



MacGeoghegan, Roche (1580–1644)

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MacGeoghegan, Roche, also called Rochus de Cruce (1580-1644), Irish Dominican and bishop of Kildare, sixth son of Ross MacGeoghegan, chief of the sept of the MacGeoghegans of Moycashel or Kinelfiacha, County Westmeath, and of Sheila Dempsey. This branch of the MacGeoghegan clan held between five and ten thousand acres in Westmeath and were a prominent Gaelic Irish family, which became closely connected to the Counter-Reformation in the seventeenth century. Roche's cousin, Anthony MacGeoghegan, was bishop of Clonmacnoise and two of his younger cousins, Dominic and Arthur MacGeoghegan, also became Dominican friars. Roche MacGeoghegan began his education under the tutelage of Catholic laymen, initially in Westmeath and then in Clonmel, County Tipperary. At this stage, he was also educated by John Power, a Catholic priest, and may have attended a state-established Protestant school for six months. After courses in the humanities, he travelled to Lisbon and entered the Dominican order. He also completed a further five month course in humanities whilst residing at the Irish College. He then spent eight years at Salamanca, where he lectured to Irish students.

Around 1617, MacGeoghegan was appointed vicar of the Irish congregation of Dominicans, though this can perhaps be predicated to 1614. He was certainly in Ireland from 1614, where he undertook the task of re-organising the Dominican order. In the late sixteenth century, the Dominicans had been virtually obliterated in Ireland, so that the order's re-organisation in the seventeenth century became one important element of the Counter-Reformation drive steered by Irish clergy returning from the continent. At this stage, MacGeoghegan's priorities were to facilitate the missionary activities of Dominican clergy and he petitioned successfully for two sets of papal faculties (1617) which enabled them to celebrate the sacraments whenever and wherever possible, to read prohibited books in order to refute heresies and to grant marriage dispensations. He also attended the Dominican chapter at Lisbon in 1618, where he was awarded the theological decree of *praesentatus* after the requisite examination, in recognition of his preaching activity in Ireland. This chapter also allowed him to present his plans for the Irish mission, which were subsequently endorsed by the order. In order to increase the numerical strength of the Dominican congregation, all Irish Dominicans were ordered to return to Ireland on completion of their studies

and MacGeoghegan was ascribed authority to recall all those who had already completed their studies to the Irish mission.

MacGeoghegan did not attend the 1622 chapter of the order, but was represented there by John Fox. This chapter appointed MacGeoghegan prior provincial of Ireland, a position which he held until 1627. By this time, MacGeoghegan had become further involved in the provision of Dominicans for Ireland; between 1619 and 1626, he established a noviciate in Urlar (Mayo) and spent two years there teaching novices. In 1626, he was forced to leave Ireland after being denounced to the royal authorities by several clergy whom he had censured for indiscipline. Provision of clergy remained his priority however and he was instrumental in the foundation of a Dominican college at Louvain. It was MacGeoghegan who lobbied Philip II of Spain successfully so that the college was granted initial funds and annual allowances for its maintenance.

His energy and organisational prowess meant that on the death of the archbishop of Armagh, Peter Lombard, in 1625, MacGeoghegan became a leading candidate for the vacant see. The Dominicans campaigned enthusiastically for his appointment, on the basis that it would enable the order to defend itself in its recurring disputes with the powerful Franciscans and with bishops in Ireland. MacGeoghegan himself wrote to Michael of the Holy Spirit, the Dominican procurator at Rome, that he believed Dominican bishops would protect the order from the interference of Franciscan clergy, some of whom held powerful episcopal positions. Although MacGeoghegan's nomination to Armagh was supported by Spain as well as the Dominican order, he was not appointed, largely due to the opposition of the earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell who argued that no Palesmen should become archbishop of Gaelic Ulster. In 1629 however, he was appointed bishop of Kildare in Leinster.

As he had been during his time as the architect of Dominican revival in Ireland, MacGeoghegan proved conscientious and energetic in his new role as a bishop who followed the Tridentine model of episcopal leadership as far as possible. He held regular visitations of his

diocese, produced two reports ad limina (1633 and 1637), preached personally and attempted to improve clerical standards through the introduction of monthly ecclesiastical conferences. He also held a number of diocesan synods, and attended the provincial synod held at Tyrchogir (Laois) (Comerford, *Collections Relating to the Dioceses of Kildare and Leighlin*, i) in 1640. In his personal life, he was equally strict, meditating daily and adapting the penitential practices of fasting, sleeping on bare ground and wearing a hair-shirt and chains beneath his outer clothing.

By the early 1640s, MacGeoghegan's lifestyle had taken its toll, although it is not clear whether his final decline was rapid or protracted. An older tradition claimed that he was seized with paralysis whilst preaching a panegyric of Saint Francis and died almost immediately, but official reports represent him as paralysed and helpless for a long time prior to his death. In either case, he died on the twenty-sixth of May, 1644. His place of burial is also unclear; he is thought to have been buried either in the Catholic church of Kildare or in the tomb of his ancestors at the Franciscan friary of Multyfarnham. During his lifetime he had accumulated a fine library, which was divided between the Dominican order and Kildare diocese on his death, a fitting epitaph to a classic Counter-Reformation cleric who had spearheaded Dominican revival in Ireland and who had devoted his final years to the introduction of Tridentine reform in Kildare.

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