Introduction

Old Wine in New Bottles

Ireland is, has been for over fifteen hundred years, and may continue to be for some time yet, a stereotypically Roman Catholic component of the British Isles. Popular culture refers often to the stern Irish nun, or the exhausted parish father – *Father Ted* is illustrative of this Irish Catholic stereotype. *Irish Catholic* as an identity has an ethnoreligious component, too: Even as the clan-based social structure of Ireland disappeared, the identity of being *Irish* was at times used as a proxy for *Catholic*, especially in the modern era – this author is an *Irish Catholic*, whose family – as far as he can tell – has adopted such a moniker. Therefore, be critical of this work, as this very author is a product of what he writes about; the last name appended to this paper's author is found as early as the 10th century, in the very texts he cites, and – albeit anglicized – must not be discounted in reading this work. As soon will be elucidated, clan propaganda and antique historiography, the *Annals* and so on, are intertwined. This is not to preface doubt in the author's argument, but to encourage readers to be cautious, to critically assess – to *read between the lines* – the story of Celtic Christianity.

Christianity before the 11th century in Ireland incorporated several unique practices, henceforth referred to as *syncretic* practices, or *syncretic* traditions, that remained with strong clerical support until the Gregorian Reforms of the Roman Church in that century and beyond; the scope of this exploration ends with the normalization of Celtic Christianity, and that would be during the late 11th century.

Relatively unaffected by the collapse of the Roman Empire, Irish monks were prolific in maintaining Christian texts and contributing to the Christian body of literature. Arguably, considering the geographical and political isolation of Ireland, the character of Irish Christianity allowed it to influence the Latin Church on an equal, if not senior, level as compared with other communities in the extremes of the Latin Christian world.

There is ample historiography – too much to cover herein – that asks *how* such an institution as the Catholic Church in Ireland came to be, or even why the Irish, uncivilized and far from Rome, contributed so much to the Latin literary body throughout the late antique and early medieval periods. If the *luck of the Irish* is a sarcastic aphorism today, consider the luck of the Irish through the 5th to 11th centuries; active in contemporary theological discourse, prolific in poetry, in literature, and successful in converting the Irish not by the sword, but the cloverleaf and the pen.

Yet there were reasons why such a conversion did not draw so much blood as did other *barbarian* – the Roman Imperial descriptor – peoples in their own conversions; Why did such a warlike culture as the Celts during this most aggressive period of their history *take to the cloth*, so to speak, without the collapse of an ever-expanding monastic institution? The conversion of the Irish to Christianity was a process that subsumed pagan traditions and local cultural norms; fairy mounds and festivals of old goddesses-come-saints, concubinage and clerical marriage, and more such *concessions* – syncretism – are informative on *how* the Irish remained Christian.

Despite the Gregorian Reforms that would normalize – make consistent; standardize – Christian practices among those in Communion with Rome, Irish Catholics today maintain much of the ancient traditions that were earlier subsumed. While Ireland would – after the Norman Conquest of England – lose much of the autonomy it had enjoyed before, the body of Latin literature of this period nonetheless remains replete with Irish monastic writings: *Pangur Bán, Lex Innocentium, St. Patrick's Breastplate,* and so on. It is at times chiding, boastful, humble, reassuring, stern, relaxed, or even intimate; the poetic achievements appreciated in academia today were not detached from the banal laws and rules of the same monastic institution. The Gregorian Reforms may have outshone Irish monastic achievement,

yet in no way does the preservation of these texts suggest that they were anything but appreciated.

But to understand the end, where this island of rogues and raiders, slavers, razers, kin-slayers, clerics with wives – in the plural, that is – among other labels both accurate and controversial, one must start by knowing such a society. It is not a flattering picture. Yet as with wine – first overpowering, raw and unrefined – Celtic Christianity proved to age this culture of death and competition into a complex blend of intellectual prowess, good intentions, and ideas that remain relevant to the date of this writing. While the bottles may now seem so new, the vintage inside is an old one – well matured and cultivated over a score or more generations – that belies some greater depth; One cannot read the label to fully understand the vintner's product.

Forgive this author for his poetics, both as they appear in the obvious as in the slightness of his writing. As the reader returns to that essential state of critical thinking, assume as much cynicism as necessary. While the sources herein present one thing, that this Celtic Christian phenomenon was both unique and relies upon said uniqueness in its survival, take no conclusions without the fullness of proof. Ireland is gifted and cursed by poetic fate, and Celtic Christianity was no less susceptible to such an ironic, anomalous fate by poetic diktat. This institution was to enter – to refine, to Christianize – an already poetic land. It did so admirably.

This author will begin this journey at its conclusion, and quote one poem; pivotal in this author's own fate, a lesser-known work, it speaks of the ill-fated Brian O'Rourke, *Rí* of *Bréifne*, leader of a warband, and his failed last gasp at his own clan's claim to power. Defeated, captured, yet so sympathetic a man, the ordeal was dour for all. He requested to Queen Elizabeth in captivity, in the Tower of London, to be hung in the manner of his countrymen – with a wicker cord – and so was granted this last request.

Address to Brian O'Rourke "Of the Bulwarks" to Arouse Him Against the English.

"By his bard, Teig Dall O'Higgin, about 1566."[1]

"The man of war is he who dwells in safety,"
A well-worn adage that shall never cease,
Save only when it girdeth on its armour
May many-wooded Banba hope for peace.

Why sit ye still? the Clans of valorous *Eoghan*,
The Clans of *Conn* and *Conor* round you stand;
Do ye not hear the troops of Saxon England
March o'er your plains and trample down your land?

Let *Brian*, son of *Brian*, out of *Brefney*,[2]
Beware the sweetness of their honeyed tongue,
Their greed and need, their indigence and riches,
Two-handed spoil from Ireland's sons have wrung.

As waters rising 'neath the snows of winter,
As hamlets flaming from one secret spark,
So shall the chiefs of Erinn rally round him,
When Brian's star arises on the dark.

Then shall wild creatures find their surest covert
Among the broken homesteads of the Pale;
The wolves' deep snarl be heard beside her mansions,
On grass-green *Tara's* slopes the children's wail.

Where once arose their…lime-washed dwellings,
Where once were precious things of price arrayed,
Be thenceforth whispered, in affrighted accents,
That such things had been, O'Rourke's fierce raid.

By him be felled their rich fruit-bearing orchards,
Each open highway clothed with ragged weeds;
Long ere the harvest-hour their crops be scattered
By his and Connaught's sons' death-dealing deeds.

Leave hungry famine in Boyne's fertile borders,
Bir of the spreading-boughs bend 'neath his smart,
So that a mother on Meath's richest pastures
Shall munch the morsel of her first child's heart.

Right up to *Taillte's* very walls and towers
Their villages be levelled with the earth;
Their mills and kilns and haggarts swept before them;
Where wealth and plenty reigns, *dread want, as dearth*.

Smooth into desert wastes fair Usna's mountains,
Pile into hills each widespread pleasant plain;
So that a wandering man may seek her cities,
So he may search her high cross-roads in vain.

By such and such an one let this be treasured
(A tale of wonder for the passing guest)
That on the plain was heard a heifer lowing,
A tinkling cow-bell from the headland's crest.

Shrink not, O desperate band, from weapon-wounding,
Stand as one body, man by brother man;
Had but the clans of Erinn cleaved together
Your land and you had not been under ban.

Arouse thee, valiant Brian of the Bulwarks!
And God be with the champions of the Gael!
The children of the seed of Conn and Eoghan
Stand round thee; —canst thou fail?[3]

He failed; hung in 1597 to his request, this was the last O'Rourke to truly reign independent. Complicated as any man: brutal yet knightly, weeping as he razed, the reason *this* author – two dozen generations past Brian of The Bulwarks – is *here*, writing *this*.

[1] Presumably O'Higgin was a courtier of Brian. He wrote this before his fateful campaign, to grant spirit and will to the man – ever wary of his place – who ruled over such small lands as Bréifne.
[2] *Sir Brian na Múrtha Ó Ruairc;* Irish names
[3] Hull, Elanor. *The Poem-Book of the Gael*. Pgs. 169-171.

Chapter I

Blood, Slavery, and Polygamy: Ireland in the Pre-Christian Period.

The historical record of pre-Christian Ireland is complicated by the fact that records were written, kept, and 'revised' by the same Christian monks that would later be so prolific beyond Ireland itself. That is, the character of Irish paganism is only gleaned through reference in Christian texts and the annals – one must read between the lines to know *what* these beliefs and pagan traditions were, not just the way they were incorporated into Irish Christian practice. However, and beyond primary sources' hints (or lack thereof) to earlier, more primordial Irish traditions, the massive Volume I of *A New History of Ireland: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* provides the reader with more critical, holistic views of such practices. If one is to inspect Ireland as it existed before it had Christianity, one must inspect the social norms and cultural structure of Irish society, here examined in the period before 800 AD.

First, marriage: in pre-Christian Ireland, it was not uncommon for powerful men to have multiple wives, or else concubines. Evidence is abundant, and not only from inference based on the early Christian period: "[a minor king] Faelan sought to bolster by means of political marriage with Sárnat, daughter of Eochu…; a second marriage to Uasal, daughter of Suibne…"[4] This is simply a marriage of convenience, and Kathleen Hughes' section later refines this understanding among the pagan Irish: "Both tales and laws show a sexual morality *different from that approved by the church*. In the laws a man might have a chief wife and a subordinate wife… [referred to in Irish as] *adaltrach*[5]… taken to provide sons if the chief wife had none."[6] Thus, these co-wives could be considered either *of status* (allowing alliance-building marriages as Faelan desired) or simply to expand the dynastic pool. Further,

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[4] Moody et al., *A New History of Ireland: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*. "Ireland, 400-800". Pg. 198.
[5] *Adaltrach;* 'lesser' wife, though not equivalent with *concubine*.
[6] Ibid, Hughes, K.. "The church in Irish society, 400-800". Pg. 315.

concubinage existed alongside such an already complex arrangement: "There are also concubines living in at least semi-permanent relationships."[7] Therefore, it is not a reach to argue that polygamy was integral to the social structure – at least, as it applied to *Rí* – of Ireland not only during the pre-Christian period, but also continuing throughout the writings of the annals.

Sacrifice, human or otherwise, is far more controversial. Burial records are scarce given the proclivity for early Irish inhumations to be crematory[8], yet the positions of some bodies, contorted and buried with *grave goods*[9], suggest some ceremonial intent. Elizabeth O'Brien – an archaeologist of burials – describes one such *atypical* burial: "The body was supine, twisted slightly to the left side, the arms were braced… the legs were wide apart and similarly braced," this elderly female, as identified by archaeological evidence, was likely alive when buried. "The excavator reluctantly arrived at this conclusion: 'one thinks in this connection of a voluntary ritual sacrifice in which the victim lay unbound in the grave which was then filled in'"[10] Such practice was clearly to be redacted in the Christian historians' recounting or, as *A New History* refers to, "'synthetic' history,"[11] of the Irish people.

Despite these later 'synthetic' histories – almost all written between the 9th and 11th centuries – there is *something* that can be gleaned from both the annals and, critically, contemporary writings by Saint Patrick (or *Patricius*, his Latin name) in the 5th century. Ionia, an island in the Hebrides that remained a Christian outpost throughout the Celtic period of raids and occupation of Scotland, offers some insight into the 6th and 7th century development of Christian life among a markedly devolved and warring Ireland.

[7] Ibid, "The church in Irish society, 400-800". Pg. 315.
[8] O'Brien, E., *Mapping Death*. Ch.1 "Iron Age cremation burial…", *Overview of Cremation in Iron Age Ireland.* Pgs. 7-33. Note: Crematory inhumation is difficult to trace archaeologically, thus O'Brien's uncertainty.
[9] Offerings – usually valuable – placed in graves of note.
[10] O'Brien, Ch. 6. "Atypical or deviant burials". Pg. 135.
[11] Moody, et al. Ch. 7. "Ireland, 400-800". Pg. 183.

On slavery, one can assume that the practice of raiding and collecting slaves – for almost any purpose imaginable – was integral to the Ireland of the late antique period. In St. Patrick's *Confessio* he speaks of his own deeply troubling experience as a victim in his first paragraph: "My father was *Calpornius*. He was a deacon; his father was *Potitus*, a priest, who lived at *Bannavem Taburniae*. His home was near there, and that is where I was taken prisoner. I was about sixteen at the time… I was taken into captivity in Ireland, along with thousands of others."[12] Peter Brown speaks on this often underlooked aspect in his first lecture: "Rather like the slave owners of the American South, both the great planters and the poor whites alike – they could only feel really *free* if they had slaves."[13] Slavery, he argues, was the "dark underbelly of Irish society,"[14] during the pre-Christian, intensely tribal, and warring period of this island's history.

Yet here we return to the question of sexual morality, and in these parts of the post-Roman world – modern Wales in Patrick's case – as in Ireland itself, there was no expectation that religious leaders be celibate: Patrick's father was a deacon of the Church, his grandfather a priest of the Church. He writes these as fact – without seeing any inconsistency – in the same way he would make chastity a virtue in later paragraphs. Again, Peter Brown's words are more informative: "There was no celibacy in those days."[15] It simply was not possible, given the need for – or desire at least – fighting men by so many chieftains and warlords to simply 'waste' a son to celibacy. Even the civilian aspect is relevant: farms and herding need muscle, and children were, as with any early farming or pastoral society, crucial to maintaining the farm and flock.

[12] Patrick, "Confession of St. Patrick." Paragraph 1. Pg. 1. Emphasis own; Latin names in italics.
[13] Brown, Peter. *"Celtic Christianity," Lecture 1*. 18:33-18:45.
[14] Ibid. 18:46-18:53.
[15] Ibid. 6:00-6:05.

Chapter II
Christian Men – by Sword or Pen

Peter Brown FBA[16] opens his first lecture with the question: "What do we mean by the Celtic Church? What is its actual importance for us?" He focuses on a particular aspect of Ireland that contributed to that importance, and the Celtic Church as a whole, "That it is the very first Church in the history of Christianity to be a Church truly of the *third world.*"[17] Emphasis on *third world* is the author's own, but crucial to understanding the position of Ireland in the European grand scheme of things – it is a dark, pagan, and decidedly *barbarian* place – one where no respectable bishop may expect a friendly welcome, a place comparable to Iceland. This is a chaotic place, Ireland, and replete with slavery, honor-killings, and blood feuds. Therefore, *third world* in this sense – as Peter Brown means it – "…barbarian peoples, who had lived entirely beyond the charmed circle of the Roman Empire."[18]

As the previous chapter has proven, modern reconstructions of Irish pre-Christian life and traditions are inferential, albeit informative on the *status quo* in Irish society during such a period of chaos. Peter Brown states the primary issue during the 6th century thusly: "…in around 550 AD, Ireland boasted a hundred and fifty warrior-kings[19] for a population of half a million."[20]

Introduced in brief before, the missionaries to Ireland in the 5th century, Palladius and Patrick (or *Patricius*) advanced – respectively – northward[21] and southwards[22]. Examining these two figures is instructive to how Rome – *the Church*, that is – retained influence during

[16] *FBA:* Fellow of the British Academy. Awarded by the British Academy as a mark of distinction.
[17] Brown, Peter. "Celtic Christianity." *Lecture 1*. 1:26-1:34, 2:02-2:13.
[18] Ibid. *Lecture 1.* 2:21-2:31.
[19] *Rí; One who reigns*. The generic term in Irish for 'king', much broader than the English equivalent.
[20] Brown, Peter, "Celtic Christianity." *Lecture 2*. 0:00-0.13.
[21] Moody et al; Hughes, Kathleen. Ch. 9. "The church in Irish society, 400-800". Pgs. 302-303.
[22] Ibid. Pgs. 306-308.

its own seemingly unending crisis, and no less at the literal end of the known world, a *barbarian island* in the far west.

Palladius represented the more *Roman* missionary. "The most natural explanation is that Palladius was a deacon at Auxerre and that Germanus sent him to Rome…"[23] Auxerre, clearly high among posts in this Latin-Speaking world, would provide the future missionary with a resumé befitting of transforming a pagan island to a Christian one. Patrick, on the other hand, was not well-learned beyond the Bible: "His Latin was not that of the educated reader, but a colloquial and ecclesiastical Latin." Obviously, being held captive must have interrupted his education, yet being resourceful and driven, he could provide a satisfactory showing; "He knew the Bible, and when its vocabulary was suited to what he had to say he is able to convey his meaning; but where he is relating everyday facts his style is so clumsy that his meaning is often… difficult to grasp."[24] It is true that Patrick is the favored one, Patron Saint of Ireland as his epithet, yet Hughes' writings in *A New History* place both Palladius and him on somewhat level footing; neither were unimportant, yet both contributed to a conversion – albeit slowly – in both directions from which these missionaries entered.[25]

Patrick's own words offer some contemporary explanation of his work, even referencing himself as "a simple country person, a refugee, and unlearned."[26] Clearly driven by his own misfortune into a devoted life, he would see Ireland as a land untamed, both the cause of his sufferings and the source of its ignorance being paganism; "How has this happened in Ireland? Never before did they know of God except to serve idols and unclean things." Within his *Confessio*, Patrick places his focus squarely on scholarly and monastic practice. Continuing from the last quote, "The sons and daughters of the leaders of the Irish

[23] Moody et al; Hughes, Kathleen. Ch. 9. "The church in Irish society, 400-800." Pg. 302.
[24] Ibid. Pgs. 305-306.
[25] Ibid. Pgs. 315-316.
[26] Patrick, "The Confession of St. Patrick and his Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus." Paragraph 12. Pg. 5.

are seen to be as monks and virgins of Christ!"[27] He notes conflict with the old ways, and parents' resistance to clerical service – most notably in virginity – which presages the issue of removing that troublesome marital tradition. It would not go quietly.

In general, however, the Irish would take to Christianity well – surprisingly so, given the clearly tribal, almost insecure nature of this chaotic island. By the time of the authorship of *The Annals of Ulster* and *Tigernach*, Ireland was majority-Christian. Burials, too, seem to prove as much: "…what guidelines can be used to archaeologically identify Christians buried in secular [non-church] cemeteries? There are indications that… bodies may have been wrapped or covered with vegetation… being wrapped in a winding sheet soon became the preferred option for Irish Christians."[28] Noting the proliferation of this technique – *extended inhumation;* non-crouched burial positions – O'Brien argues that conversion was rather detached from class and stature in society, and that this is reflected (though, she advises caution) in the last act of one's life. Such evidence is compatible with even the *Annals'* account: "Vincent in the **Speculum Historiarum** *states* that Patrick spent four score [80] years in Ireland preaching and that at Patrick's request God restored to life[29] 40 *persons*; he founded 365 churches and created the same number of bishops, as well as 3000 priests; and he baptized 12,000."[30] Even if the numbers are completely *synthetic*, there clearly was no ill-will for Patrick's missionary work, at least not recognized as such by later historians in the 9th century.

As for the authorship and literature of Ireland, there exist substantial surviving documents – even to the point that comparison and critique may be done to divine bias – that clearly were used in propagandistic ways. The *Annals* are perfect examples of this issue; the

[27] Patrick. Paragraph 41. Pgs. 13-14.
[28] O'Brien, Ch. 3. "Inhumation in the Early Medieval period…" Pg. 54.
[29] Note: This references the miracles of Jesus and the Saints; Lazarus was *restored to life*. It also serves to emphasize – if not literally taken – the gravity of Patrick's miracles as hagiographic elements in his sainthood.
[30] "The Annals of Ulster." U492.1. Note that *Speculum Historiarum* is a legendary account by one Vincent and covers an immense amount of time. Included for contemporary historiographical context.

authors were patronized by competing lords, and sought to secure their respective regions' superiority besides, and in doing so create redundant accounts of the histories they record. *The Annals of Ulster* recount in 656 thusly: "The slaying of Rogallach son of Uatu, king of Connacht."[31] While *The Annals of Tigernach* say much more: "Raghallach son of Uatu, king of Connacht, fell by Maol Brighde, son of Mothlachán, and by the Corco Cullu."[32] Followed – by what else? – by a poem of the engagement.

Raghallach's Slaying, per *The Annals of Tigernach* – T649.1

1. "Raghallach son of Uata
   Was slain from the back of a white steed.
   Muireann best bewailed him.
   Cathal best avenged him.
2. "Today Cathal had no protection,
   Though he slept with kings.
   Though Cathal is fatherless
   His father was not unavenged.
3. "God granted this to avenge him
   atar ailig neet.
   He slays six and fifty men,
   He commits sixteen devastations.
4. "*I had* my share like everyone
   In avenging Raghallach ...
   In my hand is the grey beard
   Of Maol Brighde, son of Mothlachán."[33]

So by inference, one can assume that *Tigernach* is sympathetic to the rulers of Connacht, while *Ulster* – a rival neighboring land – would rather not dwell on the event itself. *Tigernach* presents a propagandistic picture, while *Ulster* – belatedly, seven years after *Tigernach* – reports the slaying in not one tenth the number of words *Tigernach* uses. *'Atar ailig neet*[34]*';* 'Father Alex [is/was/continues to be a] good man'. This context suggests that the following *revenge is justified because* Cathal's father was of good character. Propaganda manifest, lack of motivation, or simple boredom on the annalist's mind?

[31] "The Annals of Ulster." U656.6. On the slaying of Rogallach.
[32] "The Annals of Tigernach." T649.1. Pg. 188. Note the discrepancy in dates – *Ulster* places this at 656 AD – a difference of seven years.
[33] Ibid. T649.1, inset poem. Pgs. 188-189.
[34] Note: Modern Irish differs slightly on *néet,* thus the meaning here is ambiguous.

Chapter III

An Island of Scholars in a Sea of Disorder

Pangur Bán – Anonymous, c. 9th Century. In English and Irish.

Pangur Bán and I at work,
Adepts, equals, cat and clerk;
His whole instinct is to hunt,
Mine to free the meaning pent.

More than loud acclaim, I love
Books, silence, thought, my alcove;
Happy for me, Pangur Bán
Child-plays round some mouse's den.

Truth to tell - just being here -
Housed alone, housed together,
Adds a sum - its own reward -
Concentration, stealthy art.

Next thing and unwary mouse
Bares his flank: Pangur pounces.
Next thing lines that held and held
Meaning back begin to yield.

All the while, his round bright eye
Fixes on the wall, while I
Focus my less piercing gaze
On the challenge of the page.

With his unsheathed, perfect nails
Pangur springs, exults and kills;
When the longed-for, difficult
Answers come, I too exult.

So it goes. To each his own.
No vying. No vexation.
Taking pleasure, taking pains,
Kindred spirits, veterans.

Day and night, soft purr, soft pad,
Pangur Bán has learned his trade.
Day and night, my own hard work
Solves the cruxes, makes a mark.[35]

Messe ocus Pangur Bán,
Cechtar nathar fria saindán;
Bíth a menma-sam fri seilgg,
Mu menma céin im saincheiridd.

Caraim·se fos, ferr cach clú,
Oc mu lebrán léir ingnu;
Ní forimtech frimm Pangur Bán,
Caraid cesin a maccdán.

Ó ru·biam - scél cen scís -
Innar tegdais ar n-óendís,
Táithiunn - dichrichíde clius -
Ni fris tarddam ar n-áthius.

Gnáth-huáraib ar gressaib gal
Glenaid luch: Inna lín'sam!
Os mé dufuit im lín chéin,
Dliged n'doraid cu n'dhronchéill.

Fúachaid-sem fri frega fál,
A rosc anglése comlán;
Fúachimm chéin fri fégi fis,
Mu rosc réil, cesu imdis.

Fáelid-sem, cu n-déne dul,
Hi·n-glen luch, inna gérchrub;
Hi·tucu cheist n-doraid n-dil,
Os me chene am fáelid.

Cía beimmi; Amin nach ré,
Ni·derban, cách a chéle.
Maith la cechtar nár a dán,
Subaigthius, a óenurán.

Hé fesin as choimsid dáu
In muid du·n-gní cach óenláu.
Du thabairt doraid du glé,
For mu mud céin am messe.[36]

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[35] Anonymous, "Pangur Bán." Translation by Seamus Heaney; minimally edited by O'Rourke, D. J.W. for consistency with the original.
[36] Anonymous, "'White Pangur': A scholar and his cat." In modern Irish (Gaeilge) from Thurneysen's *Old Irish Reader*. Edited by O'Rourke, D. J.W..

The above poem, *Pangur Bán* (lit. *White Pangur* – the cat's name), is one of many surviving examples, and describes that timeless relationship between the working human and a meddling, cute kitty: One monk – we'll never know his name – took the time and effort to write this by hand, with a cut feather-quill and ink, and this days-long effort must have been punctuated by Pangur trying to inspect the vellum on his desk. What we are left with is relatable to this author, and perhaps the reader – among the millions over the last 1200 years who have similarly experienced it – yet the only name, the thing identifying this as a personal, intimate work is that this anonymous monk penned *Pangur* as his subject.

Having for the most part successfully converted the Irish without violence, and now given great autonomy – if not outright protection – by their patrons, the *Rí* who controlled swathes of Ireland, the monks were left with a task well-suited to their talents: writing. "As the poem of Mad Sweeney makes plain, for an out-of-work warlord the Christian monastery began to look good."[37]

Another piece of work, more formal, is the *Lex Innocentium.* Translated as '[The] Law [of] Innocents', the *Lex* in question is one of – if not the first – laws of war. The innocent are "…clerics, and females, and innocent youths until they are capable of killing a person, and of taking their place in the *túath*[38], and until their drove[39] be known."[40] In prescribing punishment, this varies by the degree of the atrocity, but clearly is tabulated with care. The International Red Cross elaborates on this: "For instance, the vulnerable position of children between the age of 7 and manhood is dramatically improved by prescribing an eight-*cumal* penalty for their killing." *Cumal: cow*, so eight is a hefty penalty. "It is of particular interest that the law covers violence carried out not only by individuals but also by large numbers of

[37] Brown, Peter. "Celtic Christianity*." Lecture 2.* 3:00-3:10.
[38] *Túath*; English equivalent to 'house/family' or 'jurisdiction'. The former is assumed in this context.
[39] *Drove*; herd. Just as with *Túath,* this is assumed to cover the 'herd' of one's house warband.
[40] Houlihan, "Lex Innocentium (697 AD)." *The Core Text*. Paragraph 34 of the *Lex,*. Pg. 725.

people, making specific provision for armies of up to 300 men and of between 300 and 1,000. It is suggested that the involvement of such numbers of people, having regard to the population and nature of battle in our period, clearly constitutes warfare." [41] As a work describing war, and in such a warlike culture, such rules were not only revolutionary at the local level, but persist today – did the Red Cross itself not state so much? – in modern conflict. Thus, this antique law may rightfully claim precedent to our Geneva Conventions.

Therefore, even if these texts – translated in some hundreds of languages, edited and annotated – remain as the foundation of more modern works, or as inspiration to modern scholars of law, of history and of language, the fact remains that these are texts written by a Celtic Christian. *The Poem-Book of the Gael* reveals as much. *The Source of Poetic Inspiration,* a dialogue between a pagan Elder and a Christian Youth plays out in verse – a transfer from a pagan past, with all the respect it was due:

The Source of Poetic Inspiration

Unknown, no later than ~1100. Translated by Elanor Hull.

"And thou, O well-spring of Knowledge,
whence comest thou?" Says the youth.
"Well can the answer be given:
I move along the columns of age,
Along the streams of inspirations,
Along the elf-mount of Nechtan's wife,
Along the forearm of the wife of Nuada,
Along the fair land of knowledge
The bright country of the sun;
Along the hidden land which by day the moon inhabits;
Along the first beginnings of life.
I demand of thee, O wise youth, what it is that lies before thee?"

[The youth thus thinks, and answers. He references legends of old; he is not brash, but learned, and stands as future, not as replacement.]
"That I can answer thee.
I travel towards the plain of age,
Through the mountain-heights of youth.
I go forward to the hunting-grounds of old age,
Into the sunny dwelling of a king,
Into the abode of the tomb;
Between burial and judgement,
Between battles and their horrors
Among Tethra's mighty men."[42]

[41] Houlihan, "Lex Innocentium (697 AD)." *The Core Text*. Pg. 727.
[42] Hull, "The Poem-Book of the Gael." *The Source of Poetic Inspiration*. Pgs. 53-55.

There is a *passing of the torch* communicated through this poem. Authorship is unknown, though archaic Irish forms and grammar place it before the 12th century, at least. The Youth describes to the Elder the Passion of Christ, though in markedly druidic terms: "Of him who was buried in the womb of his own mother;" as in ritual inhumation, discussed in Chapter I, burial was important to those of status. "Of him who was baptized after his death. // He of all living, was first betrothed to death, // His is the first name uttered by the living, // His the name lamented by all the dead: // Adam, the High One, is his name."[43] Another hint to the age of this poem's origin is Adam – where the Passion of Christ is inferred by the first line, He is not named – as the focus of the author.

From such works the reader may be tempted to assume that the transition was clear, that literature was respectful as it addressed the past, but from previous writings the picture is yet complicated. Patrick was a man of immense intercultural respect, and yet he still raged – as guilty as he felt for such emotions – against the traditions he saw as fettered to a dying faith. On a particularly noteworthy conversion, one lady – unbetroth, a virgin – wishes with much sincerity to become a nun, to dedicate herself to God. Patrick recounts this so; "Their fathers don't like this, of course. These women suffer persecution and false accusations from their parents, and yet their number grows!" *Ever the hopeful man*, Patrick goes on, saying: "…In addition, there are the widows and the celibates. Of all these, those held in slavery work [the] hardest – they bear even terror and threats, but the Lord gives grace to so many of the women who serve him. Even when it is forbidden [to pray; else, to remain virgins], they bravely follow his example."[44]

[43] Hull, "The Poem-Book of the Gael." *The Source of Poetic Inspiration*. Pg. 56.
[44] Patrick. "Confessio." Paragraph 42. Pg. 14.

Spring to Autumn – David J. W. O'Rourke, English and Irish.

Spring to autumn,
The inevitable November;
In the cold of winter, men –
Think deeply, stay home.
Plot your thoughts with care,
Idle yet so anxious:
Spring season comes; does your mind,
Too, need greener pastures?

An t-earrach gó dtí fhómhar,
Tuar na Samhna;
Go an-fuar an gheimhridh, fir –
Smaoineamh go domhain, tígh bé.
Déan breacadh go cúramach,
Díomhaoin fós buartha:
Tagann an Earraigh; an bhfuil féarach
Glas ag teastaíl ó d-intinn?

Forgive this author for his own poetics. The 11th century was to be a metaphorical 'spring' following a cold, unforgiving 'winter' of the Roman Catholic Church; given the pre-Gregorian chaos in Rome itself, the Investiture Crisis[45], the Avignon Papacy, and countless other continental crises (purely or mostly affecting lay rulers, here), the new pontifex was poised to be reactionary, and to expand the scope and influence of His Holiness' power. "Within the [Roman] church itself, the papal victory was more complete. The independence of regional churches… was greatly curtailed by the growth of effective papal power."[46] If prior to the 11th century the Roman Pope was an insecure office, then this reaction would – granted security in local affairs – seek to extend Christendom in the Latin style to the 'neglected' lands, to normalize Latin Christianity.[47]

Ireland *was*, until the 11th century, an outpost far from the influence of Rome. Quoting again Peter Brown, "For the average bishops of the surviving Roman provinces – and for their congregations – Christianity was simply too good a thing to be wasted on barbarians. And seeing that they knew the barbarians of Ireland almost entirely as pirates, sea-rovers, and

[45] Lynch, Joseph H., and Phillip C. Adamo. *The Medieval Church: A Brief History*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2014. Pg.
[46] Ibid. Section V., "The consequences of reform". Pgs. 165-166
[47] Ibid. Pgs. 166-167 (Inc. *Dictatus papae*), 167-169.

slavers, this was not an entirely unsurprising reaction."[48] Despite the Ionian connection, through which Rome maintained strong connections even prior to the Gregorian Reforms, significant autonomy was yet granted to the institutional Church in Ireland – the monasteries' primacy in Christian life – though such autonomy came with conditions and requirements.

Papal authority affirmed as supreme[49], and fueled by fears that heterodoxies as Arianism or schism may appear at the fringes of this Latin Christian world, Ireland may have been seen as vulnerable: Any good Christian society must be in strict compliance to the standard Roman Catholic Catechism[50]. While dutifully Christian, and provably so – influential in Rome itself too, as seen with *Lex Innocentium* – the fact remained that Celtic Christian doctrine and practice was an *aberration* from those of Rome. Thus, a series of reforms were to be enforced, the most notable of which may be the prohibition of concubinage, of clerical marriage, and a reduction in some of the most striking differences in these two institutions. Gone were married bishops, but no culture so proud of itself to write histories connecting itself to the truly ancient greats – Troy, Greece, and so on – would remove the cultural component of their now orthodox Roman Catholic Church.

As Europe became more powerful, Ireland was no longer a hard target for imperial ambitions. It would be after this century – the 11th century – that a more temporal threat to Ireland and Celtic Christianity emerged, as England. As mentioned before, this is beyond the scope of this analysis, yet places this change – from an autonomous and eccentric Church to a standard Roman version of the same – at the very point by which the incentive structure that fueled Irish literature was to be broken. Without the *rí* to patronize the monasteries, their purpose changed fundamentally into one of survival, not of prestige. No longer were

[48] Brown, "Celtic Christianity." *Lecture 1*. -14:20
[49] Gregory VII, Pope Saint, O.S.B., "Dictatus Papae." *Dictātīs* I., II., VII., X., XV., XVII.; special relevance with *dictātī* XVII, "That no chapter or book may be recognized as canonical without his authority."
[50] "Catechism of the Catholic Church." *Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 9; "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church."*

"pilgrims for the love of God,"[51] so provided and supplied for, but now the monasteries were to work within their purview: Administering the laws of the Church, subordinate to Rome in their doctrine, and – though remaining islands of stability in times of strife – this newer Irish society found itself stable by lay rulership enough to survive without leaning so far on ecclesiastical law to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.[52]

At this point, the point where this examination of Celtic Christianity ends – though far from comprehensive – the Celtic component of this institution is being overruled – in theory, at least – by the new pontifical powers. The poetry remains. The Bible is yet kept in the vernacular, and the daily preaching may even feel no different, but the zenith of the Celtic Church had, decisively, passed. Throughout even examinations of the literature, change is slow, but clearly unidirectional: Is this not natural, for a Church in Rome, one that proudly wears the label of 'Catholic' – referring to the universal – to assure that such practices of the Church are consistent? "In England, France and elsewhere, similar compromises [on investiture] had been reached in the first years of the 12th century."[53] Previous reference to the *Dictatus papae* and the modern *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are of the same mind: this is good, and it is proper to maintain such consistency.

Yet there is some bargaining space, leverage that Ionia, that the collective Celtic Christian fraternity may use: autonomy and practices are clearly within Rome, but the character of the Church, the Celtic institutional Church – symbols, Saints, prayers – those are not. With that compromise, likely – though not conclusively – the first of such compromises this empowered papacy would indulge, Celtic Christianity could live on. If not in practice, if not in belief – that is, no more clerical marriage, nor are plural wives to be to a singular man – then the Church shall lean into the legend, the story, and the poetry.

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[51] Brown, Peter. "Celtic Christianity*." Lecture 2.* 6:47-6:51.
[52] Moody et al.; T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*. On 'Senchas Már', pgs. 336-344, 345-353.
[53] Lynch, "The Medieval Church." *The eleventh-century reforms*. Section IV.. Pgs. 164-165.

Conclusion
How Does the Wine Taste Now?

In truth, the Gregorian Reforms were not so much a turning point in the Irish monastic tradition – despite standardizing practices and removing marital inconsistencies – or Celtic Christianity as it had developed so far, but instead represented the point at which the Roman institutional Church outpaced regional exceptionalism. That is, Rome was now the definite center of the Latin Christian world, and Ireland – Ionia, even – found itself caught in a dilemma: Preserve the heterodox practices and remain independent or compromise these practices to preserve traditions. The latter option was chosen, and Celtic Christianity could remain distinct in *form*, but standardized in *function*.

Ireland's history is replete with documents, annals, propaganda, and poetry; the reason why Ireland's relation to Christianity can be studied in such depth – even as shallow as this examination is – relies entirely on the *incentive of legacy*. Knowing that the writers of the *Annals* were patronized by the few, rich, powerful *rí* that remained after the 6th century, names like *Uí Néill, Uí Briúin, Uí Maine,* and the shrinking number of these lords did not satisfy their need to be first among themselves.

In the poetic comedy – the Greek *comedy,* that is – Ireland seems to constantly be at the whims of, a perverse incentive to propagandize and solidify claims via monastic institutional law became a boon to literature. If the money is given to the Church, if the learned sons and daughters of these highborn families were students, is there any question as to whether such an institution could – even would – remain one without a literary tradition? This tradition was strong, atypically so, and rested firmly on the grounds of patronage and isolation. Peter Brown noted that Ionia was as a desert to the monks who lived there; much of the New Testament was written not by those in walled cities, but in the wilds of the Levant.

The Irish took to Christianity for reasons we can assume now to be both transactional and genuine: Propaganda was useful for the powerful, but the poor also found this new way of life – aided by monastic institutional law – fairer than that which came before. Patrick was a maverick, yes, but he also demonstrated the oft-forgotten inequities of such fiercely warring and tribal societies. Palladius is not remembered on that level today, despite clearly being the more suitable candidate; again, the Irish comedy of fate strikes, and the dark horse missionary is beatified. For a decidedly barbarian society, one so far physically from European power and that of Christendom, Celtic Christianity was perhaps the most prominent autonomous sect not already separated from Rome by the medieval period. It did not break with Rome after the Gregorian Reforms, it truly was loyal to the papacy – yet had the will to preserve the old gods the Latin Church replaced with the Lord.

The massive breadth of Irish literature, of poems, of annals – be they boastful of one clan, or recounting the mundane – and of laws; the influence of ancient, primordial traditions and gods – fairy forts, the Hill of Tara; Christianized druidism – their impact cannot be understated in how the history of Ireland, the Irish people, those few remaining scatterings of Celtic life before their *fall,* their *disappearance* – as in Italy, then Gaul, Iberia, even much of Britain; the Celtic culture of the antique is that of a far more ancient *barbarian* one – at the hands of centuries' erasers of this culture. It was at the hands of Caesar's Rome, the hands of the Frankish emperors, by the hands of common men from Germany – the Angles and the Saxons – or from the further reaches of the Northern European expanse.

To find such color, such drama and boredom, humility and pride (the latter, admittedly, more common), it was only by the means provided by the Celtic Christians, the Celtic Church, the Celtic monasteries, the monks and scribes, lawyers and schemers, that such explorations are possible. Ireland could easily have been forgotten, yet in poetic comedy this *third world Church* was a pioneer; in writing their own history, syncretic beliefs and

ancient traditions alike preserved, the centuries of Celtic Christianity as an institution and as a means by which such knowledge – these texts, the poetry; the *feel of the barbarian world* – was maintained cannot be forgotten. If the authors wanted this 21st century world to know their most intimate or venal thoughts, their lives in squalor or in splendor, then they succeeded not simply because Rome provided a means by which to retain it – to the contrary, Rome, the Empire and the Church, felt *barbarians* did not deserve such a gift of Christianity. The Celtic institutions of Christianity, whether the formal asceticism of Ionia or the village chapel – wattle and daub, of that rural poverty endemic to Ireland – were brave enough to buck Rome, and smart enough to know their place when such a denier of that Christian life came back with news and decrees.

This began as a question: How did clerical marriage and polygamy within the Celtic Christian world survive beyond even the *Dictatus papae* of 1075, and why was this heterodox practice so easy to delete? It then expanded in scope, to the cultural underpinnings of such practices as polygyny and concubinage, slavery and tribal competition; as with any ancient culture, one must understand *how primordial* these precepts were in the development of said culture, then *how realistic* the historiographical accounts are. Finally – and perhaps to this author's detriment – it found a synecdochic poetry in these histories: Irish is a language well-suited to those who wax poetic, and such a tendency goes beyond just the words that are spoken, but by *who* speaks with them. Celtic Christianity – for all its many faults – was imposed on a people who by no means needed it, and it yet succeeded not only in inspiring a more literal poetry – a litany of which punctuates this very work – but the maintenance of a culture so alien, so brutal and primordial, through the poetic metaphor of such a Church's place in making – yet dutifully recording – a modern people of that blood-soaked bog. The author fears that his telescope may have found both Jupiter and a flea, that his meandering

exploration concludes without true closure, but he takes solace in that same steadfast faith expressed by Patrick, that however crudely his work may appear, it is not without meaning:

> "I pray for those who believe in and have reverence for God.
>
> Some of them may happen to inspect or come upon this writing which Patrick, a sinner without learning, wrote in Ireland.
>
> May none of them ever say that whatever little I did or made known to please God was done through ignorance.
>
> Instead, you can judge and believe in all truth that it was a gift of God.
>
> This is my confession before I die."[54]

- *Patricius*, son of the deacon *Calpornius*, grandson of the priest *Potitus*; *Patrick*, Bishop and Confessor, *Patron Saint of Ireland and the Irish*; *Apostle of Ireland* in the flesh; *Venerated Saint Pádraig* of crozier and cloverleaf, who spilt no blood, who tamed the wolves of Ireland to hounds who – by word and by will – follow not the base desires of the flesh, but the love of their Master; the *maverick bishop*, driven and tested, slave and student, rejected and accepted. Remembered yet, more than fifteen hundred years since his passing.

Who better to represent such a complicated culture, in closing this waning historical project than by poetic last words of the man who began this remarkable transformation? This author offers only those conclusions he forewarned the reader some pages ago: read between the lines and gather from what has remained a conclusion that fits the chapters preceding this one. The Celtic Church, be it remembered as eccentric or heterodox, reluctant to move past tradition, or too easy to forget the stories told by the elders, that is of no concern: The fact that it is remembered at all, in such vivid detail no less, speaks of the success the Institutional Church in Ireland – the Celtic Christian world – has had in preserving such unique character.

[54] Patrick, "Confession of St. Patrick." Paragraph 62. Pg. 18.

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