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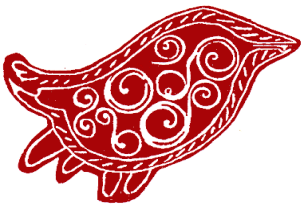

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Cork: A Diocesan History

By SISTER M. ANGELA BOLSTER

In the last issue of this Journal (*Vol. LXXVIII, no. 227*) *Professor Séamus Pender's assessment of Sr. M. Angela Bolster's A History of the Diocese of Cork appeared as a review article. Here we give Sr. Angela's reply and a letter from Rev. Fr. James Good. The matter is now closed.*

EDITOR

*Under the above heading the preceding issue of this *Journal* carried a most subjective, personal, malicious and abusive attack on me from Séamus Pender whose approach lacked any type of academic interest in diocesan history, and cast decency and propriety to the winds. His remarks—not to mention his many irrelevant gibes, i.e., the 1922 conflagration, Article 44, my use of my baptismal instead of my religious name, the hair-splitting distinctions as between 'Patrick, Canon' and 'Canon Patrick' —show that he has little appreciation of the purpose of a review. To be more explicit, his approach is completely at variance with accepted norms. If a work has faults—and what work is without them ?—a reviewer is entitled to point them out, but this does not give the writer a simultaneous mandate to revile and denigrate the author. Séamus Pender has, however, so over-reached himself in the art of denigration that the placing of his article outside the book review section of the *Journal* adds weight to the conclusion that this piece of laboured alliteration cannot, by any standard, be seriously regarded as a review. Nor is his cynical and degrading use of citations from Scripture particularly edifying. As one of my many correspondents expressed it: 'To think that a Professor Emeritus of a University would descend to this!' But so it is—and so am I constrained to set the record straight.

First as regards the Cahalane Papers, concerning which I would imagine that my Bishop's Foreword and my own acknowledgement should have left no doubt in the mind of any honest seeker after truth. Far be it from me to deny Canon Cahalane's reputation as an eminent churchman and a scholar; but I repeat that my use of his papers was minimal. Where not illegible, these papers were under-scored and over-typed, incomplete and with abbreviations which were baffling in the extreme; as for instance, C.P.R. could mean at one time *Calendar of Patent Rolls* and at another *Calendar of Papal Records*. As stated in my acknowledgements (pp. xviii-xix), Canon Cahalane had envisaged (a) a general diocesan history and (b) a history of the parishes—which I synopsized and acknowledged (pp. 280-7). His general history which he had entitled, 'From Finbarr's Cave to Finbarr's College' (Farranferris), was structured in nine chapters, two of which had a sub-section. At some early stage the Canon had submitted some of his material to Cork University Press. It was returned to him as unfit for publication. I now refer Séamus Pender to what Dr. Lucey has said of Canon Cahalane's papers when he inspected them in 1953 (p. xii). Canon Cahalane, in his will, left his papers to his nephew, Father Patrick Cahalane, with the stipulation that a relative of theirs (whose name I do not choose to mention) should be asked to sub-edit them. On his refusal to undertake this assignment the papers were entrusted to me by Father Cahalane. All this I have already stated. Dr. Lucey

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gave his sanction to my undertaking the work; his interest in it has been constant and I have no reason to believe that he is in any way dissatisfied. He is aware—as are all who monitored my research (pp. xx-xxii)—that my first draft of the diocesan history which was based almost entirely on Canon Cahalane's papers was returned to me for revision, recasting and expansion.

Séamus Pender's charge of plagiarism cannot therefore be substantiated. May I draw attention to his flagrant inconsistency in (a) lauding the meticulous research of the Canon; (b) accusing me of appropriating this material as my own and (c) roundly condemning what purports to be a take-over of the Canon's work ? In criticizing me, Séamus Pender is in reality condemning Canon Cahalane. The charge of plagiarism is further laboured on page 82 of the *Journal* where we read that 'a large portion of chapter XV appeared in volume lxxi (1966) of this *Journal;* the author does not appear to consider it necessary to mention this.' How does one plagiarize oneself ? The 'large portion' in question was not scooped by me; it was an article entitled 'The Diocese of Cork and the Great Western Schism' which was my contribution to a special commemorative edition of the *Journal* in 1966.

My reference to Cork University Press was intended as a gesture of courtesy to Dr. M. D. McCarthy, president of University College, and to those of his staff with whom I had dealings. I know it has been appreciated as such by them. Shortly after submitting my manuscript to Cork University Press it was decided to seek publication under the dual imprint of Cork University Press and Irish University Press. Why the negotiations between the two bodies petered out is a matter for those concerned, but the decision to remain with Irish University Press was my own and it is one for which I have no regrets. May I say too, that Irish University Press has not been accorded anything like sufficient recognition for their masterly work of publication.

As to style, I think it can be safely asserted that any single page of my book is more readable than Séamus Pender's five pages of what I have already called laboured alliteration; that his charge of malapropism is based on *two* words which are quite acceptable in the context within which they were used and that his scurrilous interpretation of a detail of Franciscan history in 1324 is the very essence of bad taste. Verily, *le style c'est l'homme.* Does Séamus Pender not know that the term 'monk' is never used in reference to the Mendicant Friars ? His use of the term 'epideictic display' to decry what he calls my 'pseudo scholarship' is in itself a classic example of tautology and I fail to see that references to case and shelf numbers in the Bodleian and Royal Irish Academy 'are in a form completely unintelligible to anyone wishing to consult them.' Séamus Pender would do well to re-read my references to Kenney's *Sources* on pp. xlii-xlv of my history. Kenny's work has been a basic guide to source material since it was first published in 1929. The contents of Bodleian 485 have been edited by Charles McNeill in *Analecta Hibernica* I (1930), 139-141; and if, as Séamus Pender implies, certain shelf-markings are incorrect, this is surely not an imponderable considering that with the multiplicity of new acquisitions to libraries shelf-numbers are under constant revision. The present state of the reference library of University College, Cork, is a case in point.

With regard to the Royal Irish Academy manuscripts, Séamus Pender, while apparently *au fait* with 'the printed fasciculi of the Academy collection,' seems unaware that Hodges & Smith Ms. No. 12, p. 506 was also catalogued as No. 19 King's Inns, Dublin; for which would he consult Plummer's *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* 1, xxxii, n.4. The late Liam Ó Buachalla, whose stature as a gentleman, a scholar and a

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local historian is immeasurable, had a facsimile of this manuscript which he gave to me. He had no reservations as to the scholarship of Messrs Hodges and Smith; he assisted me in the identifications of this manuscript and indeed, of many others, and my indebtedness to him is indicated on p. x of my acknowledgements. And may I observe that the fact that certain persons happen to be publishers does not at all preclude their being scholars as well. My own dealings with publishers have given me ample proof of this.

Neither Séamus Pender nor I will be alive to ascertain whether or not my work will stand the test of time, but it is a heartening sign that it has already been listed as a reliable source by Dr. John A. Watt in his recent book on *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, while Dr. Geoffrey Hand, another outstanding medievalist, has welcomed it as 'a distinguished addition' to already existing diocesan histories and as having 'set a standard and a model which will be very challenging indeed to intending historians of other Irish dioceses.' (*Irish Independent*, 9/12/1972). Finally, a review in the October issue of *Doctrine and Life* by Dr. Hugh Fenning, a Dominican historian of international repute, would make salutary reading for Séamus Pender.

I consider it unnecessary to either explain or apologize for selecting the date 1536 as a terminal date for the first volume of *A Histroy of the Diocese of Cork*, the subtitle of which reads, 'From the Earliest Times to the Reformation.' Séamus Pender's suggested revision of bibliography is somewhat enigmatic, all the more so as he puts the need for this 'drastic' measure in brackets. His statements on fourteenth century developments, not to mention his references to the Eoghanachta, are not substantiated in any of the authorities I have studied; nor is he correct in his interpretation of the *temporalia* of a see which, in addition to being the temporal possessions of a see (its manors etc.) are also the revenues, profits and tithes proceeding from them.

With reference to the 'Rental of certain places in County Cork' (p.p, 337 505): as far as Séamus Pender is concerned it seems that this ducoment *may be anything*, when in fact it is catalogued as a Rental in the British Museum, Additional Charter 136000, with a marginal notation from the copyist that it was 'possibly a sixteenth century document.' Séamus Pender's suggested renderings of some of the names on this list do not appear to be particularly constructive, and in any case such identifications were not my purpose in giving the document in its entirety (pp. 337-42).

With regard to the mis-spelling of Wittenberg: I am sure the printers will be happy to note that in a book of almost 650 pages only one printing error could be detected ! The smirk on the John Moorman 'gloss' is petty in the extreme: I wonder did Séamus Pender himself know Bishop Moorman's identity before reading that gloss ? Equally petty is the remark about my being on 'Christian-name terms of familiarity with twelfth-century ecclesiastics,' since page 60 of my text in which Maol Muire Ua Dúnáin appears in full pontificals, first as *episcopus Midie* and in the second place as *Senóir Leithe Cuind* leaves no room for the ambiguity 'discovered' by Séamus Pender on p. 63.

On the point of hagiography, I suggest a re-reading of pp. xlii-xlviii of my Introductory Chapter, the contents of which have been approved by scholars of greater credibility than Séamus Pender. (Their names may be found in my acknowledgements). Nowhere do I state that the various *Lives* (of Bairre or St. Finbarr) 'are of the late middle ages and quite fabulous.' This was Kenney's interpretation of the sources; that of Liam O Buachalla was that 'the Irish *Life* of Finbarr was compiled between the years A.D. 800 and 1200 and the original version belongs in all probability to the period of cultural revival which followed the Irish victory at Clontarf in

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1014.' (p. xlvi). Furthermore, there is extant among Mr. Ó Buachalla's papers the following important statement: 'The Irish *Life* of Bairre is one of the most interesting we have—probably the most detailed life after the *Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick*, although the historical and biographical items are not by any means as extensive as in the latter work . . . . Some internal evidence in the seventeen original chapters which make up the Latin *Life* would lead us to a date for the original work as pre 850.' I repeat that it is probable that the compiler of the Irish *Life* had access to independent sources and references that are not contained in the Latin *Life*. In referring to my treatment of St. Finbarr Séamus Pender has no right to use the phrase 'suspension of every critical faculty' when he himself is only speculating or merely adducing an opinion—one which is dangerously off the mark when he states that Finbarr was 'possibly . . . . a river god'. There were no river gods in Irish mythology.

My speculation as to the possibility of early diocesan arrangement and organization in Cork is, at the very least, a plausible one. It was held by Liam O Buachalla and by John T. Collins, with whom I conferred a great deal on the earlier chapters of my work. And let it not be assumed that Séamus Pender is the first to come up with the theory that there was more than one holder of the name Finbarr. I have accounted for eight; apart from our diocesan patron, only two of these are in any way identifiable (p. xlvii). Even allowing for such diversity and for the legendary and thaumaturgic accretions and ambiguities which surround him (as they surround other Irish saints), Finbarr nevertheless dominated the spiritual life of South Munster in his day and he was at once a saint, a teacher and a missionary. As for diocesan history in its wider sense: have I not stated (p. xxix) that there are many aspects of Cork history which can neither be definitely proved nor peremptorily dismissed and that for these no conclusion can be other than tentative in our present state of knowledge ? I have also expressed the view that my work would have achieved 'at least one good purpose' if it provoked a further appraisal of the limited sources at present at our disposal. However, historicity requires something more than the comprehensively negative approach of Séamus Pender. A pity we are surrounded by so much arrogant dogmatism which dilutes rather than strengthens the feasibility of any proposition.

I do not consider it necessary to make more than a passing reference to the many tendentious questions which Séamus Pender poses on page 84 of his article where he speculates and opines to his heart's content; and despite the obviously negative sarcasm of his remarks, I still feel complimented at being associated with names like McNeill, O'Rahilly and Binchy. These men are quoted and referred to in a manner not enjoyed by Séamus Pender.

Unquestionably the delimitation of dioceses and parishes and all that went with diocesan organization was not an overnight development; but to the extent that Gilbert legislated specifically on the non-participation of monks in parochial work and spelled out his plans for a hierarchically structured church based on European conditions, his *De Statu Ecclesiae* may be taken as 'putting an end to the separation of order and administration as hitherto practised in the Irish church.' I too have stressed the contribution of the Normans to the structuring of the diocesan system, yet—and I again quote Professor Otway-Ruthven—the contribution of the invaders merely accelerated a development 'which would have occurred in any case as part of the process of bringing the church in Ireland into line with the general pattern of western Christendom.' (*Medieval Ireland*, p. 126). It was inevitable that abuses should continue—among them, those connected with marriage: at no stage have I

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ever attempted to shelve this issue. However, the 'marital *mélanges* of Brian Boru .... in the tenth century,' while not thus specifically referred to by me have been dealt with in my reference to Dalcassian intrusion into the abbacy of Cork (pp. 54-5). Finally, 'clerks' and/or 'king's clerks' were features of all dioceses. They may or may not all have been in sacerdotal orders, but they, like others, deserve the benefit of the doubt. Hence the inclusion of *nine* clerks in a list of nearly 300.

I appreciate the decision of the Council of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society in according me the necessary space in this *Journal* to register my reply to Séamus Pender. I now repeat what I have already stated to the secretary of the Society, namely, that the article in question has done more damage to the prestige of the Society and its *Journal* than it has to me. Need I add that it has also redounded to the discredit of the writer ? *Moladh le Naomh Chorcai.*

In the course of his letter Rev. Dr. James Good writes:

Professor Pender seems to insinuate something of a conspiracy organised to prevent these papers from getting into the hands of those who had a right to them. There was no such conspiracy. The matter is much more simple. Canon Cahalane's nephew and legal representative approached me—presumably as a friend and admirer of the Canon—and asked me if I would undertake to edit and publish his work. I told him that I was not competent to do so, and recommended that the work be entrusted to Sr. Bolster as a trained historian whose knowledge of Cork diocesan history was already broad and deep. That advice was accepted.

Professor Pender also seems disturbed that greater recognition is not given to Canon Cahalane in the finished work. The Canon would have been the first to admit that his researches had not reached anywhere near the point of publication, and if he had lived he would have agreed, I believe, that much of the product of these vast researches was unusable material. It is no insult to his memory to say that but for the work of the present author the Cahalane papers would have been left to gather dust, and the work of their author would have gone for naught. One can hardly fault Dr. Bolster for not labouring the point. *Nil de mortuis nisi bonum* holds good even in literary work.

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