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Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa's *An Teagasg Críosaíde* (1611/1614): a reassessment of its audience and use*

The publication of *An Teagasg Críosaíde* in Antwerp in 1611 marked a watershed in the history of Irish exiles in the seventeenth century.¹ It was not only a catechism in the Tridentine mould but also the work of an individual, Giolla Brighde Ó hEoghusa, native of Clogher diocese, intimate of Gaelic Ireland, distinguished poet and Irish Franciscan. His catechism was born out of a desire to make general Christian doctrine, as communicated through the Tridentine catechisms, accessible to an Irish-speaking audience. His catechism was to act as a bridge between popular religion in Gaelic Ireland and the international religion of the catholic reform.²

While the subject matter of Ó hEoghusa's catechism and the friar's efforts to reach a popular Irish-speaking audience have been examined elsewhere, the exact composition of his target audience and the manner in which *An Teagasg Críosaíde* was designed to be used have received little attention. The work itself ran to three editions.³ Before establishing their press, the Louvain friars applied, on 17 June 1611, to Archduke Albert, ruler of Spanish Flanders, for authorization to publish. This was duly accorded along with a valuable concession which allowed the book to be distributed tax-free to whatever country they wished.⁴ Patrick Corish, in his assessment of *An Teagasg Críosaíde*, surmises that the work was aimed primarily at Irish soldiers serving in the Low Countries,⁵ but the permission to distribute abroad suggests a wider audience was envisaged. The idea that the work was aimed at a local audience only seems to have gained currency through a report by a spy, Richard Morres of

* Research for this article was conducted while the author was in receipt of a Government of Ireland scholarship and a post-doctoral research fellowship from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences. 1 Increasingly difficult conditions for Irish and English Catholics in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries functioned as an important catalyst, leading to the emergence of a reformed catholic clergy and an ambitious catechetical programme. See Alexandra Walsham, 'Translating Trent? English Catholicism and the Counter Reformation: some reflections on recent research' in *Historical Research* (forthcoming). 2 For a more detailed discussion of the material found in *An Teagasg Críosaíde* and its particular application to an Irish audience see Salvador Ryan, 'Popular Religion in Gaelic Ireland, 1445–1645' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 2 vols, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2002), ii, pp 31–58. 3 They are described as A, L and R, taking their names from the places of publication, namely Antwerp (1611), Louvain (1614) and Rome (1717), the latter edition having been prepared by Philip Mág Uidhir O.F.M. and published by *Propaganda Fide*. See Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa, *An Teagasg Críosaíde*, ed. Fearghal Mac Raghnaill (B.Á.C., 1976) (henceforth cited as *TC*), p.x. 4 Cathaldus Giblin, 'The contribution of Irish Franciscans on the continent in the seventeenth century', in Michael Maher (ed.), *Irish Spirituality* (Dublin, 1981), p.91. 5 Patrick J. Corish, *The Irish Catholic experience: a historical survey* (Dublin, 1985), p.105.

Templemore, sent to the earl of Salisbury in 1611. The report referred to an Irish Franciscan friar's publication refuting heresy in circulation among Irish military. Fearghal Mac Raghnaill has said that this demonstrates the early popularity of the catechism among the Irish soldiers.⁶ However, whether the book proved popular or not among the soldiers is not at issue here. The more important question is whether the work was commissioned with the soldiers primarily in mind. A close look at Richard Morres's account does not necessarily support such a conclusion. The bulk of his report deals with the trip of David Kearney, catholic archbishop of Cashel, to Spain and Rome, to complain about the mistreatment of Irish catholics under James I, and his alleged request for armed intervention to protect them. The reference to the catechism is incidental:

Moreover he [Richard] plainly alleged that after his coming from Prague he saw one of the books among the Irish soldiers, printed in Irish at Antwerp, and set forth by the friars of Louvaine confirming their own religion, and to the contrary infirming and refusing that of the Protestants, in such sort, that infinite readers and hearers of the Irish will presently believe the contents thereof to be true.⁷

Morres, who may have been speaking of a copy of *An Teagasg Críosaíde* (the work is not named), hardly had sufficient evidence to confirm that the work was commissioned with the Irish regiments specifically in mind. It is not difficult to see why such a view might be expressed, however, given the close links between St Anthony's and the Irish military community in the Netherlands. Ó hEoghusa's colleague at Louvain, Aodh Mac Aingil, served as chaplain to the troops for some years, and the college founder, Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire had been instrumental in the formation of the Irish regiment in Flanders. However, Ó hEoghusa's target audience was probably not the army. It is safe to assume that the Franciscans in Louvain were anxious to catechise as many Gaelic speakers as possible, at home as well as abroad. On the other hand, it does seem possible that Mac Aingil and his colleagues envisaged the military community playing a role in the dissemination of the catechetical material on their journeys to and from Ireland. There is strong evidence to suggest that the English administration preferred the Irish regiment to remain on the continent rather than return home, for fear that disbandment might lead to an influx of a bellicose, religiously zealous group into Ireland, tutored in the catholic reform. These fears were not unfounded. In a letter to Philip III, the Jesuit Robert Persons, who worked with the Irish soldiers in Flanders, explained the purpose of instructing the military community as arising out of a hope that they would return to their homeland with a desire to spread the faith.⁸ Ó hEoghusa's dissemination of *An Teagasg Críosaíde* among the Irish

⁶ *TC*, p.x. ⁷ *Cal.S.P.Ire., 1611-14*, p.185. ⁸ Gráinne Henry, *The Irish military community in Spanish Flanders, 1586-1621* (Dublin, 1992), p.27.

regiment (if that was, in fact, the text that Morres saw) might better be understood, then, not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. The end envisaged by the friar was undoubtedly the wider use of the publication at home in Ireland and, concomitantly, an increasing knowledge of the fundamentals of the faith among his native people.

What evidence is there to suggest that *An Teagas Críosaíde* actually reached Ireland? Evidence is scarce. A copy of Ó hEoghusa's catechism survives in Royal Irish Academy Ms 23 L 19, which also contains the only contemporary copy of Ó Maolchanoire's 1593 catechism, and other religious material. This is probably seventeenth century. Richard Hayes listed five eighteenth-century manuscripts in which *An Teagas Críosaíde* appeared in extracts or in summary form.⁹ Interestingly, a seventeenth-century manuscript, British Library Sloane 3567 (c.1664–5), written in Clanawley, Co. Fermanagh, by Cúchonnacht, son of Aodh Mág Uidhir, contains religious poems by Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa. It does not contain his catechism but rather that of Antóin Gearnon, *Parrthas an Anma* (1645), a circumstance that may imply that the scribe was unaware of Ó hEoghusa's earlier work. This would suggest a limited distribution. However, this does not necessarily have to be the case. Gearnon's work was, in many ways, different to *An Teagas Críosaíde*. It fulfilled its own function and occupied its own niche in catechesis. *Parrthas an Anma* was both a catechism and prayer book, being more suitably designed for use by the laity. Anselm Ó Fachtna, while admitting Gearnon's reliance on Ó hEoghusa's groundwork, notes, however, that *Parrthas an Anma* had a simpler style, distinguishing it from its more abstract predecessor:

Cruthúnas eile ar shimplíocht na Gaeilge i bParrthas an Anma seadh an chaoi a d'fhág sé ar lár na hargóintí teibí a bhí sna sleachta a bhain sé as Teagas Críosaíde Uí Eodhasa.¹⁰

One of the earliest claims that *An Teagas Críosaíde* was effective in Ireland is contained in a report written by the Capuchin Richard O'Farrell to *Propaganda Fide* on the state of the Irish Church in 1658. It mentions, among references to other Franciscan works produced by the staff of St Anthony's, that Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa's *An Teagas Críosaíde* contributed greatly to counteracting ignorance, inculcating holiness and preserving the native language.¹¹ This implies that the work was circulating in parts of Ireland at least at this date. It is possible that the text was in use in Ireland from an earlier

⁹ These are RIA 23 O. 41 (scribe Séamus Mág Uidhir, 1720–1), British Library Egerton 192 (scribe Séamus Mág Uidhir, who wrote it for Tadhg Ó Baoighealláin, 1729), RIA 23 L. 20 (various Munster scribes, 1750–70s), Belfast Museum Gaelic MS. XXXV (scribe Simon Macken, Brookeborough, Co. Fermanagh, 1788) and RIA 24 C. 39 (18th century?): R. J. Hayes (ed.), *Manuscript sources for the history of Irish civilisation*. 11 vols. (New York, 1965). ¹⁰ 'Another proof of the simplicity of the Irish [language] in *Parrthas an Anma* is the manner in which he leaves aside the abstract arguments that featured in the passages of Ó hEoghusa's *Teagas Críosaíde*' (my translation): Antóin Gearnon, *Parrthas an Anma*, eag. Anselm Ó Fachtna, (B.Á.C., 1953), p.xix. ¹¹ Giblin, 'The contribution of Irish Franciscans on the continent in the seventeenth century', pp 101–2.

date. One puzzling aspect regarding its possible earlier use concerns Theobald Stapleton, a diocesan priest who produced an Irish-language catechism in 1639. Continentally educated, Theobald had already spent twelve years on the mission in Ireland before returning to Europe to write his catechism, which was published in Brussels. It is not clear when he was in Ireland. However, having been ordained in 1616, he was probably in the country at some time between 1616 and 1639.¹² In the preface to his work Stapleton, recounting his experience in Ireland, says

Misi, amh, do réir na haimsiri dho chaitheas an Erinn, am shagart á ccurum na nanam, do cúnnos dhamh nach raibh aoin ní as riochtanasuidh ar lucht aitribh na duthes sion, na an teagasc Criostuí áfhoillsiudh dhaibh, go soileir, idirdhealuithe, aithghear & á nghaoilaig (chum tarabhtha na nErenach) go suimeamhail, ionnas go ttuigidís é.¹³

Earlier, in the prologue to his work, he laments the pitiful state of religious knowledge he encountered in Ireland.¹⁴ Such a statement from Stapleton might lead one to surmise that Ó hEoghusa's catechism was not in circulation. It must be remembered, however, that Stapleton was working in Munster and most likely in Cashel diocese. His pastoral experience was probably confined to the south, and his concerns about the lack of a catechism in Gaelic may refer to Munster only. A report by John Roche, bishop of Ferns, to Luke Wadding in Rome in 1631 serves as a fitting illustration of just how limited an individual's knowledge of church affairs could be in seventeenth-century Ireland. Writing about one Seathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating), an Old English scholar and priest working in Tipperary, whose work *Trí bior-ghaoithe an bháis* is believed to have been in circulation as early as that year,¹⁵ Roche comments

One Doctor Keating laboureth much, as I hear say, in compiling Irish notes towards a history of Irish. . . . I have no interest in the man, for I never saw him, for he dwelleth in Munster.¹⁶

It is conceivable, then, that *An Teagasg Críostaidhe* was not in circulation in Munster during the period in which Stapleton ministered in Ireland. The catechism, however, may have been in use elsewhere, particularly in Ulster, from where its author hailed and in which the Franciscan order traditionally had a strong base. In the early seventeenth century, smuggling operations,

¹² Thomas Wall, 'Doctrinal instruction in Irish: the work of Theobald Stapleton', in *I.E.R.*, lxii (1943), p.107. ¹³ 'Indeed, from the period I spent in Ireland as a priest in care of souls, I noticed that nothing was more necessary for the inhabitants of that country than the transmission of Christian doctrine to them, clearly, distinctly, concisely, and in Gaelic (for the benefit of the Irish) [and] interestingly in order that they might grasp it': Irish Manuscripts Commission, *The Catechismus of Theobald Stapleton* (Dublin, 1945), Prologue §32. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Prologue §9. ¹⁵ Bernadette Cunningham, *The world of Geoffrey Keating: history, myth and religion in seventeenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), p.3. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.100.

bringing catholic printed material into Ireland, were reasonably successful.¹⁷ According to Nicholas Sanders, between 1564 and 1567, forty-one Catholic books written on the continent (amounting to 20,000 copies) were successfully smuggled into England.¹⁸ Despite the English administration's perpetual fear of disbanded Irish soldiers travelling back to Ireland freshly catechised by the Jesuits and Franciscans, between 9 September 1611 and 30 September 1613, eighty-nine licences were granted to mainly Old Irish soldiers to return home.¹⁹ It is quite possible that copies of *An Teagasg Críosaíde* were smuggled back to Ireland on some of these trips.

It seems likely that *An Teagasg Críosaíde* was not intended solely for the use of the Irish military community in Spanish Flanders. The project, which Ó hEoghusa began, had a wider target audience. The declaration of permission for the catechism to be printed, dated 20 June 1611, describes the work in the following terms:

ung livre intitulé Catechismus . . . en la langue hybernique pour servir à la jeunesse et aultres braves gens dicelluy pays contre la faulse doctrine des aultres religions contraires à nostre saincte foy et nostre mère la Sainte Eglise Catholique de Rome . . .²⁰

The perceived threat to the faith at home in Ireland from false doctrine was, then, the immediate impetus for producing the book. In applying to Archduke Albert for permission to print a second edition, in a letter dated 15 April 1614, Ó hEoghusa describes his homeland as afflicted by heresy. He noted that every day the power and malice of the heretics grew stronger and that they were attempting to turn people away from the faith, having already produced a translation of the Bible and a catechism in the Irish language.²¹

The text of *An Teagasg Críosaíde* cannot be properly understood without some appreciation of its target audience and the Tridentine works that inspired it. Ó hEoghusa broadly adopted the structure of the *Roman Catechism* (1566) of the Council of Trent, dealing with the Articles of the Creed, Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Sacraments in separate sections, with the exception of a fifth section dealing with such miscellaneous matters as the Virtues and

¹⁷ See Brian Mac Cuarta S.J. 'Old English Catholicism in Chester documents, 1609–19' in *Archivium Hibernicum* lvii (2003), pp 1–10, passim. ¹⁸ Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation* (Cardiff, 1997), p.251. ¹⁹ Henry, *The Irish military community in Spanish Flanders, 1586–1621*, p.50. ²⁰ 'a book entitled *Catechismus . . .* in the Irish language to serve the young and other brave people of this country against the false doctrine of other religions contrary to our holy faith and our mother the Holy Catholic Church of Rome' (my translation): Brendan Jennings and Cathaldus Giblin (eds), *Louvain Papers 1606–1827* (Dublin, 1968), pp 32–3. I wish to thank Micheál Mac Craith for drawing my attention to this reference. ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 38–9. Interestingly, this argument was used elsewhere in an effort to have a translation of Canisius's *Summa Doctrinae Christianae* made. In 1579, Owen Lewis wrote to Cardinal Sireto of Milan requesting that he become patron of the work, explaining that various heretical books had recently appeared in Welsh and that local catholics had no antidote for them in their own language. The financial backing was not forthcoming in this case and the edition did not appear until 1611, when it was published in Paris. See John Brodrick, *Saint Peter Canisius S.J. 1521–1597* (London, 1935), p.249.

Vices, Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, etc. Its also remains close to the *Roman Catechism* in so far as there is no division of material into questions and answers as in the manner of Peter Canisius. However, it does depart from the *Roman Catechism* model in some important ways, especially its tendency to address issues peculiar to the land for which it was composed. In this it resembles catechisms produced for use in mission territories, such as that of the Jesuit Jean Bréboeuf, who compiled a catechism in 1630 for use among the Hurons in French Canada.²² Therefore, while essentially a Tridentine work, Ó hEoghusa's catechism was not merely an Irish-language version of the standard version of the *Roman Catechism*.

While the *Roman Catechism* was designed as a handbook for parish priests, who were then supposed to teach it in a simplified form to their flocks, other catechisms produced in the aftermath of the Council of Trent functioned in a different way. The acknowledgement by the authorities granting permission for Ó hEoghusa's first edition in 1611 that it was designed to serve '*la jeunesse et lautres braves gens*' indicates that *An Teagasg Críosaíde* was viewed as being in the mould of works such as those of Peter Canisius. The catechisms of this Jesuit were highly regarded as practical tools of instruction, evidenced in the recommendation by the Synods of Dublin and Armagh in 1614 that every priest possess a copy of his work.²³ The works of Canisius were aimed at young audiences. The *Summa Doctrinae Christianae* (1555), for instance, was aimed at undergraduate students and advanced pupils of high schools. It was divided into short questions and long answers, some running to three or four pages in length.²⁴ The work was continually adapted and reproduced to reach various audiences. In 1556 a version for small children, known as the 'Shortest catechism', included a series of prayers for all occasions. In 1558 another version, called the 'Shorter catechism', was designed for boys and girls attending middle schools.²⁵ Given the young audience that Canisius had in mind, it could be argued that Ó hEoghusa's catechism was designed for similar age groups, but it is more likely that he had a more general audience in mind, as the structure of the catechisms indicates.

The structure of *An Teagasg Críosaíde* allowed the work to be used in a number of ways. Although written in accessible Irish, it was probably designed for use by the priest, who could disseminate the necessary doctrine, in small doses, to his flock, making use of the verse summaries at the beginning of each section to help hearers commit the lesson to memory. In Flanders, the instruction of Irish soldiers in the catechism was facilitated by the presence of chaplains from St Anthony's. However, the process was not as straightforward in Ireland. In the absence of clergy, the more difficult sections of the catechism could be accessed by learned laity, with the verse summaries providing suitable

²² Ryan, 'Popular religion in Gaelic Ireland, 1445-1645', ii, p.32. ²³ Daniel McCarthy (ed.), *Collections on Irish Church history from the manuscripts of the late Very Reverend Laurence Renehan*, Vol I (Dublin, 1861), pp 427-37. ²⁴ Brodrick, *Saint Peter Canisius*, pp 234-5. This work was later updated in 1566 to better reflect the decrees of Trent: *ibid.*, p.239. ²⁵ *Ibid.*

teaching material for the general populace. It is not surprising that it is the verse forms of Ó hEoghusa's work (*An Teagas Críosaíde a ndán*) that appear most frequently in seventeenth-century manuscripts. The diffusion of catechesis in short verse forms could be achieved relatively easily, even in the absence of clergy. Verse forms were easily memorised, and the use of verse summaries of sermons was a feature of Gaelic Ireland in the sixteenth century, if not earlier, as Donatus Mooney's account of the Franciscan preacher Eoghan Ó Dubhthaigh (minister provincial from 1580–3) reveals:

At the conclusion of each sermon, even of the longest, he was in the habit of reciting elegant verses in the Irish language, containing the pith of what he had said. These verses were so fruitful of good that they appear to have been inspired less by the spirit of poetry than by the unction of the Holy Ghost.²⁶

Peter Canisius also used verses in his 'Smaller catechism' of 1564 to assist children in remembering the feast days of saints.²⁷

Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa was a realist. His explanation of how catechetical requirements differed according to social group provides an insight into who the '*braves gens*' mentioned in the letter of approval for publication in 1611 might be:

Fiafraighthear ann so an bhfoil d'fhiachaibh ar an n-uile Chríosaíde fá phéin slánaighthe iad so uile // do chreideamh. As í ar bhfreagra go bhfoil d'fhiachaibh ar an n-uile dhuine foghlamtha 7 ar an n-uile dhuine ar a bhfoil cúram teagaisc an phobail, airteagail na Créidhe go hiomlán do chreideamh go follas, 7 a bhfios do bheith aige. Na daoine ainbhfeasacha thráth, dho-gheibh tógbháil suas bharbardha 7 nach cualaidh iomrádh go meinic ar airteagalaibh an chreidimh, ní fhoil d'fhiachaibh ortha fá phéin a slánaighthe a bhfios uile do bheith aca, achd atá d'fhiachaibh ortha na hairteagail as prínsipálta 7 as mionca ar a ccluínid iomrádh do chreideamh go follas, .i. a chreideamh go bhfoil aoinDia amháin ann, go bhfoilid trí pearsanna san Tríonnóid, go ttáinig Críosaíde a ccolaind daonda, // gur fhulaing páis, 7c. Atá dh'fhiachaibh ortha fós bheith ullamh dochum an uile neitheadh do chreideamh agá bhfoillséocha an eaglas gurab cóir a chreideamh.²⁸

²⁶ Colmán Ó Clabaigh, 'Preaching in late medieval Ireland: the Franciscan contribution' in Alan J. Fletcher and Raymond Gillespie (eds) *Irish preaching, 700–1700* (Dublin, 2001), p.93. ²⁷ Brodrick, *Saint Peter Canisius*, p.238. ²⁸ '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 catechising 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' (my translation): *TC*, p.32.

The allowance that Ó hEoghusa makes displays a greater pastoral sensitivity than is evident in Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire's catechism of 1593, where it is stated that unless one understands what is contained therein one cannot fulfil the requirements alluded to.²⁹ Ó hEoghusa's catechism was, therefore, aimed exclusively at neither the young nor the learned. It appears that the 'braves gens' in question were those deprived of catechetical instruction in their youth and currently ignorant of their faith. The simplicity of language in Canisius's works aimed at children and young people did not, after all, prevent such works from functioning as effective tools of instruction for unlearned adults. Evidence of this is found in English-language editions of his work in the late sixteenth century. In 1567 an adaptation of a Canisius catechism published at Louvain by Laurence Vaux, a Lancashire priest, was given the title *A Catechisme or a Christian doctrine necessarie for children and ignorant people*, thus neatly incorporating both groups.³⁰ John Fowler later reprinted the book both at Antwerp and Liège, stating in the preface that 'I have compiled this little book for young scholars and the unlearned'.³¹ Thus a catechism for the use of young students could be easily adapted to the instruction of adults with no formal religious instruction.

The rise of print in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, along with the accompanying increase in literacy, opened up new possibilities for the promoters of printed catechetical material. Alexandra Walsham, in a study of the role of printed religious works as 'domme preachers' in post-Reformation England, highlights what could be achieved with books when preachers were not available.³² The observations of the Jesuit Robert Persons in a letter to Aquaviva in 1581 are interesting in this regard: 'books penetrate where the priests and religious cannot enter and serve as precursors to undeceive many'.³³ Cardinal William Allen, founder of the English college of Douai (1568), held that 'books opened the way'.³⁴ It is not surprising, then, that catechetical material in early seventeenth-century Ireland was expected to be used with equivalent zeal by both clergy and laity. The fact that the business of catechesis was not envisaged as the sole preserve of the clergy is crucial to an understanding of how a work such as *An Teagasg Críosdaidhe* was intended to function. Theobald Stapleton was convinced of the crucial role of lay people in catechesis.³⁵ This was also the conviction of Jesuit missionaries working in Ireland in the earlier part of the seventeenth century. A Jesuit, returning from the Hebrides in 1613, converted a minister's son in the north of Ireland. As an act of repentance, the man burnt all his Protestant books and devoted himself to teaching the catechism to little children from then on.³⁶ A lady, who used to

²⁹ Brian Ó Cuív, 'Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire's catechism of Christian doctrine', in *Celtica* i (1946–50), p.165. ³⁰ Brodrick, *Saint Peter Canisius*, p.243. ³¹ Ibid. ³² Alexandra Walsham, "'Domme preachers': Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the culture of print", in *Past and present* 168 (August 2000), p.102. ³³ Ibid. ³⁴ Williams, *Wales and the Reformation*, p.250. ³⁵ Cunningham, 'Geoffrey Keating's *Eochair Sgiath an Aifrin* and the Catholic reformation in Ireland', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds.), *The churches, Ireland and the Irish* (London, 1989), p.138. ³⁶ James J. Corboy, 'The Jesuit Mission to Ireland 1596–1626', (M.A. thesis, University College Dublin, 1941), p.140.

educate the children of one of the northern chieftains in the protestant faith, repented in similar fashion and set about instructing people in catholic doctrine instead.³⁷ It is quite probable that, in both cases, the penitents assumed the role of catechists at the suggestion of their Jesuit confessor. The practice of prescribing the teaching of catechism as a form of penance is alluded to in an entry in Theobald Stapleton's *Catechismus* where, in a list of methods of satisfaction for sin, he includes 'the teaching or learning of catechism'.³⁸ The practice of enlisting lay assistance for catechetical work was a common feature of the Society of Jesus. In 1618, before members of the order would visit people in their homes (for it had become too dangerous for large groups of people to gather together at this time), they would first send some young men to teach the catechism in Irish.³⁹ The Jesuit Christopher Holywood frequently alludes to the employment of lay assistance in rural areas.⁴⁰ One of the functions of the sodalities, which were being formed in towns at this time, was to form lay leaders who, by their example and influence, might bring others to a more zealous practice of their faith.⁴¹ It appears, then, that the role of the educated laity in catechising their families, relations and communities in the first half of the seventeenth century may have been quite significant indeed.

Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa's *An Teagasg Críosaíde* is a work of real significance. It was the first successful printed work in the Irish language produced by the friars of St Anthony's that went quickly into a second edition three years. Its contribution towards the evangelisation of Gaelic-speaking people at home and abroad. While adopting the general structure of the *Roman Catechism* of 1566, Ó hEoghusa's work was more than an Irish translation of the Roman original. It borrowed from a variety of catechetical models. While clearly Tridentine in tenor, *An Teagasg Críosaíde* also contains passages of instruction explicitly directed at a native Irish audience. Suitable for the use of clergy and learned laity, the catechism provided teachers with attractive verse summaries of doctrine that had wide application. These summaries, copied and circulated in manuscript form, took the doctrinal message to new audiences. While we lack significant evidence regarding the circulation of the catechism in the first half of the seventeenth century, it seems likely that it had an impact before 1658, when Richard Farrell alluded to its efficacy. At a time when instruction by clerics was difficult, catechisms such as Ó hEoghusa's would have permitted educated laity to catechise in their homes.

³⁷ Ibid. ³⁸ Irish Manuscripts Commission, *The Catechismus of Theobald Stapleton*, p.122. ³⁹ Corboy, 'The Jesuit Mission to Ireland 1596–1626', p.207. ⁴⁰ Ibid. ⁴¹ Ibid., p.240.