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Title	O'Brien, Terence Albert [1600-1651]
Author(s)	Forrestal, Alison
Publication Date	2004
Publication Information	Alison Forrestal, 'O'Brien, Terence Albert (1600-1651)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004
Publisher	Oxford University Press
Link to publisher's version	<a href="http://www.oxforddnb.com/">http://www.oxforddnb.com/</a>
Item record	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/6806">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/6806</a>

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**O'Brien, Terence Albert** (1600-1651), bishop of Emly, born at Tuogh in Limerick (Emly diocese). His Old Irish family were descended from the ancient house of Thomond and held almost 1600 acres in the Limerick city area. With eleven siblings, O'Brien was initially educated by his pious mother and an aged priest who resided with his family. He was then placed under the care of his uncle, Maurice O'Brien, prior of the Limerick Dominicans, before joining the order in 1622 and receiving Albert as his religious name. His religious formation continued at the Dominican convent of Saint Peter Martyr in Toledo, where he spent eight years. He then returned to Ireland as an ordained priest and was successively prior of the Dominican convents at Lorrha (Tipperary) and Limerick city. By 1643 he was provincial of the Irish Dominicans and was one of two representatives of the province at the general Dominican chapter held in Rome in 1644 (*Hibernica Dominica*). O'Brien was a prominent force at the chapter, displaying his commitment to reform of the Irish Dominicans through the revival of the order's ancient schools in Dublin, Limerick, Cashel, Athenry and Coleraine. His enthusiasm did not go unnoticed and he was appointed judge of controversies over conventual boundaries for Munster and was awarded a masters in Theology. He returned to Ireland via Lisbon, in order to visit the two Irish Dominican institutions there. A report that he had been appointed bishop of Emly recalled him to Ireland, but this preferment was delayed by the death of Pope Urban VIII in July 1644. At this stage, O'Brien became involved in the politics of the Confederation, immediately displaying the political and religious allegiances which he would maintain until his death in 1651. As Dominican provincial, he signed the protest against the peace with Ormonde in February 1646, on the grounds that it did not

offer sufficient guarantees to catholicism and, like many other Old Irish, thus aligned himself with the papal party of Nuncio Rinuccini. No doubt influenced by this support, Rinuccini twice recommended O'Brien for the episcopate as an individual of 'prudence and sagacity, who have been in Italy, and is so expert in the management of church revenues that happy results might be expected from his care' (*Memorials*, p. 235).

O'Brien was appointed bishop of Emly on 11 March 1647 and consecrated in Kilkenny eight months later. Closely involved in Confederate politics, he resided in or near Kilkenny in 1648, and was one of five bishops who recommended Thaddeus (Tadhg) O'Clery to Rome for the bishopric of Derry in May of that year (*Spicilegium Ossoriense*, i). He may also have held a diocesan synod at this time. Yet, his attention was primarily directed towards the negotiations between the Confederation and the Royalists, and his stance was consistently influenced by papal policy. In August 1648, he was amongst the bishops who signed the declaration against Inchiquin's truce, pronouncing its ratification as a 'deadly sin against the law of God and of his church.' (*Confederation and War*, vi, p. 279). Supported by O'Brien, Rinuccini subsequently issued ecclesiastical censures, declaring excommunication against those who supported the truce. Still adhering to the nuncio, O'Brien then travelled to Galway to join him, but found that Rinuccini had sailed to the continent. As the war in Ireland entered its final phase, O'Brien then attended the meeting of bishops at Clonmacnoise in December 1649. Faced with the arrival of Cromwell in Ireland, the bishops, although deeply divided, succeeded in agreeing a call for loyalty to

Ormond. O'Brien's disquiet with this position became clear in his subscription to the declaration of Jamestown just eight months later, which released the people from their duty of obedience to Ormond and excommunicated all those who persisted in following him. He was also involved in the desperate plan to offer the title of 'protector royal' to the Duke of Lorraine in return for military aid against Cromwell, although the negotiations never came to fruition.

The situation was now acute, not least in O'Brien's own diocese of Emly which was controlled by the parliamentary army. The bishop spent the remainder of his life in Limerick city which was under siege by Ireton's forces during the summer of 1651. O'Brien worked intensively during this period to buoy up the spirit of the Limerick citizens, urging stubborn resistance to the besieging army. His refusal of the terms of surrender offered by Ireton meant that when the city capitulated (29 October 1651) he was among the twenty-two citizens excluded by name from protection of life and property. Reputedly, O'Brien refused a bribe of £40,000 and a safe passage from Limerick though this appears to be part of the hagiographic tradition which emerged following his death (*Hibernia Dominicana*, p. 488). Having been discovered in the city hospital where he was administering to the sick, O'Brien was executed on 31 October and his head exposed on Saint John's Gate in Limerick city. He was finally buried, some years later, in or near the old Dominican priory of Limerick. Subsequent hagiography has stressed O'Brien's place within Irish martyrology and nationalism, on the basis of his staunch support for catholicism against the royalist and parliamentary forces, upon his care of the plague-ridden of Limerick during the 1651 siege and upon his

manner of death and the miraculous preservation of his hair and flesh for several years. Certainly his active tenures as prior and then bishop reveal O'Brien as a man of initiative, stringent in his demands upon himself and others acting on behalf of Catholics and acutely aware of the political and religious issues at stake during the civil wars.

938 words

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- 2 \*Patrick Moran, *Spicilegium ossoriense*, i-iii, (1874-84)
- 3 \*Myles O'Reilly, *Memorials of those who suffered for the Catholic faith in Ireland in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries*, (1868)
- 4 \*C. P. Meehan, *The rise and fall of the Irish Franciscan monasteries and memoirs of the Irish hierarchy in the seventeenth century*, (1877)
- 5 \*Patrick J. Corish, 'Ormond, Rinuccini, and the confederates, 1645-9', and 'The Cromwellian Conquest, 1649-53', *A new history of Ireland*, eds. T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne, iii, (1976), 317-35 and 336-52
- 6 Augustine Valkenburg, *Two Dominican martyrs of Ireland*, (1992)
- 7 *Dictionary of National Biography*, (1885-91)
- 8 Dominic De Burgo, *Hibernica Dominica*, (1762)
- 9 John Gilbert (ed.), *History of the Irish Confederation and the war in Ireland*, i-vii, (1882-91)
- 10 Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; its history and antiquities, ecclesiastical, civil and military from the earliest ages*, (1866)