appear to reference Holcot and Sabundus, as well as the controversy over whether the Trinity could be proved by natural reason.[4] Much more work is needed to decipher these, but they suggest the possibility that Ireland's influence, for a time at least, continued to be felt in his native land.

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[4] The work in question is Pierre d'Ailly, *Quaestiones super libros Sententiarium Petri Lombardi* (Brussels, 1483) [Special Collections, University of St Andrews, TypNB.A80FA]. Relevant annotations occur in "*Prologus*", d. 2 and d. 3. I am very grateful to Professor Mark Elliott for arranging for me to be able to see Archbishop Scheves' books and to the staff of Special Collections for their kind help.

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