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## Divine Law in the Pauline Commentary of the Eighth-Century Hiberno-Latin *Reference Bible*

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### Recommended Citation

Carella, Kristen. "Divine Law in the Pauline Commentary of the Eighth-Century Hiberno-Latin *Reference Bible*." *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 31, edited by Deborah Furchtgott, Matthew Holmberg, A. Joseph McMullen, and Natasha Sumner, Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 74-90.

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## Divine Law in the Pauline Commentary of the Eighth-Century Hiberno-Latin *Reference Bible*

Bryan Carella

So far, the eighth-century, Hiberno-Latin biblical commentary designated *das Bibelwerk* by Bernhard Bischoff,<sup>1</sup> and now more commonly known as the *Reference Bible*, has attracted only modest attention, especially by those scholars whose work lies outside the field of exegetical studies. This neglect is surprising given that the *Reference Bible* is unique for its age as the sole Insular example<sup>2</sup> of a commentary covering the entire Bible (albeit selectively). Both its depth and its scope make it an invaluable resource, not only for those interested in the history of exegesis, but also for students of early Irish literature generally. No doubt, this inattention has resulted from the fact that the text remains unedited, save for all but the Pentateuch (which has been edited by Gerard MacGinty for the *Corpus Christianorum Scriptorum Celtigenae*). The Royal Irish Academy has appointed editors for the remaining portions of the text, to be published as separate volumes. Until these volumes appear, however, the *Reference Bible* will remain, as Martin McNamara claimed, "...one of the most obvious desiderata in the

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<sup>1</sup> Bernhard Bischoff, "Wendepunkte in der Geschichte der lateinischen Exegese im Frühmittelalter," *Mittelalter Studien*, Vol. I (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1966), 205-273; trans. by C. O'Grady, "Turning-Points in the History of Latin Exegesis in the Early Middle Ages," *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, ed. Martin McNamara (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1976), 74-160. For convenience, all citations are to the English translation.

<sup>2</sup> On this point, see Bischoff, "Turning-Points in the History of Latin Exegesis in the Early Middle Ages," 88, 100, 102. More recently, Gerard MacGinty writes, "An analysis of the stylistic features of the text led Bischoff to decide in favor of an Irish, or Irish-influenced, centre of origin. His arguments are still valid, and there are many other detailed arguments from the language and orthography of the text... which could confirm ultimate Irish inspiration and possible authorship." MacGinty, Introduction, *Pauca problemata de enigmatibus ex tomis canonicis. Praefatio de Pentateucho Moysi*, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis Scriptorum Celtigenae*, Vol. 173 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), x-xi.

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field of Hiberno-Latin exegetical studies.”<sup>3</sup> Recently, I was appointed to edit the Pauline section, and it is from this project and my ongoing interest in the relationship between early Irish secular and ecclesiastical law that has led to the present preliminary study.

Since the text is not well known, I will begin by describing the *Reference Bible*, though only briefly, since this task has been done more expertly elsewhere than I could hope to accomplish here.<sup>4</sup> Though my comments will pertain to the document as a whole, I will focus primarily on the Pauline material. The text survives in two almost complete witnesses<sup>5</sup> (and several fragments).<sup>6</sup> The commentary covers the entire Bible, although unevenly and very selectively. Some books, such as Genesis, received relatively thorough discussion, while others—especially the New Testament (other than the Gospels)—received only cursory treatment. The Pauline Epistles, in particular, received markedly less attention than other portions of the sacred text, filling only about sixteen of the 217 folios in the Paris manuscript. Of these epistles, Romans and Hebrews were covered more fully than the other books, filling roughly four folios and three folios respectively. On the other hand,

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<sup>3</sup> Martin McNamara, “Plan and Source Analysis of *Das Bibelwerk*,” *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission / Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 84-112, at 88.

<sup>4</sup> See especially: McNamara, “Plan and Source Analysis of *Das Bibelwerk*,” 84-86; MacGinty, Introduction, xi-xvii; and, for the New Testament, Joseph F. T. Kelly, “*Das Bibelwerk*: Organization and *Quellenanalyse* of the New Testament,” *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission / Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 113-123.

<sup>5</sup> These are Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 11561 (copied most likely in France, sometime from middle to the latter half of the ninth century) and Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 14276 and 14277 (copied at the monastery of St. Emmeram at Regensburg sometime near the beginning of the ninth century).

<sup>6</sup> For a list of manuscript witnesses, see Bischoff, “Turning-Points in the History of Latin Exegesis in the Early Middle Ages,” 9. See also MacGinty, Introduction, xxii-xxiii, for a list of manuscript witnesses of the shorter recension.

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only two verses each from Galatians and Thessalonians received comments, while Titus and Philemon received no treatment at all.

The sources of the commentary derive from a wide variety of patristic authorities, sometimes designated by name (often incorrectly) and, less frequently, by work. In the Pauline section, the most commonly cited authorities are, unsurprisingly, Augustine, Jerome, Cassian, and Josephus; but lesser-known authorities are frequently cited as well, including, for example, Eucherius of Lyons and Pelagius. In addition to a wide variety of patristic authorities, the commentator also apparently provided his own interpretations or—if not his own comments—interpretations for which there is no identifiable source. Quite possibly, these unidentified comments derive from patristic authors, Insular or Continental, other than the *Reference Bible* commentator himself, though it is impossible to say for certain at our present state of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Both the structure and quality of the text present methodological obstacles to a study of the sort I propose to undertake here. Generally speaking, contemporary scholars have regarded the *Reference Bible* as a disjointed collection of patristic quotations lacking either a tightly-conceived plan or a consistent ideological framework. These same scholars have emphasized the low quality of the text (both in terms of its organization and content), which at times borders on sloppiness,<sup>8</sup> leading some to conclude that the text

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<sup>7</sup> Although, for convenience, I refer to the “*Reference Bible* commentator” in the singular, I do not mean to imply that the work, as it has come down to us, was produced by a single individual. In fact, the surviving witnesses indicate that the *Reference Bible* existed in two recensions and was reworked over time. See MacGinty, Introduction, xi-xii.

<sup>8</sup> On this point, Kelly writes, “The New Testament section of the Reference Bible represents a rather poor specimen of Hiberno-Latin exegesis. The text has great value as a guide to the patristic and insular literature available to the Irish exegete, but it contains little or no independent organization, nor is there much independent thinking. The author/compiler was completely at the mercy of his patristic sources. . . . In general the work is very careless. For example, it is not uncommon to find the same word or name spelled in two different ways on consecutive pages. . . . This carelessness appears throughout the commentaries.” MacGinty adds, “Accuracy does not characterize any of [the] MSS,” and Bischoff notes, “One discovers the Irish tradition [represented in the “Reference

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was haphazardly compiled, perhaps as a kind of classroom tool, originally intended for oral presentation.<sup>9</sup> Such criticism, while accurate to an extent, does not diminish the value the text holds for students of early medieval Irish history, literature, and theology; nor do these criticisms preclude deeper investigation into the broader concerns that underlie the commentary, and perhaps motivated the commentator.

While it is certainly true that the commentator relied heavily on external authorities, which he usually cited without context and with only a bare minimum of firsthand discussion or assessment, it does not follow that the compiler lacked a set of principles guiding his choices to include certain patristic quotations, or to juxtapose these quotations under the rubric of a given biblical verse. His reticence to draw explicit conclusions based on his citations or to reconcile contradictions between them does not diminish the significance of the questions he raises implicitly. On the contrary, I would argue that there is a great deal to be learned from the choices that the *Reference Bible* commentator made, both in terms of what authorities he elected to cite and how he marshaled these sources to address individual scriptural *loci*, even in the absence of overt discussion underlying his rationale.

Indeed, it was common practice among early Irish commentators to cite various, sometimes conflicting, authorities pertaining to a given question by listing them, one after the other, with *formulae* such as *alii dicunt* (others say) or *siue...siue* (whether . . . or), often without any manifest attempt to resolve the question under consideration. In such cases, however, one can nonetheless infer much about the author's approach to the problem, despite the lack of an openly proposed resolution. True, the *Reference Bible* commentator did not use these enumerative *formulae*. That said, it is in this tradition of marshaling authoritative citations apropos of a given question that, I would argue, we should seek to identify the

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Bible"] especially in the irksome return of certain very superficial questions." Kelly, "*Das Bibelwerk: Organization and Quellenanalyse of the New Testament*," 113-114; MacGinty, Introduction, xvii; Bischoff, "Turning-Points in the History of Latin Exegesis," 102.

<sup>9</sup> MacGinty, Introduction, ix.

broader concern(s) in the text. While evidence of this sort may not allow us to detect such themes unambiguously, or even to elicit a consistent ideological perspective in the text, it can nonetheless help us understand what kinds of questions the commentator considered significant, and what kinds of witnesses he regarded as sufficiently authoritative. In this way, we may be able to develop some insight into the matters the commentator deemed relevant to the theological concerns of his day.

With this understanding of the text, it is my purpose here to conduct a focused, preliminary investigation into one of the ideological concerns that the commentator seems to address consistently (albeit implicitly) in the Pauline section of the *Reference Bible*. Specifically, I will examine the commentator's conception of divine law, concentrating particularly on his conception of the relationship between the Law of Moses (and to a lesser extent, the Law of Nature) and the Law of Christ. This question is important, since it has now become commonly regarded as fact that early Irish legalists—both canon lawyers and secular jurists—regarded Old Testament Law as living law, and applied it literally in early medieval Ireland.<sup>10</sup> I have challenged this assumption in preliminary fashion,<sup>11</sup> and my argument here is a piece of a larger project on this same topic.

If this widely-held view that early Irish Christian jurists conceived of Mosaic precepts as living law is true, then we should

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<sup>10</sup> See especially: Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Aidan Breen, "The Laws of the Irish," *Peritia* 3 (1984): 382-438. "...In the second half of the seventh century, if not before, there existed in Ireland an extremely influential school of exegetes and canon lawyers who regarded the Mosaic law as living law, based many of their own detailed prescriptions directly upon it, and consciously identified the clerics, men of learning and their dependents with priests and levites of the Old Testament. For persons of such attitudes, Paul's arguments cut both ways and explicit use of them was best avoided, particularly (and this may well have been the case) if there were contrary opinions about the place of Old Testament law in the life of the christian" (394).

<sup>11</sup> In an unpublished lecture at the Harvard Humanities Seminar in Celtic Languages and Culture on February 17, 2010, entitled "Irish Vernacular Law and the *New* Testament: Pseudo-history and Gentile Identity in Early Irish Legal Thought".

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expect to find similar ideas in Hiberno-Latin biblical exegesis, whether overtly expressed or as relicts. Indeed, we should expect to find a common doctrine underlying both legal and exegetical texts, especially since those who claim that Irish jurists regarded the Old Testament as living law usually believe also (as I do) that early Irish law was produced by clerics working in monastic *scriptoria*, not in secular law schools for which there is little, if any concrete evidence of their existence in the early Middle Ages. Presumably, in these *scriptoria*, the related exercises of commenting on the scriptures and writing law would have been part and parcel of the same scholarly endeavor, performed by the same individuals, or—at the very least—by individuals in close contact with one another.

Commentary on the Pauline Epistles provides an apt focus for this study, since Paul was deeply concerned with the relationship between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ, and the status of Jews and Gentiles under the New Dispensation. In the Pauline section of the *Reference Bible*, thus, we have an opportunity to examine how an early Irish exegete understood and responded to Paul's conceptualization of dispensation history: a conceptualization that, as usually interpreted, starkly contradicts any claim that Christians should regard the Law of Moses as living law, or that the Law of Moses should provide a model for jurisprudence in Christian society. In fact, what we find is that the *Reference Bible* commentator had a sophisticated understanding of Paul's arguments, informed, to a large extent, by reference to a wide variety of patristic authorities, but also expressed in his own words. At the same time, what we find is that the *Reference Bible* commentator had a mostly, though not entirely, orthodox understanding of the progression of divine law over the course of dispensation history, including the preeminence of New Testament Law.

Before I discuss a few examples from the text, let me mention a few potential methodological problems with the study I propose to conduct. First, while the *Reference Bible* is indeed a biblical commentary, it might better be described as a *collectaneum* of authoritative citations organized sequentially according to the books of the Bible, following book, chapter, and verse. As a result, it is difficult to identify a unified theme. Given the commentator's

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organizational choice to follow the sequence of the biblical text rather than to maintain thematic unity, one must be careful not to assign too much weight to individual citations. Instead, one must seek to identify recurrent patterns in the commentator's interests; not only in the verses he chose to explicate, but also in the way he integrated his sources with his own ideas over the commentary as a whole. And so, while cherry-picking passages from patristic authorities to provide evidence for a certain belief or practice within a particular medieval culture is always problematic (and usually misleading), it is especially problematic with this text.

It will be more necessary than ever, therefore, to consider individual *loci* within the context of the broader commentary and to identify trends in the way the commentator interacts with his sources, rather than point out an isolated reading and take it to be representative of Irish thought (or even this particular commentator's thought) by itself. Here, context is especially important. I would argue that the commentary in the *Reference Bible* can best be understood as an ongoing conversation—organized sequentially by biblical book, chapter, and verse—in which certain questions were addressed discursively and recurrently, with each successive treatment of a particular theme bearing on and nuancing prior commentary on related issues. In this ongoing discussion, the commentator considered certain questions intermittently, without—apparently—feeling a pressing need to settle on a definitive solution.

Second, the *Reference Bible*, as it has survived, would appear to be an informal work-in-progress. MacGinty notes that the work “has rather a schoolroom air,” meaning, I think, that the commentary seems most like lecture notes or a handbook intended for pedagogical use.<sup>12</sup> Not infrequently, the commentator's discussion of a verse amounts to nothing more than a reference to a patristic source, without quotation. For example, the commentator's discussion of Romans 2:12 consists of a short explanation and a

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<sup>12</sup> MacGinty explains, “[The *Reference Bible*] is based on lecture notes, very probably the master's own (if the compilation was the work on one author)...[T]he style is compatible with oral delivery: the syntax, very incomplete at times, would be quite acceptable in an oral style...” MacGinty, Introduction, xi.



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referral to Augustine's *In explanatione iohannis*:

*QUI SINE LEGE PECCAVERUNT, reliqua • Hieronimus dicit • QUI SINE LEGE Id est impius in aeternum peribit • Qui in lege peccaverunt • Id est peccator credens deum per legem iudicabitur et non peribit; quere quomodo agustinus dicit in explanatione iohannis*

THEY WHO HAVE SINNED WITHOUT THE LAW, etc. [Rom. 2:12]. Jerome explains [it]:  
THEY WHO [HAVE SINNED] WITHOUT THE LAW: That is: the wicked man will be destroyed in eternity. That is: a sinner who believes in God will be judged by the [Old] Law and will not be destroyed. Inquire about how Augustine explains [this] in *In explanatione iohannis*.<sup>13</sup>

In such cases, it is difficult to tell if the commentator was directing the reader to consult this source, or simply making a note reminding himself to do so. On the other hand, perhaps, he expected that his audience knew the text so well that there was no need to cite it. Similarly, one often gets the sense that remarks in the *Reference Bible* assumed an audience with whom the commentator was already

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<sup>13</sup> All quotations from the *Reference Bible* are based on my own transcriptions directly from the manuscripts. I have used the Paris MS as a base text, though I have inserted readings from the Munich MS on a small number of occasions where these readings seemed clearer. I have indicated these insertions by placing them in parentheses. I have made few emendations. Where I have done so, I have placed them between triangle brackets: <> (and I have indicated them in the same manner in the translation as well). All translations from the *Reference Bible* are my own, except citations from the Bible itself. For translations of the biblical text, I have used the Douay-Reims version, updating obvious archaisms (though sparingly), and making changes to reflect non-standard readings in the manuscript witnesses. For clarity, I have capitalized citations from the Bible, though this practice is not followed in the MSS. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Bonnie A. Catto, Professor of Classics at Assumption College, for her helpful comments on my translations. All mistakes, however, are entirely my own.

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engaged in a broader dialogue. The result is that the text has something of an “insider” feel to it, leaving the modern reader to feel very much as an “outsider.” My point is that the task of identifying the commentator’s ideological concerns is made all the more difficult by the fact that we cannot be certain either of the text’s purpose or its intended audience.

With these potential pitfalls in mind, let me turn now to the main topic of this paper, the understanding of divine law in the *Reference Bible*, particularly the relationship between the Old Law and the New Law. I will begin with an excerpt from the *Reference Bible*’s commentary on Galatians, verse 2:14. In this passage, the commentator begins by paraphrasing Pelagius, but then recasts the Pelagian doctrine, apparently in his own words:

*SINA ENIM MONS EST IN ARABIA QUI EST  
CONIUNCTUS EI QUAE NUNC EST  
HIERUSALEM • Quomodo est hoc • Id est de  
qualitate locorum uult intellegi diuersitatem  
testamentorum • Uno enim fine non intercedente  
alia gente • Sicut enim una patria sina et  
hierusalem sic est unum totum uetus testamentum •*

FOR SINA IS A MOUNTAIN IN ARABIA WHICH HAS AFFINITY TO JERUSALEM [Gal. 4:25]. How is this? It is: he wishes the difference between the testaments to be understood by the character of these places: Indeed, just as Sina and Jerusalem are within one land (since, in fact, no boundary divides one people from the other) so also is the Old Testament complete by itself.

In this passage, it would appear that the commentator wished to emphasize the completeness of Old Testament Law. I take the final phrase *unum totum uetus testamentum* (which literally translates as: “the Old Testament is one whole”) to mean that the Old Law is complete in and of itself, a claim similar to what Pelagius made. And yet, the commentator makes this point by defining the Old Law (symbolized metaphorically as Mount Sinai) expressly in terms of its relationship with the New Law (as symbolized by Jerusalem). Since

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the two are conjoined within one boundary, and not separated (so his reasoning goes), each is a law complete within itself, providing a path to salvation.

Some light may be shed on the significance of this passage by comparing it with the commentary on I Timothy 2:14-15. Here, the commentator addressed the New Testament sacrament of penance with an example taken from the Old Testament:

*ADAM NON EST SEDUCT(U)S MULIER AUTEM  
SEDUCTA IN PRAEUARICATIONE FUIT  
SALUABITUR AUTEM PRO FILIORUM  
GENERATIONEM • (quid est hoc?) Id est non  
uindicabitur super mulierem si aliud malum non  
fecerit praeter generationem filiorum • Aliter  
saluabitur • Id est genus paenitentiae mulieribus  
labor generandi filiorum ut dicit IN DOLORIBUS  
• PARIES FILIOS TUOS reliqua • Sicut in uentre  
cibum uetitum et sic paries filios tuos in uentre  
cum dolore habebis uel saluabitur • Id est in  
praeuaricatione mandat(i) fuit sed non ideo  
disperat mulier quia per baptismum quod est  
filiorum dei generatio et ipsa saluabitur • Non eua  
sed unaquaque credens mulier quia eua ad  
exemplum dicta est creatonis et non de ipsius  
salute tractatus • Item hieronimus • Saluta est  
mulier • Id est quod ipsa perdidit per  
incontinentiam adquirat in fili(i)s <et> uirginibus*

ADAM WAS NOT SEDUCED; BUT THE  
WOMAN BEING SEDUCED, WAS IN  
TRANSGRESSION; YET SHE SHALL BE  
SAVED THROUGH CHILDBEARING [I Tim  
2:14-15]. What is this? It is: There is no  
punishment against a woman more than  
childbearing, if she does not commit another evil  
deed; otherwise, she will be saved. That is: the  
origin of penance is the toil that [women] must  
bear children, as it says: IN SORROWS SHALL  
YOU BRING FORTH YOUR CHILDREN, etc.

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[Gen 3:16]. Just as you will have prohibited food in your stomach, so also YOU BEAR YOUR CHILDREN IN YOUR STOMACH WITH SORROW [cf. Gen 3:16], and yet she will be saved. That is: It was in transgression of a commandment, but let the woman not despair on that account, because through baptism, that is, the bearing of the children of God, indeed, she will be saved. Not [just] Eve, but each woman who believes, because Eve was intended as an example pertaining to [all] creation, and not [merely as] a discourse concerning her own salvation. Likewise, Jerome: "The woman is saved." That is, what she destroyed through lack of self-control let her obtain by sons <and> virgins.

In this passage, the commentator has imbued a feature of the Old Law with significance usually reserved for New, by explaining the New Testament notion of penance with the example of God's injunction on Eve. Note that in these comments, a woman's pain during childbirth was equated—not compared, but equated—with baptism. Apparently, the commentator understood both acts to absolve women from original sin. For the commentator, then, the act of childbirth did not merely prefigure the sacrament of penance (a sacrament usually associated specifically with the Law of Christ), but apparently constituted penance outright, in literal terms.

On the other hand, alongside these comments—which seem to emphasize the validity of the Law of Moses even under the New Dispensation—elsewhere, the commentator would appear to adhere to more orthodox Pauline and Augustinian theology, in which the requirements of the Old Law fail to lead to salvation *sub gratia*, under the Law of Christ. For example, consider the commentary on Romans 3:20:

*QUIA EX OPERIBUS LEGIS NON  
IUSTIFICABITUR OMNIS CARO • Quomodo est  
hoc cum dicit NON AUDITORES LEGIS IUSTI  
SUNT APUD DOMINUM • SED FACTORES  
LEGIS IUSTIFICANTUR • Id est non iustificabitur*

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*in nouo circumcissio et sabbata et neomenia •*

BECAUSE BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW NO FLESH WILL BE JUSTIFIED [Rom 3:20]. How is this, when he says FOR NOT THE HEARERS OF THE LAW ARE JUST BEFORE GOD, BUT THE DOERS OF THE LAW SHALL BE JUSTIFIED? [Rom 2:13]. It is: one will not be justified in the New [i.e., in the New Testament or under the New Law] by circumcision or by [keeping] the sabbath, or by [keeping] the festival of the new moon.

Here, the commentator seems to embrace the Pauline doctrine condemning those who seek salvation by adhering solely to the requirements of the Mosaic Law.

What are we to make of these apparent contradictions? That is, what are we to make of these comments which, on the one hand, seem to argue in favor of the continued significance of the Old Law under the New Dispensation but, on the other, appear to suggest that one cannot achieve salvation by adhering to the Old Law? This problem presents a complex theological dilemma, one which I believe the early Irish *literati* took head on; theologians, to be sure, but also jurists (both ecclesiastical and secular), historians, poets, etc. Ultimately, I do not think there was a contradiction here, at least not in the mind of the commentator. Rather, the position expressed in the *Reference Bible* is an understanding of the relationship between the Old Law and the New Law deeply influenced by Pelagian doctrine, a claim not all that earth-shattering given the heavy reliance on Pelagius as an authority throughout the Pauline section of the text. In fact, I would argue that a major goal of the *Reference Bible* commentator was to reconcile Pelagian ideas about divine law with the more orthodox views expressed by other authorities.<sup>14</sup>

Since Pelagius's doctrine on the relationship between the Law

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<sup>14</sup> The nature and extent of the Pelagian legacy in Ireland has been a matter of controversy for some time. For recent discussion and bibliography, see especially: Michael W. Herren and Shirley Ann Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2002), 8-13.

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of Moses and the Law of Christ has frequently been misrepresented, let me briefly discuss his views on this matter. While neither he nor his followers ever denied that the Law of Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17 was often quoted in this context), nor that Christians were released from the “yoke” of the Mosaic Law (as Peter asserts in Acts 15:10 and which becomes a main theme of the Pauline Epistles), they resisted any suggestion that the obligation of a Christian to obey the scriptures in their entirety was thereby reduced. Instead, Pelagians emphasized the notion that Christians bear a far greater load under the New Dispensation. A few citations will suffice to make the point:

*...nescio, quomodo Christus Dominus non uenit  
soluere legem, sed adimplere, si per eius  
credulitatem disciplina non aucta est, sed minuta*<sup>15</sup>

...I cannot understand how the Lord Christ can be said to have come not to destroy the law but to fulfill it, if this means that through belief in him discipline has not been increased but diminished.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, elsewhere:

*...intentius peruidendum est, utrumne post Christi  
aduentum solis inpiis futurae beatitudinis spes  
abnuatur, quando etiam illis, qui uniuersa legis  
iussa conpleuerint, nisi etiam addita gratiae  
mandata seruauerint, denegetur. In hoc enim  
discipulorum Christi plus quam scribarum et  
Pharisaeorum poterit eminere iustitia, si non ea  
tantum, quae Moysen et prophetas scribis  
Pharisaeisque praecepta sunt, uerum etiam, quae  
per Christum sunt mandata, subpleuerint*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Carl Paul Caspari, ed., *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten aus den Zwei Letzten Jahrhunderten des Kirchlichen Alterthums und dem Anfang des Mittelalters* (Brussels: Culture et Civilization, 1964), 71.

<sup>16</sup> B.R. Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1991), 217.

<sup>17</sup> Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten*, 82.

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... We can see that we have to give more careful consideration to the question whether, after Christ's coming, the hope of future blessedness is denied to the ungodly only, when it is refused even to those who have fulfilled all the commandments of the law, unless they have also kept the additional commandments of grace. For the righteousness of Christ's disciples will be able to stand out above the scribes and the Pharisees, as long as they have fulfilled not only the precepts given to the scribes and Pharisees by Moses and the prophets but also the commandments given by Christ.<sup>18</sup>

And yet, Pelagian doctrine did not advocate adherence to the Mosaic Law without understanding it in the context of the New Dispensation:

*Adinplet enim legem, cum eam ueram ostendit. Ueram enim ostendit, quando per se cessare facit, quae illa cessatura praedixerat. Et de antiqua lege legem produxit nouam, et nouam, et nouum testamentum promulgauit ex uetere, ut magis ac magis legis et prophetarum praedicta subpleret... In quibus omnibus aduertendum est, nos iam non antiquorum imitatores oportere esse, sed Christi, nec tam ueteris testamenti praecepta seruare debere, quam noui<sup>19</sup>*

...[F]or [Christ] fulfils the law by revealing it to be true, and he reveals it to be true by making to cease what the law had foretold would cease. And out of the old law he brought forth the new, and out of the old covenant he promulgated the new, so that he might make good the prophecies of the law and the prophets... In all these matters we

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<sup>18</sup> Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius*, 227.

<sup>19</sup> Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten*, 39-40

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must now observe that we are not to imitate the men of old but Christ and that we are to keep not the commandments of the old covenant but the new.<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, clarifying his position:

*Quid ergo proderit mihi eius rei obseruatio, per quam iam caelestis regni possessor esse non possum? Ob hoc tantum nunc nobis uetus legendum est testamentum, ut Dei in eo facta miremur, omnipotentiam operum, mysteriorum rationem, signa uirtutum, et ut Christum nouissimis temporibus promissum, eodem testamento adnuntiante, noscamus. Caeterum ad uitae conuersationem noui praecipue testamenti doctrina spectanda est... Si uetus semper celebrandum erat, cur successit nouum? Aut si succedere debuit, quomodo celebrandum est uetus? Quamquam et in nouo uetus celebretur, dum, quod uetus fore adnuntiavit, celebratur<sup>21</sup>*

What will it profit me to observe a rite which can no longer enable me to possess the heavenly kingdom? The sole reason for our reading the Old Testament now is in order to marvel at the acts which God did in it, at the omnipotence of his works, at his mysterious plan, at wonders and signs, and to know the Christ promised in the last days and announced in the same Testament. But for the conduct of our lives we must pay special attention to the New Testament... If the Old [Law] was always to be observed, why did the New [Law] supersede it? Or if it had to be superseded, why is the Old [Law] to be observed now? Nevertheless, it is true that the Old [Law] is

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<sup>20</sup> Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius*, 187.

<sup>21</sup> Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten*, 151.



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observed in the New [Law], since what the Old [Law] announced is still observed.<sup>22</sup>

The underlying principle seems to have been that, for a Christian, the burden of biblical law was heavier than before the advent of Christ, since the New Law in no way released one from prior obligations. In this view, Christ removed the “yoke” of the Law of Moses, but he did not abrogate the Law: rather, he fulfilled it. Thus, according to the Pelagian understanding, the Law of Christ superseded the Law of Moses only in the sense that it provided a new context for it; that is, the “Old [Law] is observed in the New [Law].” And so, for Pelagians, a Christian remained bound by the practical obligations of the Old Law (albeit under a revised and expanded interpretation) over and above the requirements of the New. For this reason, Pelagians believed that Christians carried a greater burden than Jews; and because of this more onerous responsibility, they believed that Christians were even more liable to fall into transgression.

So, in conclusion, the *Reference Bible* commentator had, on the one hand, an essentially orthodox view of the relationship between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ and, as such, his views were (for the most part) consonant with Pauline theology. On the other hand, one of his main sources was Pelagius’s *Expositiones XIII epistularum Pauli*, a work that, to a certain extent, challenged orthodoxy on this very point. What explains the commentator’s apparently contradictory understanding of the relationship between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ? I would suggest that his relatively heavy reliance on Pelagius most likely indicates his interest in how Pelagian ideas might bear on early Irish theological and legal doctrine. Specifically, Pelagius’s views about the significance of Old Testament Law under the New Dispensation would have presented a dilemma of particular interest to the Irish *literati*, for whom the question concerning the proper role of the Law of Moses in Christian society was of special concern. Since the commentator drew heavily on Pelagius for his explanations of the Pauline Epistles, it would appear that he was interested in reconciling—or at least problematizing—these sometimes divergent

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<sup>22</sup> Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius*, 284.

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understandings of divine law. Achieving a balance between these two perspectives—the orthodox and the Pelagian—I would argue, was a major aim of his commentary.