

# CHRISTIANITY AND THE LATIN TRADITION IN EARLY MEDIAEVAL IRELAND<sup>1</sup>

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Christianity stands behind the introduction of literacy and a literate culture among several ancient peoples who were in contact with Rome, such as the Armenians and the Visigoths,<sup>2</sup> and also among the ancient Irish, the first barbarian people to be converted outside a Roman framework. The pre-Christian Irish did have a form of writing called ogham, incised, usually linear, writing on lapidary monuments, which developed "in southern Ireland, probably in the fourth century, as a result of contact with Roman Christian civilization and the Roman alphabet",<sup>3</sup> but incised stones are a far cry from books. True literacy, that is, the use of writing and books as a normal and indispensable part of life, awaited the Christianisation of the island in the fifth and sixth centuries.

That last sentence may seem too bold to some, since, *prima facie*, the link between Christianity and literacy may not have been decisive; that is, could not Christianity have been merely the conduit for literacy and, once the Irish discovered it, literacy *per se* attracted them? The answer to this would be Yes if the adoption of literacy were a necessary consequence—or even an historically verifiable commonplace—of contact between literate and non-literate societies, but it is not. For centuries, in such diverse places as Brazil and the Philippines, non-literate societies have existed alongside literate ones but have not availed themselves of the benefits of literacy. Indeed, ancient Ireland is itself an example of this phenomenon.

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was read at the University of Manchester on 8 May 1984. My thanks to Rt. Rev. Dr. R. P. C. Hanson for arranging for the presentation and to Dr. Richard Bauckham for inviting me. My thanks also to the American Council of Learned Societies for support given to the research behind this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bruce Metzger, *The Earliest Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 153-81, 375-93.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd Laing, *The Archaeology of Late Celtic Britain and Ireland* (London, 1975), p. 95.

In the *Agricola*,<sup>4</sup> Tacitus tells us that the Irish harbours were well known to the Romans, "aditus portusque per commercia et negotiatores cogniti". Furthermore, archaeological evidence has demonstrated the presence of Roman artifacts in pre-Christian Ireland,<sup>5</sup> some obtained by plunder but most by trade, so the contacts suggested by Tacitus were maintained throughout the Late Antique period. It is simply inconceivable that in centuries of trading with the Romans Irish merchants never saw books or titles on buildings or inscriptions on coins, and almost certainly they saw Roman merchants keep written records of business transactions. When to this is added the influence of the Roman alphabet on ogham, there can be no doubt that the Irish had ample opportunity to see the effects, indeed the benefits, of literacy but simply chose not to avail themselves of it. Christianity made the difference.

The Christianity which arrived in Ireland with the fifth-century missionaries was more than just a literate religion; it was very much a religion of the book. The earliest Christians took for granted a basic Jewish notion, that the revealed word should be accessible to all—either by reading or preaching—and that people should govern their daily lives according to the Old Testament or, as was often the case, the Old Testament as interpreted by religious authorities. This attitude, which neither Jews nor Christians have ever abandoned, contrasts sharply with the Hellenistic allegorisation of the divine Homer by Alexandrian savants or with the Roman attitude toward the sacred Sibylline books, which could be consulted only by a priestly college and then only by decree of the Senate.

By the second century the Christians had concluded that there was a second set of inspired books, the "so-called New Testament" as Origen put it.<sup>6</sup> The finalisation of the New Testament canon in the fourth and fifth centuries considerably strengthened the hold of books on the Christian religious mind.

Non-scriptural Christian writings at first supplemented the inspired texts and then—in volume at least—overwhelmed them.

<sup>4</sup> Tacitus, *De Vita Agricolae*, 24, ed. R. M. Ogilvie and I. Richmond (Oxford, 1967), pp. 107-8.

<sup>5</sup> J. D. Bateson, "Roman Material from Ireland: a Reconsideration", *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 73C (1973), 21-97.

<sup>6</sup> Origen, *In Iohannem*, 5, 8, ed. C. Blanc, *Sources Chrétiennes* (SC), 120 (Paris, 1969), 388-391.

Christians themselves made the Scriptures an object of study, and the Gnostic thinker Basilides had written biblical commentaries by the early second century.<sup>7</sup> [These are non-extant, and the fragments of the Gnostic Heracleon's commentary on John's gospel quoted by Origen preserve the earliest Christian scriptural commentary.] Once this process had begun, it became a veritable juggernaut, and the biblical commentary became almost a *sine qua non* of the Church Fathers; patristic exegetes abounded in East and West, with the latter being the ones to affect the Irish the most. Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Hilary, and Gregory *inter alios* were all exegetes.

Not only did the commentary probe the Bible; so did a vast theological literature, much of it occasioned by the Trinitarian and Christological disputes of the fourth and fifth centuries, as well as a sizeable devotional literature which related the Bible to spiritual life. In sum, the Christianity which came to Ireland differed greatly from that which first spread into the Roman world when speakers in tongues and wandering prophets had important roles to play. In the fifth century Scripture and its commentators were just as important—and often more so—than authorities *viva voce*. When the Irish accepted the Faith, they simultaneously accepted many of the attitudes and much of the culture that came with it, especially this basic Christian approach to the sacred writings.

This is an obvious point, so obvious as to seem superfluous, but it is also one which has escaped many people who have written about Early Christian Ireland, especially those of a nationalistic bent. For generations scholars presented an idiosyncratic Irish Christianity, going its own way, largely independent of the rest of the Church. This interpretation has served many people, including those wishing to make the ancient Irish into proto-Protestants, rejecting papal and conciliar authority,<sup>8</sup> but mostly it has served those who feel obliged to find a primarily native learned tradition behind the accomplishments of Irish scholars of the period 500-1000, the aptly named Golden Age. In such a schema the larger Western intellectual tradition appears as the villain of the piece.

This schema I reject, and in this paper I will examine the role which Christianity played in bringing literacy and the Latin

<sup>7</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1985), p. 205.

<sup>8</sup> For the Irish as proto-Protestants, cf. Leslie Hardinge, *The Celtic Church in Britain* (London, 1971).

tradition to Ireland, first by surveying the extent of the Latin tradition among the Irish, and then by considering the roles of the Bible itself, monasticism, and the use of the Church Fathers in bringing the Irish into a larger Western tradition. I will argue that the Irish were vigorous and voluntary participants in this tradition, that they made a significant contribution to it, and, furthermore, that this was good for the Irish and for the larger tradition; the concluding section of the paper will briefly discuss the latest epiphany of the contrary, nationalistic view.

#### A. THE EXTENT AND STRENGTH OF THE LATIN TRADITION IN EARLY MEDIAEVAL IRELAND

One of the most significant achievements of modern Irish scholarship has been the recovery, editing, and study of Old Irish texts, that is, those writings in the vernacular of the Early Mediaeval period, and although this great work is far from done, scholars have been able to draw a good picture of Irish life from the poetry and laws; *inter alia*, which are available for study. Yet it in no way diminishes the work of the ancient vernacular writers or their modern editors and students to acknowledge that in this period the Latin Christian tradition stimulated the vernacular to literacy and that throughout the period it remained the stronger, if not necessarily the more creative.

The evidence for the strength of the Latin Christian is formidable. Patrick (d. c. 461), the British missionary bishop, produced the first known writings from Ireland, his Latin *Confessio* and *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*; the great abbot and scholar Columbanus (c. 540-615) wrote poems, letters, monastic *regulae*, and a yet to be discovered psalter commentary; to Columcille of Iona (d. 597) have been attributed, with varying degrees of certainty, several Latin writings, the most important of which is the famous abecedarian hymn *Altus Prosator*; Adamnan of Iona (d. 704) wrote a book *De Locis Sanctis* (of Palestine) and a *vita* of Columcille. Other Irish scholars who wrote in Latin include Cogitosus (fl. c. 650-670), the hagiographer of Brigit of Kildare; Muirchu and Tirechan (both late seventh century), the hagiographers of Patrick; the exegetes Aileran Sapiens (d. 665) and Josephus Scottus (d. 794/6); the administrator and bishop of Salzburg, Virgil (d. 784); the Carolingian geographer Dicuil (died after 825); the poet and biblical scholar Sedulius of Liège (fl. 848-

870); and the philosopher and theologian John Scottus Eriugena (c. 810-c. 877). Many anonymous Irish works survive in Latin, including the most widely-read of all mediaeval Irish books, the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, written c. 900, and from the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries dozens of exegetical treatises composed in Ireland and in Irish circles on the continent.<sup>9</sup> When the great Irish warrior-king Brian Boru visited Armagh early in the eleventh century and signed his name in the Book of Armagh, he styled himself “imperator Scottorum”, a Romanised title in Latin words. One must also note that the most important monuments of Early Mediaeval Irish art, the illuminated *evangelia* such as the books of Kells and Durrow, are Latin manuscripts of Christian books. Perhaps the most striking examples of all of the strength of the Latin tradition are the ancient pieces of Old Irish—occasionally complete poems—which have survived in the margins of manuscripts of Latin works, including biblical commentaries and even Latin grammars.<sup>10</sup> The undeniable fact is that Early Christian Irish scholars saw in this “foreign” language

<sup>9</sup> The works of Patrick are edited by R. P. C. Hanson, *SC*, 249 (1978) and the works of Eriugena are edited by E. Jeaneau in *SC*, 151 (1969) and 180 (1972). The series *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae (SLH)* (Dublin) contains the *opera* of Columbanus edited by G. S. M. Walker, vol. 2 (1970); of Muirchu and Tirechan edited by Ludwig Bieler, vol. 10 (1979); of Dicuill edited by J. J. Tierney, vol. 6 (1967); of Adamnan's *De Locis Sanctis* edited by Denis Meehan, vol. 3 (1958); and the first three volumes of Eriugena's philosophical *Periphyseon* edited by I. P. Sheldon-Williams, vols. 7, 9, 11 (1968, 1972, 1981). J.-P. Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (Paris) (*PL*) contains the writings of Aileran, *PL*, 80, 327-340; Cogitosus, *PL*, 72, 775-790; and Sedulius of Liège, *PL*, 103. Adamnan's *vita* of Columcille has been edited by A. O. and M. O. Anderson (London, 1961) and Carl Selmer edited the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* (Notre Dame, 1959). The exegetical works of Josephus Scottus are unedited; cf. p. 239 of the article by Bernhard Bischoff listed below. Exegetical works of anonymous writers can be found in *Scriptores Hiberniae Minores, Corpus Christianorum series latina (CCSL)* (Turnhout, Belgium), vols. 108B, edited by Robert E. McNally (1973) and 108C, edited by J. F. T. Kelly (1974). The only general catalogue of Irish literature in this period remains that of James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland, I: Ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929; repr. 1966). For the exegetical works, cf. Bernhard Bischoff, “Wendepunkte in der Geschichte der lateinischen Exegese im Frühmittelalter” in *Mittelalterliche Studien*, 1 (Stuttgart, 1966), 205-73; a briefer survey is my “Hiberno-Latin Exegesis and Exegetes”, *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 21 (1981), 46-60.

<sup>10</sup> The basis collection of Whitley Stokes and John Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1902-3; repr. Dublin, 1975) gives many texts and manuscript references.

a vehicle by which they could express themselves; indeed, they considered it—along with Greek and Hebrew—to be a *lingua sacra*.<sup>11</sup>

Acceptance of the Latin language did not necessarily mean wholesale and uncritical acceptance of the Latin tradition or the automatic abandonment of the native one. Native elements survive in the vernacular, and some native traditions or elements appear in Latin works, such as the influence of the *imrana* or voyage tales in the *Navigatio* of Brendan, a work which overall owes more to the Bible and standard monastic hagiography.<sup>12</sup> Yet, in general, the Irish accepted not only the Latin language but also Latin literary forms, especially the Christian ones. Columbanus and Sedulius wrote poems in the tradition of pagan Latin poets and of the Christian Prudentius; Columbanus also wrote monastic *regulae*, a rather obvious Christian genre. Irish hagiography, a widespread and immensely popular genre, generally followed the conventions of Western hagiography and is, of course, distinctly Christian. There is no native predecessor or, to my knowledge, parallel to Dicuil's *Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*, which draws mostly from Roman sources, especially Pliny the Younger. The most influential Irish thinker of the Middle Ages, John Scottus Eriugena, stands in the Neo-Platonic tradition, hardly an indigenous Hibernian phenomenon. Finally, the most extensive Irish writings of this period, the many exegetical tracts—almost all of which depend upon the Vulgate or mixed Latin biblical text—are not only uniquely Christian but usually depend openly upon the great Christian *patres* (a point to which we shall return). The Hiberno-Latin writers naturally put in emphases of their own, such as the prominence of animals and books in their hagiography, but of far greater importance is their clear choice to follow existing Latin forms rather than to “Latinise” native forms or to try to create new ones. Although one might speculate endlessly on the cost of this choice to the native tradition or upon what new literary forms might have emerged, the evidence points unavoidably to the Irish preference for the standard genres.

<sup>11</sup> Robert E. McNally, “The ‘Tres Linguae Sacrae’ in Early Irish Biblical Exegesis”, *Theological Studies*, xix (1958), 395-403.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Apocalypse 21:23, “... and the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb”, stands behind *Navigatio* 28.33-34, “... ita omni tempore permanet sine ulla umbra noctis. Lux enim illius est Christus”, a citation which Selmer overlooked.

## B. WRITING AND REVELATION

Yet important as the foregoing are, they are merely external points. The real significance of the Latin tradition in Ireland lay in its effects on the Irish approach to and understanding of learning.

As noted above, Christianity was a religion of the book. At least for those who could read, to be a Christian was to read the Bible. The attitude is as old as Our Lord, who, according to the gospels, quoted the Old Testament with the formula, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4,7; 11:10; Mark 7:6; Luke 19:46; John 6:31). [According to Matthew 4:6, the devil also favored this formula.] In the mid-second century Marcion sought to rid Christianity of Jewish influences by his anti-Semitic "canon" of ten Pauline epistles and an expurgated version of the gospel according to Luke. In the late second century Irenaeus of Lyons used the Bible as one of the two pillars (along with apostolic succession) of his theological method to refute the Gnostics, who themselves wrote gospels, epistles, and acts.<sup>13</sup> Many Christian preachers, such as the great John Chrysostom, preached constantly on the Bible and presumed at least a general or rudimentary knowledge of the biblical text on the part of their congregations. The most vivid example of this familiarity comes from Augustine, who tells of a congregation in the African town of Oea which virtually rioted ("tumultus in plebe") when the bishop substituted Jerome's version (that is, his new Latin translation) of Jonah for the familiar one.<sup>14</sup>

This bibliocentrism is the basic attitude the Christian missionaries, known and anonymous, brought with them to Ireland. To penetrate the inspired book was to know the Christian God. As the American scholar Robert McNally phrased it, "... the Irish Christians placed a maximum emphasis on the written word as a sacred sign, for the Christian God was himself the veritable author of a book".<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> A vast literature exists on the New Testament and the second-century Church; a basic study remains *The Formation of the Christian Bible* by Hans von Campenhausen (Philadelphia, 1972); for the most recent bibliography, cf. Harry Gamble, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1985) and William Farmer and Denis Farkasfalvy, *The Formation of the New Testament Canon* (New York, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *Epistola*, 71.3, *PL*, 33, 242-3.

<sup>15</sup> McNally, "Old Ireland: Her Scribes and Scholars", in *Old Ireland*, edited by McNally (New York, 1965), p. 122.

Actually, the impact of the Bible on the Irish mind was probably even stronger than that. To the Irish, the Christian God had chosen the specific medium of writing for his self-revelation, and in so doing he had in some way sanctified it. An eighth-century Hiberno-Latin writer known as Pseudo-Isidore (because of an errant attribution to his work in the Middle Ages) gave the following etymology of *liber*, in the translation of Robert McNally:<sup>16</sup>

Book ("liber") is thus named on the basis of three considerations, that is, reading ("legendo"), weighing ("librando"), freeing ("liberando"). Reading, that is, to read and understand the spiritual law; weighing, that is, to measure out punishment to the wicked and rewards to the perfect; freeing, that is, to release those who served and serve the devil and the world and sins.

Father McNally comments, "According to this unique etymology, based on a pun obvious in Latin, the concept of book involves the intelligent reading of Holy Scripture ...".<sup>17</sup>

This attitude results from non-participation in the Roman world. Other early converts to Christianity, including the barbarians aping Roman ways, had to adapt to the notion of sacred books, or, at least, of sacred books available to all, but the Irish had to adapt to the very idea of literacy and to Christianity simultaneously. They were certainly aware of writings of a secular character, and they could certainly distinguish the Bible from non-canonical works, but, at base, their Christianity emphasised written character of revelation.

This biblical seed, so to speak, was nourished by monasticism and the reading of the Fathers.

### C. THE ROLE OF MONASTICISM

If bibliocentric literacy represented a cultural departure for the Irish, the rise of monasticism on the island was equally decisive for their cultural future. Although rooted in the pre-Constantinian age, monasticism arose in the Christian Empire as a protest movements of sorts, a spiritual revolt by largely Coptic-speaking laity against the Hellenised church of Alexandria, and later by Syriac-speaking laity against Antioch. The monks went to the

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



desert to live lives of strict asceticism and to flee "women and bishops",<sup>18</sup> that is, sex and power, equal threats to the moral life and thus to the soul. Initially the monks practiced the eremitic life, living alone except in times of dire necessity. The second generation of monks practiced the cenobitic life, living in community with common meals and common worship, although still avoiding the evils of the outside world. By the mid-fourth century the monks had begun producing literature to be read by the outsiders, and a movement which had long attracted the imagination of the pious now began to influence the church at large.<sup>19</sup>

Although its theological content is often minimal, monastic literature—excluding the *regulae*—usually made good reading. Athanasius' *Life of Saint Antony* and Sulpicius Severus' *Life of Martin of Tours* as well as the anecdotal and spiritually rich *Sayings of the Fathers* (who, in this case, are the Egyptian *abbas*) were, in contemporary idiom, "best sellers". Prominent bishops, such as Augustine, adopted monastic values such as the common life for their clergy, and even a partial list of fourth- and fifth-century bishops who were former monks is impressive: John Chrysostom, Basil of Caesarea, Nestorius of Constantinople, Palladius of Helenopolis, Eucherius of Lyons, Martin of Tours, Hilary of Arles, and perhaps Patrick of Ireland. The monks were Christian heroes, the new martyrs who by daily mortification died daily for the Faith.

Although the role of Patrick in Ireland's conversion will forever be debated, there is no doubt that he and, most likely, the other, anonymous, missionaries came from the British Church, which produced some important monastic figures, the most important being Gildas, who exercised influence in Ireland.<sup>20</sup> When Christianity arrived in Ireland, it brought with it at the least an appreciation of monastic values and, certainly within a short time, practitioners of those values.

<sup>18</sup> "... omnimodis monachum fugere debere mulieres et episcopos", Cassian (*Institutiones*, xi. 18, edited M. Petschenig, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (CSEL) 17 (Vienna, 1888), 203.

<sup>19</sup> The rise of monasticism is an often-told story; a recent and well-documented account is that of Karl Baus, "Early Christian Monasticism: Development and Expansion of the East" and "The Monasticism of the Latin West" in *The Imperial Church from Constantine to the Early Middle Ages, History of the Church*, ii, edited by Karl Baus et al. (New York, 1980), 337-93.

<sup>20</sup> John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*, 2nd ed. (Shannon, 1972), pp. 164-6.

The Irish and monasticism were, so to speak, "made for each other", and for three reasons. First, monasticism was a rural movement, one which at base rejected the urban civilisation of the Mediterranean world and one which rejoiced in the wilderness by proclaiming an Adamic return to the Garden of Eden.<sup>21</sup> Ireland at this time had no cities, no place for the episcopal *civitas* so well known in the Empire. Monasticism fitted in easily with the citiless Irish landscape.

A second factor in the rise of monasticism among the Irish is the nature of monastic hagiography. Although cenobitic monasticism early replaced eremitic as the dominant form and although there were some who, like Basil of Caesarea, considered eremiticism very problematic and vigorously criticised it, among the monks themselves the hermit remained the superior being, the person who not only renounced the society of the cities but even the society of the ascetics. Bede's wonderful account of Drythelm<sup>22</sup> shows that even among the supposedly Romanised Anglo-Saxons at the end of the seventh century a spiritually advanced brother would go off by himself. Monastic hagiography often portrayed the monk as the heroic individual who battled the world, the flesh, and especially the devil with no assistance from others except, of course, from God. The relation of this figure to the great heroes of northwestern European tradition, such as Thor, Beowulf, and the Irishman Cuchulainn, is not hard to discern. Great monks like Antony stood in the heroic tradition, and as such they held far more attraction for the northern European peoples than the Romanised urban bishops. [Even a dedicated Romanist like Bede had for his greatest hero Cuthbert, a hermit and rather unwilling bishop.<sup>23</sup>] In fifth- and sixth-century Ireland the great monks would have mass appeal, and it is no coincidence that Irish hagiography records many cases of the individual Christian facing the forces of evil, for example, Patrick's contest with the druids

<sup>21</sup> Macarius the Egyptian met two old monks who lived naked; cited in Derwas Chitty, *The Desert A City* (Crestwood, N. Y., 1966), pp. 33-34.

<sup>22</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*H.E.*), 5, 12, edited by B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors under the title *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 496-9.

<sup>23</sup> Cuthbert is prominent in *H.E.*, bk. 4, and Bede wrote two *vitae* of the saint, one prose and one metrical; cf. W. F. Bolton, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature*, i (Princeton, 1967), 136-44.

before King Loeghaire.<sup>24</sup> Monasticism fitted Ireland culturally as well as geographically.

The third reason for monasticism's success was a spiritual one. Monasticism involved a complete renunciation of secular goods and a lifetime of rigorous exercises and devotional practices. Persons who would undertake such a life were, in secularist terms, religious fanatics or, in Christian terms, truly zealous. Such zeal usually is found among the young, the idealistic, and converts, those who have just found the faith for the first time or who are, so to speak, born again (like Antony or Augustine) and who wish to embrace the faith with a fervor unknown to the masses of believers. I suggest that to the Irish converts monasticism held a special appeal, a chance to live the new faith to its fullest, and that they did not pass up this chance.

The general acceptability of monasticism guaranteed its great role in Irish Christian culture, and one need only consider even a brief list of famous Irish monks—SS. Columcille, Kevin, Columbanus, Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, Bairre of Cork, Enda of Aran, Moling, Finnian of Clonard, Brendan the Navigator—to see how powerful this institution was. Its power was often wielded to further literacy in Ireland.

By the time it got there Bible-reading was an essential part of the monks' life and especially to their spirituality. Louis Bouyer points out that even in the earliest generations, in the Egyptian and Syrian deserts, prayer was nourished by the reading of Scripture. "In his hour of prayer, and in particular during the great night-vigil, the monk interspersed copious readings from the different books of the Bible with psalmody and brief prayers which helped him to assimilate the readings and chants".<sup>25</sup> This does not mean that all the brothers were literate, but it does mean that literacy and the reading of Scripture were essential to the life of the community as a whole.

The primary sources support Father Bouyer. In his life of Antony Athanasius says that the saint "was so attentive at the reading of Scripture that nothing escaped him".<sup>26</sup> The monastic historian Palladius tells of Ammonius who was learned in the

<sup>24</sup> Muirchu, *Vita Patricii*, i. 15-20; *SLH*, 10, 84-99.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (New York, 1963), pp. 309, 319-20; quotation from p. 319.

<sup>26</sup> Athanasius *Vita Antonii*, 3, quoted in the translation of Robert Meyer, *Ancient Christian Writers (ACW)*, x (New York, 1950), 21.

Bible and of Paphnutius who knew the Bible by a "gift of divine knowledge",<sup>27</sup> a theme borrowed by the Irish.<sup>28</sup> This theme quickly came to the West. John Cassian tells of the monk Theodore who was a master of Scriptural interpretation,<sup>29</sup> while the biographer Gennadius refers to Orsiesius, the successor of Pachomius, as "vir scripturis ad perfectum instructus".<sup>30</sup> The monastic propagandist Jerome was the greatest Latin exegete of the patristic period, and those bishops who introduced monastic modes in the lives of the secular clergy included exegetes like Ambrose and Augsutine. The monk turned bishop, Eucherius of Lyons, was in his day a famous exegete.

The coming of monasticism to the Irish meant the coming of Bible-reading, and the spectacular growth of monasticism among them meant the growth of literacy among this new learned class. Columcille supposedly copied a psalter and supervised copying by other monks at Iona and even intervened miraculously to save a psalter. There is good historical evidence that Columbanus wrote a psalter commentary and lesser evidence that he wrote one on the gospels as well. Adamnan of Iona wrote *De Locis Sanctis*. The Carolingian Sedulius of Liège was an exegete. Patrick's hagiographers portrayed the saint as learned in Scripture, and later hagiographers routinely had their monastic subjects perform miracles with Scriptural books.<sup>31</sup>

The Irish, however, took all this even further than the Easterners because they strove for universal literacy in the monastic houses. The foremost authority on Irish monasticism, the late John Ryan, has succinctly summed this up: "To the Irish mind an illiterate monk was a contradiction in terms".<sup>32</sup> And what did the Irish monks read? To quote Father Ryan again: "It would be difficult to overestimate the place which the Bible held in the monastic system of education".<sup>33</sup> To return momentarily to an earlier theme, the Bible they read was in Latin.

<sup>27</sup> Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 11.1 and 47.3, translated by R. Meyer, *ACW*, xxxiv (1964), 46-7, 125.

<sup>28</sup> J. F. T. Kelly, "Books, Learning, and Sanctity in Early Christian Ireland", *Thought*, liv (1979), 253-61, at 256-7.

<sup>29</sup> Cassian, *Institutiones*, 5.33, *CSEL*, 17, 106-7.

<sup>30</sup> Gennadius, *De Viris Illustribus*, 9, edited by C. Bernoulli (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1895), p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. my article cited in n. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*, p. 378.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.

## D. THE FATHERS IN IRELAND

During the same time that monasticism was establishing itself among the Irish, they were also turning toward the Fathers of the Church, and this because the Bible did not arrive in Ireland unchaperoned.

No one has ever been able to read the Bible completely on his or her own. There are simply too many obscure passages or, some would say, obscure books—one thinks of Luther's early views on the Apocalypse—which sooner or later turn everyone to an authority for assistance or at least for corroboration. This attitude has its roots deep in Christian history, at least as far back as Irenaeus' theories of apostolic succession, that is, a reliable series of orthodox teachers to whom one could turn for guidance, especially in the face of the Gnostic "novelties". Origen cited Heracleon's Johannine commentary, mostly disagreeing but sometimes to agree, and, of course, Origen himself became an exegetical authority for many later Greek Fathers but also for Westerners like Ambrose and Jerome who, in their turn, became authorities for the Early Middle Ages.

To be sure, the Fathers were not only exegetes, but one does not have to read far in Early Mediaeval literature or in contemporary catalogues of large manuscript collections to realise which patristic works were valued the most. Indeed, the very prominence of Jerome in the Early Middle Ages proves this since most of his *corpus* consists of exegetical tracts;<sup>34</sup> he was hardly as prominent among the scholastics. In the Early Middle Ages exegesis made the Fathers "the Fathers".

The Irish stood firmly in the Early Mediaeval intellectual world in their acceptance of the Fathers. I suggest there are three reasons for this, although with the caveat that neither one nor all can be considered uniquely Irish.

First, for the Irish, the Fathers represented an authoritative tradition, and patristic interpretation of particular scriptural passages became standard. Although not the type of irrefutable authority later claimed by the Counter Reformation papacy, the

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the still valuable survey by M. L. W. Laistner, "The Study of St. Jerome in the Early Middle Ages", in *A Monument to Saint Jerome*, edited by F. X. Murphy (New York 1952), pp. 233-56; cf. also the catalogue of manuscripts of Jerome's *opera* by Bernard Lambert, *Bibliotheca Hieronymiana Manuscripta*, 4 vols. (Steenbrugge, 1969-72).

patristic understanding of the Bible was unquestionably normative.<sup>35</sup> The Fathers were not just exegetes but literally *paters*, the great figures who had created the Christian tradition, who had refuted the wily heretics, who had led saintly lives, and who now lived in glory with God in heaven. There was, to be sure, no reason why the individual Christian could not read the Bible on his or her own, but who would be so foolish as to ignore completely the views of those singled out by their learning, their orthodoxy, and their sanctity. (One cannot help but think of some free-thinking, independent, modern exegetes who would, with much outrage, reject the notion of a traditional authority such as the Fathers but who burden almost every paragraph of their own writings with citations to other free-thinking, independent, modern exegetes.)

A second factor in the Irish acceptance of the Fathers and thus of the larger Christian learned tradition was the method of theological argumentation which stressed the accumulation of ancient authorities to bolster one's side in an argument. (Barring the word "ancient", the contemporary application again positively intrudes itself.) This method appeared early in Christianity in the gospel debates between Jesus and the Pharisees when both cited the Old Testament to prove a point.<sup>36</sup> Patristic exegetes used it, and the Irish had absolutely no hesitation in adopting it. Perhaps the best-known example of this among them is the Synod of Whitby at which the Irishman Colman of Lindisfarne presented the case of the so-called "Celtic" party on the dating of Easter by citing the evangelist John and Anatolius of Laodicea (as he supposed his authorities to be), while his opponent, the Anglo-Saxon Romanist Wilfrid, claimed the support of Saint Peter.<sup>37</sup> While each side questioned how aptly the other had used these *auctoritates*, neither side questioned the method. Irish biblical commentaries contain many such citations.<sup>38</sup>

The third factor was monasticism. Many early Irish scholars were monks and thus belonged to a group trained to accept authority, usually unquestioningly. Ancient monasticism stressed

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médievale: les Quatre Senses de l'Écriture*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1959-1964).

<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that it originated with the Christians, who would have found it among the Jews and Romans.

<sup>37</sup> Bede, *H.E.*, 3,25; pp. 294-309.

<sup>38</sup> A consultation of the indices in *CCSL*, 108B and 108C will indicate the extensive use of the Fathers for exegesis.

the patriarchal role of the *abba* whose wisdom and virtue shined even in the Egyptian and Syrian deserts. In the famous *Sayings of the Fathers*, known in Latin at least by the sixth century, the *abba* Pambo calls obedience the greatest virtue, while an anonymous *abba* gives the obedient monks the highest place in heaven.<sup>39</sup> Abba Silvanus tells of the monastic scribe Mark who, when called by his *senior*, answered immediately, without even completing the very letter he was copying.<sup>40</sup> John Cassian wrote of the "tradition of our Fathers and the authority of Scripture"<sup>41</sup> as guides for the monks, and the great Benedict made obedience essential to his *Regula* and reading the Fathers essential to the spiritual life of his monks.<sup>42</sup>

This attitude reached Ireland virtually intact. The Irish monastic founder Columbanus also put obedience first in his *Regula Monachorum*.<sup>43</sup> Irish monastic hagiography routinely stresses the importance of obedience while simultaneously stressing that the abbot's authority lay in his sanctity and/or learning.<sup>44</sup> But surely the best example to show how the tradition of ancient monasticism continued is from the *Vita Columbani* of Jonas of Bobbio. It tells of a cellarer who had turned on the spigot of a vat of beer when he was called away by his superior; so obedient was he that he went at once without hesitating long enough even to turn off the spigot,<sup>45</sup> an undisguised parallel to the story of the Egyptian monk Mark.

The implications of this attitude are clear. Those whose lives centered around obedience to the authority of a holy man in daily life were predisposed to accept the authority of a holy man in matters intellectual. It is simply impossible that an Irish monk would spend his days in obedience to a monastic *auctoritas* and then treat with complete indifference the words of a patristic *auctoritas*, especially since the latter had already fought the good

<sup>39</sup> *The Sayings of the Fathers* xiv. 7,19, translated by Owen Chadwick, *Western Asceticism* (New York, 1958), pp. 151, 155.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv. 5; pp. 150-1.

<sup>41</sup> "... patrum traditio et scripturarum sanctarum demonstrat auctoritas", *Conlationes*, iii. 6, edited by M. Petschenig, *CSEL*, 17, 73.

<sup>42</sup> *Regula Sancti Benedicti, Prologus*, cap. 5, edited by A. de Vogue and J. Neufville, *SC*, 181 (1972), 412-5, 464-9.

<sup>43</sup> *Regula Monachorum* i, *De Oboedientia*, *SLH*, 2, 122-5.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Kelly, "Books, Learning", *passim*; many of the monastic *vitae* are of abbots.

<sup>45</sup> Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*, p. 252.

fight and kept the faith, something which the former, no matter how saintly, had yet to prove he could do.

These three factors conspired to make the Early Christian Irish accepting of patristic authority, and accept it they did. Although many Hiberno-Latin texts still await critical editions and therefore I cannot pinpoint the exact range of patristic authors known to and used by the Irish, enough evidence is available to give a reasonably clear picture. Among the Latin *patres*, the Irish knew Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, Augustine, Bachiarus, Caesarius of Arles, John Cassian, Cassiodorus, Cyprian, Egeria (a *mater*), Eucherius of Lyons, Faustus of Riez, Gennadius, Gregory the Great, Hilary of Poitiers, Isidore of Seville, Iuvenus, Jerome, Leo the Great, Niceta of Remesiana, Paulinus of Nola, Paulus Orosius, Primasius of Hadrumentum, Prudentius, Sedulius, Sulpicius Severus, Tertullian, and Victorinus of Pettau.<sup>46</sup> By the late eighth century the Irish were also treating Bede as a Father.

As for the Greeks, the Irish knew several, usually in translation. These include Basil the Great, Eusebius of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Origen, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.<sup>47</sup>

The range is impressive, but so is the depth. Of Augustine's works<sup>48</sup> the Irish knew *inter alia*, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium*, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, *Quaestiones Evangeliorum*, *Contra Faustum*, *De Civitate Dei*, *De Doctrina Christiana*, as well as many letters and sermons. Of Jerome's works the Irish knew *inter alia*, *De Viris Illustribus*, *Liber Interpretationis Hebraicum Nominum*, *Adversus Helvidium*, *Contra Iovinianum*, *Tractatus in Psalmos*, *Hebraice Quaestionum in Genesim*, and the commentaries on Isaiah, Ezechiel, Daniel, Hosea, Zechariah, Malachia, Matthew, Galatians, and Ephesians, as well as some letters.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> This list is drawn from the indices of *CCSL*, 108B and 108C and the volumes in *SLH*, with a few taken from unpublished works cited by Bischoff, "Wendepunkte".

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> J. F. T. Kelly, "Augustine in Hiberno-Latin Literature", *Augustinian Studies*, viii (1977), 139-149.

<sup>49</sup> The knowledge of Jerome is especially apparent in the exegetical works such as those in *CCSL*, 108B and 108C.



The point might be raised that any good Early Mediaeval library would have the works of Augustine and Jerome, so this does not prove that the Irish had a solid knowledge of the Fathers. The answer to that is to see what they had of the lesser or less well-known Fathers. Eucherius of Lyons wrote two works which relate to the Bible, the *Formulae* and the *Instructiones*, and the Irish knew them both. They knew Hilary of Poitiers' commentary on Matthew and the *Conlationes* and *Institutiones* of Cassian. Even more impressive is their knowledge of the *Chronicon* of Sulpicius Severus. It survives in only one manuscript, a tenth-century Breton one, but two Irish authors used it, Adamnan and an anonymous eighth-century exegete, and the manuscripts of their works are older than that of Sulpicius.<sup>50</sup> The Irish have even preserved texts not known elsewhere. An Irish biblical commentary preserves a fragment of a work of Fortunatianus of Aquileia,<sup>51</sup> and they knew of Apocalypse homilies attributed to Origen and possibly genuine.<sup>52</sup>

Although there are probably instances where a patristic source was known only second-hand from a *florilegium*, the wide and constant citation of the Fathers proves how well-known and how authoritative they were among the Irish. Moreover, there is no way that the Irish would or could have used so many and so varied patristic sources if they considered the Fathers foreign to their own concerns.

It is also worth noting how the Irish used the Fathers because there is nothing noteworthy about this use. The Fathers are the Fathers; where they have something to say, one should pay attention to what they say. Often the Irish cite them anonymously,<sup>53</sup> as do other Early Mediaeval writers. Often they cite them marginally with "AG" or "GG" or "IS" next to the text in the manuscript.<sup>54</sup> Less frequently they cite them by name, usually with a brief formula, such as "Ambrosius dixit" or "ecloga Sancti

<sup>50</sup> Bischoff, "Wendepunkte", p. 252.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 242-3.

<sup>52</sup> J. F. T. Kelly, "Early Medieval Evidence for Twelve Homilies by Origen on the Apocalypse", *Vigiliae Christianae*, xxxix (1985), 273-9.

<sup>53</sup> For example, in an anonymous Lukan commentary of the late eighth century, *CCSL*, 108C, 3-101.

<sup>54</sup> So the so-called "Reference Bible" (das Bibelwerk); Bischoff, "Wendepunkte", pp. 231-6. I consulted Paris BN. lat. 11561 in the preparation of this paper.

Augustini in Iohannem", or they simply write down the Father's name and follow it with the citation.

By the mid- to late-seventh century Christianity was triumphant in Ireland, not primarily because of intellectual reasons but because the people believed it offered them eternal salvation. But if the reasons for the Faith's success were spiritual, in a few generations it had changed Irish intellectual life for ever. Learning now meant book learning, and book learning first and foremost meant the Bible, the Latin Bible with (usually) the Latin Fathers as guides to its *arcana*. The older learned tradition remained, but now it had to take a back seat to the newer one, which put one in contact with the true God and which led to salvation. While literacy never became so Christian a duty as to be imposed on all, it did become the standard goal of the learned. (Ironically, the rise of writing in the vernacular incontrovertibly proves this.) As people became literate, written learning became the only kind of learning, and the religion of the book surely gained in authority, even among the illiterate who could no longer ignore the effects of literacy, even if they could not partake in its benefits directly.

The Irish now reached outside their island home. They became part of the Western tradition, not only accepting it but contributing to it, a fact widely recognised by some of the foremost mediaeval scholars of this century. In the standard English account of Early Mediaeval intellectual life, M. L. W. Laistner said of the seventh century, "apart from the English Aldhelm, the most interesting treatises of his age are by two Irish scholars".<sup>55</sup> By those he meant the anonymous author of *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* and Adamnan of Iona. Of the latter's *vita* of Columcille he wrote, it "is by general consent one of the finest examples of mediaeval hagiography".<sup>56</sup> Bernhard Bischoff demonstrated that Irish exegetes contributed to the standard mediaeval interpretation of the Magi.<sup>57</sup> Figures like Josephus Scottus, Sedulius of Liège, Clemens Scottus, Dungal, Dicuil and John Scottus Eriugena played a significant role in the Carolingian Renaissance,<sup>58</sup> the revival of learning which affected all of Latin Europe.

<sup>55</sup> M. L. W. Laistner, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D. 500 to 900* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1957), pp. 143-4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>57</sup> Bischoff, "Wendepunkte", pp. 226-8.

<sup>58</sup> Ludwig Bieler, *Ireland: Harbinger of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1966), pp. 115-36.

## E. LATIN OR IRISH?

The foregoing argues that the Christian tradition, with the triad of Bible, monasticism, and the Fathers, was well developed when it reached Ireland, and that the Irish accepted it, became part of it, and contributed to it. But on this point dissident voices have often been raised, the most recent that of an Irish writer Miss G. V. Murphy, who claimed in a recent article on John Scottus Eriugena<sup>59</sup> that this great scholar emerged from an idiosyncratic Irish tradition which was "unorthodox, eclectic, speculative, and peculiar to Ireland".<sup>60</sup> The views she expresses differ considerably from my own, and I wish to address them, not just to answer a rather intemperate critic but to affirm a broader and more open approach to understanding Early Mediaeval Ireland.

Miss Murphy wastes neither time nor space. In her opening paragraph she gets to her central point: "... I feel strongly that had John's name meant "originating in Gaul", "originating in England", or "originating in Italy", scholars would not have hesitated to place him in the context of his homeland. This predisposition not to regard him in light of Ireland, which I find rather unusual, can perhaps be attributed directly or indirectly, to that school of thought which seems determined to deny the Irish contribution to scholarship in the mediaeval period".<sup>61</sup> This passage sadly reflects a nationalistic and polemical tone which has no place in contemporary scholarship. What possible difference can it make what Miss Murphy feels? And who belongs to this sinister clique of scholarly Jacobs who are "determined to deny" the Irish Esau his contribution to mediaeval scholarship?

In her search for evidence to support her feelings, Miss Murphy contends that the Irish use of the Fathers belies their place in the Western tradition because they also used non-conservative authors such as Isidore of Seville and known heretics such as Theodore of Mopsuestia, Pelagius, and Priscillian. On the surface, she seems to have a case, but anyone knowledgeable in Church history—and not just that of Ireland—can see how little the use of these authors means.

<sup>59</sup> G. V. Murphy, "The Place of John Eriugena in the Irish Learning [*sic!*] Tradition", *Monastic Studies*, xiv (1983), 93-107.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

First, whether or not Isidore of Seville should be considered conservative is really a value judgment depending on how one interprets the word "conservative". The Isidore whom the Irish knew was indeed conservative since the Irish used his *Etymologiae* the most. This work is an encyclopedia which drew from much previous scholarship, both classical and Christian, and from some previous nonsense. In barbarised Early Mediaeval Spain the goal of the Hispano-Roman Isidore was to preserve—or rather to conserve—the knowledge of earlier generations. This is not to say that he did not do any creative work, but that he was primarily a rather conservative writer.

Miss Murply appears to be on stronger ground for an idiosyncratic Irish tradition by citing the Irish use of heretical authors. She lists the Antiochene Theodore of Mopsuestia, "a condemned heretic".<sup>62</sup> That the Irish used Theodore is unquestioned, but there is no solid proof that anyone in the West who used his *opera* knew the author's name since the extant manuscripts do not include it<sup>63</sup> and the writers who cite him do not name him.

Let us, however, concede that the Irish did know him as the author. In that case, the condemnation would take on some importance, so it deserves a closer look. It occurred at the Emperor Justinian's Second Council of Constantinople, held in 553 to condemn the writings of some deceased Christian authors (the "Three Chapters") who were dear to the Chalcedonians in the hopes of appeasing the Monophysites in Byzantium's eastern provinces. There was strong reaction to the council of 553 in both East and West; of interest here is the West. The pope, Vigilius (537-555), "supported" the council when the emperor had him arrested, brutalised, and threatened into approving the council's decrees. When word of his capitulation reached the West, the reaction was vigorous and negative. Consider the words of Karl Baus on the African reaction: "Of the heads of the African ecclesiastical provinces summoned to Constantinople, only the Primate of Numidia proved to be submissive to the imperial wishes, while Reparatus of Carthage had to pay for his refusal with banishment ... A second group of eight bishops, who were probably chosen as delegates for the Council of 553 by the successor of Reparatus, Primosus of Carthage, because they were

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>63</sup> My thanks to Roger E. Reynolds of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, for confirming this for me.

loyal to the Emperor, likewise caused no difficulties ... But on their return to Africa these bishops encountered the cold repudiation of their colleagues, whose resistance to the decrees of 553 they could break only with the aid of the State's power".<sup>64</sup> Consider the words of Eugen Ewig on the Spanish reaction: "... the Spanish attitude toward the Three Chapters was more strongly determined by the African polemic than elsewhere. The Spanish Church never recognised the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II of 553".<sup>65</sup> The prominent North Italian sees of Milan and Aquileia went into schism over the Three Chapters, a schism not healed until the next century.<sup>66</sup> In Rome itself there was opposition from the clergy and even from the pope's own family.<sup>67</sup> No less a person than Gregory the Great avoided mentioning it on occasion.<sup>68</sup> The council which condemned Theodore's writings hardly carried the stature of Nicea.

The West did eventually accept Constantinople II, but even then its decision carried little weight. At that council the great Alexandrian Father Origen, dead some three centuries, was condemned along with the Three Chapters, and in the years following in the East many of his works were destroyed. If the council's decrees carried weight in the West, one would expect little use of Origen's works or at least anonymous use, yet the learned Dom Jean Leclercq has written "the two great masters of medieval exegesis were not Jerome and Augustine but Origen and Gregory (the Great)".<sup>69</sup> Constantinople II's condemnation of Origen's teaching in no way prevented his widespread and open use in the West by writers from many countries, so what is so

<sup>64</sup> Karl Baus, "North African Christianity from the Beginning of Vandal Rule to the Muslim Invasion", *Imperial Church*, pp. 602-14 at 610.

<sup>65</sup> Eugen Ewig, "The East Germans and Catholicism: The Conversion of the Sueves and Visigoths of Spain to Catholicism ...", *ibid.*, pp. 558-73 at 568.

<sup>66</sup> As anyone familiar with the career of the Irishman Saint Columbanus knows; cf. his *Epistola*, 5, *SLH*, 2, 32-57.

<sup>67</sup> The Roman deacon Rusticus, a nephew of Pope Vigilius, opposed the condemnation of the Three Chapters so strenuously that he was deposed, excommunicated, and forced to flee from Italy; cf. Hermann Vogt, "Theological Discussions", *Imperial Church*, p. 731.

<sup>68</sup> Vogt, "The Epilogue of Early Christian Latin Literature", *ibid.*, p. 750.

<sup>69</sup> Jean Leclercq, "The Exposition and Exegesis of Scripture, 2: From Gregory the Great to St. Bernard", in *The Cambridge History of the Bible, 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, edited by G.W.H. Lampe (Cambridge, 1969), 195.

remarkable—or idiosyncratic—about the Irish use of another person condemned by that council? To say that Irish citations of the “condemned heretic” Theodore of Mopsuestia support the notion of a tradition which was “unorthodox, eclectic, speculative, and peculiar to Ireland” is to say nothing.

As for the Irish use of Pelagius, I made a study of that in 1978;<sup>70</sup> it is unnecessary to rehearse those arguments, so let me just repeat the conclusions. There was widespread and continuous use of Pelagius’ works, and there may have been a general sympathy for Pelagian views, for example, of the *bonum naturale*, but there was no Pelagian party in the Irish church nor is there any strong evidence of pervasive Pelagian doctrines. The Irish used him largely as an exegete, and their citations of him would not violate Early Mediaeval orthodoxy. They were not alone in their use of Pelagius; the Carolingian exegete, the Aquitanian Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, also used him, albeit *de caute legendis*.

As for Priscillian, his writings or at least some *Priscillianistica* were known and used in Ireland, although this extent of their use is yet to be determined. The example Miss Murphy adduces, however, to show Priscillianist influence is that of the so-called Monarchian prologues, Priscillianist works to be sure, but also ones which are found in so many non-Irish Vulgate codices that Irish use of them cannot be considered idiosyncratic or even unusual.<sup>71</sup>

[The Irish fondness for the apocrypha has sometimes been considered evidence of Priscillianist influence. The Irish knew many apocrypha,<sup>72</sup> but Robert McNally’s observation that Hiberno-Latin biblical commentators “used (the apocrypha)

<sup>70</sup> J. F. T. Kelly, “Pelagius, Pelagianism, and the Early Christian Irish”, *Mediaevalia*, iv (1978), 99-124; cf. also Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, “‘New Heresey for Old’: Pelagianism in Ireland and the Papal Letter of 640”, *Speculum*, lx (1985), 505-16. Mr. Ó Cróinín argues that the Roman authorities linked the heresies of Pelagianism and the improper dating of Easter among the Irish, but he does not disagree with my general conclusions.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. the large and varied list of manuscripts of the Monarchian Prologues consulted by J. Wordsworth and H. White in their edition for the Oxford Vulgate, *Novum Testamentum Latine*, i (Oxford, 1889-1908), 15-7, 171-3, 269-71, 485-7; in his study of *Priscillian of Avila* (Oxford, 1976), Henry Chadwick speaks simply of “Many manuscripts of the Vulgate” (p. 102) which contain the prologues—they are so many that he sees no need to distinguish their use among the various mediaeval national groupings.

<sup>72</sup> Martin McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church* (Dublin, 1975).

mainly to supply inconsequential, imaginative details" is still true.<sup>73</sup> Any survey of Mediaeval Christian artistic themes, such as the Magi, the childhoods of Mary and Jesus, or the marriage of Mary and Joseph, proves the widespread popularity of the apocrypha.<sup>74</sup> That so much of that art is in churches proves how acceptable it was to ecclesiastical authorities.]

Perhaps the final rejection of the idea that citations of authors outside the orthodox pale prove that the one making the citations is *ipso facto* marked off as idiosyncratic from his or her orthodox contemporaries was administered in 1966 by Professor Gerald Bonner in his Jarrow Lecture on the sources of Bede's commentary on the Apocalypse, in which he demonstrated Bede's reliance on the Donatist writer Tyconius.<sup>75</sup> Bede's orthodoxy, devotion to the Fathers, and his Romanist views are well-known, yet even he felt it safe to cite such an author because the great Augustine had done so and proved it could be done safely.<sup>76</sup>

That the Early Mediaeval Irish scholars inevitably had many idiosyncracies and that these sometimes appeared in their writings, no one would doubt, but, all in all, the Irish belong to the larger Western tradition<sup>77</sup> and they must be studied in the context of Western Christian history.

No doubt to some this article will seem yet one more attack on the Irish tradition by a foreigner, in this case an American, but the true question is not the *ad hominem* one of who is attacking or defending such a tradition but rather the scholarly one of what is that tradition? In the Early Middle Ages many Irish writers, most of whom are now anonymous to us, wrote theological, hagiographical, spiritual, devotional, and exegetical works in Latin, the international language of their day. In so doing they drew upon a great Western European tradition which they simultaneously expanded and furthered. It was no small achievement, and one of

<sup>73</sup> McNally, *The Bible in the Early Middle Ages* (Westminster, Md., 1959), p. 26.

<sup>74</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *Saints and Sinners in the Early Church* (Wilmington, Del., 1985), pp. 50-1.

<sup>75</sup> G. Bonner, *Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalypse Commentary* (Jarrow, 1966).

<sup>76</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 3.30-37, edited by Joseph Martin, *CCSL*, 32 (1962), 102-16.

<sup>77</sup> For the position that Irish exegetical works are so much a part of the larger tradition that they cannot properly be called Irish, cf. Clare Stancliffe, "Early 'Irish' Biblical Exegesis?", *Studia Patristica*, xii (1975), 361-70.

which the Irish, mediaeval and modern, could be justly proud. But among some moderns one finds fruitless attempts to make these Hiberno-Latin writers idiosyncratic in order to defend their Irish character, to make them more Irish. This is a value judgment, and one which is wrong. Does it follow logically that an Irishman who knew Augustine's *opera* well and who wrote an exegetical treatise in Latin is somehow "less Irish" than an Irish Priscillianist who wrote lyric poetry in the vernacular? Should mediaeval writers be dragged into a controversy whose very tenets they would neither recognise nor accept? Does a people's greatness lie in its isolation and rejection of a great learned tradition, or does it not lie in its participation in and influence upon that tradition? The Early Mediaeval Irish made their choice, and modern scholars should respect it.