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## Obituary and Bibliography of Hugh Fenning OP

Fr Hugh Fenning, O.P., was born in Dublin on 25 January 1935, the second eldest of seven children born to Seamus Fenning, a book dealer, and Nora Richardson. He received his early education from the Sisters of the Holy Faith at Clarendon Street, Dublin, and at the Infant School of the Sisters of St Louis, Rathmines. For his primary and secondary education, he attended CBS, Synge Street, Dublin.

On 14 September 1953, Fr Hugh received the habit of the Dominican Order at St Mary's Priory, Cork, where he made his first profession a year later on 15 September 1954. After a year of philosophical studies at St Mary's Priory, Cork, as was customary at the time, he was assigned to St Mary's Priory, Tallaght, where he studied philosophy for a further two years and embarked upon the study of theology. On 10 July 1960, Fr Hugh was ordained to the priesthood at Holy Cross College, Dublin, by John Charles McQuaid, C.S.Sp., Archbishop of Dublin.

To complete his theology, he was assigned to Collegio San Clemente, Rome, where for a year he attended the Angelicum, at that time the Pontifical International Athenaeum of the Dominican Order in Rome. He then attended a year of courses in pastoral theology at the Pontifical Lateran University, and assumed the office of bursar. He also heard reports that Fr Aubrey Gwynn, S.J., Professor of Medieval History, University College Dublin, and Robert Dudley Edwards, Professor of Modern Irish History at University College Dublin and a nephew of Fr Humbert MacInerny, O.P., were anxious to have his superiors set him on the path of historical studies. Whether due to their efforts or not, his publication of *St Saviour's Church, Dublin: centenary, 1861–1961* (Dublin, 1961) is usually credited by his brethren with the decision in 1962 to send him to study history. Fr Hugh himself favoured UCD, Fr Louis C. Coffey, O.P., Prior Provincial, preferred an institute in Rome, while Fr Leonard E. Boyle, O.P., suggested the Université Catholique de Louvain.

By the end of the year, Fr Hugh was enrolled in the Université Catholique de Louvain for the Licence en sciences historiques, a course that required three years of lectures, exercises, and examinations, as well as a mémoire. In addition, he taught a weekly class of English to the Flemish Dominican students at Louvain and assisted occasionally with chaplaincy work at a US air force camp at Bitburg, Germany. With the permission of Fr Aniceto Fernández, O.P., Master General, he resided with the Irish Franciscans at St Anthony's College, Louvain. As he advanced

through the course of studies, he prevailed upon Professor Roger Canon Aubert, to direct his mémoire on the decree issued by the Congregation de Propaganda Fide in 1751 forbidding novitiates in Ireland in so far as that concerned the Dominican Order, a field of research that proved ideally suited to expansion for a doctorate. As the doctoral programme itself required no fixed period of residence at Louvain, Fr Hugh returned to Collegio San Clemente to which he was still officially assigned and where he remained until 1967, engaged in research for his thesis.

At the beginning of 1967, it was decided that Fr Hugh was to be assigned to the Historical Institute of the Order at the Convent of Santa Sabina, Rome, 'for some time to come.' Proclaimed on the day of his assignation 'una nuova gemma nella corona gloriosa di Santa Sabina e dell'Istituto Storico,' Fr Hugh welcomed the appointment as an opportunity to pursue research into the history of the Province of Ireland. However, he was less enthusiastic at the prospect of living 'on fish and spaghetti, [and] on a dole of a pound a month,' and on more than one occasion referred to the regime at Santa Sabina in terms of penal servitude.

In addition to the completion of his doctoral thesis, membership of the Historical Institute obliged him to submit one article a year to its journal, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*. A judiciously chosen area of research saw him faithfully discharge this annual task and subsequently revise, edit, and publish the articles as a book, *The Irish Dominican Province, 1698–1797* (Dublin, 1990), a volume regarded as 'a milestone in Irish historiography' and 'in terms of scale and scope ... without peer.' While resident at Santa Sabina, he also found himself with an unenviable nomination to the Commission de Dépouillement des Réponses au Questionnaire du Maître Général, a commission established to manage the revision of the constitutions in the wake of Vatican Council II and tasking its members with an examination of 2,500 replies arranged into more than 6,000 propositions. To supplement 'the dole,' Fr Hugh also acted as *de facto* English editor of *International Dominican Information*.

On 15 February 1973, in the Salle des Promotions at the Université Catholique de Louvain, Fr Hugh successfully defended his doctoral thesis, *The undoing of the friars of Ireland: a study of the novitiate question in the eighteenth century*, described in the pages of *L'Osservatore Romano* as 'an excellent contribution to our knowledge of the Irish Church in the eighteenth century.' Already an invited lecturer at the Pontifical Institute Regina Mundi, he was soon teaching ecclesiastical history also at St Mary's Priory, Tallaght, and at the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas, Rome, where the new Docteur en sciences historiques was further invited to teach the course *De gratia!* Fr Hugh would gradually limit his teaching commitment to St Mary's Priory, Tallaght, and eventually cease teaching altogether so as to concentrate on the historical research for which he was so eminently qualified and signally suited.

In 1975, with the permission of Fr Vincent de Couesnongle, O.P., Master of the Order, Fr Hugh was assigned to Collegio San Clemente while still remaining a member of the Historical Institute and continuing to contribute on an annual basis to its journal. In 1982 he was assigned to St Mary's Priory, Tallaght, where he remained assigned for the rest of his life except for a brief assignation to the Black Abbey, Kilkenny. The assignation to Tallaght afforded prolonged proximity to the provincial archive for which he was responsible since 1973 and allowed Fr Hugh to add to its holdings, respond to inquiries, and facilitate users. He also secured more suitable accommodation for the archive, and contributed a fine series of obituaries of his brethren to a succession of provincial chapters.

With the encouragement of Fr Flannan Hynes, O.P., Prior Provincial, he gradually established in the provincial archive a substantial library of Catholic literature printed in Ireland from its genesis in the eighteenth century until the Catholic Relief Act of 1829, gathered almost entirely from the priories in Ireland. Long before his return to Ireland, Fr Hugh had already examined the libraries of six Irish colleges in Rome for similar publications and published his findings. Over several decades in Ireland, he sought out all relevant publications in each of the major institutions while also affording attention to smaller religious libraries, and published a remarkable series of annotated bibliographies of all material of Catholic interest printed in Dublin and Cork in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

With apparent ease and great self-deprecation, Fr Hugh managed to combine the roles of historian, archivist, librarian, and bibliographer, and to great effect. His extensive bibliography provides eloquent and indisputable evidence of diligence and ability.

The significance of his research was perhaps better known to his historiographical peers than to his brethren although the latter did not fail to express their own appreciation and admiration. In 1997, after successful application to Fr Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., Master of the Order, the degree of Master in Sacred Theology was conferred on Fr Hugh, a degree reserved for academic eminence and excellence. The following year, a further accolade was paid to Fr Hugh when he was recognised as the Historian of the Province of Ireland.

Continuing the tradition of the Order's involvement in the cause of the Irish martyrs, Fr Hugh served in the 1990s as a member of the historical commission for the beatification of a second group of Irish martyrs, just as Fr Reginald Walsh, O.P., and Fr Humbert McNerny, O.P., had been associated with the beatification of the first group. In addition, Fr Hugh was for many years a member and sometime committee member of the Catholic Historical Society of Ireland and also served as chairman of the Association for Church Archives of Ireland from 1994 until 1996. Although the primary work entrusted to him by his superiors was of an

intellectual nature, he always discharged the simple duties of his priesthood readily and with fidelity.

A severe stroke in 2012 deprived him of his powers of concentration and left him physically incapacitated and dependent upon care provided by others. Unable to continue what had been his life's work and passion, and deprived even of his love of gardening and ornithology, he accepted his lot nobly. However, even in his infirmity, he continued to be possessed of an ability to couple apt description of character and circumstance with a subtle sardonic style. Ultimately, his needs required transfer to the Kiltipper Woods Care Centre, Kiltipper Road, Dublin 24, in 2013 where he remained for the last years of his life and where he died peacefully on 25 July 2018. His remains reposed in the large parlour of St Mary's Priory, Tallaght, prior to removal to the church. Fr Patrick Lucey, O.P., *socius* to the Prior Provincial, was the celebrant of the Mass of Christian Burial after which Fr Hugh's remains were interred in the community cemetery with his brethren, the record of whose lives he had himself composed for many years.

While a student of theology, the effort required of Fr Hugh to grasp God's knowledge of contingent futures persuaded him that his mind was not suited to such speculation. As a result, having been introduced to Irish Dominican history by Fr Luke Taheny, O.P., he decidedly favoured the realm of historical investigation. Indeed, Fr Louis C. Coffey, O.P., Prior Provincial for most of the 1960s, regarded the decision to advance Fr Hugh on the path to a professional historian's career as one of the most important achievements of his own term of office. In turn, Fr Hugh regarded him as 'the first mover' in his career as an historian. Fr Hugh's brethren remember with admiration and pride his dedication to the historical investigation and publication of the history of the Province of Ireland while posterity will value the enormity and erudition of his contribution to Irish historiography in general.

### Bibliography

The provincial archive of the Irish Dominicans contains a collection of the early articles and reviews by Fr Hugh Fenning, O.P., pasted into a copybook and entitled 'Opera omnia of Fr Hugh Fenning, O.P.' Those first publications date back to his days as a clerical student and consist principally of articles published in *The Watchman*, a journal edited and published twice a year by the students of St Mary's Priory, Tallaght, from 1935 until the 1970s. Although a review of Constance Cruickshank's *Lenten fare and food for Fridays* also whets the appetite, Fr Hugh's articles focus for the most part on Irish Dominican history.

Indeed, the history of the Irish Dominicans at home and abroad proved to be the focus of his research and publication for more than fifty years, affording him the subject for his doctoral thesis and for his tome on the

eighteenth-century history of the province. In addition, he was also the author of a fine collection of scholarly yet popular historical accounts of various foundation of the Dominican Order in Ireland and of the obituaries of his brethren. On one occasion, he set himself to assemble and edit a series of articles published by a confrère some decades previously, identifying all the primary sources used by the author and annotating the text to furnish the articles with the necessary scientific apparatus to produce *Medieval Irish Dominican studies*, the authoritative text on the Dominican Order in medieval Ireland.

His research extended far beyond *Dominicana Hibernica* to include the role of clergy in nineteenth-century typhus and cholera epidemics and the Famine, as well as a succession of articles regarding imprints of Catholic interest in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a major project undertaken to assist students of Irish spirituality. Although his bibliography is extensive, it is unlikely that his publications exhausted his research. No doubt, as the arrangement and description of his research papers and the cataloguing of his private library are undertaken, unpublished research will be found.

The fundamental arrangement of the bibliography is chronological. Items with the same date of publication are arranged in alphabetical order according to title except for book reviews which are arranged in alphabetical order according to the surname of the author. It should also be noted that when there is the same date of publication, book reviews, translated works, and edited works are listed after books, articles in journals, essays, and entries in dictionaries. Occasionally, the publisher's details are included for items published locally or obscurely.

The current list is a simple tribute to a distinguished scholar and confrère. It might even allow the progress and development of his research to be traced. It is intended to ensure that a complete bibliography will be available to students and scholars. Notification of any omission will be received with gratitude.

### Abbreviations

A.A.	<i>Analecta Augustiana</i>
A.C.A.I.	<i>Association for Church Archives of Ireland</i>
A.F.P.	<i>Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum</i>
<i>Archiv. Hib.</i>	<i>Archivium Hibernicum</i>
<i>Collect. Hib.</i>	<i>Collectanea Hibernica</i>
Cols	Columns
<i>D. &amp; L.</i>	<i>Doctrine and Life</i>
<i>F. &amp; N.</i>	<i>Far and Near</i>
Fasc.	Fascicle
<i>I.E.R.</i>	<i>The Irish Ecclesiastical Record</i>
Transl.	Translator

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