
A glimpse of Scottish religion from a Dominican letter of 1561

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In Volume 9 of the *Innes Review*, the late John Durkan gave a translation of a letter, originally published in Italian in 1607, from the Scottish Dominican John Grierson to the Prior of the Dominican convent in Paris and dated 6th October 1555.¹ Durkan proposed that the date 1555 should be amended to 1559, and in this he was followed by David McRoberts and Iain Flett.² Another date tentatively suggested by Durkan was 1565. In a subsequent publication, however, Durkan changed his mind and reverted to the original date of 1555.³ In this note, we consider the letter in more detail and date it, with reasonable confidence, to October 1561. The letter gives an interesting glimpse of Scottish religion in 1561 and of the state of wider Dominicanism.

I. Grierson's letter

First we give the letter, as translated by Durkan, to show the dating problem.

Reverend Magister Noster, Greetings and mutual charity in the Lord. Be so good as to receive from the present bearer, Michael Bassinden, son of a Scots merchant from Edinburgh, James Bassinden, 8 French crowns,

¹ J. Durkan, 'The Dominicans at the Reformation', in 'Miscellany', *Innes Review*, Vol. 9:2 (1958), pp. 216-217. The letter is taken from Michele Pio, O.P., *Delle Vite de Gli Huomini illustri di S. Domenico* (Bologna, 1607), col. 383.

² D. McRoberts (ed.), *Essays on the Scottish Reformation, 1513-1625* (Glasgow, 1962), p. 445; I. E.F. Flett, 'The Conflict of the Reformation and Democracy in the Geneva of Scotland, 1443-1610' (unpublished M. Phil. thesis, University of St Andrews, 1981), p. 74.

³ J. Durkan (ed.), *Protocol Book of John Foular, 1528-1534* (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh, 1985), pp. xiii and xxiii, note 40. The date 1555 is also adopted in T.S. Flynn, *The Irish Dominicans, 1536-1641* (Dublin, 1993), p. 59.

all of weight, with sixteen shillings, French also, to send to Rome by a banker or in whatever other way pleases the Most Reverend Master General and Procurator of the order, for the contribution which this our province owes in the present year 1555. Of which we send six to the Most Reverend General and two to the Procurator. However in the books of our province we have found that for the space of 13 or 14 years these contributions have no longer been paid to them or to their successors, as also the Reverend Father Procurator has written, adding that according to the new taxes our province ought to pay six ducats to the Procurator by way of contribution, which practice is not to be introduced or accepted by our province on any account, because it has scarcely been able to pay the aforesaid 8 crowns with the four Giulii [that is, sixteen French shillings, each crown with two French shillings making a ducat in Rome], and if our province cannot pay according to the old taxes, much less can it pay according to the new taxes.

Nor ought anyone to hope or look for so much as a penny from this province for the years gone by, because the friars in it, for the most part, in all these past years, have been hidden in hiding holes and caves of the earth, afflicted and in straits, living with their parents or others, who yet show themselves unwilling to receive them. They were thrown out forcibly and by violence from their house, despoiled even of their own clothes, not to speak of their other habits, and many houses were ruined and burnt. The Edinburgh house was burnt in part and sacked completely. That of St Andrews sacked and completely burnt except for the church. Those of Dundee and Montrose sacked, cast down to the ground and destroyed, and all the others sacked in great part. We now live on some very small rents which we had before. To us are not given alms of any sort (as is also the case with the other religious), except those given by certain ecclesiastics, who for this oblige us to perform intolerable tasks and to preach in their churches, whereby we lead a poor and highly austere life.

And because it would take long to write other similar things to the Most Reverend General, I ask you to send this along with the aforesaid money to the General and the Procurator. The ship is about to leave, and as it now happens the wind is still. Wherefore I shall not write more but at the first opportunity offered by another ship I shall write at length to the Most Reverend General, to the Procurator, to Master Antoine Messott and to F. Eugene Ohairt from Ireland. We greet your Reverence well. From Edinburgh in Scotland, the 6th October 1555. From your Reverence's son and servant, the Provincial of Scotland.⁴

⁴ This letter is re-published with permission of the Editor of the *Innes Review*, for which we are grateful.

The Scottish vicariate of Dominicans was elevated to a province in either 1470 or 1481 (the precise steps are unclear) and the annual provincial contribution was fixed at that stage at ‘eleven gold ducats to the Master of the Order and six to the procurator’.⁵ This sum must have been reduced sometime thereafter.⁶ In 1515, these contributions were ordered to be paid either to the priory of Paris or to that of Bruges.⁷ The purpose of the contribution was to meet the expenses of the General Chapters. The General Chapters occurred roughly every three years, and were supposed to alternate north and south of the Alps, but in fact were generally in Italy.⁸ From 1484, the Scottish province was exempted from sending diffinitors (representatives) to General Chapters held south of the Alps,⁹ but nevertheless diffinitors were sent to six of the General Chapters up to that in Rome in 1518 (at which John Adamson and John Spens were present). There is no record of Scottish attendance thereafter. In the Reformation period, General Chapters were held in Rome in May 1553 and May 1558, in Avignon in May 1561, and in Bologna in May 1564.

II. The Personnel

1. John Grierson

John Grierson, the writer of the letter, was born about 1486 and studied at King’s College, Aberdeen.¹⁰ He was procurator of the Dominican convent in Aberdeen in 1511 and prior there in 1512. He subsequently spent time at the convents in Edinburgh and St Andrews, becoming provincial of the Dominican order in Scotland, on the death of John Adamson, in 1523. He retained this position until his own death which, according to

⁵ W. Moir Bryce, ‘The Black Friars of Edinburgh’, *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, Vol. 3 (1910), pp. 13-104 (pp. 43-44).

⁶ The rates were re-assessed at the 1551 General Chapter in Salamanca but no mention was made of the Scottish province on that occasion; B.M. Reichert (ed.), *Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica: Acta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum, 1220-1844* (9 vols., Rome, 1898-1904), Vol. 4 (1500-1553), pp. 317-318.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 141.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 132.

⁹ J.P. Foggie, *Renaissance Religion in Urban Scotland: The Dominican Order, 1450-1560* (Leiden, 2003), p. 257.

¹⁰ For accounts of Grierson, see his entry by John Durkan in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* and Foggie, *Renaissance Religion in Urban Scotland*, pp. 279-284.

Thomas Dempster, occurred in 1564.¹¹ He was a prominent part of the Church establishment in Scotland, being present at the heresy trials of Patrick Hamilton in 1528/9 and Walter Milne in 1558, and a member of the Provincial Councils between 1549 and 1559.¹² In May 1534, he and the Warden of the Franciscans were active in proposing articles to James V for the suppression of Scottish Lutheranism, both in burghs and religious houses.¹³ It would be interesting to know where he stood with regard to the ‘spirituali’ doctrine that came into Scottish Romanism from the late 1540s.¹⁴ In March 1559/60, he recanted his errors on Scripture, the Pope, Purgatory, the sacrifice of the mass, images, saints, clerical celibacy, and transubstantiation before the St Andrews Kirk Session, but this recantation is usually regarded as insincere.¹⁵ The last recorded event in his life was his consenting as provincial to the feuing of lands and fishing rights of the Montrose convent on 18th May 1564.¹⁶

The state of the Scottish Dominican province under Grierson is discussed by Anthony Ross and Janet Foggie, with Ross (who was a Dominican) generally painting a brighter picture than Foggie.¹⁷ The subject is of special interest to Protestants because of the number of important Scottish reformers who were former Dominicans, such as John Willock and John Craig.¹⁸

¹¹ Thomas Dempster, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Scotorum*, ed. D. Irving (2 vols., Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1829), Vol. 1, p. 330. Dempster is often unreliable, but there seems no reason to question this date.

¹² It should not be assumed that those present at the trials of Protestant martyrs necessarily endorsed their condemnation. If the law was on the side of these pressing for their death, there may have been little that others could do to prevent this.

¹³ R.K. Hannay (ed.), *Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs, 1501-1554* (Edinburgh, 1932), pp. 422-3.

¹⁴ See D.W.B. Somerset, ‘The *spirituali* movement in Scotland before the Reformation of 1560’, *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal*, Vol. 8 (2018), pp. 1-43.

¹⁵ D. Hay Fleming (ed.), *Register of the minister, elders and deacons of the Christian congregation of St Andrews, 1559-1600* (2 vols., Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1889-90), Vol. 1, pp. 16-18. Hay Fleming thought that the hand of Knox could be traced in the wording of the recantation (p. xii).

¹⁶ Foggie, *Renaissance Religion in Urban Scotland*, p. 282.

¹⁷ A. Ross, ‘Some notes on the religious orders in pre-Reformation Scotland’, in McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation, 1513-1625*, pp. 185-244; Foggie, *Renaissance Religion in Urban Scotland*.

¹⁸ D.W.B. Somerset, ‘Martin Luther and his influence on Scotland’, in *Scotland’s Debt to Martin Luther* (Edinburgh, 2018), pp. 1-24, lists at least a dozen Scottish Dominicans who became Protestants between 1530 and 1560 (p. 13).

2. The Paris convent and Antoine Messot

The Dominican convent in Paris was on rue Saint-Jacques (which derived its name from that of the Dominican chapel), just south of the Sorbonne. The convent was suppressed in 1790 and its buildings demolished in the early nineteenth century. We have not so far discovered the identity of the prior or priors at the time of the Scottish Reformation.

The situation of the convent was somewhat complicated, with two potential sources of discord. One source may have been the Huguenot movement, which was running strongly in France at the time. One of the friars, Nicholas Garrapin, was under 'vehement suspicion of heresy' in 1558;¹⁹ and another, Dominic Sergent, was facing excommunication in 1558 and was finally dismissed from the convent in May 1561, although the reasons behind this are not clear.²⁰

The other (undoubted) source of discord was the internal strife among the Dominicans. Unlike the Franciscans, the Dominicans never formally split into Observant (i.e. stricter) and Conventual (more liberal) but the underlying division were still there. In the early part of the sixteenth century, Saint-Jacques was taken over by the stricter party after a struggle, and the Gallican congregation was separated from the congregation of Holland by the Master General Thomas Cajetan, and comprised the Observant wing of Dominicanism in the north of France.²¹ By the seventeenth century, however, the Gallican congregation had become 'decadent',²² and it would seem that this change was already under way by 1558. In that year, the new Master General, Vincenzo Giustiniani placed the convent under his own direct authority to rectify 'those matters in which it appeared to have failed', securing the approval of the General Chapter for this step in May.²³ The French king, however, intervened²⁴ and the 1561 General Chapter at Avignon had to reverse the earlier decision

¹⁹ Reichert, *Acta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Vol. 5 (1558-1600), p. 20. Garrapin (or Garapin) had been approved as a bachelor of theology in 1553; *ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 355.

²⁰ Reichert, *Acta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Vol. 5, pp. 20, 41.

²¹ Ross, 'Some notes on the religious orders in pre-Reformation Scotland', p. 191; Benedict M. Ashley, *The Dominicans* (Wipf & Stock, 2009), pp. 119-120.

²² Ashley, *The Dominicans*, p. 146.

²³ Reichert, *Acta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Vol. 5, p. 16.

²⁴ Ashley, *The Dominicans*, p. 123. Which 'French king' is unclear. Henry II died in July 1559, and his son Francis II in December 1560, to be succeeded by Charles IX. During the brief reign of Francis II, ecclesiastical power lay with the Cardinal of Guise.

and restore Saint-Jacques to the Gallican congregation.²⁵ At the same time, Antoine Abeli, a friar from the Paris convent who had ‘resisted’ the Master General, presumably by appealing to the French king, was dismissed to the Troyes convent.²⁶ Whether these external changes were accompanied by an internal change of the prior we do not know.

‘Master Antoine Messott’, mentioned in the letter, appears to have been Antonio Massot, a Dominican from the province of Aragon. In 1558 he was given permission to study in Paris and to lecture in the *studium generale* on Thomas Aquinas. On 11th June 1560, he recorded the minute for the peculiar licensing of Petrus Aridiensis (Pierre Seichépée).²⁷ In May 1561 he was approved as a master of theology and appointed regent in the *studium generale* in Barcelona.²⁸ How he was known to Grierson is unclear.

3. Michael Bassendyne

Michael Bassendyne (Bassinden), the bearer of the letter, was – or was soon to become – a barber and an Edinburgh burgess. He was probably born about 1540 and died of the ‘pest’ in September 1585.²⁹ His wife’s name was Marion Purves (d. before March 1589/90).³⁰ He was the brother of the

²⁵ Reichert, *Acta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Vol. 5, p. 41.

²⁶ J. Quéatif and J. Échard, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Recensiti* (2 vols, Paris, 1719-1721), Vol. 2, p. 293; Reichert, *Acta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Vol. 5, p. 41. I am grateful to ‘Batavulus’ on Latin StackExchange for help with the translation and interpretation of the *Acta* on this point.

²⁷ Quéatif and Échard, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Recensiti*, Vol. 2, p. 310. Aridiensis was a Dominican studying at the Sorbonne. He was refused licence by the Sorbonne because of three theses that he had advanced on 27th November 1559 (one of which was that a man who does not exercise faith in each action is building for Gehenna). The Faculty declared that he was *membrum putridum*. On appeal, their decision was reversed – either by the college of Cardinals or by Parliament – and licence was granted on condition that Aridiensis immediately declare that he had advanced the theses only for purposes of disputation and would not maintain them against the judgment of the Faculty. Massot’s minute records the ceremony of his licensing. Soon afterwards, Aridiensis was a member of the Council of Trent. See P. Féret, *La Faculté de Théologie de Paris et ses Docteurs les plus célèbres* (7 vols., Paris, 1900-1910), Vol. 1, pp. 404-405; B. Hauréau, *Histoire Littéraire du Maine* (4 vols., Paris, 1843-52), Vol. 1, pp. 182-3.

²⁸ Reichert, *Acta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Vol. 5, pp. 19, 21, 39, 44.

²⁹ For Michael Bassendyne’s testament, see ScotlandsPeople CC8/9/18, ‘Michaell Bassindene’. I am grateful to Michael Pearce for this information.

³⁰ F.J. Grant (ed.), *The Commissariot Record of Edinburgh: Register of Testaments, 1514-1600* (Edinburgh, 1897), p. 225.

printer Thomas Bassendyne (d. 1577).³¹ Michael and his wife had ‘bairnes’, mentioned in Thomas’ testament in 1577, and these were probably Nicol and Alexander.³²

Michael’s father James was born probably in the 1490s and became an Edinburgh burgess on 1st March 1523/4. He was dead before August 1564.³³ His wife Alison Tod was probably a few years younger and died sometime before June 1589.³⁴ In March 1536/7, James rented the north vault of the Netherbow as a booth for his shop, and two years later he and his spouse were granted the wadset of the property on condition that they maintain the Netherbow.³⁵ By May 1558 James also had a house at the Netherbow, and he and his son Thomas owned further property in the area.³⁶ In April and May 1542 James rented three plots of land from the Edinburgh Dominicans which were part of the grounds of their priory; and through these transaction he had obviously been acquainted with Grierson over many years.³⁷ Another James Bassendyne who was described as ‘elder son and heir apparent of James’ became an Edinburgh burgess on 16th December 1551. This may possibly have been an elder brother of Thomas and Michael who predeceased them.³⁸

³¹ Thomas Bassendyne’s antecedents are often said to be ‘unknown’, but they were known to Durkan, *Protocol Book of John Foular, 1528-1534*, p. xiii, and probably to researchers before him.

³² Sir D. Wilson, *Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1891), Vol. 2, p. 68.

³³ C.B. Boog Watson (ed.), *Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild-Brethren, 1406-1700* (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh, 1929), p. 49; *Commissariat Record of Edinburgh: Register of Testaments, 1514-1600*, p. 22.

³⁴ *Commissariat Record of Edinburgh: Register of Testaments, 1514-1600*, p. 276

³⁵ Sir J. Marwick (ed.), *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, A.D. 1403-1589* (4 vols., Scottish Burgh Records Society, Edinburgh, 1869-1882), Vol. 2 (1528-1557), pp. 83, 85, 90, 93.

³⁶ Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, Vol. 3 (1557-1571), p. 21; C.B. Boog Watson, ‘Notes on the names of the closes and wynds of old Edinburgh’, *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, Vol. 12 (1923), pp. 1- 156 (pp. 86, 154). Gilbert Bassendyne also owned property nearby (*ibid.*, p. 48).

³⁷ Moir Bryce, ‘The Black Friars of Edinburgh’, pp. 61, 78, 98. The curious conditions under which the land was leased are quoted in Foggie (p. 103): ‘providing that the said grantees shall not let the said piece of waste ground, or any houses to be built thereon, to loose women, smiths, or schoolmasters, for schools or for ball-playing.’

³⁸ Boog Watson, *Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild-Brethren, 1406-1700*, p. 50. Another probable relation, though more distant, was the Edinburgh goldsmith Edward Bassendyne; see W. Angus (ed.), *Protocol Book of Mr Gilbert Grote, 1552-1573* (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh, 1914), No. 273.

On 17th January 1557, Michael made a payment to the Dean of Guild, so he was presumably an apprentice by then.³⁹ He may have started as an apprentice wright before becoming an apprentice barber. In addition to cutting hair, barbers were employed in bloodletting and applying leeches, in pulling teeth, in setting bones, and even in amputations. They were also allowed to prepare and sell aqua vitae (whisky). In Edinburgh, the Incorporation of Surgeons and Barbers was established in 1505, and as Helen Dingwall observes, a knowledge of Latin was a prerequisite for its apprentices.⁴⁰

On 30th April 1563, the Edinburgh council decided to convert the old 'revestrie' (vestry) at the east end of St Giles' church into a new chamber for the Town Clerk Alexander Guthrie.⁴¹ Michael's shop was built at about the same time and was separated from this new chamber by a small space. Because he had built, slated, and furnished the shop himself, he was discharged from paying the first years 'maill' (rent). The small space between the shop and the chamber turned out to be a mistake, 'being continually filled with filth', and in September 1564 the council resolved to enclose it so that Michael and the Clerk would share a common entrance.⁴² Thus October 1563 onwards seems to have been Michael's first year as a barber. The earliest mention of his brother Thomas is also from about that time, when John Scot's printing irons were ordered to be delivered to him on 21st March 1563/4. Sir Daniel Wilson deduces from Thomas's testament that Michael probably rented part of Thomas's house at the Netherbow and lived there.⁴³

4. Eugene O'Hart

The 'F. Eugene Ohairt' to whom Grierson was intending to write was Eugene (or Owen) O'Hart.⁴⁴ O'Hart entered the Dominican order in Sligo, spent eight years in Paris, probably in the 1550s, returned to Ireland, and

³⁹ R. Adam (ed.), *Edinburgh Records: Burgh Accounts* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1899), Vol. 2, p. 61.

⁴⁰ H.M. Dingwall, *History of Scottish Medicine* (Edinburgh, 2003), p. 50; Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, Vol. 1 (1403-1528), pp. 101-104.

⁴¹ Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, Vol. 3, p. 160.

⁴² Adam, *Edinburgh Records: Burgh Accounts*, Vol. 2, pp. 187, 195.

⁴³ Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, Vol. 3, p. 171; Wilson, *Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time*, Vol. 2, p. 69.

⁴⁴ For Eugene O'Hart, see his entry by Terry Clavin in the online *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Royal Irish Academy), and Flynn, *The Irish Dominicans, 1536-1641*, pp. 58-63. The primary source for his life, apparently, is John Lynch, *De Praesulibus Hiberniae: potissimis catholicae religionis in Hibernia serendae, propagandae et conservandae auctoribus*, ed. J.F. O'Doherty (2 vols., Dublin, 1944), Vol. 2, pp. 339-342 (not seen).

went to Rome at the end of 1561, receiving the bishopric of Achrony on 28th January 1562. From May 1562, he attended the Council of Trent, returning to Ireland after the conclusion of the Council in December 1563. He was an enthusiastic promoter of Tridentine Romanism and died in 1603 (reputedly in his hundredth year, although it seems strange that a man of his obvious talents should have remained in obscurity until he was in his fifties).

The letter mentioning O'Hart's journey to Rome in 1561 was sent by David Wolfe, S.J., the papal commissary to Ireland, to Cardinal Morone, the Cardinal Protector of the Dominicans, in Rome. It was written from Limerick on 12th October 1561, and from it we extract the following:

Bernard O'Huyghin, Bishop of Elphin, has resigned his see to a Dominican, Andrew [O']Crean, prior of Slighiach (Sligo), a devout man enough, and of good repute, more especially with the seculars, by reason rather of his virtuous life and kindness than of his doctrine. Bernard O'Huyghin has the character of a worthy and devout man, but he was not acceptable to the people, and having by reason of their ill will lost great part of his temporalities, he has selected this Andrew, who is much in the good graces of all, to recover what he has lost. Andrew is now by order of his Vicar Provincial on his way to Rome to get the see upon Bernard's resignation; and for that purpose he craved a testimonial from me, which, though I know little of him personally, I gave him because of the good repute in which he is held throughout the country. He is accompanied by one Owen or Eugene O'Hart, also a Dominican, a great preacher and a man of good life, and zealous for the honour of God. Owen has been for eight years or thereabouts in Paris; and I deem (though he goes not for that purpose or gives it a thought) that he would make a good bishop; and in the event (which is common to all) of the said Andrew's death, he might well replace him, notwithstanding that the resignation was not made in his name. And assuming the said Andrew to live and be made Bishop of Elphin, Eugene might be made Bishop of Achonry, which see is now void by the death of the Dominican Cormac O'Coyn, of good memory.⁴⁵

Thus O'Crean and O'Hart were on their way to Rome by 12th October 1561, and may already have reached Paris. O'Crean fell ill in and remained in Paris, but O'Hart proceeded on to Rome, perhaps after a delay.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ This letter is often quoted; see *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Vatican Archives, Vol. 1, 1558-1571*, ed. J.M. Rigg (London, 1916), pp. 39-70 (available at British History Online).

⁴⁶ Entry by T.S.R. O'Flynn on Andrew O'Crean in the online *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. See also Flynn, *The Irish Dominicans, 1536-1641*, pp. 63-67.

The Irish Dominican province had been suppressed by Henry VIII from 1539 onwards, but this had taken effect mainly in Leinster. Further west, the convents, though unsuppressed, had suffered serious decline. Under Mary I, the Dominican revenues was restored to them, and most of the houses that had been leased or sold to laymen were recovered, but the number of friars remained small. In 1558, provincial status, which had lapsed, was re-established, but the same year brought Elizabeth to the throne, and the Protestant suppression of the Dominican province was resumed. Grierson's letter was thus written at a time when the Irish Dominican province was also struggling for its existence.⁴⁷

5. The Master General and the Procurator General

The Master General of the Dominican order was Stefano Usodimare (1500-1557) from 1553 to 1557, and Vincenzo Giustiniani (1516-1582) from 1558 to 1570. Usodimare was prior of the convent of S. Domenico in Bologna (where John Craig was: see below) from 1539 to 1547 and was also inquisitor of Genoa. He used his powers, however, to shield members of the *spirituali*.⁴⁸ Giustiniani was from Chios and became a cardinal in 1570.

The Procurator General of the order from 1561 to 1569 was Eustachio Locatelli (1518-1575), who was confessor to Pius V and became bishop of Reggio Emilia from 1569.⁴⁹ He was slightly younger than the Scottish reformer and former Dominican John Craig (1512-1600) and would have been well known to him. Locatelli was born in Bologna and entered the Dominican convent there in 1537 when Craig was the instructor of novices. In 1547 and 1548 Locatelli took part in the Bolognese sessions of the Council of Trent. From 1554 to 1560 he was inquisitor of Bologna, strictly applying the index of forbidden books promulgated by Paul IV, and taking part in the trial of Cardinal Morone. It is possible that he was the man who apprehended John Craig when the latter was converted through reading Calvin's *Institutes*.

⁴⁷ Flynn, *The Irish Dominicans, 1536-1641*, pp. 45-48.

⁴⁸ See entry on Stefano Usodimare by Guillaume Alonge in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (online)

⁴⁹ Quétif and Échard, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Recensiti*, Vol. 2, pp. 231-32. Locatelli's successor as Procurator General, Serafino Cavalli (1522-1578), was one of the inquisitors injured when the Ripetta prison in Rome was destroyed in August 1559, see M. Mampieri, *Living under the Evil Pope: The Hebrew Chronicle of Pope Paul IV by Benjamin Nehemiah ben Elnathan* (Brill, 2020), pp. 298-299.

The Dominican order was very heavily involved in the inquisition,⁵⁰ but was also affected by the *spirituali* movement which was one of the principal targets of the inquisition. The most notable Dominican member of the *spirituali* was Peter Martyr Vermigli who became a Protestant in 1542. Further information on Dominican-*spirituali* connections would be welcome, and may have relevance to the pre-Reformation period in Scotland. For example, the English Dominican Richard Marshall, who moved to Scotland and was probably the main author of Archbishop Hamilton's *Catechism* in 1552, was at the Dominican General Chapter in Rome in May 1539, just when the *spirituali* movement was at its height.⁵¹ Was it at this juncture that he imbibed or consolidated the *spirituali*-type views that came out in the *Catechism*?

III. The dating of the letter

The first thing to note is that Grierson's letter must have been written after June 1559. The description in the second paragraph of the damage to the friaries is impossible to reconcile with anything in the earlier 1550s (notwithstanding Durkan's reversion to the earlier date of 1555).⁵² There is simply no record of simultaneous, widespread, and effective attacks on Scottish friaries before 1559 nor of friars going into hiding; and nor would well-informed Dominicans in other countries have believed such stories if Grierson had invented them. Thus the letter must postdate June 1559.

Furthermore, the reference to the friars hiding 'in all these past years' requires some lapse of time between the destruction of the friaries in the summer of 1559 and the writing of the letter. Thus, if the day and month of 6th October are accepted for the letter (on the principle of retaining the data as far as possible), then the earliest possible date would be October 1560, and the plural 'years' would really require October 1561 or later. On

⁵⁰ See, for example, M.M. Tavuzzi, *Renaissance Inquisitors: Dominican Inquisitors and Inquisitorial Districts in Northern Italy, 1474-1527* (Brill, 2007). This involvement continued with the Roman inquisition, set up in 1542. Michele Ghislieri, Inquisitor General of Christendom from 1557, and later Pope Pius V, was a Dominican.

⁵¹ Reichert, *Acta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Vol. 4, p. 283.

⁵² The date of 6th October 1555 can be excluded for further reasons: for example, on 27th September 1555 the Edinburgh council sent a puncheon of wine to the Black Friars (Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, Vol. 2, p. 293), and in December 1555, the provincial chapter of the Dominicans met in their Edinburgh convent – see Adam, *Edinburgh Records: Burgh Accounts*, Vol. 1, p. 175; D. Patrick, *Statutes of the Scottish Church, 1225-1559* (Scottish Historical Society, Edinburgh, 1907), p. 162 – both of which indicate that the convent was habitable during that period.

the other hand, the information in the letter about the destruction of the friaries seems reasonably fresh, and was apparently coming as news to the recipients, which would make a later date less likely.

At the other end, the death of Grierson sometime in 1564 and of James Bassendyne before August 1564 gives a latest date for the letter of October 1563, but Michael Bassendyne's involvement with his shop around that time makes that date unlikely. Eugene O'Hart was probably in Paris in the 1550s (but we have already excluded that period for the letter), and was abroad again from say September 1561 to December 1563, when he returned from the Council of Trent. As he was probably staying at the Paris convent of Saint-Jacques in October 1561, but was at Trent in October 1562, the former date would fit better with the letter. Furthermore, Antonio Massot may still have been in Paris in October 1561, or have left shortly before, whereas by the following October he would have been long settled in Barcelona.

Thus, all in all, a date for the letter of 6th October 1561 is the best fit for the information available.

IV. Discussion

On the assumption that Grierson's letter was written in the 1560s, and probably on 6th October 1561, we now make some observations.

1. The letter confirms that Grierson's recantation in March 1559/60 was insincere, as has long been supposed.⁵³
2. The letter provides an interesting glimpse of the Scottish Dominican province in October 1561. The friars had been scattered, the houses damaged or destroyed,⁵⁴ and the land of at least four of them (St Andrews, Wigtown, Dundee, Stirling) had been feued to others.⁵⁵ The

⁵³ See Quétif and Échard, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Recensiti*, Vol. 2, p. 187; Ross, 'Some notes on the religious orders in pre-Reformation Scotland', p. 198.

⁵⁴ The Glasgow house was damaged but 'undemolished' in February 1561/2, while those in Elgin and Inverness may have been relatively intact; J. Hill Burton (ed.), *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Vol. 1, 1545-1569* (Edinburgh, 1877), p. 202. The Inverness burgh council held its meeting in the Inverness convent on 8th January 1559/60, and the roof was available in June 1571 for the repair of the parish church; W. Mackay and H.C. Boyd (eds.), *Records of Inverness* (2 vols., New Spalding Club, Aberdeen 1911-24), Vol. 1, pp. 40, 201-2.

⁵⁵ Hay Fleming, *Register of the minister, elders and deacons of the Christian congregation of St Andrews, 1559-1600*, Vol. 1, p. 16; Foggie, *Renaissance Religion in Urban Scotland*, p. 282; *Charters and Other Documents Relating to the Royal Burgh of Stirling, A.D. 1124-1705* (Glasgow, 1884), pp. 90-92.

return of Mary Queen of Scots in August 1561 had obviously heartened Scottish Romanists, but it does not seem to have inspired any great optimism in Grierson. Of the 70-odd Dominican friars in 1559, thirty-eight are recorded as receiving the pension or 'friars wages' eventually paid to them, for which they had to conform to Protestantism; and probably many of these had already conformed by October 1561.⁵⁶ One of them, David Rag, was now the Protestant minister in Inverness.⁵⁷ So the Scottish Dominican province was in complete disarray. It was a surprising time to resume paying the annual contribution to Rome after so many years, but we will see the probable reason for this below.

3. Grierson does not seem to have drawn any encouragement from the ongoing religious turmoil in Edinburgh. On 2nd October 1561, the newly elected Provost and baillies had issued a declaration:

Perceiving the priests, monks, friars, and others of the wicked rabble of the antichrist the Pape to resort to this town, in contrariety to the tenor of the proclamation made to the contrary, therefore ordains the said proclamation to be proclaimed of new, charging all monks, friars, priests, nuns, adulterers, fornicators, and all such filthy persons to remove themselves of this town and bounds within xxiiii hours, under the pain of carting through the town, burning on the cheek, and banishing the same for ever.⁵⁸

On 5th October, Mary had issued a counter-declaration: that because the declaration of 2nd October had been contrary to her commandment, and she had not been made privy thereto, and they had not sought to know her pleasure in the matter, therefore the town was to 'convene incontinent within the Tolbooth of our said burgh and deprive the Provost and baillies who presently bear office therein of all further bearing of office for this instant year, and to choose other qualified persons in their room.' This command was duly put into effect, to John Knox's indignation and dismay,

⁵⁶ Ross, 'Some notes on the religious orders in pre-Reformation Scotland', pp. 234, 238-9.

⁵⁷ David Rag was minister in Inverness before 18th January 1560/61. He was robustly supported by the burgh council against local opposition. In June 1561 a man who had said that Rag was a 'harlot' and had been forcing men's wives in Caithness and Orkney and had bitten the ear of Andrew MacNeil (Dominican prior of Stirling in 1559), was ordered to acknowledge his fault at the Mercat Cross and the church. In December, another man who had accused Rag of adultery with his wife and drawn a whinger on him was fined and required to confess his fault; *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 1, pp. 50, 51, 54, 58-9, 71.

⁵⁸ Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, Vol. 3, p. 125.

and Grierson must have known all about it, but he takes no notice of it in his letter.⁵⁹ Perhaps he thought it was all too late.

4. For all four Dominican convents that it mentions, the letter provides information about their destruction that seems not to be recorded elsewhere.

The Edinburgh house was burnt in part and sacked completely. That of St Andrews sacked and completely burnt except for the church. Those of Dundee and Montrose sacked, cast down to the ground and destroyed, and all the others sacked in great part.

There are various accounts of the sacking of the Edinburgh friary at the end of June 1559 but none of them mention that it was set on fire.⁶⁰ Possibly this was something that happened subsequently. The north aisle (or chapel) of the St Andrews church survives to this day, but Grierson's letter seems to be the only explicit record that the entire church was spared in June 1559.

It is generally understood that the Dundee convent had been lying in ruins since it was destroyed by the English in 1548, and indeed this is acknowledged in a letter from Grierson on 26th January 1557/8 which says that the town of Dundee

is infected with heresies, and, for the most part, favours and encourages heretics; not only are there no religious contributions, but the friars are mocked, scorned, and despised without any hope of amendment, and even proceeding from bad to worse. Yet we have assigned thereto two friars, who do not live there, but in other convents, coming and going, so that religion may retain a hold on their place.⁶¹

Yet Grierson's letter of October 1561 would seem to imply that some repairs had been made in order for further destruction to have taken place in 1559.

Relatively little is known about the Montrose convent at the period of the Reformation but the friars had certainly been ejected by 22nd February

⁵⁹ See W.C. Dickinson (ed.), *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland* (2 vols., London, 1949), Vol. 2, pp. 21-23; M. Lynch, *Edinburgh and the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 97-99.

⁶⁰ See D.W.B. Somerset, 'The Scottish Reformation in late June 1559: the destruction of the friaries of Stirling, Linlithgow, Glasgow, and Edinburgh', *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal*, Vol. 6 (2016), pp. 1-33 (pp. 11-18).

⁶¹ Moir Bryce, 'The Black Friars of Edinburgh', pp. 73-74. See also A. Maxwell, *Old Dundee Prior to the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1891), p. 165; Flett, 'The Conflict of the Reformation and Democracy in the Geneva of Scotland', p. 74.

1559/60.⁶² Grierson is the only source of information, however, about the destruction of the convent.

5. Grierson's letter discloses the fact that the Scottish Dominican province had not paid its annual contributions to the Master General and Procurator for the previous thirteen or fourteen years. In itself, the non-payment of annual contributions by provinces was nothing unusual,⁶³ as recorded by the General Chapter in Salamanca in 1551,⁶⁴ but the Scottish non-payment draws attention to a significant feature of the Scottish Dominicans under Grierson's provincialate, namely the diminished contact with the wider Dominican community compared with what had gone before. This in turn was part of the general Scottish ecclesiastical isolation after the death of Cardinal David Beaton. As J.H. Pollen observed: 'The separation of Scotland from Rome, 1559-1560, had been preceded by a long period during which communication had become casual and infrequent'.⁶⁵

Various illustrations of this isolation can be given. In the forty years preceding Grierson's tenure, the Scottish province had six times sent diffinitors to the General Chapter, but in the forty years of his provincialate they sent none; and there are seldom even any references to the Scottish province in the records of the General Chapter during these years. Grierson's other surviving letter (already mentioned), dated 26th January 1557/8 and addressed to the Master General of the order, was presumably written with an eye to the General Chapter a few months later. The part of it that has been printed lists the Scottish Dominicans convents at the time with their patron saints, and mentions problems in connection with St Monans and Dundee; but it is simply a general report rather than an ongoing interaction.⁶⁶ The present letter is likewise giving information

⁶² *Fifth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London, 1876), Appendix, p. 640.

⁶³ The Irish province, for example, paid no contributions for the years 1525-1531 and 1542-1547; see Flynn, *The Irish Dominicans, 1536-1641*, p. 43.

⁶⁴ Reichert, *Acta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Vol. 4, pp. 317-8. Neither the Scottish nor Irish provinces are mentioned in the list of required contributions from the provinces and congregations. The Irish province had secured an exemption from the Master General in 1548 (Flynn, *The Irish Dominicans, 1536-1641*, p. 43), but Grierson's letter shows that the Scottish province did not have an exemption.

⁶⁵ *Papal Negotiations with Mary Queen of Scots, 1561-1567* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1901), p. xviii.

⁶⁶ Contrast this with the attempted direct oversight of Saint-Jacques in Paris mentioned above.

from a couple of years earlier, indicating a lack of formal communication during that period.

Further evidence of Scottish Dominican isolation can be seen in the small numbers of Dominicans studying abroad, or even travelling abroad, after the 1520s. In 1525, no fewer than nine Scottish Dominicans had their degrees approved by the General Chapter, probably all of them having studied on the continent.⁶⁷ Thereafter, the only Scottish Dominican recorded as having studied abroad seems to have been John Hunter, probably around 1540.⁶⁸ As far as travel is concerned, the only mention that we have seen is 'a brother George of Scotland in Antwerp in 1536'.⁶⁹ Grierson himself is not known to have left Scotland; although the fact that he was somehow in touch with O'Hart and Massot suggests that there may have been more travel going on than has left a record. After 1560, only two Scottish Dominicans, John Hunter and William Henderson, are known to have retired to the continent.⁷⁰ Others who refused to conform to Protestantism, such as Andrew Leitch, Andrew MacNeil, and David Black, chose nevertheless to remain in Scotland.

6. Why had Grierson resumed paying the annual contribution at this point, and how had the money been raised? The immediate answer to the first question was probably an ultimatum from the Master General. Grierson speaks of a letter having been received from the Procurator General, and perhaps there was a threat to suspend Grierson as provincial if payment was not received, which might have affected his legal position in Scotland.⁷¹ Furthermore, the return of Mary Queen

⁶⁷ Three of the nine friars are *known* to have studied abroad. A tenth student, probably Alexander Seton, was approved for study at Paris at the same time. Ross, 'Some notes on the religious orders in pre-Reformation Scotland', p. 200.

⁶⁸ According to David Camerarius, Hunter studied in Cologne; see Ross, 'Some notes on the religious orders in pre-Reformation Scotland', p. 200.

⁶⁹ A. Ross, 'Libraries of the Scottish Blackfriars, 1481-1560', *Innes Review*, Vol. 20, (1969), pp. 3-36 (p. 13).

⁷⁰ Henderson conformed to Protestantism at first, and received friars wages as late as 1566. He was abroad, probably in Flanders, by the early 1570s. G. Donaldson (ed.), *Accounts of the Collectors of Thirds of Benefices, 1561-1572* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1949), pp. 256-7; Ross, 'Some notes on the religious orders in pre-Reformation Scotland', p. 229.

⁷¹ Anthony Ross claimed, regarding the year 1559, that 'the Master General was insisting that a new Provincial should be elected by October of that year' (Ross, 'Libraries of the Scottish Blackfriars', p. 34). Ross did not state his evidence, but probably it was Grierson's letter (which Ross was presumably dating to 1559). Being a Dominican himself, Ross was

of Scots may have made the retention of his status as provincial more desirable.

For the second question, we have no idea. The sum of money raised was not large – in modern terms, a few thousand pounds – but one would have thought that the friars would rather spend it on their plight than send it to Rome. One wonders whether any further annual contributions were paid.

7. How did Grierson know Antonio Massot and Eugene O'Hart? Had he, perhaps, been to Paris in, say, the later part of 1558, when Massot had recently arrived and O'Hart may still have been there? If so, Grierson was certainly back in Scotland by March 1558/9 when he was present at the final Scottish Provincial Council.⁷²
8. If our dating of the letter is correct, there must have been good channels of communication between Scottish and Irish Dominicans for Grierson to have known that O'Hart was in Paris and on his way to Rome. Somehow the Scottish Reformation had not disrupted these channels. Aside from this letter, however, there is surprisingly little record of contact between the Scottish and Irish provinces before the Reformation.⁷³
9. It is noteworthy that Grierson still had the 'books of our province' in 1561. These had presumably been kept in either the Edinburgh or St Andrews convent and rescued in 1559, but they have long since disappeared.
10. The hardship of the friars, as described in Grierson's letter, was considerable.

Nor ought anyone to hope or look for so much as a penny from this province for the years gone by, because the friars in it, for the most part, in all these past years, have been hidden in hiding holes and caves of the earth, afflicted and in straits, living with their parents or others, who yet show themselves unwilling to receive them.⁷⁴

likely to have had insight into the situation, and we have adopted his suggestion, slightly modified.

⁷² Patrick, *Statutes of the Scottish Church*, p. 163.

⁷³ See Ross, 'Libraries of the Scottish Blackfriars', p. 14; Foggie, *Renaissance Religion in Urban Scotland*, p. 132, for a few mentions.

⁷⁴ A similar description of Scotland was given by the papal envoy Nicholas de Gouda in September 1562: 'Some monks too there are, but very few, and they either wander

Their plight was to continue until they started to receive their pensions or ‘friars wages’ of £16 per annum; and although the collection of the ‘thirds of benefices’ commenced in 1561, it appears that payments may not have been received until 1563. Furthermore, as already mentioned, nearly half the friars were not paid pensions, presumably because they refused to conform to Protestantism. In addition to his pension, Grierson received four bolls of wheat, in response to a supplication to the queen, and a supplementary payment of £9 6s 8d.⁷⁵

11. The friars were helping to conduct Protestant services, but these are described in strangely neutral terms:

To us are not given alms of any sort (as is also the case with the other religious), except those given by certain ecclesiastics, who for this oblige us to perform intolerable tasks and to preach in their churches, whereby we lead a poor and highly austere life.

The newly established Protestant Church was very short of preachers, and presumably those being employed here were friars who, in name at least, had conformed to Protestantism. Grierson used the word ‘ecclesiastics’ for their employers, rather than the more usual ‘heretics’, probably because he did not want to admit or publicise in wider Dominican circles exactly what was happening. Grierson presents the friars as preaching with reluctance but this would not uniformly have been the case. Of the 70-odd Dominican friars ejected in 1559/60, over a quarter became ministers, exhorters, or readers in the Reformed Church, and they cannot all have been insincere.⁷⁶

about without any fixed abode, or wear secular clothes and live among their friends. There are some priests also, but one would hardly distinguish them from laymen by their dress and appearance’; Pollen, *Papal Negotiations with Mary Queen of Scots, 1561-1567*, p. 137.

⁷⁵ Donaldson, *Accounts of the Collectors of Thirds of Benefices, 1561-1572*, pp. xxxv, 54, 98.

⁷⁶ A comparison of the lists in Foggie and Haws yields twenty-two ejected Dominicans who joined the Reformed Church: John Blindscheill, James Carruthers, Alexander Colt, James Dodds, James Fotherington, John Gibson, William Gibson, John Gray, Robert Keith, Thomas King, Elias McCulloch, Andrew Philip, David Rag, John Robertson, James Scott, William Simson, Henry Smith, James Steel, Patrick Strathauchin, Arthur (Anthony) Stronoch, Francis Wright, and Thomas Wright. Of these, Dodds, Keith, and Rag were ministers. Several of the identifications are less than certain, and at least one (Keith) is not recognised by Foggie as a Dominican. Foggie, *Renaissance Religion in Urban Scotland*, Appendix 3, pp. 256-322; C.H. Haws, *Scottish Parish Clergy at the Reformation, 1540-1574* (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh, 1972), pp. 250-323.

12. The fact that the letter and money were committed to Michael Bassendyne shows that he was not unsympathetic with Romanism; and probably the same was true of his father James, and perhaps also of his brother Thomas. Indeed Grierson may well have been residing with the Bassendyne family in Edinburgh.
13. What had taken Michael Bassendyne to Paris? Perhaps his visit was connected with his father's business activities; or perhaps it was something to do with his training as a barber; or perhaps his brother Thomas was in Paris at the time.⁷⁷ Another remote possibility might be a family connection with the celebrated astronomer and astrologer James Bassentine or Bassendyne (d. 1568) who was also in Paris, and who returned to Scotland in 1562.⁷⁸ It was a period of major religious unrest in France, with a particular outbreak of violence at the church of St-Médard in Paris in late December 1561, but presumably wary travellers could steer clear of danger.

⁷⁷ The claim that Thomas Bassendyne learned printing at Paris and Leiden does not seem to date before the late eighteenth century.

⁷⁸ See the entry on James Bassentine by A.J. Turner in *ODNB*.