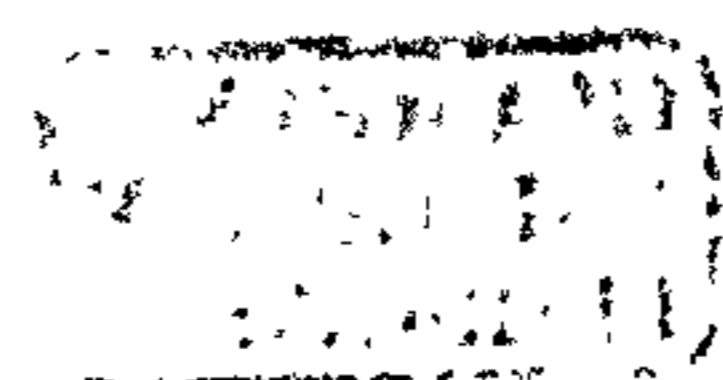


**The *céli Dé* and ecclesiastical government in
Ireland in the eighth and ninth centuries.**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the *céli Dé*, individual ecclesiastics who constituted the intellectual and spiritual elite in the early medieval Irish church. The period covered by the thesis is restricted to A.D. 700-900 and focusses most fully on the late eighth and early ninth centuries. A distinction is drawn between those individuals referred to as *céli Dé* during this period under study and those 'communities within communities', concerned for the welfare of the sick and the poor, to whom the name is later attested. The thesis examines the primary source material, considers past and present theories regarding these ecclesiastics and refutes the consensus of opinion that the *céli Dé* were a reform movement who emerged in reaction to a degenerate clergy in a church under secular influence. It discusses what was intended by the designation *céli Dé* and proffers the opinion that the *céli Dé* were instead concerned with advancing all aspects of the duties and responsibilities of the church. Particular developments in ecclesiastical organisation during the period under study are discussed and the extent of the role of individual *céli Dé* in these are examined, but will conclude that it should not be assumed that these developments, or concern for their introduction, was wholly restricted to the *céli Dé*.

There was a change in the basis of the source of royal authority from popular to divine sanction, during the course of the eighth century, and the political repercussions of this more abstract concept of kingship would ultimately culminate in the emergence of Irish national identity. The potential extent of *céli Dé* involvement in the promulgation of ecclesiastical law, a contributory factor in establishing centralised ecclesiastical authority, is discussed and an examination of attempts by kings of Tara to control the appointment of the abbots of Armagh is provided in an effort to indicate how they sought to establish a centralised secular authority on the basis of the acknowledged authority of Armagh. Finally, the thesis provides an examination of the reign of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, king of Munster (820-47), who was an ecclesiastic before becoming king and who, it is considered, was himself a *céli Dé*.

CONTENTS

Tables	4
Preface and acknowledgement	5
Author's declaration	8
Abbreviations	9
Chapter 1: Concepts of the <i>céli Dé</i> : views past and present	10
Chapter 2: The context of <i>céli</i> : what was meant by <i>céli Dé</i> ?	40
Chapter 3: The primary source material deriving from the <i>céli Dé</i>	76
Chapter 4: The eighth-century Irish church: degenerate and vulnerable to an encroaching secularisation?	109
Chapter 5: Church organisation and the <i>congressio senadorum</i> of 780	142
Chapter 6: The promulgation of the 'laws of saints' in the eighth and ninth centuries	171
Chapter 7: The abbacy of Armagh	195
(I) Abbatial rivalry in Armagh 787-807 and the year of four abbots	196
(II) Leth Cam and its aftermath: the abbacy of Armagh 826-48	214
Chapter 8: Feidlimid mac Crimthainn and the <i>óentu Máel Ruain</i>	228
Chapter 9: Conclusion and aftermath	262
Bibliography	269

Tables

Fig. 1: Ecclesiastical titles from all annalistic sources, 700-900	153
Fig. 1a: Ecclesiastical titles from <i>AU</i> , 700-900	154

Preface

There has been, for almost two decades, a significant revision in the understanding of the early medieval Irish church. Prior to this, the work of scholars in the field of early Irish ecclesiastical history had focussed on the peculiarities of the early Irish church and had developed an understanding whereby an early diocesan organisation introduced by Patrick had succumbed to a monastically-based organisation, in which abbots were perceived the supreme ecclesiastical authority to which bishops, if they were considered at all, were subject. This unique understanding of ecclesiastical organisation evolved from the concept of a 'Celtic Church' at variance with Rome, a concept which has proved tenacious, lingering long after the decline of the religious sectarianism from which it emerged. The monastically-based organisation which was understood to have supplanted Patrick's diocesan framework, however, came to be accepted as itself falling prey to an avaricious laity and the subsequent secularisation of the church proffered as the reason for the emergence of a monastic reform movement called the Culdees, an anglicization of the Irish *céli Dé*, in the latter half of the eighth century. These Culdees would themselves be perceived as succumbing to secular concerns by taking wives and establishing hereditary succession in their positions and titles and generally neglecting spiritual affairs until displaced by more orthodox monastic orders from the continent from the twelfth century.

For almost two decades, however, this accepted model has been displaced and the understanding of the organisation of the early Irish church has fundamentally changed, as a result of the re-examination of the primary source material, originating from the question of the provision of pastoral care. It is now well established that the mere fact of the obligation of pastoral care must mean the presence of a network of priests under the direction of bishops – indeed, the revision has been so well accepted and established that it is almost anachronistic to refer to it in the present tense when there is now a generation of scholars, myself included, who have known nothing other than the revised understanding of early Irish ecclesiastical organisation for our entire academic lives.

Nevertheless, the understanding of the organisation of the early Irish church is far from complete. The efforts of those scholars most directly involved with the subject have, understandably, been focussed on a detailed examination of all aspects

of pastoral provision; however, there is still a great deal of work to be done in other areas of early Irish ecclesiastical history, the understanding of which were also called into question by the revision in ecclesiastical organisation but which have not yet received the attention they deserve. The aim of this thesis is to turn attention towards one of the most important of these topics that of the body of ecclesiastics who have become known to us as the *céli Dé*. The religious impact of these ecclesiastics has been noted, if not entirely agreed upon in regard to detail over the years, and their significance, consequently, accepted. The general impression, as will be discussed, has been one of a movement promoting the ideals of an austere, rigorous ascetic lifestyle in reaction to the failings of a church which had succumbed to the corrupt and insidious influence of a voracious laity and this, by-and-large, has remained, despite the removal of the model to which this understanding belonged.

The purpose of this thesis, however, will be a study of the impact of the *céli Dé* both on political philosophy and on ecclesiastical organisation in early medieval Ireland. No attempt will be made here to deal with their liturgical or spiritual concerns: these matters have already been dealt with in print at some length and are, in any case, the bases of other, concurrent doctoral theses undertaken by Morgyn Wagner in Edinburgh and Westley Follett in Toronto. The focus of the study will be restricted to the period from the early eighth century until the middle of the ninth, after which time the understanding of the nature of the *céli Dé* began to change and they were not so influential as they had been during this period. It will examine the impact the ecclesiastical developments of the period in question had on political development and the dynamics of power politics, on the centralisation of authority and on the concept of the kingship of Ireland, and attempt to delineate the extent to which the *céli Dé* were responsible for these developments.

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From a financial perspective, I would like to acknowledge the award of a Major Scottish Studentship from the Student Award Agency for Scotland, without which this work could not have been undertaken. From an academic perspective, however, my degree of debt is much broader. I have profited greatly from the meticulous supervision of Thomas Owen Clancy, who has saved me from many glaring errors and whose knowledge of the cleric-kings of Munster, particularly, greatly helped me when researching the background of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn. I

would also like to thank Alex Woolf, Gilbert Márkus and Nick Evans, for the many productive conversations benefitting various aspects of this work, and the staff in the university library at Glasgow for their efforts in securing the many inter-library loans necessary. I would particularly like to thank Dawn Gattens for her patience and support and who contributed many helpful suggestions upon reading the thesis in draft. It is to Dawn I would like to dedicate this work.

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Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis embodies the results of my own special work, that it has been composed by myself and that it does not include work forming part of a thesis presented successfully for a degree in this or another university.

Date: 13th March 2003.....

Signature: Craig Haggart.....

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of texts and manuscripts

- AClon: The Annals of Clonmacnoise.* D. Murphy (ed.), Dublin, 1896; repr. Lampeter, 1993.
- AFM: Annála Rioghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters.* J O'Donovan (ed), 7 vols, Dublin, 1848-51.
- AI: Annals of Inisfallen.* S. Mac Airt (ed.), Dublin, 1951.
- AT: Annals of Tigernach.* W. Stokes (ed.), *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896), 119-263; repr. 2 vols, Lampeter, 1993.
- AU: Annals of Ulster.* S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (edd. to 1131), Dublin, 1983; W.M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy (edd.), 4 vols, Dublin, 1887-1901.
- CCH: Collectio Canonum Hibernensis.* H. Wasserschleben (ed. as *Die Irische Kanonensammlung*), Leipzig, 1885.
- CIH: Corpus Iuris Hibernici.* D.A. Binchy (ed.), 6 vols, Dublin, 1978.
- CS: Chronicon Scottorum.* W.M. Hennessy (ed.), London, 1866.
- FO: Féilire Óengusso.* W. Stokes (ed.), London, 1905; repr. Dublin, 1984.
- HE: Bede's Ecclesiastical History.* B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (edd.), Oxford, 1969; Leo Sherley-Price (ed.), *Bede: Ecclesiastical History of the English people*, Harmondsworth, 1990.
- Mon. Tall.:* E.J. Gwynn and W.J. Purton (edd.), 'The Monastery of Tallaght', *PRIA* 29 C (1911), 115-79.
- T: The Martyrology of Tallaght.* R.I. Best and H.J. Lawlor (edd.), London, 1931.
- RCD: Ríagail na Celed nDé.* William Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 84-98; E.J. Gwynn (ed.), 'The Rule of Tallaght', *Hermathena* 44 2nd Supplementary volume (1927), 2-63.
- VC: Adomnán of Iona's Vita Columbae.* A.O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson (edd.) *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, Oxford, 1991; Richard Sharpe (ed.) *Adomnán of Iona. Life of St Columba*, Harmondsworth, 1995.

Abbreviations of books, journals and periodicals

- CMCS: Cambridge / Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies.*
- DIL: Dictionary of the Irish Language*, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 1913-76.
- JRSAI: Journal of the Royal Society of the Antiquaries of Ireland.*
- PRIA: Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy.*
- ZCP: Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie.*

Concepts of the *céli Dé*: views past and present

At the turn of the nineteenth century, John Jamieson considered that ‘There is no portion of Scottish history, which has a higher claim to attention, than that which respects the Culdees.’¹ Jamieson proved to be an extremely influential writer – indeed, his book was cited as ‘One of the standard works on the history of the Culdees’ in a bibliography published by the Pictish Arts Society as recently as 1995² – but rather than history from our concept of study of the past through the objective consideration of surviving contemporary evidence, Jamieson’s *Historical Account* belongs to an era where contemporary attitudes were projected into the past and then used as a justification for the present. For Jamieson, the *céli Dé* were synonymous with the monks of Iona and he considered that they were ‘a subject which merits the regard of all who bear the name of Protestants.’³

Jamieson was born in south-west Scotland in 1759, in the years following the Jacobite Rising and in an area which had been the heartland of the staunchly presbyterian Covenanters. During the course of the Rising, the religious card had been played, with the terrors of a return to idolatrous papistry being projected by a Hanoverian regime preparing for flight as Charles Edward Stuart’s ill-fed, ill-equipped and exhausted army reached as far south as Derby. Viewed in such a light, Jamieson’s account was more moderate than it could have been, but it cannot be considered an objective account of the *céli Dé*.

Jamieson projected that Iona was the principal seat of the *céli Dé*, or the Culdees as he refers to them throughout. He discussed the term ‘Culdee’, then noted Tertullian’s assertion, that the Gospel had reached further north than Roman arms,

¹ John Jamieson, *A Historical Account of the Ancient Culdees of Iona and of their Settlements in Scotland, England and Ireland*, Glasgow, 1811; repr. 1890.

² J.R.F Burt, ‘A Pictish Bibliography’, in E. Nicoll (ed.), *A Pictish Panorama*, Angus, 1995, 37-173.

³ Jamieson, *Historical Account of the Ancient Culdees*, 2.

‘perfectly agrees’⁴ with the claims of the Culdees themselves that they received their modes of worship from the disciples of John the Apostle. He also notes, however, that

The Irish say, that this order of monks was first instituted in their island, by Columba, A. 546 [*sic*]; and afterwards, by the same apostolic presbyter, in Scotland. Till his time, indeed, we have no evidence of the existence of any societies observing a particular institute; though there seems to be no good reason to doubt that the doctrines by which the religious of the Columban order were distinguished, were held in North Britain long before.⁵

Thus, for Jamieson, the *céli Dé* were introduced by Colum Cille, as evidenced by anonymous Irish sources, but their ethos had been in general accord with the long standing principles of those Christians Tertullian had believed domiciled ‘in North Britain long before.’ Based on an unknown assertion of the ‘Culdees’ themselves, Jamieson argued that the distinct organisation of the *céli Dé*, which he went on to detail, derived from John the Apostle, thus emphasising that the ‘Culdees’ had an apostolic origin wholly separate from the ‘Romanists’.

Jamieson repeatedly emphasised this difference in the matter of ecclesiastical organisation between the ‘Culdees’ and ‘Romanists’, citing that

By some it has been urged [again, it is not specified by whom], and certainly not without great appearance of reason, that the government of these societies of Culdees bore a very near appearance to the Presbyterian form.⁶

The basis for this was Bede’s statement that Iona had as its *princeps* a presbyter-abbot, ‘to whose authority the whole province and the bishops themselves, by an unusual constitution, were subject.’⁷ With the emphasis on presbyter, rather than on abbot, Jamieson provided Iona with a Presbyterian organisation that was a forerunner to the ecclesiastical governance of his own day. He conceded, however, that bishops

⁴ *ibid.*, 17.

⁵ *ibid.*, 17.

⁶ *ibid.*, 36.

⁷ *HE* III 4.

were sent from Iona to Northumbria and Mercia; yet, while pointing out that ‘No pastor can have any reasonable prejudice merely against the name of Bishop. For it is of scriptural authority; and was originally given in common with that of Presbyter, or Elder, to all who were overseers of the flock’,⁸ he considered that, since it was evident that these bishops ‘cannot be viewed as diocesan bishops’,⁹ they were distinct from ‘Romanist’ bishops. Indeed, he went on to posit of Finan, bishop of Lindisfarne, that ‘we cannot hence conclude that he viewed the office of bishop as essentially distinct from that of a presbyter’,¹⁰ and envisaged that there was a ‘College of Culdees at Iona’¹¹- which he subsequently describes as a ‘college of Elders’¹² - who ordained these bishops.

Jamieson’s work was concerned to show the ‘hostility between the Culdees and the Romanists was of a very ancient date’;¹³ that, ‘from a very early period the Culdees vigorously opposed the errors, and resisted the encroachments, of the Church of Rome’;¹⁴ and to conclude that ‘the ecclesiastical power, established at Iona, bore a striking analogy to the presbyterian form.’¹⁵ His work was a fluent, closely argued and impassioned account and it is not difficult to see why it proved to have such an influence - much of the subsequent concept of a ‘Celtic church’, indeed, grew from it – yet, for all the sophistication of his writing, Jamieson’s history of the Culdees was no more than a retrospective *apologia* for the Reformation in Scotland and its subsequent preference of ecclesiastical form.

The first scholarly, and the most comprehensive, examination of the evidence concerning the *céli Dé*, and one intended to refute Jamieson’s projection, was that by William Reeves, at the time vicar of Lusk and Armagh, but subsequently bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore, and secretary of the Royal Irish Academy. Published,

⁸ Jamieson, *Historical Account of the Ancient Culdees*, 237.

⁹ *ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 37.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 36.

¹² *ibid.*, 37.

¹³ *ibid.*, 161.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 146.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 236.

firstly, as a single volume in 1864 and, subsequently, in the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy,¹⁶ Reeves' collation of the evidence was intended as a work of reference – 'to gather together, in a compact and methodical form, all the scattered evidence upon my subject which I could discover in external as well as domestic records'.¹⁷ In stating his intent not to comment upon the nature of the evidence, to allow a simple and impartial presentation of the material, Reeves restricted himself merely to a discussion, firstly, on the origin of the name *céli Dé* and then an analysis of its meaning. The Irish term *céli Dé*, he suggested, was a direct translation of the Latin *servus Dei*, the use of which to denote a follower of an ascetic lifestyle he traced back to as early as the fourth century writings of saints Hieronymus and Augustine.¹⁸ Reeves believed the earliest example of the term *servus Dei* in an Irish context belonged to Tírechán, who referred to one *Bronus filius Ichni, servus Dei, socius Patricii*,¹⁹ which he dated to the first half of the eighth century, but which is now more generally accepted to date from the end of the seventh. He pointed out that the *Vita Tripartita* of Patrick contains the sentence *fororchongart for céli nDé dia muintir .i. Malach Britt a thodiuscu* and believed this to have been one of the earliest instances of the use of the vernacular equivalent. Reeves gave no indication of the date he believed should be ascribed to *Vita Tripartita*, but the dates variously ascribed to it subsequently frequently place this example later than other instances cited by Reeves himself.²⁰ As a postscript to his work he added that the Life of St Fintan provided a

¹⁶ William Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands as they appear in History with an Appendix of Evidences*, Dublin, 1864; reprinted Lampeter, 1994 (all subsequent references will be to the 1994 reprint); 'On the Céli Dé', *Trans RIA*, xxiv (1873), 202-15.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, v.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 1-2; 64-5.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 3; *Liber Ardmachanus*, fol. 11. See also Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, Dublin, 1979.

²⁰ The date to which the compilation of the *Vita Tripartita* should be ascribed is still very much under a discussion which is far from reaching consensus. Kathleen Mulchrone, in *Bethu Phátraic: the Tripartite Life of Patrick*, Dublin, 1939, concluded that it was compiled c. 895-901; Bieler, in *Four Latin Lives of Patrick*, Dublin, 1971, had indicated an earlier ninth-century recension, but in *Patrician texts from the Book of Armagh* concurred with Mulchrone's dating; Frederic Mac Donncha, 'Dáta *Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii*', *Éigse* 18 (1980), 125-42, and 19 (1983), 354-72; Kenneth Jackson, 'The Date of the Tripartite Life of St Patrick', *ZCP* 41 (1986); and David Dumville, *Saint Patrick A.D. 493-1993*, Woodbridge, 1993, all consider a tenth or eleventh-century date. See the discussion of their conclusions in Francis Byrne and Pádraig Francis, 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick: *Vita Secunda* and *Vita Quarta*', *JRSAI* 124 (1994), 5-115,

further example of the early use of the vernacular term.²¹ He believed this *vita* to have been compiled soon after Fintan's *floruit*, which he stated to be c. 800, in Switzerland, 'and was committed to writing in that country by someone who was conversant with the Irish language, and who seems to have understood the term as denoting a religious order.'²² Fintan's *floruit*, and thus this *vita*, was not so early as c. 800,²³ but, nevertheless, Reeves believed that this reference apparently indicated that the *céli dé* were understood to have been a religious order, in Europe, by the turn of the ninth century.

Within Ireland itself, the Rule of the Céli Dé – *Riagail na Celed-nde ó Maelruain cecinit*, as it was entitled in the manuscript – apparently placed 'the term Céle-dé in a definite sense, and in local connexion with a religious class or institution'²⁴ by the end of the eighth century. Despite this, however, Reeves seemed uncertain whether or not the term *céli Dé* did indeed reflect a religious order at this time. In a discussion of the author of *Félire Óengusso* he noted that

he may have borne [the epithet *céle Dé*] rather as denoting his order than for any peculiar quality which he possessed; or, as COLGAN supposes, his personal holiness procured him, *par excellance*, the title of Céle-Dé in the sense of 'a lover or worshipper of God.'²⁵

This suggestion that the epithet may have denoted the adherence to a religious order contrasts with his own earlier statement, in regard to *Riagail na Céle nDé*, that 'It is sufficient to observe in this place that the subjects of its precepts are in various places

where, in his introduction, Byrne states that the internal evidence indicates a date for the exemplar of no later than c. 830.

²¹ *Ainme ilad ocus in naidchi ni longe celedre remut no fer fa sruithiu.*

²² Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 145.

²³ James F. Kenney, while agreeing that it was written soon after his death, states that it was believed he died in 878: *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical*, New York, 1929; repr. Dublin, 1997, 602-3.

²⁴ Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 7.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 9; cf. *Acta Sanctor. Hib.*, 580 a, cap. 5.

styled *Céle-nDé*, either in an application limited to a particular so called, or, what is more likely, in a sense allied to that of “ascetics” or “clerics of stricter observance.”²⁶

While discussing Tallaght, however, Reeves noted that the ‘church of Tamhlacht was founded about twenty-four years after the institution by Chrodegang of the order of canons, in his church of Metz, to whom the title of *Fratres Dominici* was given, and afterwards that of *canonici*.’²⁷ Chrodegang’s canons ‘were an intermediate class between monks and secular priests, adopting to a great extent the discipline, without the vows, of the monastic system, and discharging the office of ministers in various churches.’²⁸ Despite his suggestion that the epithet was more likely to denote a ‘cleric of stricter observance’, he wondered whether ‘the institution of Maelruain’ – by which it could be logically thought he meant Tallaght, since the suggestion was made in the section discussing Tallaght [7-10] – may have adopted some features in common with the order of canons, since ‘in after ages both the Keledei of Scotland and the Colidei of Ireland exhibited in their discipline the main characteristics of secular canons.’²⁹ This point is confusing, for it seems to suggest that Reeves had the *céli Dé* themselves in mind, rather than Tallaght, when he referred to ‘the institution of Maelruain’. He had pointed out in his previous sentence that the Council of Aix-la-Chapelle in 817 created a new rule and enacted additional regulations which formalised the order of canons, but this took place well after Máel Ruain’s death in 792, so presumably Reeves must have envisaged any adopted features to have come from Chrodegang’s own rule. In that case, however, the compiler of the *Vita Fintani*, based in the upper Rhine, presumably Rheinau,³⁰ who could be expected to have been aware of the rule of the bishop of Metz, referred to the supposed order as *celede* rather than *canonici*, and so, presumably, did not

²⁶ *ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 10.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ For further aspects regarding St Fintan and Rheinau, see Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (edd.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* vol. 2, Cambridge 1903, 258; Kenney, *Sources*, 602-3; Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe (edd.), *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400-1200*, Dublin 1985, no. 1272.

consider the two to equate. Reeves based the remark on the fact that those referred to as *céli Dé* 'in after ages' displayed more in common with an order of canons than with 'clerics of stricter observance'. Despite the fact that the formalisation of the order of canons took place a generation after Máel Ruain's death and despite the implicit suggestion being loosely made and, indeed, at variance with much of the evidence Reeves had himself presented, the consideration that the emergence of the *céli Dé* was a consequence of the introduction of Chrodegang's Rule was one which not only persevered, but was embellished by subsequent scholars.

Heinrich Zimmer's discussion of the *céli Dé*³¹ did little to further any appreciation of their significance. Essentially following Reeves, he added a further example, unknown to Reeves, of the use of the vernacular term in a gloss to the Commentary of the Psalms then attributed to Columbanus³² and maintained that the term originally could be applied generally to any monk or anchorite, but that it subsequently became limited 'to the members of spiritual associations whose existence cannot with any certainty be traced back beyond the close of the eighth century.'³³ Zimmer made explicit Reeves' implied suggestion that the Rule Chrodegang compiled for Metz in 749 was introduced into Ireland, stating that it was 'in accordance with this rule that those Irish anchorites who were not under the sway of monastic rule were first associated.'³⁴ Having asserted such origins for the *céli Dé*, he then, somewhat confusingly, described them as the 'last creation of the Celtic Church of Ireland'³⁵ and dismissed them with the statement that 'these associations of Colidei never attained any great importance.'³⁶ While Zimmer summarily dismissed the *céli Dé* as largely an irrelevance, he nevertheless considered those of 'North Britain' to have 'attained a much greater importance',³⁷ but neglected to explain why. Instead he

³¹ In *The Celtic Church in Britain and Ireland*, (trans. A. Meyer), London, 1902, 99ff.

³² *Amal asmberar is céle dae in fer hísín*. No modern scholar, however, would now attribute this Commentary to Columbanus. See Stokes and Strachan (edd.), *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* vol. 1, Cambridge 1901, 'The Milan Glosses and scholia on the Psalms', 7-483.

³³ *ibid.*, 100.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 101.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 112.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 101.

³⁷ *ibid.*

proceeded to explain the introduction of the *céli Dé* here, bizarrely, to be a result of the expulsion of ‘the refractory monks of Hi’ by Nechtan in 717³⁸ – thus contradicting his own earlier assertions – claiming the resultant vacancies among the clergy of the Pictish church could not be entirely filled by Roman clerics from Northumbria, and so the *céli Dé* were introduced to plug the gaps. The *céli Dé* in Scotland ‘appear as a mixture of secular clerics and of anchorites disciplined in the monastic pattern’, circumstances due to ‘the absence of a common head and the lack of fixed forms.’³⁹ Zimmer, clearly, did not regard the *céli Dé* as either reformers, or as what could be considered to be a cohesive movement – describing them as spiritual associations – and in this, as Daniel Binchy was to note concerning an entirely different matter, ‘Zimmer’s treatment of the subject is typical of his flair for reaching the right conclusion for totally wrong reasons.’⁴⁰

Whitley Stokes came to consider the *céli Dé* while translating and editing the *Félire Óengusso*,⁴¹ but did so in the briefest of terms. While again providing the earliest examples of the use of the term, he, too, envisaged the *céli Dé* in terms of Chrodegang’s Rule, claiming they ‘denoted a kind of secular canons, who occupied an intermediate position between the monks and the secular clergy.’⁴² Indeed, he perceived that ‘They had a rule of their own, regulating their food, drink, communions, confessions, sleeping, fasting, tonsuring, labour, etc; their head was called *cenn* “chief”, or *prioir* “prior”, not *abb* “abbot”; they were sometimes married; and at Armagh they looked after the sick, had charge of the repairs of the church, and helped in the service of the choir and the altar.’⁴³ Despite his work on one of the earliest and best known ecclesiastical texts to emerge from the scribes and anchorites of the late eighth/early ninth centuries, and one of the very few to have an accepted *céli Dé* provenance, Stokes appears to have envisaged the *céli Dé* to have been some

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*, 111-2.

⁴⁰ D.A. Binchy, ‘The Old-Irish Table of Penitential Commutations’, *Ériu* 19 (1962), 47-72, at 50.

⁴¹ *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, edited by Whitley Stokes, Henry Bradshaw Society 29, London, 1905; repr. Dublin, 1984.

⁴² *ibid.*, xxvii.

⁴³ *ibid.*, xxvii-xxviii.

form of an ecclesiastical third party, neither monastic nor pastoral in function, but supplementing both.

James Kenney's comprehensive and meticulous collection of the sources for the early Irish church naturally included a discussion of the *céli Dé*.⁴⁴ His consideration, while brief, provided a much greater insight than any previous discussion. Rather than simply expound an opinion on what the entity referred to as *céli Dé* should be, Kenney outlined the circumstances he considered resulted in the emergence of the *céli Dé*, listed those individuals whom he thought could be considered *céli Dé* and then concluded with a discussion of the significance of the monastery of Tallaght to 'the eighth century reform movement.'

Kenney considered that 'By the eighth century the beginnings were apparent of that secularisation which overwhelmed the monastic churches in the tenth and eleventh centuries.'⁴⁵ In reaction to this secularisation and decay, he outlined the development of the *dísert*, 'where the more devout monks, and the "pilgrims" from other establishments, might lead the life of recluses'; the tendency for religious ideals to become 'more rigorous and more Puritanical'; the emergence of leaders who promoted and organised these reform tendencies; and, finally, the rise of the *céli Dé*.⁴⁶ Thus, he considered the *céli Dé* to be an organised reform movement whose aim was to counter secular encroachment on the church; but although he listed the rise of the *céli Dé* as one of a number of reactions to this, it is clear that he considered all of these aspects to be manifestations of a single movement. Kenney named Fer-dá-chrích, abbot of Dairinis, the Uí Suanraig of Rahan, Caencomrac and Dublitir of Finglas, Elair of Ros Cré, Fothad *na Canóine* of Othan or Rahan, Eochu of Louth and Máel Ruain of Tallaght among those who were the driving force of this reform and also, implicitly, the houses, together with Lismore, Terryglass and Dísert Diarmata (Castledermot), from which these ideals emanated.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Kenney, *Sources*, 468-71.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 468.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 468-9.

In a discussion of the importance of Máel Ruain and Tallaght, Kenney draws attention to the fact that 'From his church of Tamlachta, or Tallaght, come three famous documents, the Martyrology of Oengus, the Martyrology of Tallaght, and the Stowe Missal.' He also pointed to the influence of the *céli Dé* as an apparent spur to the introduction of Irish monastic rules, since, with the exception of that of Columbanus on the continent, 'all the Irish rules are of the eighth or ninth century, or later.'⁴⁸

Only after such consideration does Kenney attempt to define what was meant by the term *céli Dé*. It was Kenney who first dismissed Reeves' implication and Zimmer's assertion that the *céli Dé* were a consequence of the introduction into Ireland of the rule of Chrodegang of Metz and concludes:

In the 'Notes on the customs of Tallaght' it seems to designate all who were leading a strict monastic life under spiritual direction and in accordance with the ideals of Máel-Rúain, Elair, Máel-Dithruib, etc; but the Rule of Fothad *na canóine* has distinct sections for *Céli Dé* and for monks. The most satisfying hypothesis seems to be that the *Céli Dé* were the communities of religious who gathered around the reform leaders as the monks of an earlier age had gathered around the primitive church-founders; that their aim was to revive the ancient zeal and discipline of the monastic churches; and that the method followed was to combine the austere life of the recluses or anchorites, already an element in the majority of the larger churches, with a community organisation and the close and strict supervision of a spiritual superior. It is probable that in some churches, as at Tallaght, they formed the whole monastic body; in others, as at Ros-cré, a distinct community set up in the neighborhood of the old church; and in others, as at Armagh, a group residing within the monastic bounds, perhaps performing most of the sacerdotal and eleemosynary duties, and constituting a community of 'stricter observance' in the midst of the older, larger, and laxer organisation.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 469.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 470-1.

Louis Gougaud⁵⁰ followed Kenney in dismissing the hypothesis that Chrodegang's Rule 'gave rise to the institution of the Culdees of Ireland or aided in its development.'⁵¹ Otherwise, however, he was content merely to state what little was known for certain about the *céli Dé* by the late eighth/early ninth centuries, drawing no greater conclusion than 'we are chiefly struck by the austere life of the Culdees on the one hand, and, on the other, by the singularity of some of their liturgical practices.'⁵²

Robin Flower provided another early, considered, discussion of the *céli Dé* themselves,⁵³ rather than speculation on the part of the writer on what was thought they should have been. This short, but highly influential, essay focussed on his literary interests, but the perspective, together with Flower's critical analysis, provided a different approach to an understanding of the *céli Dé*, since, he considered, they themselves had a particular preference to be referred to as anchorites and scribes. He indicated, indeed, that the terms 'anchorite and scribe' had a particular relevance during the late eighth to early tenth centuries, but which peaked in the first half of the ninth century. The frequency of these annalistic references to scribes and anchorites, Flower argued, indicates 'that we are in the presence of a movement which rises, culminates and declines.'⁵⁴ The stark preference he indicated had emerged for this specific nomenclature led Flower to state his preference to refer to the *céli Dé* as an anchoritic movement, a reform movement which 'clearly aimed at enforcing an anchoritish severity of conduct in monastic life and in the direction of the lay conscience.'⁵⁵ The great outpouring from scriptoria at this time was itself a direct result of 'the spirit that causes and sustains all reformations in religion.'⁵⁶ For Flower,

⁵⁰ Louis Gougaud, *Christianity in Celtic Lands: A History of the Churches of the Celts, their Origin, their Development, Influence, and Mutual Relations*, London, 1932; repr. Dublin, 1992.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 77.

⁵² *ibid.*, 78.

⁵³ Robin Flower, "'The Two Eyes of Ireland'". Religion and Literature in Ireland in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries', in W. Bell and N.D. Emerson (edd.), *The Church of Ireland A.D. 432-1932*, Dublin, 1932, 66-75.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 72.

however, there is no indication of reactionary reform – his anchorites ‘throw aside all the defences of conventional morality, the easy compromises of a merely conforming faith’⁵⁷ and are driven, not by disgust at the encroaching secularity of an increasingly degenerate church, but by a desire for a more intense, personal piety.

One further point regarding Flower’s essay which has deserved greater attention, but which has been largely overlooked, was his recognition of the potential significance of the *congressio senodorum* at Tara in 780. The record of this congress states it was attended by anchorites and scribes and held under the direction of Dublittir of Finglas,⁵⁸ who, together with Máel Ruain of Tallaght, was considered by Flower to be the driving force behind this movement. The fact that this was the first recorded gathering of ecclesiastics since that of Birr nearly a century earlier and one which was held at a pivotal point in the history of the early medieval Irish church should mark it as deserving scholarly attention, but the further fact that it was held under the auspices of an individual accepted to have been a *céle Dé* and, Flower suggested, resulted in the drawing up of a penitential⁵⁹ makes it all the more surprising that the event has been largely ignored. The potential importance of this congress and the likelihood that it may have been responsible for more than the possible compilation of a penitential will be discussed in due course.

Early Irish ecclesiastical historiography shunned the *céli Dé* for a generation until Nora Chadwick published *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*.⁶⁰ Chadwick’s work was very much a product of its time and its value today lies in the fact that it stands as a testimony to how the history of the early Irish church was once perceived. In her consideration of the *céli Dé* she essentially followed Flower’s terminology and structural outline, although not always agreeing with his conclusions. She considered that ‘the Anchorites, with whom are frequently mentioned the Culdees, as if they were identical or at least closely related, are clearly the religious

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ AU 780.12: *Congressio senodorum nepotum Neill Laginentiumque in op[p]ido Temro ubi fuerunt ancorite 7 scribe multi, quibus dux erat Dublittir.*

⁵⁹ Flower, ‘The Two Eyes of Ireland’, 69.

⁶⁰ Nora K. Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints*, Oxford, 1961.

who in the *Catalogus [Sanctae Hiberniae]* are classed as the Third Order of the Saints of Ireland.⁶¹ On the basis of the *Catalogus*, therefore, she rejected the dating of both Flower – who placed the greatest influence of the *céli Dé* in the late eighth and early ninth centuries – and Kenney, whose dating was erroneously thought to have been to the seventh and eighth centuries. Instead, she considered that ‘To my mind all the weight of evidence is in favour of a close association of the asceticism of the Anchorites with the saints of the Second as well as the Third Order, and I believe that they were contemporary’, which prompted her dating of the emergence of the *céli Dé* at the latest to the sixth century.⁶² Following Flower’s outline, she addressed the ‘Two Eyes of Ireland’ and the *congressio senodorum* of 780, interpreting the literature produced by the anchorites and scribes as a defence by the ‘Celtic Church’ against ‘Romanization’:

The Irish monastic church was stimulated to substitute the written for the oral – eyes for ears. It is thus that I would interpret the nickname of the two monasteries on the two banks of the Liffey, Tallaght and Finglas, the ‘Two Eyes of Ireland’. It is Tallaght that during the eighth century led the literary movement for the recording and formulation of much of the ‘Literature’ of this period.⁶³

Chadwick was aware of the progressively increasing volume of religious material produced from the late seventh century, but considered that this was not

a period of original thought, for it echoes and develops the thought of the Age of Saints and Anchorites of the preceding century. It is a period of consolidation and organisation, of the mobilizing of the intellectual specialists, the Anchorites of the monastic Church, and an implementing of their teaching by the scribes. It is not an Age of Reform, but of Formulation. It is as an element of this formulation that I would interpret the notice in the *Annals of*

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 84.

⁶² *ibid.*, 86.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 142.

Ulster (sa 780) of a congress of the synods in the *oppidum* of Tara attended by anchorites and scribes under the presidency of Duiblitir.⁶⁴

While agreeing with Flower that this congress was concerned with production of 'rules and other anchorite literature', Chadwick's reasons for doing so were perhaps less than secure: 'Writing was still a rare and impressive thing. They called the president of the Congress Duiblitir, "Black Letter", "Old Inky".'⁶⁵

While many of Chadwick's conclusions were wholly led astray by her blithe and uncritical acceptance of the *Catalogus Sanctae Hiberniae*, a text which had long been accepted in her day should not be treated as evidence for the history of the earliest Irish ecclesiastical period, and while her imaginative assertion regarding Duiblitir's name is perhaps indicative of questionable methodology, her position of *céli Dé* influence representing not reform, but 'consolidation and organisation' was a departure from the accepted position and, as will be seen, actually had much to commend it. Nevertheless, her reliance on the *Catalogus* so unbalanced her thesis as to virtually ensure that any valid point made in it would be essentially discounted.

Hard on the heels of Chadwick's book was D.A. Binchy's article on the Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations. Here, Binchy considered that

The 'Culdee' movement was essentially a reform movement: it represented a sharp reaction against the laxity and corruption of the older monastic federations, 'the people of the old churches' (*lucht na sencheld*) or 'the lax folk' (*lax-aés*) as they are called with obvious disapproval in the 'Monastery of Tallaght' (§§26, 27). Its insistence on the renewal of ancient ascetic zeal is shown, *inter alia*, by the composition in the vernacular of a Penitential based almost entirely on the older Latin sources, as well as by the stringent monastic rule prescribed for by its members.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Binchy, 'The Old-Irish Table of Penitential Commutations', 53-4. No mention of *lax-aés* appears in either §§26 or 27 of *Monastery of Tallaght*.

Binchy noted the frequency with which the Penitential cited ‘the specialised O.Ir. *arr(a)e* in the sense of a commutation of penance, which...was originally confined to the religious literature of the Culdees.’⁶⁷ This, together with the evidence of the linguistic forms, provided ‘almost conclusive evidence’ that the date of the compilation of the text was c. 800. Nevertheless, his belief in reform and sharp reaction against laxity and corruption led Binchy to reject the dating of the Penitential to so late as the end of the eighth century, arguing that the ascetic zeal of the reform would have been unlikely to countenance any commutation of penance – even although he noted the term was initially found only in *céli Dé* material – and so he dated the Penitential instead to no later than the mid-eighth century.⁶⁸

Kathleen Hughes also noted that the emergence of the *céli Dé* equated with the period when ‘the number of recorded anchorites markedly increases.’⁶⁹ When she came to consider their origins, however, she appears to have been swayed by Zimmer’s assertion that the *céli Dé* must have had continental antecedents. She highlighted the fact that ‘the Culdees have much in common with the Carolingian reform associated with the name of Benedict of Aniane’ and added that, as ‘the reformers definitely encouraged boys to take holy orders’, then ‘the number of men in orders must have substantially increased, as it did during the Benedictine reform on the Continent.’⁷⁰ These ascetics, who ‘achieved a powerful revival’,⁷¹ were ‘no longer isolated individuals, but often groups of like-minded men.’⁷² With reference to Binchy and Chadwick, she concludes that it ‘is surely reasonable to apply the words “reform” or, better, “religious revival” to these developments.’⁷³

Hughes believed that the *céli Dé* ‘certainly regarded themselves as reformers’,⁷⁴ citing *Teagasg Maoil Ruain* as the principal evidence of the need for reform. The

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, London, 1966, 173.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 180.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 173.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*, 174.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

impression that the eighth-century church was a degenerate one lies almost entirely with this text and, correspondingly, this question will be examined at some length in chapter 3; however, for the present, it will serve merely to state that Hughes apparently accepted the evidence of the text, but was aware that there was other, contradictory evidence which painted a different picture.

Hughes was aware that these passages, particularly that from *Teagasg*, has had much to do with the generally accepted belief that the church in the eighth century was degenerate and corrupt, succumbing to the secular abuse against which the *céli Dé* emerged in reform. However, as has been noted, she herself appears to have felt some disquiet at many, if not all, aspects of this scenario or the terminology used. She pointed out that the relationship between the 'reformers' and 'the folk of the old churches' need not have been one of animosity or of opposition: 'on the contrary, they often maintained the ascetics, giving them honour, sometimes appointing an anchorite as head of their scriptorium or as abbot.'⁷⁵ Hughes rationalised this clear paradox by stating that 'ardent reformers are bad witnesses to the piety of their predecessors, and, in any case, though the views expressed in the tract are likely to be an accurate representation of the reformers opinions, the self-righteous tone in which they are couched may not be typical of the whole movement.'⁷⁶

In her discussion of the *céli Dé*, the most comprehensive examination there had been to that time, Hughes, perhaps understandably, appeared uncertain about what exactly to make of them. While the prevalent attitude had been one of the *céli Dé* as a 'reform movement', there were points in her discussion that rightly emphasized a diversity which indicated that the description of the *céli Dé* as a movement could only have been valid in very loose terms, but she appears to have been unwilling to draw that conclusion. She seemed to be happier, at least, with the suggestion of the *céli Dé* as reformers, which, although she stated a preference for a description as 'religious revivalists', was the term she maintained throughout. Hughes

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 175.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

questioned the orthodox account of the emergence of the *céli Dé* as a contemptuous reaction to the laxity, worldly concerns – the evil - of the clergy of the older churches to some extent, but not entirely, envisaging that there was indeed a decline in religious standards which needed to be revived. As she was apparently influenced by earlier assertions that the antecedents for the *céli Dé* lay in the continental reforms of Benedict of Aniane, she appears to have considered that the movement emerging to reform a religious decline due to peculiarly Irish circumstances should be thought of having continental origins.

Peter O'Dwyer's book on the subject was subtitled 'Spiritual Reform in Ireland', although he admits that 'An examination of the literature of the reform throws little light on its precise nature.'⁷⁷ O'Dwyer was primarily concerned with the spiritual, liturgical and ritual observance of the *céli Dé*, together with day-to-day life within the religious community; however, he accepted uncritically the now familiar theme that the *céli Dé* instigated reform 'to counterbalance a tendency towards laxity in the older churches... restoring monastic studies to their rightful place.'⁷⁸ He further considered that this reform 'was also meant to counteract what was to be the chief cause of the downfall of Irish monasticism in the twelfth century namely the introduction of the lay-abbot.'⁷⁹ Notwithstanding the fact that the circumstances of the Irish church in the twelfth century cannot, with any validity, be cited as justification for events in the eighth, O'Dwyer considered this the chief reason for reform. In mentioning the growth of monastic property, and the wealth of monasteries providing a magnet for Viking raiders, he reiterated that, as far as reform was concerned, 'Probably the continuance of the lay-abbot or *airchinnech*, due to family interests, proved to be the greater obstacle.'⁸⁰ O'Dwyer referred to the text known as the *Monastery of Tallaght* and to *Teagasg Maoil Ruain*⁸¹ in stating that there are surviving documents which condemn the laxity of 'older churches' and equated this,

⁷⁷ Peter O'Dwyer, *Céli Dé: Spiritual Reform in Ireland 750-900*, Dublin, 1981, 1.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 192.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 193.

⁸¹ For these texts, see below pp. 76ff.

in unequivocal terms, to a church coming under the increasing control of a degenerate and avaricious laity. This conclusion had little bearing on the subject matter of O'Dwyer's topic, which provided no justification for it. It detracts from the overall perception of worth from an otherwise valuable study, particularly since, as will be discussed, there is evidence to suggest that, rather than emerge in reaction to the *airchinnech*, the most influential of the *céli Dé* in the late eighth century themselves encouraged the position. The perception that the church was coming under increasingly secular control in this fashion, therefore, was not one that would have been generally recognised by any contemporary ecclesiastic.

The accepted understanding of the *céli Dé* sat comfortably within a perceived progression of circumstances within early Irish ecclesiastical history, whereby Patrick, following the introduction of Christianity throughout Ireland, had established an episcopally controlled diocesan system along conventional lines, but which was unsuited to Irish conditions. Consequently, this system was supplanted by a monastically controlled system of organisation, in which abbots replaced bishops as the ultimate authority in the church, as apparently better suited to these conditions. There was much difference in opinion, however, as to precisely when this change took place, but the new monastic system itself was understood to have quickly succumbed to secularisation and the *airchinnech*, or 'lay-abbot', replaced the abbot in importance. It was in reaction to this secularisation, it was then considered, that the *céli Dé* emerged in an attempt to re-establish or reform the church along ascetic ideals.

In 1986, however, Richard Sharpe forced a major re-evaluation of this scenario,⁸² pointing out that a great deal of primary evidence had been misinterpreted or ignored as a result. Citing the hitherto largely neglected eighth-century text *Riagail Phátraic*, Sharpe demonstrated that the understanding of the Irish church as a purely monastic organisation was a great distortion. Following a previous contribution by

⁸² Richard Sharpe, 'Some Problems Regarding the Organisation of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 230-70.

Corish,⁸³ concerning the fundamentally important question of the provision of pastoral care for the population at large, Sharpe emphasised that *Riagail Phátraic* was solely concerned with the question of pastoral provision and that, consequently, there was an attested infrastructure of priests and bishops in the eighth century which had been passed over or ignored in the emphasis on monasticism. He was scathing of the prolonged development of a model of the early Irish church whereby it was envisioned that there were two different ecclesiastical systems – an episcopally administered church and a monastically administered church – involved in a constant struggle for supremacy in Ireland. Important primary evidence, such as *Riagail Phátraic*, he considered, was overlooked or ignored because the circumstances portrayed did not fit in with this model. This ‘distinction of two systems’, he pointed out, ‘is the work of modern historians: the Irish church knew only one.’⁸⁴

Sharpe’s re-evaluation of the picture the primary evidence provides of the early Irish church greatly invigorated work in this field. Subsequently, many scholars have focussed on the question of early Irish ecclesiastical organisation and a great deal of valuable work has been undertaken in regard to the question of the pastoral responsibilities and provision by the church during this period. The question of the *céli Dé*, however, has yet to be reconsidered in a context whereby the old model of successive forms of organisation, each emergent in opposition to its predecessor, no longer holds credibility. With it went the validity of the thesis of the *céli Dé* emerging in reaction to an increasingly secular and degenerate church

Sharpe himself did not consider the *céli Dé* directly. He noted, however, that

the tendency to see secularization of ecclesiastical office as an abuse has become part and parcel of an approach which prevents a proper understanding. It is a phenomenon of the eighth and ninth centuries and is a critical step in the definition of the peculiarities of the Irish church. But during this crucial period there has been some diversion of historical attention: growing abuses are noted, succeeded by a revival of true monasticism at the end of the eighth

⁸³ P. J. Corish, *The Christian Mission*, Dublin, 1972.

⁸⁴ Sharpe, ‘Some Problems’, 263.

century under the influence of Maelruain of Tallaght...The monastic revival of the late eighth century, which may have been rather limited, did not try to change churches; it sought to invigorate the small religious communities within the churches or living separately as small ascetic monasteries. There was no attempt to reverse the secularization of large-scale power, merely to avoid the wholesale neglect of devotional life.⁸⁵

Despite the fact he does not explicitly refer to them by name, Sharpe clearly considered that the *céli Dé* had emerged in reaction to a secularisation of the church, although he revised what was understood to have been meant by secularisation and indicated that there was no subsequent attempt to change churches, merely maintain communities committed to devotional life.

In a subsequent paper,⁸⁶ Sharpe had had time to consider the *céli Dé* and monasticism in light of his earlier work and doubted that, in the ninth century, there was

any general continuance of regular monastic life in Ireland at this date. The surviving 'monastic rules' (so called) from this period do not attest widespread regular life, and it would be highly tendentious to argue from the several works associated with the *Céli Dé* movement and to Máel Rúain of Tallaght that a monastic reform in the late eighth and early ninth century led to a universal revival of a supposed 'monastic' organisation. The Rule of Tallaght [i.e., *Riagail na Celed nDe*] actually summarises the provisions of *Riagail Phátraic* for a pastoral ministry under episcopal direction.⁸⁷

To deal with the last point first, Sharpe was quite correct to point out that §§57-65 of *RCD* summarises *Riagail Phátraic* – the text is clearly composite and, in addition, §§55-56 is drawn from the Rule of Columcille. §§1-54, however, has been drawn up in a conscious effort to provide a general rule from other, earlier, Tallaght material (see below, pp. 83-90) for a coenobitic community. The Rule of Columcille provides

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 266-7.

⁸⁶ Richard Sharpe, 'Churches and communities in early medieval Ireland: towards a pastoral model', in J. Blair & R. Sharpe (edd.), *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, Leicester, 1992, 81-109.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 102.

for a more austere asceticism, while *Riagail Phátraic*, as Sharpe emphasised, deals with pastoral provision – thus all aspects of the church are covered to some degree and the text needs to be regarded as an entity rather than considered in its composite parts. Sharpe, otherwise, was quite correct to nip in the bud any suggestion that a ‘monastic reform’ led to a universal revival of a supposed ‘monastic’ organisation. This matter should have been laid to rest following the publication of his earlier paper, but he was forced to point out that ‘some recent writers have not appreciated that the challenges are not further refinements; they undermine the model from start to finish.’⁸⁸ The need to recover this ground may have distracted Sharpe from a proper consideration of the *céli Dé* in the context of his revision; however, this surely does not excuse the inconsistencies within his paper. He notes that ‘it is generally the case that by the late eighth or early ninth century monastic life means “collegiate or communal life” rather than the contemplative religious life’,⁸⁹ – although quite how the degree of contemplation practised within a community can be measured is uncertain. Contemplation, indeed, may be thought to be a cornerstone of any religious practice. In *Bretha Nemed Toisech*, §6 lists both being ‘without the active life’ and being ‘without the contemplative life’ as among the disqualifications debasing a church; while §12 has ‘maintenance of the contemplative life’ listed as the first of the ‘three lights which characterize privileged ecclesiastics.’⁹⁰ Even if, by ‘contemplative religious life’, those referred to as anchorites, or perhaps ascetics, were intended, the coenobitic community need not be to the exclusion of individual ascetic practice. Indeed, both forms of monastic lifestyle are apparent in early medieval Ireland, although it is quite correct, as Sharpe states, that communities of coenobitics were far more numerous than anchorites – indeed the Tallaght texts clearly encourage coenobitism and discourage the undisciplined anchorite, although the individual who became an anchorite after having mastered self discipline within the coenobitic community was greatly respected. Nonetheless, the monastic rules of this period do

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 100.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 107.

⁹⁰ Liam Breatnach, ‘The first third of *Bretha Nemed Toisech*’, *Ériu* 40 (1989), 1-40, at pp. 11, 13.

deal with the coenobitic community. Those communities were, therefore, by definition, 'regular'. It is true that they were not uniformly regular, as the later Benedictine Order, for example, would be uniformly regular, but they were regular, nevertheless. The texts themselves provide no indication of whether or not those for whom they were intended were widespread; however, there is no reason to expect that they would. It is an unexpected observation, therefore, that the surviving monastic rules do not attest widespread regular life. Whatever the opinion of scholars as to just how widespread regular life may have been, it is, nonetheless, clearly attested and, correspondingly, Sharpe's doubt of 'any general continuance of regular monastic life in Ireland' in the ninth century is surprising, particularly as he himself goes on to note the 'collegiate or communal life' as a feature of the late eighth/early ninth century.

Sharpe's work proved to be something of a watershed in early medieval Irish ecclesiastical studies and these apparent contradictions in his work should not detract from the overall value of his observations, particularly, as one suspects that they come about largely as a consequence of a different understanding of the definition of particular terms.

The first scholar to consider the *céli Dé* since Sharpe's re-evaluation, and who has broached the subject on several occasions, was Thomas Owen Clancy. In his paper entitled 'Iona, Scotland and the Céli Dé',⁹¹ he examined the history of Iona and its abbots in the years following the foundation of Kells and sought to account for 'the mysterious success in Scotland of the religious reform movement associated with the name of the *céli Dé*.'⁹²

Evidence for the presence of *céli Dé* communities in Scotland is sparse prior to the early twelfth century, although it has long been known that Custantín mac Áeda, king of Scots, 'retired' to become head of the *céli Dé* in St Andrews, c. 943.⁹³

⁹¹ T.O. Clancy, 'Iona, Scotland and the Céli Dé', in B.E. Crawford (ed.), *Scotland in Dark Age Britain*, St Andrews, 1996, 111-30.

⁹² *ibid.*, 111.

⁹³ A.O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History A.D. 500 to 1286*, 2 vols, Edinburgh, 1922; repr. Stamford, 1990, I, 447.

Clancy sought to account for the arrival and influence of the *céli Dé* in Scotland, a topic hitherto wholly neglected yet one with significant implications for the kingdom of Alba, which, he convincingly argued, was due largely to Diarmait, abbot of Iona (814x c. 831). Diarmait's importance and influence among the *céli Dé* can be seen from the references to him in the *Monastery of Tallaght*,⁹⁴ but Clancy's examination of what is known of his life, and there is a surprising amount, indicates that Iona must have been one of the most important and influential of the *céli Dé* centres at the beginning of the ninth century.⁹⁵

Although declining to go into detail about *céli Dé* customs and practices which would detract from his purpose, he noted that 'it is accurate enough to call this a monastic reform, dedicated to the renewal of the coenobitic lifestyle',⁹⁶ which appears to be along fairly conventional lines of reform in reaction to laxity. However, in regard to the increase in reference to anchorites recorded in the annals at this time, which led to Flower's preference to refer to the *céli Dé* as an anchoritic movement, Clancy considers that

it is somewhat less than accurate to describe the *céli Dé* as an anchoritic, or even simply as an ascetic movement. All the documentation makes it clear that the *céli Dé* lived in communities and served under rules. Later notices of their communities, existing within larger monasteries oriented primarily towards pastoral care or property management or political games, make it clear that within this mixed development called the monastery, they were the true monks.⁹⁷

While, in this respect, Clancy was in agreement with the consideration that the *céli Dé* were driven by a desire for a more intense, personal piety, he also noted that 'they

⁹⁴ §§ 47, 52, 65, 66, 68, 69, 80, 85.

⁹⁵ T.O. Clancy, 'The Career of Diarmait *dalta* Daigre, Abbot of Iona 814x831', forthcoming. Contrast this with Máire Herbert's important and otherwise fine study *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Dublin, 1996), which did not consider the *céli Dé*, despite the fact that Iona was clearly an important and formative influence. I am grateful to Dr Clancy for providing me with a copy of his paper in advance of publication.

⁹⁶ 'Iona, Scotland and the *céli Dé*', 118.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

were also deeply interested in promoting those proper orientations and structures for church government and pastoral care which had been a main concern of ecclesiastical legislators in the eighth century.⁹⁸ In other words, while accepting the aim of the *céli Dé* was to strive for a more devout, pious and detached coenobitic existence, he was the first to appreciate that the *céli Dé* were well aware of the fact that any such aim could only have been achieved as a result of 'each member performing his task...[and that] the very possibility of ascetic detachment demanded a peaceful and well-functioning church.'⁹⁹

More recently, Clancy has emphasised that 'the bulk of the literature belonging to the earliest phase of *Céli Dé* communities in Ireland shows that the ethos behind them was one of reform.'¹⁰⁰ Citing the various problems outlined by Hughes which affected the church, he stated that 'Groups both of monastic communities and of like-minded individuals were involved in a reorientation of the Gaelic church',¹⁰¹ but warned that the distinction between the 'old churches' and 'the communities participating in the reform spirit'¹⁰² is much less marked than has often been suggested, referring to the influential involvement within the *céli Dé* of Colcu úa Duinechda of Clonmacnoise as well as Diarmait of Iona.

The early medieval ecclesiastic Blathmac mac Con Brettan compiled stanzas of poetry reflecting subject matter that James Carney placed firmly within the *céli Dé* milieu. The language of the verse places their compilation in the eighth century and, in a recent study,¹⁰³ Brian Lambkin examined the context in which these poems were

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ T.O. Clancy, 'Reformers to Conservatives: *Céli Dé* Communities in the North East', in J. Porter (ed.), *After Columba, After Calvin: Religious Community in North-East Scotland*, Aberdeen, 1999, 19-31.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Brian Lambkin, 'Blathmac and the *Céli Dé*: A Reappraisal', *Celtica* 23 (1999), 132-54.

compiled, during the course of which, following a brief outline of the comments of Hughes and O'Dwyer on the nature of the *céli Dé*, together with a discussion of the meaning and implications of *céli / céilsine*, he notes that

The concept of the *céle Dé* was a profoundly aristocratic one. There are no 'servile' or 'menial' or 'totally dependent' connotations to the term. Rather, it connotes 'inter-dependence'. In the tradition of Christian spirituality in Western Europe the concept is audacious, signifying membership of the 'retinue' (*dám*) of God as his 'companion'. That the *céle Dé* was a spiritual aristocrat is indicated by the existence of the complementary term *mog Dé* (literally 'slave of God'), which may be taken as a reflection of the social and economic divisions within secular society between the *soér-chéle* (noble client) and the *doér-chéle* (base client) and the *mog* (slave). Not every man could be a *céle Dé*. The *céli Dé* were a select group from among all the men on earth who were 'followers' of God and who could in suitably humble fashion call themselves collectively *mogae Dé* (slaves of God). In other words, the *céli Dé* were 'saints', men of high status within the 'following' of God marked from the other *mogae Dé* by virtue of their spiritual wealth or holiness of life.¹⁰⁴

Through the secular analogy whereby the retinue of a *rí ruirech* was legally delineated as thirty *soér-chéli*, Lambkin more closely refines this concept: 'Although God as *flaith* [Lord] called all men to be his *céli*, it would not be practicable for all men to become his immediate and intimate *céli* (*soér-chéli*) while on earth. This honour could only be attained by a few, a spiritual elite – the *Céli Dé*.'¹⁰⁵

With regard to the prevalent consideration that *céli Dé* was a translation of *servus Dei*, Lambkin pointed out that this undue emphasis on servility and abject dependence obscured

the fundamentally aristocratic nature of their motivation. A man became a *céle Dé* in order to improve his status. There was no higher status to which a man could aspire in this world. In order to prepare for this higher status and to earn it, the *céle Dé* set himself apart from his fellow men. He underwent a severe

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 142.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 144.

ascetic regime which was designed, like the training of a soldier, to prepare him for a spiritual battle with the forces of evil (*gó*) on behalf of his *flaith* in Heaven and his fellow men on earth. The *céle Dé* was apart, but at the same time was an integral part of the society which had produced him. He acted as an intermediary for his fellow men.¹⁰⁶

Lambkin doubted any suggestion that the emergence of the *céli Dé* was due to a need for reform, or, indeed, that there was any increase in degeneracy within the church during the course of the eighth century. He saw the increasing number of scribes and anchorites referred to in the annals as the result of an increased attention to detail and of a widening of the range of information given by annalists and noted that it 'seems too much of a coincidence that laxity and corruption in the Church should have become an acute problem at exactly the time when the historical record becomes much fuller.'¹⁰⁷ Correspondingly, he perceived the ideals of the *céli Dé* 'to be the product of a slow, more or less continuous development in Irish spirituality in which the sacred and secular spheres were becoming increasingly inter-connected, rather than the product of a "reform" or "religious revival".'¹⁰⁸

This view, as he noted, reflected Chadwick's view of continuity in the Irish ascetic tradition projected in her *Age of the Saints*. While Chadwick's reasoning was unorthodox, Lambkin's understanding of the emergence of the *céli Dé* has, nevertheless, reached the same conclusion. Whether the picture of the circumstances of the later eighth-century church, with warfare between monasteries, dynastic inheritance of abbacies and the degree of involvement of secular overlords in local churches, was entirely due to more precisely detailed annalistic records, however, is not quite so certain, as Lambkin himself seems to indicate, noting that, as a result of the synthesis of the sacred and secular he outlines, 'it may be supposed that an

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 150-1.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 151-2. For an examination of the periodically greater increase in attention to detail by annalists from around the middle of the eighth century, see Colmán Etchingham's study, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century: A Reconsideration of the Annals*, Maynooth, 1996; see also A.P. Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals: their first contemporary entries and the earliest centres of recording', *PRIA* 72 C (1972), 1-48.

¹⁰⁸ Lambkin, 'Blathmac and the Céili Dé', 151.

increase in ecclesiastical laxity and corruption was an inescapable consequence.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Lambkin has provided the most acutely perceptive analysis of the *céli Dé* provided to date, but one which requires a degree of re-examination to particular facets before it can be accepted (see below, pp. 44ff).

Colmán Etchingham produced the first post-revisionist volume concerned with a comprehensive examination of early Irish ecclesiastical organisation, and this naturally included a consideration of the *céli Dé*.¹¹⁰ He, also, coincidental to Clancy's observation, considered that the *céli Dé* were concerned with rigorous coenobitical monasticism rather than anchoritic seclusion, and, similarly, also refuted the suggestion that the *céli Dé* were a reform movement, noting that

The *Céli Dé* of the Tallaght memoir were advocates and practitioners of cenobitism, a cenobitism which, however, was combined with an ideology of anchoritic or eremitic mortification. Such a combination had a precedent...and, in fact, is attested in sources from as early as the seventh century.¹¹¹

Etchingham also considered Flower's observation in regard to the annalistic evidence reflecting the rise, culmination and decline of an anchoritic movement to be in error, due to changes in the keeping of annalistic record.¹¹² This, together with his conclusion that while the *céli Dé* have been seen as reformers emerging in reaction to secularisation in the later eighth and ninth centuries, 'they may reflect no more than the continuation of the rigorously monastic tendency in this period, alongside and in more or less uneasy co-existence with greater laxity',¹¹³ indicating, quite

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 152.

¹¹⁰ Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland AD 650-1000*, Maynooth, 1999.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 354.

¹¹² Etchingham justifiably points out, *ibid.*, 356, that since Bannerman (in 'Notes on the Scottish entries in the early Irish annals', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 11 (1968), 149-70; reprinted in *idem*, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, Edinburgh, 1974, 9-27) noted (on p. 20) that anchorites do not appear to have been reported in the 'Iona Chronicle', which provides the basis of the Irish annals up to c. 730, it 'is surely significant...that following three isolated seventh-century obits of *anchoritae*, the eighth-century cluster begins in the 730's.'

¹¹³ *ibid.*, 463.

independently, much the same conclusion as Lambkin and, ultimately, however uncertainly arrived at, that of Chadwick.

Over the years, therefore, there have been a great many different, even contradictory, perceptions of what was meant by the term *céli Dé* and even more so by its anglicised derivative, 'Culdee'. From being seen as stubborn Celtic champions against the errors of Rome and projected as proto-Presbyterians, the term 'Culdee' has been perceived as a name applicable to all monks of a 'Celtic Church' generally. Nor, as Thomas Clancy has recently had cause to remark, is this perception wholly restricted to the past and the 'notion that it may be applied wholesale to the Celtic Churchmen of early medieval Scotland before the reforms of the twelfth century'¹¹⁴ can still be encountered.

The subsequent development of a model which considered that Patrick introduced a diocesan framework throughout Ireland, although, as a concept alien to the Irish, it was quickly (or, in some cases, not so quickly) supplanted by a monastic organisation 'better suited to Irish conditions', allowed a new concept for the *céli Dé*. While the evidence was interpreted in such a way to perceive that monasticism fell victim to the avaricious degeneracy of the laity, the *céli Dé* were believed to have emerged in reaction to such secularisation. While this scenario necessarily presupposed a meekly passive and submissive church which fell prey to a voracious laity, it also wholly reversed the perception of the *céli Dé* from one of dogged resistance to Roman reform to that of the champions of reform by the reintroduction of ascetic ideals, the basis of which was most commonly accounted for along the lines of continental models.

Since the basis of this model is no longer accepted, the nature of the *céli Dé*, and the evidence of the sources, can be re-examined with a fresh, and more critical, eye and the remainder of this thesis seeks to try to understand them in the context of changing ecclesiastical governance in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Chapter 2 will discuss the meaning of *céli Dé* and its possible origins and will attempt to

¹¹⁴ Clancy, 'Reformers to Conservatives', 19.

provide a context for the term from which a better understanding of the implications of the applied designation may be attempted. Chapter 3 will examine a few of the wide range of *céli Dé* texts which show signs of their concern, not just for the proper maintenance of the coenobitic spirit, but also for the overall organisation of the church and for pastoral care. Chapter 4 will take the ideas provided by these texts and measure them against the dominant idea that the *céli Dé* emerged in reaction to the perceived laxity of the eighth century. That idea will be found to be wanting, particularly when subjected to statistical scrutiny. Without the underpinning notion of degeneracy, the idea of the *céli Dé* as simply a 'monastic / ascetic reform movement' cannot stand. In its place must be put an understanding of how they fit into the wider scheme of developments in ecclesiastical organisation. This will be attempted in chapters 5-7.

Chapter 5 will seek to show how reorganisation of concepts of authority within the church, especially in regard to the temporalities of the church, fit into the *céli Dé* agenda. It will concentrate on the coincidence between changes in annalistic practice in recording the deaths of a wider range of ecclesiastical officials and the *congressio senodorum* at Tara in 780. While conclusive proof is not possible, and while there will be still further questions that will arise from this approach, it will be examined from the prospect that the coincidence is due to the agenda of the *céli Dé*, which, it will be argued, advocated a proper organisation of the church and a more efficient harnessing of its temporalities in order to aim towards a universal standard of pastoral care. Further, the freeing of ecclesiastics from temporal concerns would allow them to focus more fully on their spiritual concerns.

Chapters 6 and 7 will deal with matters not directly contingent on the *céli Dé*, the rise in the use of *cána* by churchmen and secular rulers in the period under consideration and the simultaneous disputes over the control of the successorship of Patrick, the chief ecclesiastical prize in Ireland. As will be seen, although not directly the product of *céli Dé* concerns, the rise in the use of *cána* and disputes over the control of Armagh reflect and are reflected in *céli Dé* texts, events and personages.

The *céli Dé* cannot be taken in isolation and these chapters will provide some indication of how interconnected ecclesiastical development was in this period.

Finally, chapter 8 will deal with the career of one individual who brings together these disparate strands. Feidlimid mac Crimthainn was associated, at the very least, with the *céli Dé*, interfered with the successorship and organisation of major religious houses, intervened in the disputes over the control of Armagh, and enforced *cána*. In this chapter, he will be viewed quite contrary to previous analyses - as a king who emerged from the ecclesiastical and elitist training of the *céli Dé* and who attempted to enforce their ideals by violent means. He will be viewed against the backdrop of Viking incursions and through contemporary ideas of a 'providential' reading of diasters.

This thesis does not seek to be a comprehensive history of the *céli Dé*. It does, however, seek to comprehensively examine the question of whether or not the *céli Dé* can legitimately be claimed to have been a reform movement, or 'reformers' in any capacity. It also probes, occasionally speculatively, their relationship with the ecclesiastical politics of their day. While not all of the arguments presented here may find favour, it is hoped that it will make clear that the *céli Dé* were not isolationist or inwardly monastic, but were instead to the very forefront of the complex and changing nature of ecclesiastical government in the period 750-850.

The context of *céli*: what was meant by *céli Dé*?

What seems to be apparent from the historiographical review in the preceding chapter is the modern acceptance of the understanding that the *céli Dé* constituted some form of religious order – an understanding that has been compounded through the appellation of the anglicised term ‘culdee’ by scholars in the past. While the evidence for the church in eighth-century Ireland was interpreted as revealing a degenerate clergy, it made sense to believe that this ‘order’ emerged in reaction to the increasing secularisation of the clergy by the end of the century. The purpose of this chapter, however, will be to examine the significance of this term *céli Dé*, its origin and its intended meaning. Again, from the historiographical review, it is clear that many scholars have addressed the meaning of the term, with such diverse conclusions ranging from ‘slave-’, ‘friend-’ or even ‘spouse of God’, to that of an ecclesiastical elite, God’s retainers on earth. This diverse, even contradictory, range of conclusions is due, in large part, to the range of idiomatic usage in which the term *céli* is found and to the consideration of how ‘formal’ a meaning, from the perspective of its use in the Old Irish law tracts, should be placed upon it in the context of this term ‘*céli Dé*’. The use of the term *céli* makes the early Irish law tracts the obvious place to begin in any consideration of the meaning of the term, particularly in light of some of the more recent suggestions in this regard. Ultimately, however, it will prove necessary to look elsewhere for an understanding of what was meant by the appellation of this term during the period under study, for, as will be seen, the application of the term *céli Dé* was not unique – nor, indeed, was it even the most prevalent term used, even in regard to the community of Tallaght. It will be

necessary, therefore, to attempt to determine the extent of the significance of the term before it will be possible to even begin to address the view that the *céli Dé* constituted a reform movement.

The association between Tallaght and the *céli Dé* was first brought to the attention of scholars by Reeves in his collection of sources, it acquired universal acceptance following Kenney's great work, to the extent that, in regard to the origin of the *céli Dé*, it has been claimed 'Mael Ruain, who died in 792, is honoured as the founder and patron saint of the "Culdees".'¹ This differed from Kenney, who listed Fer-dá-chrích (d. 747) and the Uí Suanaig of Rathán (d. 757 and 763) as numbering among these reformers (see above, p. 18), and indicates a further evolution of the model. Yet, despite the survival of several texts originating from Tallaght which refer to him and cite his practice, Máel Ruain is never referred to as *céle Dé*. His obituary notice in *AU*, on the other hand, states *Mael Ruain Tamlachtaí, Aidhain Rathain, Aedhan h. Con Cumbu, episcopi 7 milites Christi in pace dormierunt*,² the potential significance of which will be examined below. Nowhere, however, is there any contemporary suggestion that the *céli Dé* were founded by Máel Ruain and the evidence for all of these basic assumptions requires to be reconsidered.

The understanding that the *céli Dé* constituted some form of religious 'order', regardless of whether or not that 'order' ought to be thought of as a reform movement – a separate argument that will be considered in due course – has been generally held, although with the caveat that they should not be considered an order in the same formal sense that, for example, the Benedictines or Augustinians were orders. The basis for this belief essentially appears to stem from the fact that a 'Rule' survives for the *céli Dé*, albeit one certainly much less formally defined than those

¹ D.A. Binchy, in Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* v, Dublin, 1963, 47.

for the later Continental orders. This understanding of the *céli Dé* as an 'order' is further reinforced by the earliest annalistic reference to them which provides a context, with the sack of Armagh by Ímar in 921.³ The list of evidences collected by Reeves explicitly connect the *céli Dé* with the foundation of hospitals at St Andrews and York⁴ and the annalistic entry relating the burning of Armagh in 921 would seem to imply that here, too, the sick were under the care of the *céli Dé*. Further annalistic references⁵ also indicate care of the poor and the subsequent Latinisation of the term *céli Dé* so frequently used in the Latin texts transcribed by Reeves⁶ certainly suggests an entity, recognised by contemporaries, and which constituted distinct communities within communities. The evidences provided by Reeves indicate such communities at Armagh, Clonmacnois, Clondalkin, Monahincha (formerly Ros Cré), Devenish, Clones, St Andrews, Dunkeld, Brechin, Rosemarkie, Dunblane, Dornoch. Lismore, Iona, Abernethy, Monymusk, Muthil and Monifieth, among others. There are many

² AU792.1.

³ AU921.8, which details the sack of Armagh by Ímar son of Gothfrith : ...7 na taighi aernaighi do anacal lais cona lucht de cheilibh De 7 di lobraibh... (...and he spared from destruction the prayer-houses with their complement of *céli Dé* and the sick...). The only annalistic notice of a *céle Dé* prior to this is the entry contained in *AFM sa* 806, which noted that 'In this year the Céle-dé came over the sea dryshod, without a vessel; and a written roll was given to him from heaven, out of which he preached to the Irish...' This entry appears to be connected with the *Cáin Domnaig* (see below, pp. 189-92; Kenney, *Sources*, 476-7). An entry in *AU*, 887.3, relates *Eipistil do thiachtain lasin ailithir docum nEreinn co Cain Domnaigh 7 co forcetlaibh maithibh ailibh*. 'A letter, with the Law of Sunday and other good instructions, came to Ireland with the Pilgrim'. This Pilgrim, elsewhere named as Ananloen (see below, pp. 189, n. 40), is not otherwise referred to as a *céle Dé* in any of the references to him and the uncertainty of the basis of the entry and the variation in the date ascribed to it makes the reference of 921 the first certain annalistic notice of the *céli Dé*.

⁴ Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 38, 144.

⁵ As, for example, the incidental references in *AFM sa* 1031: 'Conn na mBochd, head of the *céli Dé* and anchorite of Clonmacnois, [died. He was] the first that invited a party of the poor of Cluain to Iseal-Chiarain and who presented twenty cows of his own to it...'; and *AFM sa* 1072: 'A forcible refecton was taken by Murchadh, son of Conchobhar, at Iseal-Chiarain, and from the *céli Dé*, so that the steward of the poor (*rechtaire na mbocht*) was killed there; for which Magh Nura was given to the poor.'

⁶ See Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 98-145 for numerous examples contained within his transcriptions of ecclesiastic *registra* from both sides of the Irish Sea. One entry which may be cited here, to illustrate how common was the usage of the Latinised form of the term, is the etymological rationalisation found in the *Vitae Dunkeldensis Ecclesiae Episcoporum ab Alexandro Myln ejusdem Ecclesiae Canonico*, published by the Bannatyne Club in 1831 and cited by Reeves, p. 118. It notes: *In quo quidem monasterio imposuit viros religiosos, quos nominavit vulgus Kelledeos, aliter colideos, hoc est, colentes Deum;...*

explicit references to the care of the sick and the poor by the *céli Dé* at these sites and, if these specific examples allow the conclusion that this was true in every case – perhaps universal care for the poor with hospitals established at the larger foundations – then it would indeed appear reasonable to consider that the *céli Dé* constituted a recognisable ‘order’. This ‘order’ maintained a contingent within most of the greatest ecclesiastic foundations in the Gaelic world and were concerned with provision and care of the sick and the poor.

This can be seen to be true, however, only from the third decade of the tenth century. The annalistic record for this period, it has to be said, carries a great deal more incidental information – which, in 921, allows an annalistic reflection of the *céli Dé* for the first time – than had been the case earlier. It cannot be claimed, therefore, that this recognisable ‘order’, to which the term *céli Dé*, to judge from its subsequent Latinisation, had formally been appended, must have emerged at around this time: it is certainly possible that the *céli Dé* had existed in this guise, invisible to the annalistic record, prior to the 920s. In this case, there could be some validity to understanding the formal appellation of *céli Dé* as intending to denote ‘servants’ of God, in the sense of clerics who devoted themselves specifically to emulation of Christ’s concern for the infirm, the sick and the poor.

What falls to be considered in such case, then, is the primary perception of the *céli Dé* as an ascetic reform movement emerging in the eighth century. The validity of this hypothesis itself will be discussed at length in chapter 4, but for present purposes, the emphasis of this perception rather provokes the question of by what justification, irrespective of whether or not their attributed motive of reform is accepted, are those individuals of the second half of the eighth century – Máel Ruain, Dublithir, Elair and Diarmait, among others – considered to have been *céli Dé*? If it

should prove to be justified, does this mean that the appellation of this term to those individuals in the eighth and early ninth centuries ought to be understood in precisely the same sense as those ‘communities within communities’ apparent from the tenth?

Lambkin’s recent proposal that the *céli Dé* were an ecclesiastical elite who considered themselves, or were considered by others, to constitute God’s retinue on earth is based upon the definition of the rights, responsibilities and obligations of the *céle* in a formal, legally-governed state of *céilsine* with his lord, outlined in such detail in the early Irish law tracts. These law tracts express some distinction between the *céle gíallnai*, the ‘*céle* of submission’, and the *sóerchéle*, literally the ‘free *céle*’. Subsequent glossators rendered *céle gíallnai* as *dóerchéle*, which has provided the literal understanding of the distinction between *dóerchéle* and *sóerchéle* as ‘unfree’ and ‘free’, respectively. The problem with this literal rendition of these terms, however, is that only free men were legally competent to enter into the formal and reciprocal relationship of *céilsine*, so that despite the literal rendition of *dóer* as ‘unfree’, the *dóerchéle*, by definition, must have been a free man. An appreciation of this fact has resulted in the more recent tendency to render these terms as ‘base clients’ and ‘noble clients’, respectively. It is this more recent understanding applied to these terms that provides the foundation to Lambkin’s thesis – a proposal that is seductive if one considers Máel Rúain, Dublithir, Elair of Ros Cré, Diarmait of Iona and others of similar renown, but becomes less so when one considers those largely anonymous individuals to whom the term *céli Dé* is applied in an annalistic context, who appear to constitute distinct communities within communities tending the sick and the poor. The annalistic record exclusively refers to the *céli Dé* in this context, but begins only from the tenth century, with the earliest notice belonging to 921 (see n. 3, above).

In light of Lambkin's hypothesis, it would be, clearly, a necessary undertaking to re-examine what the legal texts relate in regard to *céli*. The term *céli Dé* was certainly current in the eighth century and it is clear from the poems of Blathmac, dateable to the third quarter of the eighth century, that the concept of *céilsine* with God, in specific circumstances, was certainly understood.⁷ This would seem to indicate that when the term *céli Dé* was used in this context, it was intended in the full, legal sense and not merely as some informal indicator of a follower or devotee of God. *Céilsine* was a cornerstone in both the political and economic structure of early Irish society and there is a significant amount of surviving material in the extant law tracts that deals with the topic.⁸ The *Cáin Aicillne*⁹ relates in some detail the rights, responsibilities and obligations of the *céle gíallnai*, while the *Cáin Sóerraiht*¹⁰ does so for the *sóerchéle*, although, in its extant form, this is a fragmentary text. There is a large section on *céilsine* included in the Munster law

⁷ J. Carney (ed.), *The Poems of Blathmac*, Dublin, 1964. The explicit reference to *céilsine* is in regard to the Jews, the chosen people of God:

§106 *Cach feb tecomnacht in rí
do Iudib ara célsini,
batar móini do mogaib;
ro-coillset a cobfolaid.*

'Every advantage bestowed by the King
upon the Jews in return for their *céilsine*
was a wealth to slaves;

they violated their obligations.' [I have amended Carney's translation.]

The concept of *céilsine* with God, however, is also implicitly referred to in regard to the early Christian martyrs:

§256 *Anro-chésasat ind fir
diá riagad i corpaib,
bethus dígal dígrais de;
nídat céili drochluige.*

'For what those men have suffered
in the torturing of their bodies
they shall have keenest vengeance;
they are not *céli* of [a lord of] bad oaths.'

⁸ It is clear from these various tracts that there was some, often significant, regional variation in the terms of *céilsine*. See T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, Cambridge 2000, 71-80.

⁹ *CIH* 1778.34 – 1804.11; 479.23 – 502.6. *Cáin Aicillne* is translated in Hancock *et al* (edd.), *The Ancient Laws of Ireland II*, 223-341 and edited by Rudolf Thurneysen in *ZCP* 14 (1923), 338-94.

¹⁰ *CIH* 1770.15 – 1778.33; Hancock *et al*, *Ancient Laws of Ireland II*, 195-221; Thurneysen, *ZCP* 15 (1925), 239-53.

tract *Bretha Nemed Toisech*, while the text *Di Dligiud Raith 7 Somaíne la Flaith*, contained within the *Senchas Már*, most probably written in the northern Midlands,¹¹ outlines the requisite obligations there.¹² *Críth Gablach*,¹³ providing detail in delineating the various grades of free society, illustrates the relative extent to which rank, in theory at least, depended upon, or allowed, specified numbers of *céli*. In line with his understanding of the *céli Dé*, Lambkin believed that ‘Unqualified, *céle* usually indicates *sóer-chéle*, i.e. a “noble” man’,¹⁴ but the use of the simple – that is, un-compounded and unqualified – term *céli* in the early eighth century tract *Críth Gablach* would appear to indicate that this understanding needs to be revised. In its formulaic definition of the levels of nobility, for example, *Críth Gablach* notes: (ll. 328-31) *Aire désa...Deich céli leis – cóic céli gíallna[i] leis 7 cóic sóerchéli*; (ll. 368-70) *Aire ardd...fiche céili leis, .x. céili gíallna[i] 7 .x. sóerchéli*; (ll. 386-9) *Aire túise...vii. céili .xx. la suide, cóic céili .x. gíallna[i] 7 dá sóerchéli .x. lais*; (ll. 417-22) *Aire forggaill...cethorcha céili la suide, fiche céle gíallna[i] 7 fiche sóerchéli*. It would certainly appear to be clear, from its usage in these instances at least, that the simple, un-compounded and unqualified term *céli* should not be seen as an indicator of any particular grade of retainer.

Outwith its usage in this definition of noble rank, there are six further instances of the use of the simple term *céli* in *Críth Gablach*. Of these, three explicitly qualify the term with a reference to *taurchreic*.¹⁵ The *taurchreic* was a grant of land or stock in return for a fixed annual food render and, although it is clear from the respective tracts *Cáin Aicillne* and *Cáin Sóerraith* that the form of *céilsine*

¹¹ Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, 114-5.

¹² *CIH* 432.21 – 436.32; 919.25 – 922.11.

¹³ *CIH* 777.6 – 783.38; 563.1 – 570.32. D.A. Binchy (ed.) *Críth Gablach*, Dublin 1941 (repr., 1979).

¹⁴ Lambkin, ‘Blathmac and the Céili Dé’, 141. cf. T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 68, where ‘...[henceforth] “client” without qualification will refer to the base client rather than to the more privileged “free client”.’

undertaken by both *céle gíallnai* and *sóerchéli* involved the provision of an annual food render, the reference to *taurchreic*, as will be seen, clearly indicates the *céli gíallnai* in this context. Of the other three, one appears to refer implicitly to *céli gíallnai*,¹⁶ while the final two would certainly appear to be applicable to both *céli gíallnai* and *sóerchéli*.¹⁷ This would negate any argument that the simple term *céli* itself ought to be understood to mean *sóerchéli*, but what of the more recent general tendency to render *sóerchéli* as ‘noble’ *céli*?

Críth Gablach names the *aire désa* as the lowest level of noble rank, where his rank is defined by, or is entitled to, ten *céli* – five *céli gíallnai* and five *sóerchéli*. While the *sóerchéle* ‘may have often been of the same social class as his lord’,¹⁸ it would appear unreasonable to consider this to have been the case in every instance and, if the *aire désa* was the lowest level of noble rank, then it clearly cannot be correct to consider the *sóerchéle* to have been noble by definition. From this perspective, the formulaic usage employed in *Críth Gablach* must also be noteworthy: here the order, consistently, is *x* number of *céli gíallnai* followed by *x* number of *sóerchéli*. This consistent order of notice would be contrary to expectation if the description as *sóerchéle* was understood to be an indication of nobility, in contrast to the free commoner, the *céle gíallnai*.

It is clear, from *Cáin Aicillne* and *Cáin Sóerraith*, that the form of *céilsine* undertaken by both *céle gíallnai* and *sóerchéli* involved the provision of a fief in return for military and labour services and an annual food render. The *céle gíallnai*

¹⁵ ll. 249-50: ...arindí follen a bóairechas di thaurchreic céile; l. 252: ...tabeir i taurchreicc céile; l. 259: Berid diib derscugud dia tauchría céliu...

¹⁶ ll. 376-7. The passage states: Cid dobeir.v. séotu x. do aineclainn don[d] fi[u]r so? .v. séoit dó cétamus ar thothacht a thige fadesin, sét cach céili dia ndlig blathad n-airchem.

¹⁷ ll. 339-40: Imdích dliged a chéle cintaib cuir, cáin, cairddi[u] co neoch atallen – ‘He defends the rights of his *céli* in their liabilities according to contract, law and treaty and whatever should result from them’; l. 373: Arcuithethar a chéliu cur 7 chairddiu – ‘He represents his *céli* in contract and treaty.’

¹⁸ Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, 32.

certainly appears to have been required to fulfil the due labour services – *drécht gíallnai* – personally.¹⁹ Fergus Kelly suggested that, in the case of the *sóerchéle*, it may ‘be normal for this work to be done by a dependent (e.g. a slave or a *fuidir*) rather than by the free client himself.’²⁰ This is clearly possible, but the suggestion may rather have been provoked by the understanding that the *sóerchéle* had noble or semi-noble status and that this would have been diminished by undertaking manual labour. The fragmentary nature of *Cáin Sóerraithe* does not allow any conclusion to be drawn in this respect.

In both cases, as already indicated, an annual render is due and, indeed, the annual render due from the *sóerchéle* was greater than that from the *céle gíallnai*.²¹ While the *sóerchéle* paid this render for six years, he returned the full value of the original grant during the seventh,²² so that while his *flaith* received a three-fold return of the initial outlay, the *sóerchéle* owed no render after seven years. The *céle gíallnai*, on the other hand, owed his food-render for the lifetime of his *flaith*, but, if he had paid this render for seven years, the fief became his after the death of his lord.²³ The fief granted to the *sóerchéle*, by contrast, was returned to the lord or his

¹⁹ The tract *Di Dligiud Raith 7 Somaine* stipulates further duties which the *céli gíallnai* must undertake in the event of the death of his lord, including digging the lord’s gravemound, paying a death-levy and attending a commemorative feast. See, *ibid.*, 30.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 33. For the terms of the labour services owed by the *sóerchéle*, see *CIH* 1770.23; 435.25; 436.13.

²¹ Both the *céle gíallnai* and the *sóerchéle* owed an annual food render proportional to the value of their original grant. In the case of the *céle gíallnai*, this depended on the value of the initial *taurchrec* and appears to have been paid during the lifetimes of the principal parties. In the case of the *sóerchéle*, the annual render was much higher, being the equivalent of one-third of the value of the original grant, but payable only for the first six years. Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 75, provides reference to a case noted in *Bretha Nemed Toisech* (*CIH* 2230.16 – 20) wherein the annual render on a fief given to a *bóaire* by an *airé désa* was one-third the value of the grant. This would suggest the *bóairech* to have been the most likely source for *sóerchéli*, but, in this instance, the fief ‘is not returned until heirs return it to heirs’, indicating an agreement with the potential to remain in effect far beyond the six years stipulated in *Cáin Sóerraithe*.

²² *CIH* 1770.28 – 1771.18.

²³ *CIH* 486.24-5. If the *céle* died first, however, his heirs maintained his contractual obligations. The period of seven years could be greater in Munster, depending on the gulf between the rank of *flaith* and *céle*: the greater the difference, the longer the required period to entitle ownership (*CIH* 2230.16-17, 24-5).

heirs following the death of either party.²⁴ In certain respects, therefore, the situation of the *céle giallnai*, particularly in the long term or for his heirs, was potentially better than that of the *sóerchéle*.

The initial grant given to the *sóerchéle*, however, appears to have been much smaller than that typically given to the *céle giallnai*. *Cáin Sóerraithe*, dealing with *sóerchéli*, provides an example of the return due on the grant of three milch cows.²⁵ By means of comparison, the grant provided to *céli giallnai* varied according to rank: the *ócaire* was entitled to receive an initial grant worth 16 *séts*;²⁶ while the *bóaire* was entitled to a grant worth 30 *séts*.²⁷ Fergus Kelly drew attention to the fact that later glossators generally equated the relative value of the currencies in the early Irish law tracts to be one milch cow = one ounce of silver = 2 *séts* = 1/3 *cumal*. With the caveat that there was some regional variation and instances when relative value must have fluctuated, he notes that 'Sometimes the Old Irish law-texts agree more or less closely with these equivalences.'²⁸ If the example in *Cáin Sóerraithe* is at all representative, and there is no reason to consider otherwise, then the typical value of the grant to the *sóerchéle* was roughly equivalent to 6 *séts*, one-fifth of that of the *bóaire*. As the *Cáin Sóerraithe* is a fragmentary text, however, it is uncertain whether there were grades of grant according to rank for the *sóerchéli* as there was for the *céli giallnai*; but, clearly, the value of the initial grant to the *sóerchéle* could be very much smaller than that to the *céle giallnai*. Thomas Charles-Edwards has noted, in regard to this, that

At the end of the clientship the lord will receive back the entire fief...In effect, the lord gets the entire return, although the client has contributed two of the

²⁴ CIH 436.9.

²⁵ CIH 1770.28 – 1771.18.

²⁶ CIH 485.15-6.

²⁷ CIH 485.19-20.

²⁸ Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, 116. See his discussion, pp. 115-6.

three factors of production, land and labour; and, secondly, that it is an aspect of the honourable character of the relationship from the clients point of view not only that he can return the fief at any time, ending the relationship, but also that it is of no economic benefit to him. The relationship creates a clientship which, by its very paradoxical nature, demonstrates that the client is not economically dependent upon the lord. On this view the benefits of the relationship to the free client were social and political rather than economic.²⁹

In this context, it could be argued that the basis of 'sóer-céilsine' was indeed considerably different from that of the *céli giallnai*, but there were social, political and economic aspects to the basis of both forms of *céilsine*, since, arguably, the rank of a lord was defined by the number of *céli* he could support. Thomas Charles-Edwards goes on to acknowledge that

in terms of the legal order, the rights of the lord rested on an agreement made with him by the [base] client...the northern Irish lord's ownership of the livestock granted to his client might endure only seven years. At that point what began as a loan would become an outright grant. The renders and services of the client thus answered a grant by his lord: in that sense it was an exchange, an honourable relationship between two parties both of whom were ultimately independent agents.³⁰

The distinction between *céli giallnai* and *sóerchéli*, therefore, once again, becomes blurred. It is clear from *Cáin Aicillne* that at any time a lord and his *céle* may terminate their agreement by mutual consent. In such a case the lord takes back the value of the original grant, less the value of the rent and services already provided.³¹ If the dissolution of the contract was not by mutual consent, however, then there were penalties incurred by either the *céle* or his *flaith* in compensation. This does differ from the position of the *sóerchéle*, as *Di Dliguid Raith 7 Somaine* states that, in

²⁹ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 76-7.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 79.

³¹ *CIH* 495. 8-11. See also Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, 31.

this case, either party may dissolve the contract without penalty. The lack of penalty in this instance, however, is almost certainly due to the fact that, unlike the *céle giallnai*, the *sóerchéle* did not receive an initial, single payment known as *séoit taurchluidé*.

One point of reference continually referred to in the *Cáin Aicillne* is this *séoit taurchluidé*, which is most frequently rendered as ‘chattels of subjection’.³² This was a payment made to the *céle giallnai* when the terms of the *céilsine* were initially agreed and it was equal in value to his honour price.³³ As Etchingham notes, ‘this payment constituted a material benefit...alongside the *taurchrec*...from which, however, it is clearly distinguished.’³⁴ Binchy believed it entitled the *flaith* to ‘nothing more than a right to share in the compensation due for certain injuries...committed against the client.’³⁵ It might be thought, however, that, in many cases, particularly if the *céle* was acting on behalf of his lord or in his service when any offence happened to be committed against him, the *flaith* would have had a stake in the compensatory claim against the offender in any event. This, indeed, may have been expected whether the victim was *céle giallnai* or *sóerchéle*. Etchingham has recently suggested that the *séoit taurchluidé* may have entitled the lord to appropriate part of the inheritable property of the *céle giallnai*, but the precise implications of this further legal commitment remain uncertain.

Whatever the legal purpose and implications of *séoit taurchluidé*, however, it appears to have been perceived by contemporaries as impinging in some manner upon the independent legal capacity of the *céle giallnai*. It is this that appears to have

³² In *DIL* the term is rendered ‘recoverable chattels’. Since *sét* was a recognised unit of value and may be translated as an object of value as well as a chattel, however, the meaning of *séoit taurchluidé* appears to have been something along the lines of ‘the worth, or price, of fore-purchase’.

³³ *CIH* 1780.9.

³⁴ Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 467.

³⁵ Binchy (ed.), *Críth Gablach*, 97.

been the principal difference between the *céle giallnai* and the *sóerchéle* – all other discernible differences could be argued to be merely matters of degree. Yet this conclusion must be tempered and the implications of *séoit taurchluidé*, whatever they may have been, should not be perceived as a crippling handicap. It must be remembered that all *céli*, by definition, must have been free men, legally competent to enter into *céilsine* and, as an individual could, legally, have been *céle giallnai* to as many as three lords at the same time,³⁶ this payment of his honour price clearly did not entail a surrender of his legal standing. If the independent legal capacity of the *céle giallnai* was indeed acknowledged to have been restricted to some degree by acceptance of *séoit taurchluidé*, it could have been so only in a very specifically defined capacity that was clearly understood by contemporaries. Otherwise, the legal rights, responsibilities and dues of the *céle giallnai* were unaffected and exercised according to his status as a free man in society. Nevertheless, the legal implications resulting from the payment of *séoit taurchluidé*, however narrowly they may have impacted upon an individual's independent legal competence in practice, appears to have been the principal determinant in the distinction between the *céle giallnai* and the *sóerchéle*. The distinction between the 'céle of submission' and the 'free céle', therefore, appears rather to have had an economic, rather than a hierarchical, difference in the basis of *céilsine*. Consequently, it is all too easy to overemphasize this distinction in status between the *céle giallnai* and the *sóerchéle*, which certainly does not appear so stark in practical terms as the rendition of such fundamental

³⁶ *CIH* 488.1-3; 434.13; 435.9,32. The restriction on the taking of subsequent lords was only that the *tuarchrec* granted by the second lord could not exceed two-thirds of the value of that of the principal lord and the value of that of third lord no more than one-third of the principal. See also, Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, 32.

divisions as 'unfree' and 'free' or 'base' and 'noble' would indicate.³⁷ It is clear that the greatest numbers of both the *céli giallnai* and the *sóerchéli* came from the same social level in society and, from this perspective, Lambkin's understanding that 'Unqualified, *céle* usually indicates *sóer-chéle*, i.e. a "noble" man' must be considered to be pushing the evidence too far. He cited Byrne's understanding that the '*sóer-chéle*...gave the lord political support, becoming a member of his retinue (*dám*); for the word *céle*, like the feudal Latin *comes*, means "companion"' and used it as one of the principal props to his conclusion that 'The concept of the *céle Dé* was a profoundly aristocratic one.'³⁸ While Lambkin's proposals should be appreciated as an attempt to provide a fresh approach to the concept of the *céli Dé*, and will be looked at again from a broader perspective distinct from this discussion of what was meant by the term *céli Dé*, there are clear problems with this hypothesis as it stands. The understanding he draws from Byrne is not so straightforward as it is presented. Byrne's comment that 'the word *céle*, like the feudal Latin *comes*, means "companion"', should not be understood to mean that that this singularly refers to *sóerchéli* – the rendition, necessarily, must be accepted to mean the same in compound form as it does in simple form. Lambkin may have been misled to some degree by Byrne's understanding of the differences between *céli giallnai* and *sóerchéli*. Byrne stated that 'The *céle giallnai*...paid a food rent and performed certain menial services...The *sóer-chéle* – the "free" or "noble" client – paid a higher rate of interest on his stock and gave his lord political support, becoming a member of his retinue.'³⁹ This clear distinction is misleading, for, as already noted, both the *céle giallnai* and the *sóerchéle* owed labour services and food renders and both owed

³⁷ The section dealing with *céilsine* in the Munster tract *Bretha Nemed Toisech*, indeed, appears to make no such distinction (see Etchingham, 402-3) even although it clearly had some legal significance.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 141,142; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 28.

military service. Nor, indeed, should the *sóerchéli* be understood to constitute the lord's retinue. To refer again to the definition of the *aire désa*, the lowest level of nobility, provided in *Críth Gablach*: this level of lordship entitled, or was determined by, ten *céli* – five *céli giallnai* and five *sóerchéli* – and a retinue of six. Should this be taken to mean that his retinue consisted of the five *sóerchéli* allowed for, plus one other? Or should it be understood to mean that a lord's retinue was intended to be distinct from his *céli*? The example of the *aire désa* is particularly useful, since in all other cases of the grades of noblemen other than kings, the number allowed for in his retinue is less than that of the *sóerchéli* allowed for by his position and it could be thought that his retinue may have been drawn from his *sóerchéli* in rotation.⁴⁰ This question of whether a lord's retinue indeed consisted of his *sóerchéli* consequently has a fundamental impact on Lambkin's proposal that the *céli Dé* were the ecclesiastical equivalent of *sóerchéli* who constituted, in effect, God's retinue on earth.

This examination of what the legal texts relate in regard to *céli* is far from exhaustive, but it ought to be sufficient to indicate that Lambkin's hypothesis, as it stands, has some significant difficulties to its basis. Indeed, this re-examination of what the legal texts relate in regard to *céli* has been considered a necessary undertaking only in light of this hypothesis. However, any discussion attempting to uncover what was meant by the term *céli Dé* must also incorporate other, similar, terms found in early Irish ecclesiastical texts by way of comparison. The 'Rule of

³⁹ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 28.

⁴⁰ The *aire ardd* was entitled to twenty *céli* – ten *céli giallnai* and ten *sóerchéli* – and a retinue of seven within his *tuath* and five abroad; the *aire tuise* was entitled to twenty-seven *céli* – fifteen *céli giallnai* and twelve *sóerchéli* – and a retinue of eight within his *tuath* and six abroad; the *aire forgaill* forty *céli* – twenty of each – and a retinue of nine and seven.

Comgall',⁴¹ for example, contains the both the term *muintir Dé* (§16b) and the apparently unique term *céle maic Maire* (§22 – *diamba chéle maic Maire*⁴²). 'The Rule of Ailbe',⁴³ (§39a) states:

<i>Nech dothéi do chélidu</i>	<i>co mugada Dé</i>
<i>Ní bes dech adcethar</i>	<i>bad ed ón foglé.</i>

Which O Neill translates as 'A person who goes on a visit to servants of God, the best thing he sees, let it be that he learns.'⁴⁴ The context of the use of *muintir Dé* in the 'Rule of Comgall' could be understood merely as a generic for Christians, but the context of the term *mugada Dé* could be taken to imply its application to a community. These two instances may not shed much light upon the present discussion, but they do serve to indicate that the term *céli Dé* was not unique in its composition and this must have some bearing on the weight of significance which can legitimately be placed upon it.

More importantly, however, must be the range of terms found within those texts connected to Tallaght itself. These are the inter-related texts *Teagasg Maoil Ruain, Riágail na Celed nDé (RCD)* and the text containing the notes on the customs of Tallaght which has subsequently become known as the *Monastery of Tallaght (Mon. Tall.)*. These texts will be discussed in detail in chapter 3. Another text with Tallaght connections, if the account contained within its prose Preface is to be believed, is the *Féilire Óengusso (FO)*. Here, as will be discussed below, however, the term *céli Dé* is conspicuously absent from the range of terms employed in the

⁴¹ John Strachan dated the 'Rule of Comgall' to c. 800 ('An Old Irish Metrical Rule', *Ériu* 1 (1904), 191-208). The rule is referred to twice – §§68, 80 – in *Mon. Tall.*

⁴² The use of this phrase strikingly mirrors the formulaic usage that opens each of the sections in 'Fothad's Rule (*Dia mba(t)*)... 'If you should be...'), except for that for *céli Dé*, which opens with the first person plural *Dia mbem* (see below, p. 98).

⁴³ Joseph O Neill, 'The Rule of Ailbe of Emly', *Ériu* 3 (1907), 92-115.

⁴⁴ While O Neill states that 'the Middle-Irish plural *mugada*...is such a late form that it seems to point to some corruption in the text' (93), §39a is one of the twelve stanzas found in the two A group variants, but missing from the two later B group transcriptions. Of the two groups, O Neill notes

course of the work. There are certainly references to *céli Dé* in the other texts, but while they do appear to be specific in context, they do not appear to be exclusive to these specific contexts. Other forms – son(s) of life and ‘the monks of perfect life’ (*na manaigh fhoirbhthi*) – are also referred to in terms which mirror the use of *céli Dé*. It will be necessary to reproduce the relevant sections in order to illustrate this point and to provide a basis to attempt to answer whether these terms are intended as synonyms and, if so, what implications such synonymous reference may have to the understanding of the *céli Dé* as a formally recognised or identifiable entity.

Teagasg §§1-2 and *RCD* §§3-4:

Teagasg §1: ...*Ní neach fadesin dobereadh fiach aibhni lasna Céli Dé acht neach oile. Ni biodh iomthórmach fide aráin leo-samh isna sollamnuibh, acht do dhigh 7 d’anlann 7 do neithibh eile archena.*

§2: *Braiseach ni thesbhann don acnabhadh aráin gé thegmaidh ní dhi, déigh as anlann leo-samh í comuscthe do bainne, ní d’ím...*

§1: ‘...Among the *céli Dé*, no one administered castigation to himself, but received it from another. They admitted no increase of the bread ration on festivals, but only of drink and condiments and other things generally.’

§2: ‘If they happen to eat cabbage [which appears, in context, to mean the *céli Dé*], it does not subtract from the allowance of bread, because they regard it as a condiment when dressed with milk, not with butter...’

RCD §3: ...*Aran dino ni bi imthormach de lasna Celiuda De, cid isna sollamnaib, acht do dhig 7 andland 7 aliis rebus.*

§4: *Braissech dino, ni dígband in aran, cia thecma ni di, daig is andlann side leo-sam .i. ass fuirri 7 ni himm...*

§3: ‘...the *céli Dé* allow no increase of bread, even on the festivals, but only of drink and of condiment and of other things.’

‘the A group is much superior’ (92) and the term *mugada Dé* is common to both A group texts, indicating its presence in an earlier archetype.

§4: 'If there chance to be any kale, the quantity of bread is not diminished, because they regard kale as a condiment, and it is dressed with milk, not butter...'

Teagasg §3 and *RCD* §5:

Teagasg §3: *Mas mor an orda eisg theigeamhas docum an Cheili De, ní bfuighe ní as mó ina an eun-orda. Mas mion-oirdni bhias ann, ní gnath go bhfuighi se ní as mó ina a do dhiobh. Fa ceadaightheach doibh buinne losa no a dó nó a tri an tan do thegmadh. Ní ceaduigheadh Maol Ruain do Maol Díthreph a desgiopal millsen nó druchtán ge go ndendaois cáisi 7 marsin pirsuin don millsén. Acht nir crosta ort[h]a he o tét bláitheach ar a fud nó an gruth do níthi de marsin. Nir crosta buaidren, or as d'arán...*

§3: 'If the piece of fish that falls to the lot of a *céle Dé* is large, he may not have more than one piece: if they are small pieces, it is not customary that he should have more than two of them. They were permitted to have a head of leeks, or two or three, when there chanced to be any. Máel Ruain did not allow his disciple Máel Dithruib curds or whey, unless they were making cheese: in that case he was allowed a portion of curds. But if buttermilk was mixed with it throughout, this was not forbidden to them, nor the curds made therefrom likewise. *Buaidren* was not forbidden, because it is made from bread...'

RCD §5: *Tri buinde no .iiii. de luss. Millsen dino no druchtan ni caiter leo-som, sed fit chaisse de. Dognither imorro guthrach doib, acht ni theit binit ind, 7 ni aurchuill iarum. Bad aire dino ni aurchuill, fobith is aran som...*

§5: 'Three or four heads of leeks are allowed. Curds and whey are not eaten by them, but are used to make cheese. *Guthrach* is made for them, and is not forbidden, provided that no rennet is put into it. The reason why it is not forbidden may be that it counts as bread...'

Teagasg §3 and *RCD* §12 (cf. *Teagasg* §1):

Teagasg §3: Fiach aibne aca do gnathaighthi aca o mioncaisg go cingcidhis 7 a notluig stéil (.i. epiphania) ar ball .i. gan beith saor uaidi acht idir da caisg 7 idir da nodluig.

§3: 'It was their custom to administer castigation from Little Easter to Pentecost, and immediately after Star Christmas (i.e. Epiphany), that is, with no exemption therefrom save between the two Easters and the two Christmasses.'

RCD §12: Ni nech budessin dino dosbeir fiach n-aibne lasna Celiuda De sed alius 7 doberar o notlaic steill 7 o mhinchaisc cu notlaic mor iterum.

§12: 'With the *céli Dé*, castigation is not inflicted on a man by himself, but by some one else; and it is administered between Epiphany [and Easter], and between Low Sunday and Christmas Day following.'

Teagasg §7: Codladh a leinidh nír ghnath leo, 7 nír dhleisdeanach a bheith fa enneach, 7 nír bh'ail leis na Ceilibh De an t-edach do bhiodh iompa san la go madh e do bheith iompa san oidhche 'na ccodhladh.

§7: 'It was not their custom to sleep in a shirt and it was not permissible for anyone to lie in such, nor did the *céli Dé* desire to sleep in the same garment as they wore by day.'

RCD §30: Ni fosgní tra lasna Celiuda De cotlad i ndaurrthig. Issed dino fosgní leo-som .i. dias dib isin daurrthig co hiarmérgi 7 na .III. do chetul doib, 7 im nóin prainnit, 7 codlait co hoidche, 7 contuilet ó iarmérgi co matain. Dias eile dino o iaemérgi co matain, 7 cetul na .III. beos doib, 7 cotlaid iarum cu teirt 7 celebrat in teirt hi comain fria cach.

§30: 'It is not the practice of the *céli Dé* to sleep in the oratory. Their practice is that two of them should remain in the oratory until matins and recite the hundred and fifty Psalms: they dine in the afternoon and sleep until night, and sleep from matins until lauds. Two others then remain from matins until lauds and they also recite

the hundred and fifty Psalms and then sleep until tierce and say the office of tierce in company with all the brethren.’

RCD §31: *Is ed fosgni lasna Celiuda De .i. fer oc airrlegend tsoscela 7 riagla 7 fertai noem cen bit oc praindid, daíg na beth a menma isin praind sed hin Deo, 7 praindid o nóin in fer pritchas and, et in die singuli 7 rogantur de quod predicatum est, dus in and bis a memna in nocte an ann.*

§31: It is the practice of the *céli Dé* that while they are at dinner one of them reads aloud the Gospels and the Rules and the miracles of saints, to the end that their minds may be set on God, not on the meal: and the man who preaches at that time has his dinner in the afternoon and in the course of the [following] day they are questioned about the object of the sermon, to see whether their minds were occupied with it on the [previous] night or not.’

RCD §35 and *Mon. Tall.* §40:

RCD §35: *Ni dlegar dino do Chele Dé ól neich iar tabairt a fhuail.*

§35: ‘It is not lawful for a *céle Dé* to drink anything after urinating.’

Mon. Tall. §40: *Ni fogní lasna celiu dé ól neich iar tabirt do neoch a fuail. Is sed rochuala la maol dithruib ised fognid la siadal mac testa o aird móir ba diching aralúsad fer a muindtiri banne iar mbrith a fuail immach. Is sed dano forógeni la cumine fotai. Is sed dano fogní la clemens mac nuadat ma danetarredsom dagmenme no mesce tre ol cormæ no chingiti medæ inddand dondecmsid. Troscud darahesi aidchi arabarach statim.*

§40: ‘It is not the practice of the *céli Dé* for one to drink anything after urinating. This is what I have heard from Máel Dithruib. This was the practice of Siadal mac Testa of Ard Mor:- it was forbidden that anyone of his monastery should drink a drop after urinating. This had also been the practice of Cummene Fota; this is also the practice of Clemens mac Nuadat – if he were overtaken by jollity or tipsiness through drinking beer or a goblet of mead, when this

happened to him, he had to fast the next night immediately thereafter.'

Mon. Tall. §45: Ni fogní lasna celiu dé ni di nach ret do denam iar nespertain domnaich.

§45: 'It is not the practice of the *céli Dé* to do anything whatever after evensong on Saturday.'

While these instances do give the clear impression that the use of the term *céli Dé* implies a distinct 'order' of monks, it can be compared to other terms in the same texts:

Mon. Tall. §1 and Teagasg §32:

Mon. Tall. §1: Athlaoch bóí hi comaidecht meic bethad. Asbert niconfeddur cid fil do sirgabail na bláide 7 cantaci maire (.i. magnificat). Ní handsai ém ol sessomh .i. fer indorsa fri bun cruche ind molad ocus ind nemeli noferfad frisind rig immo saorad is foion iondas sin .fermaidni nemeli fri rig nime isind bláid immo ar sáorad. Imarchide iarom dano andíol dichoid de muldach muire ingini iar compert din spirad naob la tascc ind aingil .i. la haithisc Cethe cathbarr nogabtha forsind cetul hi fil molad dé 7 nemeli fris.

§1: 'A former layman was in company with a son of life. He said, "I do not understand your continual singing of the *Beati* and the Canticle of Mary (i.e. the *Magnificat*)." "This is not difficult to explain, truly", said the other. "As a man, being now at the foot of the gallows, would pour out praise and lamentation to the king, to gain his deliverance; in like manner we pour forth lamentation to the King of Heaven in the *Beati*, to gain our deliverance. And it is fitting also that the song which came from the head of the Virgin Mary, when she had conceived by the Holy Ghost at the angel's announcement, i.e. at the message:- that this should be set as a crown upon the chant which contains praise of God and lamentation addressed to Him.'"

Teagasg §32: Brat[h]air tuata do bhí a ccuideachta meic beathadh la ann adubhairt mar so: 'Ní feadar', ar se, 'créud an tarbha bhios duinn beith ag sir-radh na biaide 7 chantaige Muire 'na coimhideacht tar urnaighi oile.' 'Na biodh sin 'na cheisd ort no 'na chonntabhairt', ar an mac beathadh: 'Ionnamhail,' ar se, 'do bhiadh neach fá bhun croiche do chom a chrochda, an moladh do gheunadh se don righ do bhiadh da chrochadh 7 neimheile (.i. tuirsi) do geunadh se ris ag iarraidh a shaorta air, as a leithid sin do mholadh 7 do nemeile do nimid-ne re ri nime annsa bhiaid far sáoradh o phianaibh ifrinn. As iomchubhaidh,' ar se, 'na briat[h]ra do chuaidh as beul Muire inghine iar mbeith torrach an sbiorad naomh le failti an aingil do chur mar chathbharr tuas ar an urnaighi ina bfuil moladh De 7 neimeili (no tuirsi) ris da deagh-mhaisiughadh.

§32: 'One day a lay brother who was in the company of a son of life said to him: "I do not know," he said, "how it profits us to be perpetually saying the *Beati* and the Canticle of Mary along with it, more than other prayers." "Let not this cause you any doubt or difficulty," said the son of life. "Just as one at the foot of the gallows, ready to be hanged, might utter before the king who was about to hang him praise and lamentation, imploring him for deliverance – such is the praise and lamentation that we utter in the *Beati* to the King of Heaven for our deliverance from the pains of Hell. It is fitting," he said, "that the words which came from the lips of the Virgin Mary, when she conceived by the Holy Ghost at the angel's greeting, should be set as a crown upon the prayer wherein there is praise of God and also lamentation, as an embellishment."

Mon. Tall. §25:...ol máolruin. Ernitir dona macaib bethad na cridi scelæ maithi conescomriter doib a fochrici amail forfertis a cridiscelæ nahí sin.

§25: '...said Máel Ruain, 'Let the good desires of their hearts be granted to the sons of life, so that their rewards may be paid them according as their desires should bring about those results.'

Mon. Tall. §39: Fri saltair do géss nogebád mac bethad a salmu Issed asberedsom desuidiu atat tri foglaide oc mo fogail mo suil 7 mo tengæ 7 mo menme dosnaircelæ hule int saltair. Is sed immurgu asrubart maolrúaoín fri maoldithruib ní lugæ mbis ind menme hisin cheill dia gabail ind tsailm de memur indas cid fri saltair.

§39: 'A son of life should always recite his Psalms by the Psalter. This is what he used to say of this: there are three adversaries busy attacking me, my eye, my tongue and my thoughts; the Psalter restrains them all. Howbeit, this is what Máel Ruain had said to Máel Dithruib: the thought is no less occupied with the meaning when one is reciting the psalm by rote than it is when he is reading it with the Psalter.'

Mon. Tall. §61: Arale cendaigi taighigit hi tír muman ind amsir samdine dobered huadisi imchomrac ua mac bethad in tíre...

§61: 'There was a certain itinerant pedlar in Munster in the time of Samdan, who used to carry greetings from her to the sons of life in that country...'

Teagasg §37: As í figheall do niodh Muirceartach mac Olchobar airchinneach Cluana Fertá, dí bhiaid deug do radh ar son na trí ccaocat psalm, ar an adbar go raibhe a fhios aige gurb lia dona manchaib, nó don aos peannaide, aga mbíodh an bhiaid do mhebhair ina na psailm, 7 adeireadh se Magnificad a ndeireadh gach biaide. O mac beathadh fuair se an gnathugadh sin .i. Magnificad do radh ar deireadh gach biaide. Adubairt mar so: 'Obair do gentaoi do rígh', ar se 'as coir a beith ar na horadh 7 a beith breaghdha don taobh amuigh. As é oradh na hoibre ud do nímid-ne do Dhia,' ar se, 'an chaintic do labhair an sbiorad naomh tre bheul Mhuire.'

§37: 'The vigil which Muirchertach mac Olchobar, *airchinnech* of Clonfert, used to keep was to say the *Beati* twelve times in place of the hundred and fifty Psalms, because he knew that there were more of the monks or penitents who knew the *Beati* by heart than knew

the Psalms; and he used to say the *Magnificat* after each repetition of the *Beati*. He learned this practice of saying the *Magnificat* after the *Beati* from a son of life. He said: "it is right that the work that is made for a king should be gilded and adorned outwardly. And this is the gilding of the work that we fasten for God," said he, "even the canticle which is the Holy Spirit uttered through the mouth of Mary."

Mon. Tall. §13 and Teagasg §62:

Mon. Tall. §13: Luss bongar ind domnuch nó braisech nó ará fonither nó mérai nó cnoi bongar dia domnaich ní fogní leisim a cathim na ráod sin nach lasna firchlerchiu.

§13: 'A herb that is cut on Sunday, or kale that is cooked, or bread that is baked, or blackberries or nuts that are plucked on a Sunday, it is not his practice, nor the practice of true clerics, to eat these things.'

Teagasg §62: Nir ghnath leis na fir-chleircibh lus do beantaoi dia domnaigh no praiseach, da mbeanfuidhe, no aran, dá bhfuinfidhe ann, do chaitiomh fa mar do hoibrighead iad san domhnach.

§62: 'It was not the practice of the true churchmen to eat leeks or cabbages that were cut or bread that was baked on a Sunday, because labour was spent on them on a Sunday.'

Teagasg §75: Do chuir Elair uadha an mheid do ghlac se chuige d'áos na hanmchairde, mar nach diongnadaois a ndícheall 7 go cceildis cuid da bpeacaibh san fhaoisidin. Ní fuilngeadh se en-duine do theacht chuige do chom a anmchairdeasa do ghabhail: gidheadh do fhuilngeadh se 7 do mholadh sé don aos pennaide dul d'fhiafraighidh neith fa chúis a n-anmann don aos fhoibhthi .i. na manaigh fhoirbhthi aga mbiodh eolas ar theagusg do thabhairt doibh fa chuis a n-anmann: acht ní ghaibheadh se chuige féin do chom comhairle do thabhairt doibh daoine ar bith aga measfadh se anmchara do beith aca fein dobheuradh comhairle dhoibh.

§75: 'Elair dismissed all that he had accepted under his spiritual direction, because they would not do their best, and because they concealed part of their sins in confession. He would not suffer anyone to come to him to receive spiritual direction: however, he did suffer and encourage penitents to go and question men of perfect life for their souls' sake – that is, monks of perfect life, who had experience in giving them instruction for their souls' sake. But he did not himself accept, with a view to have confessors of their own who might give them counsel.'

The degree to which these texts are interdependent makes it clear that, generally, they cannot be used as independent witnesses, but here these textual comparisons clearly demonstrate that the terms found in these extant texts were used in the archetype which provided the common source. While, as may be anticipated, there is a monopoly of usage of the term *céli Dé* in RCD, the term *mac / meic bethad* is used as frequently in *Teagasg* as *céli Dé* (§§32 (x2), 37 and §§1, 3, 7 respectively); while in *Mon. Tall.*, *mac bethad* is indeed used more frequently (§§1, 25, 39, 61) than *céli Dé* (§§40, 45). Although there is no reproduction of the passage in the other texts to allow confirmation, the use of the term *na manaigh foirbhthi* in §75 of *Teagasg* can be reasonably accepted to have been used in the archetype (see p. 89, n. 48).⁴⁵

The context of the use of *mac bethad* in *Mon. Tall.* would appear to be suggestive. Many of the sections in *Mon. Tall.* are concerned with the recitation of the *Beati* and the Canticle of Mary,⁴⁶ indicating their significance to the community of Tallaght – a significance explained by a 'son of life' in §1 of *Mon. Tall.* and §32

⁴⁵ There is also the instance of *firclerchiu / na fir chleircibh* in *Mon. Tall.* §13 and *Teagasg* §62, but it is used in such a context that it cannot be convincingly argued that there was any significance attached to the description beyond the straightforward exhortation that devout ecclesiastics should not eat any food prepared or gathered on a Sunday.

of *Teagasg*. In §37 of *Mon. Tall.* Muirchertach mac Olchobar was stated to 'have learned this practice of saying the *Magnificat* after the *Beati* from a son of life.' Similarly, §39 of *Mon. Tall.* states that 'a son of life should always recite his Psalms by the Psalter.' These examples of the usage of *mac bethad* could be considered to indicate that the term was synonymous with *céle Dé*, even if, as in the instance cited in §39, the guideline was stated to differ from the practice of Máel Ruain.⁴⁷ If this could be argued to be the case, what then of the understanding that the *céli Dé* were some form of religious order or reform movement who were known by this name?

The term *mac bethad* is also found in the 'Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations' and again, once, in *Félire Óengusso*. §23 of these commutations relates, in the case of penitents close to death, that a year of penance may be commuted to the recitation of 365 *pater nosters* while holding the stance of a cross-vigil and the recitation of the *Beati* while prostrate on the ground, concluding:

*Patraicc timmarnai in figill-si 7 colum cille 7 maidocc fernæ 7 molacca mend
7 brendab moccu altæ 7 colum mac craim 7 mochamoc insi celtra 7 enna airni
timarnasat cethri primsuid herenn gres fria tu cach mac bethad adcobra nem
.i. hua minadain 7 cumaine fota 7 muirdiu bur 7 mocolmoc mac commain a
haraind.*

'Patrick has recommended this vigil and Colum Cille (d. 597) and Maedoc of Ferns (d. 626) and Molacca Menn and Brénainn moccu Altae (d. c. 580) and Colum mac Crimthain (d. c. 550) and Mocholmóc of Inis Celtra (d. 549) and Énda of Aran. The four chief sages of Ireland, that is Ua Minadan and Cumaine Fota (d. 662) and Murdebar and Mocholmóc mac Cumain (d. 751) from Aran,

⁴⁶ §§1, 2, 5, 8, 28, 30, 31, 33, 47 and 83. There are still further sections concerned with the recitation of the 'Three Fifties' of the Psalms and the *Pater Noster*.

⁴⁷ Binchy (in 'The Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations', *Ériu* 19 (1962), 47-72) states that 'In *Mon. Tall.* §1, etc., *mac bethad* apparently means a member of a 'Culdee' community. But in other texts it is used of any professed religious' (notes for §24, p. 71). Such perplexity is understandable, but the observation seems to negate the view that the *céli Dé* constituted a reform movement, 'a sharp reaction against the laxity and corruption of the older monastic federations...' (*ibid.*, 65).

have recommended its constant practice to every son of life who desires to obtain heaven.'⁴⁸

The individual to whom *FO* is ascribed, Óengus ua Óibleáin, was, according to the prose Preface subsequently added to the work, a member of the community of Tallaght during Máel Ruain's abbacy. Lines 437-8 in the Epilogue of the *félire* state:

Anim cech maicc bethad
is truit ro nóebad
 'The soul of every son of life
 has been sanctified through you.'

This is the sole instance of the use of *mac bethad*, but it is still greater than the use of *céli Dé*, which is wholly absent in this form. Nonetheless, there are four references to being a *céle* of Christ. Lines 13-14 of the Epilogue refers to *Húasalathraing, fáithi, do Chríst cíapter céli...* - 'Patriarchs, prophets, though they were *céli* of Christ...'; otherwise, these references are to the compiler himself: lines 307 and 426 of the Epilogue both state *á Chríst dianda chéle* - 'O Christ, whose *céle* I am'; while the Epilogue closes with the plea (lines 553-4),

Rom-sóerae, á Íssu,
ol is duit am céle.
 'May you save me, Jesus,
 for I am a *céle* of yours'.

These four instances of, essentially, '*céle Chríst*', like *céle Maic Maire* in the 'Rule of Comgall', could, perhaps, be argued to be synonyms for *céli Dé*, but, if so, then the important point must be that they indicate a singular lack of consistent use of the form expected if *céli Dé* itself indicated the 'formal' adherence to a movement or order, however loosely defined. This is the more pointed in a work ascribed to an individual reputed to have been one of the community of Tallaght. Even so, however, any argument that '*céle Chríst*' could be a synonym for *céli Dé* would, in this

⁴⁸ The translation is that of Binchy, *ibid.*, 63, 65.

context, appear weak and it would seem that the sense of its use was rather to indicate the compiler's claims to be a devout follower of Christian teaching.

There are further terms used in a similar context in *FO*: lines 77 and 141 of the Prologue refer to *miled Íssu* – ‘soldiers of Jesus’ – and *thúaith Dé* – ‘people of God’ – respectively; the stanza commemorating Cóemgan of Glendalough under 3 June, too, names him explicitly as *Mil Críst*; while line 396 of the Epilogue refers to *thúaith Íssu*. These are, clearly, variations of a theme and both *thúaith Dé* and *thúaith Íssu* would seem, simply, to denote Christians generally; however, *miled Íssu* and *Mil Críst* are hibernicized forms of the Latin *miles Christi*, the significance of which will be discussed below. Finally, in an apparent variation of *mac bethad*, lines 428 and 429 of the Epilogue refer to *macc lére* – ‘son of piety’.

The use of the term *mac bethad* is not restricted to the texts connected with Tallaght, however - *Apgitir Chrábaid* states:

[§22] *Cethoir trebairi inda mac mbethad .i. credbud inda tol, omun inda pian, serc inna foehaide, cretem inda fochraice. Mani credbatis inna tola, ní lecfitis. Mani áigtis inda píana, ní fomnibtis. Mani cartis inna fochaidi, ní fudémtais. Mani cretis inda fochraici, ní ricfitis.*

‘The four safeguards of the sons of life: erosion of the desires, fear of the torments, love of the tribulations, belief in the rewards. If the desires were not made to wither, they would not be abandoned. If the torments were not feared, they would not be heeded. If the tribulations were not loved, they would not be endured. If there were no belief in the rewards, they would not be attained.’

[§30] *Inna teora tonna tiagde tar duine i mbathis, tre fretech fris-toing indib .i. fris-toing don domun cona adbchlossaib; fris-toing do demun cona inntledaib; fris-toing do tholaib colla. Is ed in so immefolngai duine dend-í bes mac báis combi mac bethad, dend-í bes mac dorchai combi mac solse.*

‘The three waves that pass over a person in baptism, in them he makes three renunciations: he renounces the world with its pomps; he renounces the devil

with its snares; he renounces the lusts of the flesh. This it is that causes a person to be a son of life from being a son of death [and] to be a son of light from being a son of darkness.'

Here, clearly, there is no sense of *mac bethad* indicating an individual who was concerned with monastic reform – nor, even, is it certain that 'the four safeguards of the sons of life' were necessarily thought of as belonging to a specifically monastic context – §30 appears to relate to a 'son of life' in the broadest terms of one who upholds his baptismal vows. This looseness in definition again takes some added relevance to the current discussion when it is remembered that the *Apgitir Chrábaid* itself was originally included in *Mon. Tall.*,⁴⁹ making it far from clear whether the compilers of the textual archetype, dateable 831x40, placed any great importance on the term. Since the usage of *meic bethad* is related in the same terms as the usage of *céli Dé*, the same uncertainty must arise about the significance of the use of the term *céli Dé* in the Tallaght documents. If it cannot be demonstrated from the texts associated with the community of Tallaght, and the practices of Máel Rúain they relate, that the term *céli Dé* had any formal or acknowledged or particular associations, or even monopoly of usage, why then should it be considered that the *céli Dé* were a reform movement, or practitioners of a more austere form of asceticism? At the broadest level, both *céli Dé* and *meic bethad* could be interpreted to simply mean devout and conscientious Christians.

Yet such a wholly informal sense for *céli Dé* does appear to be at variance with other contemporary evidence. From the evidence of 'Fothad's Rule', it would appear accepted that there was some formal difference between an ordinary monk and a *céle Dé*, at least by the compiler; however, there is not the least indication of

what he considered that difference to be. The duties of the *céle Dé* outlined in the Rule would have been, one would think, equally applicable to any individual in any coenobitic community of the time. 'Fothad's Rule' is the only contemporary text to provide any indication that the *céli Dé* differed in some regard from ordinary monks, but this suggestion exists only because of the separately headed sections, not because of any indication in the extremely limited content of the stanzas. This fundamental lack of detail, frustratingly, makes 'Fothad's Rule' an uncertain witness in this respect and provides no clear evidence of what was meant by the term *céli Dé* at this time.

The variety of terms used in contemporary texts, including those with acknowledged Tallaght connections, is bewildering and difficult to explain if there had been a reform movement or an 'order' specifically called *céli Dé*. It has already been briefly alluded to that, despite the association of Tallaght with the *céli Dé*, Máel Ruain, whom Binchy believed was their founder and 'patron saint', is nowhere referred to as *céle Dé*. However, the one unequivocal reference to Máel Ruain – in his obit – is as a 'soldier of Christ'.⁵⁰ The prevalent consensus that the *céli Dé* had emerged as reformers to the degeneracy of the church in the eighth century has undoubtedly camouflaged the particular usage of this term *miles Christi* in earlier sources. There are no fewer than thirteen instances of the term in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*,⁵¹ two instances in *AU*, including that of Máel Ruain,⁵² and one instance in

⁴⁹ It follows §80 in the text of *Mon. Tall.* in RIA MS 1227, but while notice of its inclusion was made by Gwynn and Purton, it was omitted from their published edition.

⁵⁰ *AU* 792.1: *Mael Ruain Tamlachtaí, Aidhain Rathain, Aedhan h. Con Cumbu, episcopi 7 milites Christi in pace dormierunt.*

⁵¹ There are twelve specific instances and one inferred instance. The latter instance, in II 31, calls Colum Cille's companions 'fellow-soldiers' – *pro quo commilitiones sanctum mesti rogitant ut oraret*. The twelve specific instances are: Second preface – *Christi militi spiritu revelante sancto*; I 2 – *religioso sene praespitero Christi milite Oisseneo*; I 20 – *Mailodramus nomine Christi miles*; I 32 – *longaque in brevi Christianae tempora militae complentes*; I 36 – *prespiter Findehanus, Christi miles*; I 40 – *Christique commilitones*; I 43 – *Lugbeus, Christi miles*; I 49 – *Christi miles Finanus nomine, qui uitam multis anchoriticam*; II 4 – *Silnamus Christi miles sancti legatus*

*AU of miles Dei.*⁵³ Of the instances of use in *VC*, three are priests and soldiers of Christ, one an anchorite and soldier of Christ and one, in III 7, a soldier of Christ ‘who built a little monastery for himself.’ It has been noted, too (above, pp.66-7), that the compiler of *Félire Óengusso* provided the terms *mílid Íssu* (Prologue, l. 77) and, more significantly, *Míl Críst* (under 3 June). These two terms, the latter particularly, as hibernicized forms of *miles Christi*. The term *céli Dé*, therefore, would appear to be one of several, including ‘*céli Críst*’, *céli maic Maire* and *Míl Críst*, which were used as vernacular renditions of *miles Christi* and *miles Dei*. While *miles Christi* is attested to from at least the seventh century, the emergence of the term *céli Dé* by the middle of the eighth century occurred during a period which saw an increasing emergence of vernacular ecclesiastical texts and of vernacular terms used for ecclesiastical positions (see chapter 5). Consequently, any attempt to understand what was meant by the term *céli Dé* through an examination of the Irish socio-legal concept of *céilsine* would be largely fruitless, as it presupposes that the term was Irish in its original construction.

The description of *miles Christi* to an individual certainly appears to denote a reputation for particular piety, but it could also be argued, given its martial image, to reflect individuals perhaps concerned with reform. Also, if the term *céli Dé* was a vernacular rendition of an epithet previously applied to individuals, in what way could it be applied to communities?

The community of Tallaght has the best claim to be called a community of *céli Dé* at this period, even although they, and those most influenced by them, referred to themselves as *meic bethad* at least as frequently as *céli Dé* in their own

Columbae; II 10 – *et deinceps Christianae usque in exitum militae mancipandus*; II 42 – *Cormacus, Christi miles*; and III 7 – *Alium Christi scio militem qui sibi in eodem territorio in quo et ego commanebam monasteriolum construxit, nomine Diormitium.*

⁵² The other entry is *AU 729.1: Eicbericht, Christi miles, in ii Pasca die pausat.*

writings. These writings allow a better insight into this community than any other and it is for this reason it is difficult even to suggest that this community provided a blueprint for those later communities, established within existing communities, to whom the name *céli Dé* appears to have been universally appended and who appear to have been principally concerned with the sick and the poor. The poor, by contrast, are mentioned very rarely in *Mon. Tall.*:

§3. *A forbí tra dano for lortaid na muindtíre bís id choimidecht. ised is choir laissom di thabairt donda bochtaib ar nistá leó leth docoiset do chuincid neich. acht is dual duitsiu cena narrabae let sentaisc de dia de na mbocht de chrochaib saildi 7 di rusccaib imma 7 reliqua.*

‘Whatever remains after the monks that live under you are satisfied, this he thinks it right to give to the poor, for they have nowhere that they can go to beg anything. But it is meet, even if you have no old leavings, [to feed] the poor with fitches of bacon and firkins of butter and so on.’

§35. *Muin doberthar o thuatib is faitciu laissom a nemfairitiu. Arisfemat araile do fodail leusom do bochtain iaram fobithin arna fodlat ind tuati do bochtaib. Ata lasna tuati iarum beith lór dóib do ascnam nime acht dorotat ní dona hanchairtib 7 bidsom iarum fria toil. Is ferr a nemgabail iarum acht onti bass formbthi nóti addaim anmcartine.*

‘Gifts (?) that are given by the laity, he is careful not to accept. Some accept such things to be distributed by them to the poor thereafter because the laity do not distribute to the poor. The consequence is that the laity deem it enough to win a place in Heaven, if they have given something to their confessors and after that they think it will be at their pleasure. It is better then not to accept anything, save from one that is holy, or from one who submits to spiritual direction.’

⁵³ *AU738.2: Tole, episcopus Cluana Iraid, dignus Dei miles, pausat.*

§57: *Ni haurcul laisim dano cid arfaomtar ní o lex áos 7 a tabirt detsiu iarum do bochtaib neich forbé lortid do muindtir de fobithin maith leisim bess ni tabrait ní de dena bochtaib.*

‘He considers it not unlawful that somewhat should be accepted from idle folk, and that you should afterwards give to the poor anything that is left of it when your own monks are satisfied, because if it is in the hands of the idle, they give none of it to the poor.’

It is clear from these few passages from *Mon. Tall.* that provision for the poor carried no great priority for Máel Rúain and was far from the central concern to his community. This is all the more surprising as provision for the poor was generally considered an important aspect of the duties of the church.⁵⁴ There is little evidence here to believe the Tallaght community to have been the forerunner of those *céli Dé* communities evident from the middle of the tenth century.

So what, in the final analysis, can be said about what was understood by the term *céli Dé* when it emerged in contemporary sources between the mid-eighth and mid-ninth centuries? The origin of the term appears to have been a vernacular rendition of *miles Christi* and, as such, does not derive from a formal, legal concept of *céilsine* with God. Those ecclesiastics to whom the term *miles Christi*, and, presumably, therefore, *céli Dé*, was applied certainly appear to have numbered among the intellectual and spiritual elite, however: one that included the foremost ecclesiastical minds of their day. These were men well versed in Scripture and who appeared to devote much time to exegesis within the bounds of the rigorous discipline they maintained and were most commonly described as scribes, bishops and anchorites in their obituary notices. The term appears as an honorific to denote a devout individual who devoted his life to teaching, or scribal activity or otherwise

advance the glorification of God and the honour of the church. Yet while it is clear that individuals could thus be respected at the end of their lives and revered as a devout soldier of Christ, it is clear, too, that particular communities – Tallaght under Máel Ruain, Finglas under Dublitir, Elair’s new foundation at Ros Cré, Terryglas under Máel Dithruib and very likely others – could apparently be collectively considered *céli Dé*. As it is clear from the Tallaght documents themselves, however, the appellation *céli Dé* was far from being the sole, or even the prevalent, term used. It cannot be claimed, therefore, that these communities formed a cohesive movement – there are several instances in the Tallaght texts, particularly *Mon. Tall.*, where different practices in regard to particular circumstances are reported in some of these communities – who were known as *céli Dé*. The degree to which there were reports of different practices in *Mon. Tall.*, particularly, makes this text largely anecdotal in nature, providing an indication of ‘good practice’, rather than providing, in any sense, a ‘Rule’. Clearly, therefore, these communities maintained and followed their own practices and did not constitute an ‘order’, however loosely defined.

Equally clearly, however, these communities were regarded in some sense as distinct from the majority of ecclesiastic foundations. This has led to the belief that the *céli Dé* were a reform movement emerging in reaction to a, necessarily, degenerate and corrupt clergy. This understanding will be discussed in detail in chapter 4, but, for the meantime, it will have to suffice to say that it is unwarranted, but has given rise to a belief that the *céli Dé* represented a more severe form of asceticism or were clerics of stricter observance. What, rather, appears to differentiate these communities from others was not severity of discipline, but, it is suggested here, that once they had entered the community, the monks rarely, if ever,

⁵⁴ The law text *Córus Bescnai*, for example, requires alms from the laity to feed the poor (*CIH* 524. 23-4).

left its confines,⁵⁵ that the individual became, as the heading to the section in the LB variant of 'Fothad's Rule' (below, pp. 97ff) puts it, 'the *céle Dé* or the cleric of the enclosure' (*Do celiu Dé nó di clérech Réclesa*). It would appear to have been this form of 'white martyrdom'⁵⁶ which entitled the community to be regarded as *céli Dé*, *meic bethad*, *céli macc Maire*, *meic lére*, *mílid Íssu* or any of the other terms noted to have been current in contemporary texts. This is not to suggest that they were any stricter in their discipline or more devout in their observance, but that they simply devoted their entire existence to the contemplation and devotion of God. Nor, indeed, is it to suggest that the members of these communities were prohibited from leaving their confines – monks travelling abroad are explicitly mentioned in §6 of *Mon. Tall.* and Dublitr of Finglas presided over the *congressio senodorum* at Tara in 780 (see chapter 5) – but it may have been that, on these occasions, it was the elders of the community abroad on specific business of the community. Similarly, the consideration that the basic profile of the *céli Dé* emerged in the eighth century cannot be maintained, although scholarly consensus in this respect is already changing.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ This may account for the 'year of purification' alluded to in *FO* and *Mon. Tall.* and undergone by those who wished to join the community. This may have allowed the individual an opportunity to experience such withdrawal before becoming full members of the community. §2 of *Mon. Tall.* also states 'As for those who came to converse with him [? Máel Ruain], it is not his usage to ask them for news, but to see that they profit in those matters only for which they came. Because it might harass and disturb the mind of him to whom it was told'. It is also clear from *Mon. Tall.*, however, that some, at least, of Máel Ruain's community could leave the confines of the community on occasion: the oft-quoted stanza on drinking (§6) indicates that although Máel Ruain did not allow the drinking of beer in Tallaght and, 'When his monks used to go anywhere else, they used not to drink a drop of beer in Tir Cualann, whomsoever they might meet. However, when they went a long distance, in that case they were allowed to drink.' It is clear, therefore, from this that, on occasion, members of these communities did travel abroad, but, if the hypothesis that the monks in *céli Dé* communities rarely, if ever, left the confines of the monastery is correct, then it may be surmised that those who did travel did so on community business and were perhaps the elders of the community.

⁵⁶ For the various forms of martyrdom in early medieval Ireland, see Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', in D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (edd.), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, Cambridge, 1982, 21-46.

⁵⁷ Colmán Etchingham, for example, has stated that the '*Céli Dé* of the Tallaght memoir were advocates and practitioners of cenobitism which, however, was combined with an ideology of

These '*céli Dé*' communities did not constitute a movement, nor, in any sense, should they be considered an 'order'. The appellation *céli Dé*, and its anglicised form 'Culdee', has been exclusively applied to them and has been partly responsible for the impression of an 'order' of reformers. The appellation appears to have had no specific significance and was one of many used in contemporary writings. The exclusive use of *céli Dé* by modern scholars may be due to its adoption, to judge by the frequent latinisation of the term, by those later 'communities within communities' concerned with the sick and the poor, but which have no apparent connection to the '*céli Dé*' during the period under study. While it can be seen that these '*céli Dé*' communities no more constituted a movement any more than the church itself can be considered a movement, they were a part of a development of the church as a whole which had visible roots by the end of the seventh century. It remains to be seen, therefore, to what extent those individuals described as *miles Christi* and who founded or developed these *céli Dé* communities evident in the eighth and ninth centuries may be regarded as reformers.

anchoritic or eremitic mortification. Such a combination...is attested in sources from as early as the seventh century.' *Church Organisation*, 354.

The primary source material deriving from the *céli Dé*

As may be expected from the late eighth / early ninth centuries, marked by the prevalence of annalistic references to 'scribes and anchorites', there are many ecclesiastic texts which survive, albeit in much later transcriptions, which were originally compiled in this period. Not all of these, however, should be considered to be *céli Dé* in origin or have *céli Dé* connections; but there are devotional or liturgical texts – the *Félire Óengusso* (FO),¹ the *Martyrology of Tallaght* (T)² and the 'Stowe Missal'³ – which are accepted to have been compiled in the scriptorium at Tallaght, and disciplinary works – the Old Irish Penitential⁴ and the 'Old Irish Table of

¹ Stokes (ed.), *Félire Óengusso Céili Dé*. Stokes suggested FO survives in ten extant MSS: (1) Brussels Bibliothèque Royale MS 5100-4, folios 94a-119b. This is a seventeenth century text, written almost wholly in the hand of Michael Ó Cléirigh, one of the Four Masters. (2) National Library of Ireland MS, G. 10, which dates c. fifteenth century. (3) British Museum MS, Egerton 88, dating to the second half of the sixteenth century. (4) MS A7, ff 5-48d in the Franciscan library at Killiney. This fifteenth century text is heavily glossed and has additional saints to the original text of FO, indicated by the formula *in hoc die*. (5) Trinity College, Dublin, MS H.3.18. Only 112 quatrains of FO are recorded in this MS. (6) Laud 610. This MS, in its extant form, was transcribed in 1453 from the *Saltair Caisil* and other Mss. FO is contained in folios 59-75. (7) *Lebar Brecc*. A fourteenth century compilation, FO is contained within ff 75-106. Stokes, however (xvii), records 'though oldest in date of all the MSS, it deviates most from the archetype.' (8) Royal Irish Academy MS 23.P.3, transcribed in 1467. The prose preface, Prologue and quatrains for May, Sept. and Dec. are missing. (9) Rawlinson B505. An early fifteenth century parchment MS, FO is contained in 211-220. Stokes (xxi) considered that 'though prose-preface, prologue and epilogue are missing, this copy is, as far as it goes, by far the best that has come down to us.' (10) Rawlinson B512. A parchment MS written in various hands of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The prose-preface to FO begins at 59.a.1 and the text begins at 53b, but contains only 60 lines. 54a-56b contains the Epilogue and 57a-64a contains notes on the main text of FO, which is not contained within the MS. One of the most recent commentators on FO, however, adds a further text unknown to Stokes, National Library of Ireland MS G.169, but discounts two of Stokes' texts as they are glossaries containing excerpts of FO, rather than true texts: see Marc Schneiders, 'Pagan Past and Christian Present' in 'Félire Óengusso', in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Doris Edel, Dublin, 1995, pp. 157-69.

² *The Martyrology of Tallaght*, edited by R.I. Best and H.J. Lawlor, HBS 68, London, 1931. T survives in two extant MSS: the Book of Leinster (L) 355 fol.a-365 fol. c and Brussels Bibl. Roy. 5100-4 folios 182-97v (Br). For the former, see *The Book of Leinster*, vi, edited by Anne O'Sullivan, Dublin, 1983, pp. 1596-1648. The periods 30 January-11 March, 20 May-31 July and 1 November-16 December are missing from L, but the loss, with the exception of 1 Nov-16 Dec, can be recovered from Br.

³ *The Stowe Missal*, edited by G.F. Warner, HBS 32, London, 1906.

⁴ E.J. Gwynn, 'An Irish Penitential', *Ériu* 7 (1914), 121-95. The only surviving copy of the text is contained in RIA MS 1227, formerly the 'Tallaght codex' RIA MS 3 B 23.

Penitential Commutations'⁵ – which cannot, with any certainty, be attributed to any specific scriptorium, but which have clear *céli Dé* connections. Also of primary importance, from the perspective of the current study, are the inter-related texts *Teagasg Maoil Ruain*,⁶ *Riagail na Celed nDé (RCD)*,⁷ the text containing notes on the customs of Tallaght which has subsequently become known as the *Monastery of Tallaght (Mon. Tall.)*;⁸ and the Rule which has been variously ascribed to Mochuta of Rathen and Lismore (d. 636) and to Fothad *na Canóine* (d. 819).⁹ These particular texts have demonstrable *céli Dé* connections – *Teagasg*, *RCD* and *Mon. Tall.* are clearly concerned with *céli Dé* practice, while the internal context of Fothad's / Mochuta's Rule indicates that it was compiled by a *céle Dé* (below, p. 98). The archetype which provides the common source for the extant variants *Teagasg*, *RCD* and *Mon. Tall.*, therefore, which is reflected to some degree in a textual comparison, can be seen to have clear and unequivocal *céli Dé* origins and, consequently, provide some insight into how the *céli Dé* viewed ecclesiastical organisation. As will be indicated in the subsequent two chapters, all of these texts will emerge as crucial to our understanding of the wider concerns of the *céli Dé*.

Reeves called *Riagail na Celed nDé* the 'Prose Rule of the Céli Dé' in order to distinguish it from that section on the *céli Dé* contained within Fothad's / Mochuta's Rule he cited in isolation and called the 'Metrical Rule of the Céli Dé'.¹⁰ Correspondingly, the 'Prose Rule' is often regarded as a prose version of the 'Metrical Rule', even although there is no direct equation between the two. There is,

⁵ D.A. Binchy, 'The Old-Irish Table of Penitential Commutations', *Ériu* 19 (1962), 47-74. This tract is found in the MSS Rawlinson B 512 and in RIA 1227, with the latter providing the fuller text and the basis for Binchy's edition.

⁶ E.J. Gwynn, 'The Rule of Tallaght', *Hermathena* 44 2nd Supplementary volume (1927), 2-63. *Teagasg Maoil Ruain* survives only in a single text, G. 36, in the Franciscan library in Dublin, written in the first half of the seventeenth century.

⁷ Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 84-97; Gwynn, 'The Rule of Tallaght', 64-87. The extant text is preserved solely in *Lebar Brecc*, folios 9v-12v.

⁸ E.J. Gwynn and W.J. Purton, 'The Monastery of Tallaght,' *PRIA* 29 C (1911), 115-79.

⁹ The text survives in six MSS – B.M. Addit. 30512, fol. 20 a 1; H 1 11, TCD, fol. 125v; *Lebar Brecc*, p 261 a 1, which carries the heading *Incipit Regla Mochuata Rathin*; RIA 23 N 10, which carries the heading *Fothad na Canóine .cc. hanc regulam*; vol. 28 of the Murphy Collection in Maynooth Library; and *Yellow Book of Lecan*, H 2 16, TCD. See also n. 63, p. 98, below.

¹⁰ Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 82-97.

on the other hand, a clearer and much more direct textual relationship between *Riagail na Celed nDé*, *Teagasg Maoil Ruain* and the *Monastery of Tallaght*. The final sections of *Riagail na Celed nDé*, that is §§55-65, have been incorporated from other texts: §§ 55-56 from the Rule of Colum Cille, while §§57-65 also correspond to parts of *Riagail Phátraic*.

As already noted briefly in the preceding chapter, the basis for the understanding that the *céli Dé* constituted some form of religious 'order' essentially appears to stem from the survival of the *Riagail na Celed nDé*. This text is clearly a composite work and consists of sixty-three sections, the subject matter of which concerns the following:

§1: 'The *Beati* of the refectory is sung standing and thereafter the *Magnificat* and *Ego vero* and other canticles...'

§§2-6: concerned with various aspects and prohibitions of diet.

§7: a note to lay additional penance – although without specific indication – on cooks, scullions and milkers who spill the produce.

§§8-11: again concerned with various aspects of diet.

§12: a prohibition upon self-castigation; the outline of periods within which castigation was permissible.

§13: an outline of the progressive involvement of newcomers in the midnight mass at Easter over their first seven years in the community.

§14: an outline of the specific stances to be adopted while reciting the *Pater Noster*, called the 'Shrine of Piety' and the 'Corselet of Devotion.'

§15: the stipulation that mass must be attended on Thursday if missed on Sunday.

§§16-18: concerned with aspects of confession.

§19: diet.

§20: the stipulation that the *Beati* is to be sung while washing feet.

§21: the stipulation that only baptismal names are to be used at the celebration of vespers.

§§22-3: relate aspects concerned with the recitation of Psalms.

- §§24-5: matters of diet.
- §26: a prohibition on holding mass by priests who have abandoned their orders.
- §27: the stipulation that the effect on the keeping of the evening vigil is dependent upon the day of the week upon which a chief festival falls.
- §§28-9: *anmchairdine* and its problems.
- §30: a prohibition upon *céli Dé* sleeping in the oratory and an outline of the correct times to sleep and to recite the Psalms.
- §31: relates the practice for *céli Dé* to have religious works read to them while eating.
- §32: an outline of the proper penance for missing mass.
- §33: a prohibition against drinking at particular times of the day.
- §34: an outline of the proper penance for anger towards a servant.
- §35: a prohibition against a *céle Dé* drinking after urinating.
- §36: a notice that Máel Rúain's community fasts on half rations once a month.
- §37: concerned with the proper actions and sanctions regarding *anmchairdine*.
- §38: a list of the four most heinous acts for which, in Ireland, no penance could ever be done.
- §39: relates opinions on diet.
- §40: relates the manner in which diluted whey or buttermilk ought to be drunk.
- §41: an outline of the proper penance for eating outwith the proper time.
- §42: an assertion that lavatories are inhabited by demons and of the necessity for making the sign of the Cross within them.
- §43: a prohibition upon the keeping of food in the same house as a sick man or eating in the company of the dead.
- §44: an anecdote concerning Máel Rúain's disapproval of *peregrinni*.
- §45: an affirmation that posthumous piety on behalf of the dead benefits the soul of the deceased.
- §46: directions in regard of reducing rations in order to practice abstinence.
- §47: a prohibition upon bathing in polluted water.
- §48: a notice that giving half of one's rations to God serves in lieu of a fast.
- §49: a stipulation that the unborn child of a woman near to death should be named Flann or Cellach.

§50: a notice that menstruating nuns are to be excused vigils and prohibited from attending mass.

§51: a prohibition upon eating food transported on a Sunday.

§52: a notice that castigation to be undertaken on a Sunday should be administered at nones on Saturday.

§53: a notice that the tonsuring of the head was to be undertaken once a month, on a Thursday.

§54: relates the collection of tithes.

§§55-6: sections taken from 'The Rule of Columcille'.

[§55: an exhortation to avoid idleness and an indication of appropriate labours.

§56: an exhortation to eat only when hungry, sleep only when tired and speak only when necessary.]

§§57-65: sections taken from *Ríagail Phátraic* (see below, pp. 87, 89).

It can be seen that the greatest single concern within *Ríagail na Celed nDé* was diet, with which twenty-one of these fifty-seven sections were concerned in some aspect or other. The other principal topics were concerned with prohibition, for whatever reason, upon individuals holding or receiving mass; with outlining appropriate or necessary occasions for reciting the *Pater Noster* or the 'Three Fifties' of the Psalms; and relating the trials and tribulations of the responsibilities of 'soul-friendship' to another. Several of the sections are anecdotal in nature and, other than the title appended to it, there is little apparent reason to consider the text to be a 'rule' at all. Indeed, several of the topics are concerned with pastoral, rather than ascetic, themes. §§26 and 54, particularly, are unexpected in a text considered to have been a rule, however loosely defined, compiled for the adherence of what has been believed to be an ascetic reform movement. Those sections appended to the text from *Ríagail Phátraic* are profoundly concerned with pastoral provision, resulting in a text that, rather than one exclusively concerned with ascetic contemplation, was rather more concerned with ecclesiastical matters as a whole, even if in the fragmentary and disjointed manner which resulted from its compilation as a composite text. Rather

than a 'rule' for the 'céli Dé', this text appears instead an amalgam of anecdotes and practices touching upon the full spectrum of ecclesiastical concerns.

Reeves dated *Riagail na Celed nDé* to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, but this was revised by Strachan, on the basis of extensive linguistic analysis, to being 'probably of the ninth century.'¹¹ These interdependent texts would appear, from internal evidence, to derive in part from a source dating to the first half of the ninth century, although they do not evidently share the same exemplar suggesting the original was copied and recopied.¹² E.J. Gwynn also stated that *Riagail na Celed nDé* was 'originally written perhaps in the ninth century',¹³ but went on to indicate that the extant form of the text must be an abbreviated and generalised form of this original (see below, pp. 83-90). The extant text is preserved solely in *Lebar Brecc*, folios 9v-12v, and carries the heading *Incipit Riagail na Celed nDe o Moelruain cecinit*.

It appears to have been this heading which has introduced and preserved the understanding of this amorphous compilation as a 'rule', reinforcing the acceptance of the *céli Dé* as an 'order'. The accreditation to Máel Rúain, if correct, would place it firmly in the latter half of the eighth century; however, the consensus over the likelihood of a ninth century date of compilation on linguistic grounds is reinforced with its clear relationship to *Mon. Tall.*, datable to 831x40, and *Teagasg Maoil Ruain*. Reeves, who understood the extant version to date to the twelfth or thirteenth century, believed this heading to indicate that the 'rule' derived 'from that' Máel Rúain compiled. This reasoning was essentially accepted by Gwynn, who suggested that there had been a later attempt to fashion a rule for the *céli Dé* from *Mon. Tall.* and the *Teagasg* or from the common original. In any event, it is clear that Máel Rúain could have had no part in the compilation of any of these texts as they were written long after his death in 792. While Reeves' translation and edition¹⁴ consisted

¹¹ John Strachan, 'The Deponent Verb', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1892, 516-7, n.1.

¹² E.J. Gwynn, in 'The Rule of Tallaght', saw 'no reason for postulating more than one ultimate source' (xii) for *Monastery of Tallaght* and *Teagasg Maoil Ruain*, which is undoubtedly correct, but it would appear clear from the variation in the texts themselves that there were certainly intermediate copies between the original text and the extant survivals.

¹³ *ibid.*, vii.

¹⁴ Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 84-97.

of unnumbered paragraphs, Gwynn's re-edition of the text numbered the paragraphs to allow direct comparison with *Mon. Tall.* and *Teagasg Maoil Ruain*, providing an indication of the extent of interrelationship. This work is summarised and commented upon below.

The text relating the customs from the monastery of Tallaght survives only in a single copy, contained in the Royal Irish Academy MS 1227 (formerly the 'Tallaght codex' RIA MS 3 B 23) and appears to date to the later fifteenth century.¹⁵ The text itself, however, contains some orthographic and textual peculiarities which distinguish it from the other material included in the MS, but Gwynn and Purton believe the MS to have had a single scribe and that these peculiarities 'are probably copied by him from the archetype which he had before him.'¹⁶ The original text clearly post-dates Máel Ruain's death (d. 792), but appears to have been mainly compiled during the lifetime of his disciple Máel Díthruib, whose death is recorded in *AFM sa* 840. §§86-90 (of §§90) was added after his death, which 'is quite consistent with the disjointed character of the document,...a collection of *memorabilia*, probably jotted down from time to time.'¹⁷ Gwynn reasons the original text to have been compiled 831x40.¹⁸ It is principally concerned with outlining practice in discipline and observance, but is clearly no Rule, being largely anecdotal in outlining practices of prominent *céli Dé* which are often related informally as a discourse between individuals. The text essentially comes across as being one concerned with the provision of example as a guide in an attempt to introduce standardisation.

Teagasg Maoil Ruain also survives in a single text, G. 36, in the Franciscan library in Dublin, written in the first half of the seventeenth century. Gwynn believed the transcription was initially undertaken by Louis Dillon, who compiled the first half of the first page, but that the remainder was compiled by John Colgan, who referred to an 'old book' as his authority.¹⁹

¹⁵ See Gwynn and Purton, 'The Monastery of Tallaght,' 115.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 120.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 121.

¹⁸ See the discussion, *ibid.*, 120ff.

¹⁹ See his discussion in 'The Rule of Tallaght', v-viii.

Gwynn and Purton's edition of *Mon. Tall.* consists of 90 numbered sections; Gwynn's edition of *Teagasg Maoil Ruain* of 106 sections and his edition of *Riagail na Celed nDé* of 65 sections. Gwynn undertook a direct textual comparison of these three texts, providing an indication of the interrelationship that may be outlined thus:

<u>Mon. Tall</u>	<u>Teagasg</u>	<u>RCD</u>
§83 (in part)	§1	§§1-3, §12 (in part) ²⁰
	§2	§4 ²¹
	§3	§5, §12 (in part)
	§4	§13 ²²
	§5	
	§6	§14
	§7	
	§8 ²³	§6
	§9	§2
	§10a	§13
§56	§10b	§7
	§11	
	§12	
	§13	
	§14	
	§15	
	§16	
	§17	
	§18	
	§19a	
	§19b	§15
	§20	§16
	§21	§17
	§22	§18
	§23	§8
§24		
§25	§§19-20	

²⁰ §12 of *RCD* is drawn from §1 and §3 of *Teagasg*.

²¹ §4 of *RCD* covers only part of the material covered by §2 of *Teagasg*.

²² The material summarised in §13 is covered in §4 and §10a of *Teagasg*.

²³ §51 of *Mon. Tall.* also relates to diet over Easter but does not appear to be the source of §8 in *Teagasg* or §6 in *RCD*.

<u>Mon. Tall.</u>	<u>Teagasg</u>	<u>RCD</u>
	§26	
	§27	
	§28	
	§29	
	§30	
	§31	
§1	§32	
	§33a	§21
§2	§33b	
§3	§34	
§4 ²⁴	§35	
§5	{§36 ²⁵	§22
§31	{	
§33	{	
§37	§23	
		§24
	§38	§9 (in part)
§6	{§39	
	{§40	
§7	§41	
§8 (in part) ²⁶	§42	
	§43}	§9 (in part)
	}	§10 ²⁷
	§44	
	§45	§11 ²⁸
	§46	
	§47	
§9	§48	§41
	§49	
§10	§50	
§11	§51	
	§52	
	§53	
	§54	
	§55	§36
	§56	§26

²⁴ There appears to be some duplication of subject matter here with §77 of *Mon. Tall.*

²⁵ §36 of *Teagasg* relates anecdotal material concerning Máel Ruain and Máel Díthruib which is covered in §5, part of §31 and §33 of *Mon. Tall.*

²⁶ §8 covers material related partly in §42 and partly in §91 of *Teagasg.*

²⁷ §9 of *RCD* is derived from §38 and §43 of *Teagasg*, but §10 of *RCD* also overlaps with §43 of *Teagasg.*

²⁸ The material in §11 of *RCD* is derived only from the initial part of §45 of *Teagasg.*

<u>Mon. Tall.</u>	<u>Teagasg</u>	<u>RCD</u>
	§57	
	§58 ²⁹	
	§59 ³⁰	
§12	§60 ³¹	§25
	§61	
§13	§62	
§14 ³²	§63	
§15	§64	
§16	§65	
§75	§66	
§76	§67	
§17		§44
§18		§45
§19	§68	
§20	§69 ³³	
	§70	
§21	§71	
§22	§72	§27
	§73	
§23a ³⁴	§74	§28
§23b	§75	
§24a	§76 ³⁵	
§24b ³⁶	§77	
	§78	
	§79	§30
	§80	§31
§25	§81	
§26	§82	{§51
		{§52
§27	§83	§53
	§84	§54
	§85	§32
§28	§86	
	§87	
	§89a ³⁷	

²⁹ One sentence of §48 of *Mon. Tall.* briefly touches on the material dealt with in §58 of *Teagasg.*

³⁰ §59 of *Mon. Tall.* indirectly touches upon the material contained in §59.

³¹ There is some overlap of material on diet at Easter with §12 and §51 of *Mon. Tall.*

³² There is again some overlap with material in §50 of *Mon. Tall.*

³³ This may be the source of the generalised section §26 in *RCD.*

³⁴ There is some overlap in subject matter with §54 of *Mon. Tall.*

³⁵ This may derive from the source for section §29 of *RCD.*

³⁶ There is again some overlap of subject material, this time with §42 of *Mon. Tall.*

<u>Teagasg</u>	<u>Teagasg</u>	<u>RCD</u>
§29	§89b	
§30a	§90	
§8 (in part)	§91	
	§92	
	§93	
	§94	
§30b ³⁸	{§95	
	{§96a	
	§96b ³⁹	
	§97}	§33
	§98} ⁴⁰	
§31	{§99	
	{§100	
§32	§101	
§33	§102	
§34	§103	
	§104	
§35	§105	
§36}	§106	§34
§37}		
§38		
§39		
§40		§35
§41		
§43		
§44		
§45		
§46		
§47		
§49		
§50 ⁴¹		
§51 ⁴²		
§52		
§53		
§57		
§58		

³⁷ There is no numbered §88.

³⁸ The material contained in §30b is covered by §§95-96a in *Teagasg*.

³⁹ A small part of §55 of *Mon. Tall.* reflects the material in §96b.

⁴⁰ §§97-98 covers the material contained in §33 of *RCD*, but §98 also appears to indirectly reflect the material in §48 of *Mon. Tall.*

⁴¹ See entry for *Mon. Tall.* §12.

⁴² See entry for *Mon. Tall.* §14.

<u>Mon. Tall.</u>	<u>Teagasg</u>	<u>RCD</u>
§60		
§61		
§62		
		§38
§63		§39 ⁴³
		§40 ⁴⁴
§64		
		§42
§65		§43
§66		
§67		
§68		
§69		
§70		
§71		
§72		
§73		
§74		
§78		
§79 ⁴⁵		§37
		§47
§80		§48
		§49
		§50
§81		
§82		
		§§55-65 ⁴⁶
§84		
§85		
§86		
§87		
§88		
§89		
§90		

It can be seen, therefore, that the greater part of *Teagasg Maoil Ruain* is derived from the same material which provides the basis to *Mon. Tall. Ríagail na*

⁴³ There is also some overlap here with the material in §46 of *RCD*.

⁴⁴ §48 of *Mon. Tall.* may have been the ultimate source for §40.

⁴⁵ With some overlap of material with §23b and §54 of *Mon. Tall.* and §75 of *Teagasg*.

⁴⁶ These final sections are unconnected with these other texts, with §§55-56 taken from the Rule of Columcille and §§57-65 from *Ríagail Phátraic*. For the Rule of Colum Cille, see W.F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, II, 508-9 and Kuno Meyer, *ZCP* 3 (1901), 28-30; for *Ríagail Phátraic*, see J.G. O'Keefe, 'The Rule of Patrick', *Ériu* 1 (1904), 216-24.

Celed nDé, in turn, it would appear, largely derived directly from the original source to both, but adapted its material into a more succinct and generalised form and added material from the Rule of Columcille and the *Riagail Phátraic*. When directly compared like this, it can be seen that there are material omissions from the extant texts that must have been present in the original source. An indication of the omissions from the extant text of *Mon. Tall.* particularly can be gauged from a comparison of the extant text of *Teagasg*: §§7-19, §§16-19a, §§24-31, §44, §§46-7, §49, §§52-59, §70, §78, §80, §96b and §97 of *Teagasg* have no equivalent sections in the extant text of *Mon. Tall.*, but the greater number, if, indeed, not actually all, of these sections certainly seem to derive from the common archetype.⁴⁷ The source for §§13 and 14 is uncertain - §13 relates the conflict of opinion between ‘some of the Old Fathers’, concerning approval or disapproval over provision of the sacrament to ‘people of imperfect life’ on their death-bed; while §14, similarly, relates that while some of the Old Fathers disapproved of the provision of commemorative mass for monks who did not receive communion before dying, others approved. These paragraphs merely record the difference of opinion without comment. §56 of *Mon. Tall.* relates Colchu’s approval of the provision of sacrament at the point of death as it could bring salvation. This was clearly a contentious issue, which provoked much debate. It is difficult, therefore, to postulate an origin for these particular sections in relation to the rest of these texts.

The archetype for *Mon. Tall.*, therefore, appears to have been more extensive than the extant text suggests. Evidence for some editing of *Mon. Tall.* can be perceived from the text itself: §18 of *Mon. Tall.*, for example, ends ...*fili pro mortuis parentibus debent pœntere 7 cetera*. This final sentence, in Latin, added to an otherwise Irish entry relating the fasting of Moedoc and the community of Ferns for

⁴⁷ §§12, 44 and 47 take the form of a discourse between Máel Ruain and Máel Díthruib, as so many of the entries do in *Mon. Tall.* §§8-9, 16-19a, 25-31, 46, 52-58, 70, 78, 80, 96b and 97 all either mention Máel Ruain himself, or relate the practice within the community of Tallaght, or begin with the opening sentence ‘It was not his custom ...’, in common with other entries in the extant *Mon. Tall.* §§9 and 28 refer to the Rule of Máel Ruain [*riagla Mhaoil Ruain*], and §§7, 24 and 49 may have come directly from this Rule, or, perhaps more likely, indirectly, having been included in the *Mon. Tall.* archetype.

the release of the soul of Brandub mac Echach from Hell, and particularly that final ‘7 cetera’, indicates that there was clearly more to this entry originally that has been replaced with a Latin summation of ‘the moral of the story’. More broadly, the textual comparison indicates the loss of some thirty-three sections, at least, from *Mon. Tall.* which have been included in *Teagasg*.

While there is a clear, and very close relationship, between these two texts which mainly, but not entirely, maintains the same order of sequence for the entries in common, there is a different relationship with *Riagail na Celed nDé*. The latter part of this text, §§67-74, derives from *Riagail Phátraic*. Little of the first half of *Riagail na Celed nDé* is not reflected in either *Mon. Tall.* or *Teagasg*, but very little of the latter half is reflected – of §§41-75, only §§42, 44, 47, 50-52 and 60 is reflected in either text - and none of the material deriving from *Riagail Phátraic* appears in the other texts, suggesting it has been a late *addendum*. The Rule itself, therefore, is clearly a composite and the order in which extracts from it appear is, in places, significantly different from the extant version published by Reeves. This may have been as a result of editing by the scribes of the other texts; however, the scribe of *Teagasg*, particularly, was clearly meticulous in copying the material exactly as he had it before him⁴⁸ and it is fairly certain that, in this case, he transcribed the entries from

⁴⁸ In §31, for example, he relates that a vessel called a *decimnoir* was kept to receive the tithe of fish and *gruisle*, but adds ‘I do not understand the meaning of *gruisle* unless it is the same as *gruth* or unless it is used for the morsels of food which they ate’ [*ní thuigim créad as ciall do ghruisle munab ionann e 7 gruth, no munab ar na greamannaib do ithdis do beirtheir e*]. In §40, relating a discourse between Máel Ruain and Dublitir, the scribe writes “My monks drink ale”, said Dublithain or Dublitir (it is written thus: Dublit-) [*Ibhid mo mhuinntear-sa’ ar Dubhlithain no Dublitir (mar so sgribthar e, Dublit-)*]. In §61, he writes ‘I have heard from him, says the author of the book (but I do not understand from whom he heard this)... [*Do chuala me aige (ar ugdar an leabhair, acht ní thuigim cía aga ccualaidh se sin)*...’ The ‘source’ would certainly appear to have been Máel Díthruib]. There are numerous other examples of such notes or comments throughout the text, but these are sufficient to indicate that the scribe was a meticulous copyist who transcribed the material he had before him faithfully, even if he was uncertain as to meaning or relating outdated customs, but, at the same time, modernising the language to the Irish of his own day. It is tracts from *Mon. Tall.* and *Teagasg* which are largely responsible for the reputation of the *céli Dé* as reformers reacting against a degenerate clergy, as Dr Hughes indicated (above, p. 24), particularly §4 of *Mon. Tall.* and its equivalent, §35 of *Teagasg*. The language employed in §35 of *Teagasg*, however, is greatly exaggerated from that of §4 of *Mon. Tall.*, with those of the ‘old churches’ repeatedly referred to as evil (*olc*), which is far in excess to the *corpsiu /coirpti /corpat* employed in *Mon. Tall.* Clearly, this exaggeration did not originate with this scribe and indicates at least one intermediate transcription.

the Rule in the order related by his source, one patently quite different in places from the extant text. It is interesting, in this context, that the extant texts of Fothad's Rule, too, are largely quite different in their order of sequence from each other. It would appear that it was an acceptable trait among *céli Dé* scribes to re-order the sequence of existing texts where it suited their needs, where, presumably, they wished to provide different emphases of priority, according to circumstance.

It has been understood that there is some connection between the archetype of these Tallaght texts and the Old Irish Penitential. This text, together with the 'Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations' (below), is found in RIA MS 1227, formerly the 'Tallaght codex' 3 B 23, the inclusion in which, for the latter, was cited by Daniel Binchy as suggesting it 'forms part of that early corpus of religious literature in the vernacular associated with the rise of the Céli Dé or "Culdees".'⁴⁹ Binchy considered the Old Irish Penitential to have been a product of Tallaght, but that it was based entirely upon the earlier Latin penitentials.⁵⁰ Robin Flower believed that it was compiled at, or as a consequence of, the *congressio senodorum* at Tara in 780 (below, pp. 144-6). The variant to the Penitential contained in MS Rawlinson B512 does begin with the statement that 'The elders of Ireland have drawn up from the rules of the Scriptures a penitential for the annulling and remedying of every sin, both small and great',⁵¹ but Binchy rejected Flower's theory (below, pp. 145-6). Gwynn judged that the 'Penitential cannot have been originally compiled earlier than the last quarter of the eighth century'⁵² and 'can hardly have been put together much before A.D. 800.'⁵³

The Penitential is based 'on the "schema of the eight principal sins", which is ultimately due to John Cassian.'⁵⁴ The extant text, however, which has suffered from

⁴⁹ Binchy, 'The Old-Irish Table of Penitential Commutations', 47.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 49.

⁵¹ *Conaemdetar sruithe Erenn a riaglaib na screptræ pennatoir dilgind 7 frepthæ cech pecthæ o bliuc commór.*

⁵² Gwynn, 'An Irish Penitential', 131.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 130.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 121.

both textual damage and from omission in the transcription from an earlier text⁵⁵ contains only seven – headed *de luxuria, de gula,*⁵⁶ *de avaritia, de invidia, de ira, de tristitia, and de vana gloria.*

Certain parts of the Penitential are reflected in *Mon. Tall.* These specifically deal with particular aspects of diet and refrain from sexual intercourse during particular periods, both of which are covered by the section of the Penitential that should be headed *de gula.* §14 of the Penitential covers material contained in §12 of *Mon. Tall.*; while §36 of the Penitential forms part of §§14 and 50 of *Mon. Tall.* These may be reproduced here for comparison:

Penitential §14: *Nech asrochoiliud nadnísa feoil no saill no imb no niba coirm no ass. Dlegar dau tri mirend no tri lomand di cach æ ar chaisc 7 notlaicc fri galar 7 anchas dia tichtu no fri huais ngortæ no nóina for tuatha condinappail cach toruth bis leu cenmotha aní asrochoili nech do gabail de. no frisreire n-anamcharat lasna bii naill do thorud arabera bith intí asrochoili inn anminitar dia. combí fochraicc nambi de.*

‘Anyone who takes a vow that he will not eat flesh or bacon or butter, or will not drink beer or milk, is bound to take three morsels or three sips of each of them at Easter and Christmas against the occurrence of disease and suffering; or against distress through famine or scarcity falling upon the people, so that all the victuals they have perish, except the particular thing which he has vowed [not] to partake of; or in case of a repast provided by a confessor, who has no other sort of victuals which the man may eat who has taken that vow of abstinence for God’s sake: so that it is for God’s sake that the relaxation is granted, when it so happens, and so that he gets a reward for what he does.’

Mon. Tall. §12 (= §60 of *Teagasg* and §25 of *RCD*): *Issed rochualai laisim cid indhí nad caodet feoil dogres dogniad pars isind chaisc de feoil fre terci 7 gorti do tecmung isind bliadain. Issed rochualai laisim. Issed fogníd i tír da*

⁵⁵ See Gwynn’s discussion, *ibid.*, 121-31.

⁵⁶ The heading *de gula* itself has been omitted from the extant transcription, although the subject matter clearly deals with the excess of appetites and, from comparison with other penitential texts, both Irish and Continental, the section would be expected to carry this heading.

glas indtan rombúi ind riaguil and. Asenad uli amail notreigtis addurtaig medón láoi dia caisc dochum na chuchdiri dóib fochetor co ndenad cách díob and pars de feoil fri foimtin terci no bochde in ando ar mani thuaslaicea isind chaisc nipo assa doib iarum cosin caiscc naili post andum.

‘This I have heard from him: even those who do not eat flesh regularly take a particle of flesh at Easter to guard against scarcity and hunger occurring in the course of the year. This I have heard from him; this was the practice at Tír dá Glas when the Rule was there: the whole congregation, when they left the oratory at noon on Easter Day, used to go straight to the kitchen that each of them might take a particle of flesh there, as a precaution against scarcity or poverty during the year; for unless a man relaxes at Easter, it would not be easy for them to do so afterwards until the next Easter a year later.’⁵⁷

Penitential §36: Nech bís hi lanamnas dligith itte a besa inso .i. denma in trib corgusaib na bliadna 7 aine 7 cetain 7 domnuch 7 eter di notlaicc 7 itir di chaisc mani theis di sacarbaic ar notlaicc 7 caiscc 7 cengciges. Dlegar doib dano denma i n-aimsir galair mista donaib banscalaib 7 ind aimsir comperta 7 trichae aidchi iar mbreith ingine .xx. aidchi iar mbreith maic.

Dlegair doib dano beith cen saill cen carna i trib corgusaibna bliadna.

‘Anyone that lives in lawful wedlock, these are his rules of conduct: chastity during the three Lents of the year, and on Fridays, Wednesdays and Sundays, and between the two Christmasses and between the two Easters, if he does not go to the Sacrament on Christmas Day and Easter Day and Whitsun Day. Also they are bound to observe chastity at the time of their wives monthly sickness, and at the time of pregnancy, and for thirty nights after the birth of a daughter, twenty nights after the birth of a son. They are also bound to go without bacon or flesh during the three Lents of the year.’

⁵⁷ This is supplemented in §51 of *Mon. Tall.*:

Mani chaithea dano feoil 7 saill in pascha cid gortai no genti dodnimaircet do chaithim feolæ 7 nimbe anaıld arbera bith is ferr laisim 7 is inildiu dó daul do ecaib ar comalnad a ingill inddás tuaslucud for feoil 7 ar martrai atrimther dó ced donecmai bás ind ar comalnad androtairrngert do anncharait.

‘Now if he does not eat bacon and flesh at Easter, even though hunger or heathen constrain him to eat meat, and he has nothing else that he may eat, he thinks it better and safer for him to face death for the sake of fulfilling his vow than to relax in regard to meat; and it is reckoned to him as martyrdom if he chance to die for it, to fulfil what he had promised to his confessor.’

Mon. Tall. §14: indití do áos tuatha (no e) arfaom anmcardini a chongbail dó ab uxore sua in his tribus noctibus .i. aidchi dardáoin aidchi sathairn 7 aidchi ndomnaich. Cid aidchi lúoin ma dorona Accus indtan mbís galar míostai for bandscaí dlegar do neuch a chongmail uadi iar nanmchardini petir ind libris clementis.

‘If one of the laity accepts spiritual direction, he is to keep himself from his wife on these three nights, Wednesday night, Friday night and Saturday night. As to Sunday night, he is to do so if he can. And when a woman is in her monthly sickness, a man ought to keep away from her according to the ghostly counsel of Peter in *libris Clementinis*.’

Mon. Tall. §50: Reim aósa lanamnasa forsambí anmcharti. O anteirt día luaoin co matin día cetaoin Suiri 7 dilmaine dóib in his diebus duobus 7 noctibus etir praind 7 lanamnais Abstinit foraib iarum fri feoil 7 lánamnas. O matin día cetaoin co matin día dardáoin Suire dóib iterum o matin día dardáoin co matin día aoine. A congmail iterum doib o lanamnas o matin día aoine co matin luaoin .i. tribus diebus 7 noctibus in separatis Apstinait praindi ineiunio foraib cum nocte scanti 7 in sabato cum nocte dominica die Suire dóib ar prainn tantum día domnuich 7 aidchi luaoin.

‘The course prescribed to a wedded couple who are under spiritual direction. From prime on Monday to matins on Wednesday, for these two days and nights they are given exemption and licence both for meals and conjugal intercourse. After that time abstinence is imposed on them both from flesh and intercourse, from matins on Wednesday to matins on Thursday. They are given exemption again from matins on Thursday till matins on Friday. They must keep themselves again from intercourse from matins on Friday till matins on Monday, that is, they are to live separately for three days and three nights. Abstinence from meals is imposed on them on Friday and the following night, and on Saturday and Saturday night. They are given exemption, for meals only, on Sunday and Sunday night.’

As the Penitential would pre-date the exemplar of *Mon. Tall.* by roughly half a century, it would appear, if there was indeed some connection between these texts, that the Penitential would have been used as a source for this archetype. There

appears to be little in the way of direct borrowing, however, and it is noteworthy that there is so little material in common. The use of Latin in the passages from *Mon. Tall.* may indicate a Latin text, or texts, since §§ for 14 and 50 provide differing detail and are contradictory in places, one of which is named as the *libris Clementinis*, as the authorities for these passages. The lack of penitential provision in §§14 and 36 of the Penitential, however, marks them as distinct from the rest of the text. There is a break in the text of the Penitential before §36, however, suggesting some confusion in, or damage to, the source of the extant transcription. The indication in §36 that ‘these are his rules of conduct’, highlighted above, is reminiscent of, but not identical to, the frequent statement in *Mon. Tall.* that ‘it was his [invariably Máel Ruain’s] custom...’ Binchy suggested that the OI term *arr(a)e*, with the specialised sense of penitential commutation, was unique to *céli Dé* texts (see below) and noted its use five times in the Penitential: in §27 of *de luxuria* (x2); in §15 of *de avaritia* (x2) and in §3 of *de invidia*. This, together with the fact that both *Mon. Tall.* and the Penitential were found in the ‘Tallaght codex’, now RIA MS 1227, suggested to him that the Old Irish Penitential was a product of the Tallaght scriptorium and that it may have been used as a source for *Mon. Tall.* There appears to be nothing in either text to support this however – if there is any borrowing at all between the texts, it would appear rather that §36 of the Penitential was interpolated from *Mon. Tall.*, but this, too, is uncertain – and, in any event, as Binchy noted, the Penitential derived from earlier, Latin Penitentials and, as such, provides little information for the purposes of this present study.

One penitential text which provides material of much greater value to the current study, however, is the tract Binchy named the ‘Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations’. Binchy, again, believed this tract to have been a product of the Tallaght scriptorium, what he termed the ‘Tallaght school’, but his understanding of the *céli Dé* – as a reform movement representing ‘a sharp reaction against the laxity and corruption of the older monastic federations’,⁵⁸ who demanded ‘the renewal of

⁵⁸ Binchy, ‘The Old-Irish Table of Penitential Commutations’, 53.

ancient monastic zeal'⁵⁹ – proved to be greatly at variance with the content of the text itself and this created unnecessary problems concerning which much of his discussion of the text spent trying to resolve.⁶⁰ The significance of this 'Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations' lies in its purpose and in the reasons it provides for the necessity of this purpose. As Binchy's title for the tract indicates, it provides a system of reduced periods of penance for stipulated sins, although §5 provides a list of those sins which are not entitled to any remission of the penance due for them, 'unless God himself shorten it by means of death or a "message" of sickness or the amount of mortification a person takes upon himself' (*mani chuimrigetar dia fessin tria bas no epistil ngalar no meit an saothair docharadar nech fair fessin*). §§7-37 of the tract is taken up with the appropriate remission for the otherwise legislated penance stipulated for particular sins or with examples of the practice of particular ecclesiastics in such regard, reminiscent of passages in *Mon. Tall*. The greatest impact of these commutations is upon the length of the period of penance and the philosophy behind such remission is outlined in §6:

Ar iss edh cethardæ adrimet ind ecnæ ara ndentar na arræ .i. ar emi scartha frisin pecad iarna chomlepaid ar oman imtormaich ina pecad ar chiund ar

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁰ The principal problem in this regard was the fact that the text provided a standard for the reduction in the period of penance prescribed for most – but not all – instances of sinful behaviour. This basis was at variance with Binchy's conceptualization of the *céli Dé*, leading him to state that 'Surely then the leaders of such a movement would be most unlikely to introduce a system of commutations designed to shorten (and in some cases, as we shall see, to lighten) the traditional forms of penance?', *ibid.*, 54. This was the root cause of his subsequent confusion. Having argued the text to have been the product of a *céli Dé* scriptorium and to ask whether, as the evidence appeared to suggest, the 'whole system of penitential commutations is a product of the "Culdee" movement' (*ibid.*, 47, 53), Binchy was, given his understanding of the nature of the *céli Dé*, forced to the conclusion that 'it seems more probable that the *arre* represents an ancient practice of the Irish church' (*ibid.*, 54), despite the fact that 'none of the older Latin Penitentials of Irish provenance refers to an *arrem* or any similar type of commutation' (*ibid.*, 53). Again due to his belief that the *céli Dé* were a reform movement established by Máel Ruain in the latter half of the eighth century, Binchy was forced to the conclusion of the antiquity of the acceptance of penitential commutation, since to accept that it was introduced by the *céli Dé* was also to force the conclusion 'that the entire chapter De Arreis [in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*] has been interpolated in the Irish Canons, for it could not have been compiled before the beginning of the ninth century at the earliest' (*ibid.*). Yet Binchy also acknowledged that 'despite these arguments, there remains a formidable difficulty in the way of a Latin original [and, therefore, an

*chumreg sæguil resiu risar forcend peindi conmoladar a n-anmcharat ar ascnam coirp cr 7 a folæ tria chomeicniugad peindi. * amail as marb in corp cen dig cen biad tria aimsera síra is amlaid ind ainim cen corp xr 7 a fuil triasin uile sægal indiu cen sasad a anmæ **

‘The sages enumerate four reasons why the commutations are practised: (1) for a speedy separation from the sin with which one has been united; (2) for fear of adding to the sins in the future; (3) for fear that one’s life be cut short before the end of the penance decided by a soul-friend; (4) in order to [be free to] approach the Body and Blood of Christ by restricting (?) [the period of] penance. * As the body [which is left] for long periods of time without food and drink perishes, so does the soul [which is left] throughout the whole of its present without the Body and Blood of Christ, without the food of the soul. *

The purpose behind such penitential remission, therefore, is explicitly concern for the souls of those for whom the church was responsible. The significance of this and its manifestation in other Tallaght texts will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, although, for present purposes, it can be said that it indicates that *céli Dé* concerns were much more broadly based than the usually ascribed asceticism and mitigates against the view that they were severe in the implementation of their aims.

The principal concern with souls in this text is further emphasized with the opening sections, §§1-4. These are concerned with various means by which souls may be rescued from Hell. §1 indicates that 365 *Pater Nosters*, 365 genuflections and 365 blows on the hand with a scourge every day for a year would rescue a soul from Hell; §2 states that reciting the ‘three fifties’ and the *Beati* daily for seven years will rescue a soul from Hell; §3 indicates the same result after the recitation of a Psalter with *Lauda* and the *Beati* and a *Pater Noster* at the end of each psalm daily for three years. §4 re-iterates merely that ‘Each of the foregoing commutations rescues souls out of Hell if intercession may be sung for them’ (*doessairc anmandæ a iffurnd cach arræ donaib arraib-se mad inga-balæ a ecdairec*). These opening sections sat uncertainly

earlier tradition of penitential commutation]: why should the inventors of this system of commutation have chosen an old native word to denote it?’ (*ibid.*, 50).

with Binchy, who considered that 'they represent the intrusion of a totally different idea'⁶¹ and, indeed, that confusion over the meaning of *arr(a)e* 'was responsible for the introduction of these sub-Christian practices, based on survivals of primitive magic into the list of more orthodox commutations.'⁶² This analysis of these opening sections is bizarre. There is nothing to indicate that these practices were 'sub-Christian', indeed, quite the reverse, and suggestion that they were intrusions becomes questionable when considered alongside §18 of *Mon. Tall.*, which contains the anecdote relating how the soul of Brandub mac Echach was released from Hell following the year-long fast by Moedoc and the community of Ferns. In this instance, the means of release differs from those outlined in the table of commutations, but the concept of the release of an individual's soul from Hell as a result of sustained intercessory action over a prolonged period is the same. Clearly, the understanding among Irish ecclesiastics at this time was that the condemnation of the soul to Hell was not irreversible. Neither, from this perspective, can the position as the opening sections in the text be thought of as out of place: the tract begins with the means by which the souls of individuals in the past – the dead – could be saved from Hell, followed by an indication why this may be necessary and followed in turn by the means by which the salvation of those souls of individuals in the present – the living – may be achieved. Correspondingly, the 'Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations' can be seen as a carefully considered and balanced whole, but one concerned with the ultimate outcome of pastoral provision, not 'ancient ascetic zeal'. Again, the significance of this will be dealt with more fully in chapter 4, but it is clear that Binchy's understanding of the *céli Dé*, which was, to be fair, very much the received wisdom of his day – and, indeed, remained so for the following decades – seriously undermined his understanding of this important text.

Another important text providing an indication of *céli Dé* concerns, and apparently independent of the Tallaght texts, is the 'Rule' of Fothad / Mochuta. This

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 56.

⁶² *ibid.*

metrical composition consists of a series of self-contained sections, each outlining the duties and responsibilities considered appropriate to each indicated level of society.⁶³ John Strachan dated the text 'at the latest in the beginning of the ninth century',⁶⁴ which effectively discounts Mochuta of Rahan (d. 636) as the compiler, even although the ascription was unlikely to have ever intended to suggest Mochuta's actual authorship. The more probable intention in such cases, where ascription to the founder of a house, or series of houses, was an indication that the rule was observed within, or throughout, these foundations. In this particular instance, however, the appellation of 'rule' is something of a misnomer, as will be seen. The equation between Fothad of Fathan and Mochuta's community of Rahan, however, is difficult as there is no overt connection between the two. Kenney has provided the most feasible explanation to date: 'A confusion of the names "Fathan" and "Rathan" might result in the "rule of Fathan" becoming the "rule of Rathan" and, therefore, of the great saint of Rathan.'⁶⁵ It would certainly appear to be significant that N, which appears to be the most complete of the extant texts, ascribes authorship to Fothad (d. 819). In addition to this, the section dealing with the *Céli Dé* opens *Dia mbem fo máim chléirchechta* – 'if we should be under the yoke of *clérchecht*' – while all the other sections relating the duties, responsibilities and expectations of a position begin *Dia mba[t]...* – 'if you should be'... – indicates the text to have been compiled by a *céle Dé*. Further, it may be considered that there are parallels between 'Fothad's Rule' and the three interdependent Tallaght texts. Under the sections for both the bishop and the priest, there is an emphasis on a knowledge of Scripture and Rules and to

⁶³ The text survives in six MSS – B.M. Addit. 30512, fol. 20 a 1 [B]; H 1 11, TCD, fol. 125v [H]; *Lebar Brecc*, p 261 a 1 [LB]; RIA 23 N 10 [N]; vol. 28 of the Murphy Collection in Maynooth Library [M], which is a late copy of N; and *Yellow Book of Lecan*, H 2 16, TCD [YBL]. Much of the first half of YBL is illegible; however, where it is legible it appears to follow the same order of LB. B has been used as the basis of Kuno Meyer's edition in *Archiv für Celtische Lexicographie* 3 (1907), 312-20. It carries the heading *Incipit Regula Mochuta Raithni*. Meyer also provides the variants from N, which carries the heading *Fothad na Canóine .cc. hanc regulam*. LB was used as the basis of the edition by 'MacEclaise', published in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 4th series, 27 (1910), 495-517. It carries the heading *Incipit Regla Mochuata Rathin*.

⁶⁴ Strachan, *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1892), 516-7, n.1.

⁶⁵ Kenney, *Sources*, 474, n. 324.

ensure the validity of baptism.⁶⁶ These points clearly carried a deep significance for the church hierarchy at this time and will also be discussed in detail in the following chapter. §4 of the outline of the duties of a priest reflects the circumstances of receiving confession and the provision of communion for an individual on his death-bed, a topic related in *Mon. Tall.*, §§13,14 and 56. Similarly, §2 of the duties of a confessor prohibits accepting alms from those who are not obedient to the directions of the *anmcharad*; while §8 stipulates the distribution among the poor of such alms as may be accepted. Again, this same topic is covered in *Mon. Tall.*, §35, but from the approach that it is better not to accept alms from the laity at all.

Overall, however, there is little correlation between ‘Fothad’s Rule’ and the slightly later interdependent Tallaght texts. The material that they do share in common – knowledge of Scripture and Rules, lawful baptism, acceptance of confession and communion at death, refusal of alms from disobedient laity – provide an indication of the topics of concern to the *céli Dé* in the first half of the ninth century. As such, even although ‘Fothad’s Rule’ provides no indication of what the compiler understood constituted the distinctiveness of the *céli Dé*, it does provide some evidence that the *céli Dé* at this time should not be thought of as restricted to Tallaght itself.

These points are not in themselves proof of Fothad’s authorship, but, equally, there appears to be no good reason to discount this traditional ascription without evidence to the contrary. Whether or not the ascription to Fothad is accepted, however, the text, compiled as it was by someone who considered himself to be a *céle Dé*, provides a reflection of the ideal of how society should be as perceived at the very time the *céli Dé* were entering the period of their greatest influence in Ireland, in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

⁶⁶ From the text of ‘Fothad’s Rule’ in LB and edited by ‘MacEclaise’: B5 – *Dia mebrach san noebscriptuir intan geba ard: ar ba lesmae eclaisi dia mba boeglach borb*; B6 – *Ar is borb cech n’anecnaid isin a fir cert: don coimdid ni comarba nech na leg a recht*; D2 – *ferr duit nir ba hanecnaid do legend bat cert: ba mebrach ba daigeolach i riagluib 7 recht*; D3 – *do baitir bad dlígtide is dual do gnim dil; is sruith in fer conoibre spirut noem do nim.*

Kenney observed 'The arrangement and extent of these sections varies considerably in the several versions',⁶⁷ without further comment. From a comparison of the arrangement and extent of the order of the variant texts, however, there are clearly sections common to all extant versions and sections restricted or specific to particular texts. A 'General Preface', 'preaching the Ten Commandments to every single person' (*do forcetul x. timna for cech aen duine* (LB)) is a common introductory section to all texts, following which comes the considerable variation in order. None of the extant texts, however, include all of the variant sections. Unless it is accepted that all of the texts are incomplete and that all of the various transcribers evidently felt at liberty to discard those sections not included, to rearrange the order of the sections they have included and to add to or delete from the section on kingship from, presumably, a single original text, then there must have been, from the outset, several different texts reflecting, for whatever reason, different priorities or conditions among different intended recipients. In such a case, then, the variation in the order in which the sections appear must surely have some significance beyond a whim of the transcriber. The order in which the sections appear in the variant texts are:

LB

1. 'General Preface'
2. bishop
3. abbot
4. priest
5. *anmchara*
6. monk
7. *céle Dé*
8. refectory
9. king

N

1. 'General Preface'
2. king
3. bishop

YBL (? after LB⁶⁸)

1. 'General Preface'
2. (? bishop)
3. (? abbot)
4. (? priest)
5. *anmchara*
6. monk
7. *céle Dé*
8. refectory

B

1. 'General Preface'
2. bishop
3. *céle Dé*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 473.

⁶⁸ See n. 63.

4. abbot
5. priest
6. *maccleirich*
7. *céle Dé* (no title)
8. refectory
9. husbandman

4. king
5. priest
6. abbot
7. *anmchara*
- [8. 'conclusion' – this final section is composed in a different metre, however, and is unlikely to have been a part of the original composition.]

From all texts, the list of sections covers the duties of bishops, abbots, monks, priests, novices, *céli Dé*, 'soul-friends' or confessors, kings and husbandmen. These different sections cover the spiritual duties and responsibilities for virtually all of society, together with the observations to be followed in the refectory for observances concerning feasts and fasts.

In N, the first section after the 'general preface' relates to the king. It includes considerably more material, and is given greater priority, than the corresponding section in the other texts, where it is placed fourth in B, last of all in LB and omitted altogether in YBL. N, and its later copy M, are unique in containing the section on husbandmen (*Dia mba trebthach...*), all of which appears to give the text a more 'secular' feel; however, N (and M) are also unique in containing the section on the novice (*maccleirich*). Indeed, only the sections for the *manach* and the *anmchara* are missing from those known from other variants, from what may otherwise be a 'complete' account.⁶⁹

B, on the other hand, the variant which appears to have a greater deviation in order than the others, has, as an order of priority of bishop, *céle Dé*, king, priest, abbot and *anmchara*. This may indicate a text addressed more to a *céli Dé*

⁶⁹ A 'complete' text may be expected to include a section for those of the nobility ranking between kings and husbandmen. Thomas Charles-Edwards, however, notes that 'people who maintained themselves by skill and knowledge...were sometimes put under a single heading, "the people of craft", *aés dána*, to distinguish them from "the farming people", *aés trebtha*' (*Early Christian Ireland*, Cambridge, 2000, 68). In such a case *trebthach* may also have had a more broad-ranging meaning of those of free society whose means of maintenance derived from the land, rather than its more restricted sense of 'farmer', and, as such, perhaps *trebthach* could be taken to include the nobility beneath the rank of king. The 'missing' sections for the *manach* and the *anmchara* perhaps ought not to be expected in a more 'secular' version of the text.

community, as the section on the *céli Dé* is otherwise consistently listed in seventh place in the other extant texts. In this case the order in which the king appears raises interesting questions, although no more so than the placing of abbot, below priest, and the omission altogether of monk.

Fothad's 'Rule' is unlike any other. Monastic rules, in essence, deal with the organisation, life and practice within a particular community or *familia*, or, as in the case of the *céli Dé*, as the ideal to which individuals within communities should aspire. Fothad's 'Rule' is similar to the latter, in providing an ideal; however, where it differs from all others is in its scope. All the extant versions begin with a 'general preface' outlining the responsibilities and duties of all Christians; and, while it has an undeniable, and natural, emphasis towards the religious community, N indicates that it also has a much broader range of intended audience. The inclusion of the king, in N given such prominence, at some point in all but one of the extant orders of listing, and the section on husbandmen suggests that, in fact, what was intended was the reflection of a suitable *modus vivendi*, albeit in fairly general terms, for a Christian society, religious and lay. The text itself, consequently, was compiled in fairly general terms, exhorting the ideals of Christian virtue – conscientiousness, humility, obedience, piety and so on – and appears to have been compiled in such a way that it could be adapted, perhaps was encouraged to be adapted, to suit specific conditions as a complement to established custom, which would account for the considerable variation in the order of the extant texts. As such, with the general provision of a broadly based ideal, it could indeed be considered to be a 'canon', rather than a 'rule', and thus, perhaps, reinforcing the attribution to Fothad *na Canóine*.

Two further texts require some consideration here as they purport to provide the names of those individuals of those 'at one' with, firstly, Máel Ruain of Tallaght and, secondly, with Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, king of Cashel, who is listed in the *óentu Máel Ruain*, and whom, it will be suggested in chapter 8, was himself *céle Dé*. There are two versions of first of these, the *óentu Máel Ruain*, both of which are

preserved only in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster.⁷⁰ As will be seen when cited in their entirety (below, p. 236), there is too little beyond the mere listing of the names for the language to provide any indication of the original date of compilation, although even if this had been the case, it is accepted that, where there are survivals of other transcribed texts available for comparison, the compiler(s) of the Book of Leinster modernised the language of the texts to the Middle Irish of their own day. One problem which may be raised in connection with the use of the *óentu Máel Ruain* as evidence for specific relationships in the mid-ninth century, therefore, is the question of the date of compilation. As there is nothing in the language of the *óentu* to indicate, one way or another, the date of its original compilation, it could be considered that the *óentu* may have been a late compilation, one resulting from an antiquarian interest, rather than a contemporary record. As such, the reliability if the witness of the list could be suspect, providing an uncertain basis for any close analysis.

The one potential indication of the date of compilation from the extant text itself, however, may be the final sentence of the first version, although, even here, this cannot be taken as conclusive. In this version of the *óentu*, Máel Ruain is listed with thirteen adherents. A gloss to the source of this first version, and which has been incorporated into this extant version, equates this with Patrick and his *twelve* apostles. Clearly, however, just as an abbot with his twelve monks was considered the ideal for a monastic community throughout Christendom, the basis to this accepted ideal in composition was emulation of Christ and his twelve disciples. The final sentence, relating the inclusion of Cormac mac Cuilennáin (d. 908), does not appear to have been a part of the original text, of which the twelfth name provided was that of Óengus, and it looks as though it may have been a gloss appended to an earlier text but which was incorporated into the *óentu* when it was transcribed into the Book of Leinster. However, the second version of the *óentu* consists of two simple stanzas which are attributed to Cormac and it is possible that this association itself could

⁷⁰ The Book of Leinster, vol. 6 (ed. Anne O'Sullivan), 1683, 1686.

account for the subsequent addition of Cormac to the first version. Otherwise, the stanzas in the second version correspond with the twelve preceding names to Cormac in the first. Unless the first, 'prose', version used the two stanzas attributed to Cormac as a source, there must have been a further, perhaps original, record to which the glosses incorporated into the extant version in the Book of Leinster had been added.

The *óentu Máel Ruain*, quite clearly, originally listed Máel Ruain and twelve adherents and the fact that the final sentence of one version has the appearance of a gloss adding Cormac's name to an earlier record, while the second version, rightly or wrongly, carries a heading attributing the compilation of a poetic account of the *óentu* to Cormac, would appear to be enormously valuable. As Cormac died in 908, it would be reasonable to accept that the original compilation of the *óentu* belonged to the ninth century. Máel Ruain's reputation and influence was at its greatest in the first half of the ninth century – this was the period during which the sources for the extant MSS of *Mon. Tall.*, *Teagasg Maoil Ruain* and *Riagail na Celed nDé* all originate. This, clearly, is not necessarily proof that the original record of the *óentu Máel Ruain* was compiled in the ninth century, but it is not unreasonable to consider that, if Máel Ruain's reputation and influence rested on practices which were recorded and cited as examples worthy of emulation, then a list of names of those considered most closely 'at one' with Máel Ruain would have been compiled during this same period. Conversely, the later heading appended to *RCD* states *Riagail na Celed nDé o Maelruain cecinit*. This, surely, indicates that the scribe considered the name of the compiler to have been Ó Máelruain. Such a slip would not have been made in the ninth century and perhaps indicates that the personal esteem in which Máel Ruain had been held in the late-eighth / early-ninth centuries was, inevitably, fading over time. In this case the question must be what relevance would the *óentu Máel Ruain* have had in the period prior to the compilation of the Book of Leinster in the twelfth century if the compilation should be considered to have been at a late date? Again, such reasoning does not constitute proof, and could even be considered sophistry, but the

Book of Leinster is a miscellany of genealogical record, folklore and ecclesiastical texts of assorted type, at least one of which, the Martyrology of Tallaght, is of demonstrably ninth-century origin and was itself once thought to be a compilation by Máel Ruain.⁷¹ In this case, unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, there seems to be no good reason for accepting that the *óentu Máel Ruain* recorded in the Book of Leinster is of anything other than genuine ninth-century origin, and, therefore, a close contemporary witness.

The second tract which requires some consideration is that which has become known as '*óentu Feidlimthe*', although the only extant version, again in the Book of Leinster,⁷² carries no heading. The text consists of a series of stanzas and it is apparent from the opening lines of the first of these that the poem commemorates those most in accord with Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, in this case, however, to the number of twenty-four. The stipulated number of twenty-four is double that anticipated and one of those named is Feidlimid himself:

(§5) *Fland mac Fairchellaig ro fess.*
Fland m Duib Chonna ra chness.
Flannan is Mael Dithruib dil.
is Feidlimid mac Crimthainn.

Feidlimid's inclusion in his own *óentu* is unexpected. Certainly, the five individuals named in this stanza are all included in the *óentu Máel Ruain* – indeed, the names of all of those named as 'at one' with Máel Ruain, with the exception of Cormac mac Cuilennain, further reinforcing the suggestion his name was appended to one of the two extant variants, are found in '*óentu Feidlimthe*'. This may suggest that the compiler of '*óentu Feidlimthe*' used *óentu Máel Ruain* as a source, but the listing of the names common to both do not follow the same sequence and the additional names in '*óentu Feidlimthe*' intersperse the common names:

⁷¹ See Craig Haggart, 'The date of composition of the *Félire Óengusso* and its relationship with the Martyrology of Tallaght', *Ériu*, forthcoming.

⁷² The Book of Leinster, vol. 6 (ed. Anne O'Sullivan), 1707-8.

óentu Máel Ruain

Máel Tuile
 Máel Anfaid
 Flann Find m. Fairchellaig
 Flann mac Duib Thuinne
 Flannán mac Tiardelbaig
 Máel Dithruib
 Dimmán Arad
 Dalbach
 Feidlimid mac Crimthainn
 Diarmait
 Eochaid
 Óengus m. Oibleáin
 [Cormac mac Cuilennain]

'óentu Feidlimthe'

Dimmán Arad
 Lobrán Uaithne
 Máel Tuile
 Máel Anfaid
 Máel Ruain
 Eochaid
 Moling
 Cinaed
 Óengus m. Oebliain
 Diarmait
 Óengus aile
 Dalbach
 Rectgus
 Rechtgniad
 Brocan
 'Epscop Scéith'
 Mo Chonna Daire
 Feradach
 Dub Tíre
 Flann m. Fairchellaig
 Flann m. Duib Chonna
 Flannan
 Máel Dithruib
 Feidlimid mac Crimthainn

Flann Find mac Fairchellaig has lost his epithet, perhaps to fit the metre of the stanza; Duib Thuinne has become Flann mac Duib Chonna, perhaps as the result of a misreading by a subsequent copyist, but, otherwise, those 'at one' with Máel Ruain are similarly identified as those 'at one' with Feidlimid. The difference in the order – although it is to be noted that the cluster of names from Flann mac Fairchellaig to Máel Dithruib in *'óentu Feidlimthe'* follow the same sequence in which they are listed

in *óentu Máel Ruain* – may indicate an independent record of the *óentu Máel Ruain*, although the inclusion of Feidlimid himself in §5 may perhaps rather point to a composite work. In marked contrast to the *óentu Máel Ruain*, '*óentu Feidlimthe*' contains important incidental detail and while any consequent reworking – if the text is a composite – may account for the variation in order between the two lists, the inclusion of Feidlimid in his own *óentu* points to some carelessness on the part of the compiler of the composite (if such it was) and indicates the need for caution when considering the value of this incidental information.

Kathleen Hughes discussed the distribution of the ecclesiastics named in the *óentu Máel Ruain*, noting that of the thirteen named, three, including, Máel Ruain himself, belonged to Tallaght, one each to the counties of Westmeath, Kildare and Clare, two to Cork and five to Tipperary and concluded 'Munster provides a weighty element in this pattern of distribution.'⁷³ This distribution is, obviously, mirrored in '*óentu Feidlimthe*'. Of the remainder of the names, not all can be identified: Mo Conna Daire can be fairly securely accepted as belonging to Daire Eidneach and so reinforcing the Munster contingent; Rechtgnia, however, is very likely Rechtgnia of Clonmacnoise (d. 784); Cinaed may have been Cinaed mac Cummuscaig, abbot of Durrow (d. 793) or Cinaed mac Cellaig, abbot and bishop of Trelec Mor, in Co. Tyrone (d. 814); Feradach may be the abbot of Rechru, now Lambay in Co. Dublin, who died in 799 or the scribe, priest and abbot of Aghaboe, in Osraige, who died in 813.⁷⁴ Of the others, Lóbrán Uaithne and 'Epscop Scéithe' are, unfortunately, unidentifiable. Óengus is too common a name to be identifiable and while Mo Ling, Rectgus, Brocan and Dub Tíre are much rarer names, there is no annalistic reference to any of them. Nonetheless, those that may be tentatively identified would indicate that although those from Munster provide the largest contingent and there is a clear emphasis on ecclesiastics from the south and east, ecclesiastics from the north and

⁷³ Kathleen Hughes, 'The distribution of Irish *scriptoria* and centres of learning from 730 to 1111', in N.K. Chadwick *et al*, *Studies in the early British church*, Cambridge 1958, 243-72, at 263. Not all of the identifications, however, can be as secure as this listing of distribution would suggest.

⁷⁴ The potential identification of these individuals has benefitted greatly from discussion with Dr. T.O. Clancy.

west are also represented. Neither list, therefore, would appear to be promoting the interests of any particular region or church, although the promotion of any interest would be difficult to argue from the mere listing of names in the *óentu Máel Ruain* particularly.

The language of '*óentu Feidlimthe*' is Old Irish throughout. None of those in the list who could be suggested as tentative identifications post-decease Feidlimid himself, perhaps indicating that it was compiled – or, if a composite work, the information contained in the sources was recorded – within the generation or so after Feidlimid's death. The likelihood of this is perhaps reinforced by the absence of the name of Cormac mac Cuilennain altogether from '*óentu Feidlimthe*', particularly, it may be thought, as it is likely to have been included if the work was a composite using *óentu Máel Ruain* as a source. This would perhaps suggest '*óentu Feidlimthe*' to have been compiled early in the second half, most likely in the third quarter, of the ninth century.

Although caution needs to be exercised in the use of '*óentu Feidlimthe*' as a source, the apparent proximity of its compilation to Feidlimid's lifetime – or that of its sources if a composite work – perhaps by someone who knew him, could well indicate that the incidental detail contained in the work, such as Feidlimid's connection to Daire Eidneach, is largely accurate. Consequently, therefore, once again, without good evidence to the contrary, there appears to be no good reason to discount the evidence provided in the incidental detail of the piece and the information provided in these stanzas will be discussed in chapter 8.

There is a significant amount of material from the late-eighth / early-ninth centuries which can be seen to be connected with the *céli Dé*, or compiled by individual *céle Dé*, and which provides some indication of how the nature and structure of the church and its role in society was perceived – and justified – by these churchmen. The question that remains is whether this primary evidence supports the accepted view of the *céli Dé* as a reform movement concerned to preserve an austere form of asceticism.

**The eighth-century Irish church:
degenerate and vulnerable to an encroaching secularisation?**

The first chapter noted that there was a heavy emphasis on what has been perceived as the degeneration of the Irish church during the course of the eighth century. Peter O'Dwyer, for example, emphasised that

This century introduces us to the murder of abbots and bishops, to the violation and burning of churches, wars between monasteries and between a king and a monastery, contention for the abbacy and the killing of pilgrims. These occurrences are not frequent and it may be that while they had occurred in earlier centuries, they were not noted by annalists.¹

This is contrasted with the previous century where 'there is hardly a single instance of oppression of the church or of its ministers, or of the misconduct of monasteries or clerics',² occurrences of which were taken as 'a general indication of the abuses which were beginning to affect the church in Ireland in the first half of the eighth century.'³ As already indicated (above, p. 26), O'Dwyer considered the *céli Dé* to be a reform movement that emerged 'to counteract what was to be the chief cause of the downfall of Irish monasticism in the twelfth century, namely the introduction of the lay-abbot.'⁴

While O'Dwyer did point out that such abuse was infrequent, it was emphasised as a principal reason for reform. As Brian Lambkin has noted, however, it 'seems too much of a coincidence that laxity and corruption in the Church should have become an acute problem at exactly the time when the historical record becomes much fuller'⁵ (see also p. 150 below). The very fact that the *Cáin Adomnáin* of 697 prohibited the slaying of clerics – followed by what would appear an even more emphatic treatment of the same topic in *Lex Patricii*, in 737 – suggests that such

¹ O'Dwyer, *Céli Dé*, 6.

² *ibid.*, 5.

³ *ibid.*, 9.

⁴ *ibid.*, 192.

⁵ Lambkin, 'Blathmac and the Céli Dé', 151-2.

incidents were not unknown in the seventh century, although no doubt as infrequent as those of the eighth, but the annalistic notice from the middle of the eighth century serves to emphasise the subsequent sense of growing abuse.⁶

O'Dwyer's understanding had drawn heavily upon that of James Kenney and Kathleen Hughes. Kenney had considered that by 'the eighth century the beginnings were apparent of that secularization which overwhelmed the monastic churches in the tenth and eleventh centuries.'⁷ Hughes⁸ noted the emergence in the annalistic record of clergy establishing dynasties, when individuals were succeeded in office by their sons; of the holding of office in plurality; and, again, of the mention of warfare involving religious foundations.⁹ Again, the fact that there were periods within the eighth century which witnessed more detailed annalistic record, often providing some genealogical and geographical detail to the hitherto fairly basic formulae employed in obituary notices, has tended to highlight these points and consequently to distort the perception of the historical circumstances which gave rise to them. Hughes herself tried to be even handed in consideration of the circumstances behind these trends, but, nevertheless, the perception, among scholars generally, of the *céli Dé* as a reform movement and the perception of a clergy whose degeneracy had resulted in the increasing secularisation of ecclesiastical interests had become interdependent supports to a circular understanding of the Irish church in the eighth century.

⁶ In addition to the content of *Lex Innocentium*, Adomnán refers to an 'impious man, an attacker of churches' in *VC* II 24. He relates that while Columcille 'set about excommunicating those men who persecuted churches', one, Lám Dess, 'attacked St Columba with a spear, meaning to kill him'. One of the monks took the blow instead, but he was unharmed due to the protection afforded by Columcille's cowl. The episode indicates that instances of raids on churches by individuals who had no qualms about the killing of clerics apparently occurred even in the sixth century.

⁷ Kenney, *Ecclesiastical sources*, 468.

⁸ In *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 157-72.

⁹ Kathryn Grabowski suggested that an entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen*, *sa* 752.2 – recording the battle of Fétamair between Bodgbal mac Fergaile and Cenn Faelad – 'is a battle apparently between the abbot of Mungret and the king of the Uí Fhidgeinte, in whose lands the monastery lay.' Kathryn Grabowski and David Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales*, Woodbridge, 1984, 31. *AU* 759.8 records a battle between Clonmacnoise and Birr, the earliest recorded conflict between two religious foundations.

O'Dwyer considered that the encroaching secularisation of the church was personified by the emergence of the *airchinnech*, a position all too commonly referred to as 'lay-abbot'. Richard Sharpe, however, realised that where 'church historians have pointed to secularisation, usually regarding it as an abuse, it has generally meant the separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions',¹⁰ but considered that

The monastic revival of the late eighth century, which may have been rather limited, did not try to change churches; it sought to invigorate the small religious communities within the churches or living separately as small ascetic monasteries. *There was no attempt to reverse the secularization of large-scale power, merely to avoid the wholesale neglect of the devotional life.*¹¹

While Sharpe realised that 'the separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions' – which resulted in the emergence of the *airchinnech* or *princeps* – should be considered an abuse was a misconception, the last sentence above indicates that he himself misunderstood the impetus behind it. He apparently considered, from the suggestion that Máel Ruain's 'monastic revival' was a reaction concerned solely with avoiding 'the wholesale neglect of the devotional life', making 'no attempt to reverse the secularization of large-scale power', that 'the separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions' was either driven externally – by definition by the laity – or internally, by a presumably degenerate clergy overly concerned with secular affairs. This, too, was to accept the view that the *céli Dé* were a reform movement concerned solely with a 'monastic revival'. As hinted in the previous chapter, the *céli Dé* were not so exclusive in their concerns and the extent to which they were concerned with all aspects of the church will be examined here. While the devotional life was to be encouraged, it was recognised that it could not possibly be embraced by all – society still had to function and the church was well aware of its responsibilities towards all of society. There was no 'attempt to reverse the secularization of large-scale power' because, as will be indicated, the 'separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions'

¹⁰ Sharpe, 'Some problems', 265.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 266-7. My italics.

appears to have been a development instigated by the church itself – indeed, any ‘monastic revival’ could only have been possible because of it – and not by a degenerate clergy concerned with the trappings of secular power, but one greatly concerned with a uniformity of standard for both the devotional life in coenobitic communities and for pastoral care to the community at large.

The extent to which the church was concerned with all aspects and levels of society is apparent from ‘Fothad’s Rule’, compiled by an individual who considered himself *céle Dé*. The significance of this text lies not so much in what it says, as it is compiled in such general terms, but as an indication of the philosophy behind it. Firstly, it encompasses the ideal for free society as a whole; while, secondly, it has an underlying emphasis on ordination, that is, the station of the individual within society being ordained by the will of God. The majority of the sections which deal with specific positions open with a formulaic reference to being under the ‘yoke’ (*fo máim*) of that station. What appears to be reflected is the consideration that an individual’s station is a burden which must be borne, whatever his rank, within a society which has ultimately come about as a consequence of Man’s Fall from Grace and, as a result, been ordained by God to provide each individual with a vehicle through which he may strive to attain the salvation of his soul. While the status of the individual was thus ordained by God, it followed that, so too, the structure of society itself must equally be ordained as it was the instrument chosen by God to allow the faithful the opportunity of salvation. Consequently, it was to be preserved and supported. This concept of the ordination of station, but within a framework which allowed the individual exercise of free will, a chance to accept or reject the means of salvation for the immortal soul, appears to have been one which took on increasing ecclesiastical and political dimensions during the course of the eighth century.¹²

¹² The development of the concept of ordination according to the will of God inevitably would have had an impact on the pre-existing concept of the source of authority for kingship and nobility. This can be seen in a comparison of the understanding of the source of such authority in the two approximately contemporary texts, *Críth Gablach* and *CCH. CG*, which Thomas Charles-Edwards has considered in this respect, is a tract on status which concludes with a discussion of the nature of kingship (Charles-Edwards, ‘*Críth Gablach* on kingship’, 107-19. This paper is a continuation of his earlier article, ‘*Críth Gablach* and the law of status’, *Peritia* 5 (1986), 53-73.

The 'separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions', nevertheless, was indeed a consequence of 'large-scale power'. The church, by necessity, had always had a political responsibility because it had a political significance. In a hierarchical society where the personal ties of lordship / dependency largely determined an individual's status, which in turn provided the basis of his legal standing, the *manaig*,

Neil McLeod's article, 'Interpreting Irish law: status and currency', (part 1) *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 41 (1986), 46-65; and (part 2) *ZCP* 42 (1987), 41-115, covers some of the same material.). This concluding section opens with the question 'Which of the two is of higher status, king or people?', to which it provides the paradoxical answer: 'The king is of higher status, although they are of equal status; for it is the people which ordains a king, it is not a king which ordains a people.' This concept of the conferral of the dignity of kingship 'makes it unlikely that *Crith Gablach*'s contractual approach has its roots in canon law' ('*Crith Gablach* on kingship', 119). In this instance, as Charles-Edwards points out, 'nobility is determined by the number of base clients; the larger the lord's clientela, the more noble he is. Nobility is conferred, therefore, from below...Base clients, who are not themselves noble, confer nobility upon their lords.' (*ibid.*, 110). This is in contrast to the contemporary *CCH*, where the source of authority for royal dignity was by the will of God. The first two chapters of Book XXV of *CCH*, entitled *De Regno*, outlines the references to ordination in the Books of Kings (Bart Jaski has noted that while Recension A, that published by Wasserschleben, has Book 25 begin with the chapter on Saul's unction by Samuel, followed by the chapter in which Saul is chosen by lot, Recension B (which adds a number of chapters not found in A) opens with a quotation from Isidore on the title of king and then cites the two chapters of Recension A in reverse order: first lots are drawn, then follows the unction, 'a more logical sequence from the point of view of Irish practice of succession and ordination' ('Cú Chuimne, Ruben and the Compilation of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 14 (2000), 51-69, at 61)). Charles-Edwards has also noted, in connection with Adomnán's account of Áedán's ordination, that

The substitution, as the ordainer, of the saint for the people shifts the focus of interest away from the relationship between ruler and ruled towards the relationship between ruler and God. Once this has happened the critical issue is no longer to be the discharge of matched obligations by king and people, but the moral condition of the ruler in the sight of God. In Adomnán's story, God's determination to have Áedán as king triumphs even over the saint's strong preference for Áedán's brother Éoganán; the Dál Riata – the people – are out of the picture entirely. ('*Crith Gablach* on kingship', 118.)

This ideology, first reflected by Adomnán's account, must have resulted in a significantly different relationship between the church and the ruling elite: if kings ruled by the will of God, then the church itself increasingly became the source of legitimacy for kings and nobles and, consequently, acquired an increasingly important political role throughout the course of the eighth century. This is not to suggest that this political power was deliberately pursued by the church, but there can be no doubt that it arose because the church had come to effectively supplant the dependent population as the source of the sanction to rule.

The disassociation of kingship from the basis of a mutual, contractual obligation with a free population, in favour of an ideology advocating the right to rule by divine consent, sanctioned by the church, removed the personal ties between king and people and, correspondingly, allowed a more abstract concept of kingship. This change in the understanding of the source of royal authority would have the greatest impact, inevitably, upon the understanding of the potential extent of political power as the ruling elite came to consider that they ruled by divine, rather than popular, consent. It resulted in the removal of the geographical restriction of kingship, hitherto derived from, and dependent upon, the localised population over which kings could legitimately claim to rule. This allowed the increasing centralisation of authority among the more powerful kings that, ultimately, would result in a concentration of power within the hands of a narrowing, ultra-elite group contesting the very pinnacle of the ruling hierarchy with the title of *rí Érenn*.

the socio-economically dependent tenantry of ecclesiastical estates,¹³ provided the church with that political significance. The heads of ecclesiastical foundations would have been political figures, if for no other reason than they were the embodiment of the legal standing provided by the status of their church. This political power, whether desired or not, could not have been neglected or ignored.

This 'large-scale power' had been progressively more focussed since the second half of the seventh century. The claims put forward by Tírechán and Muirchú¹⁴ and by Cogitosus,¹⁵ that the *paruchia* of Patrick or of Brigit consisted of the whole island of Ireland, resulted in a change of perception in the basis of rights to superiority over land.¹⁶ This, in turn, led to an increasing centralisation of ecclesiastical authority within the hands of the greatest of the religious foundations as they vied for supremacy and the consequent acknowledgement of metropolitan status. While the basis of *paruchiae* centred on pastoral provision at a local level,¹⁷ the *manaig* of

¹³ For the development of the debate on both the meaning of the term *manach* and the position held by *manaig*, see Kathleen Hughes, 'The Church and the world in early Christian Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies* 13 (1962), 99-116; *idem*, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 134-274; Corish, *The Christian Mission*, 32-49; Sharpe, 'Churches and communities', 81-109; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The pastoral role of the church in the early Irish laws', in Blair & Sharpe (edd.), 1992, 63-80; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, esp. 363-454.

¹⁴ For the text of both Muirchú's *Vita S Patricii* and Tírechán's *Collectanea*, see Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, 62-122; 122-62. For a discussion of the purpose of the *Collectanea*, see Catherine Swift's article, 'Tírechán's motives in compiling the *Collectanea*: an alternative interpretation', *Ériu* 45 (1994), 53-82.

¹⁵ For Cogitosus' *Vita S Brigidae*, see S. Connolly and J.-M Picard, 'Cogitosus: Life of Saint Brigit', *JRS* 117 (1987), 5-27.

¹⁶ That is, in the right to superiority by the gift of God. Tírechán could claim that, of Patrick, 'God gave him the whole island with its people through the agency of an angel of the Lord' (...*Deus dedit illi...totam insulam cum hominibus per anguelum Domini...*) (138 §18.2, 3). Cogitosus, notably, could not lay such a claim, projecting only that Kildare was

Caput pene omnium Hibernensium ecclesiarum et culmen praecellens omnia monasteria Scotorum, cuius parochia per totam Hibernensam terram diffusa, a mari usque ad mare extensa est.

Head of almost all the churches of the Irish and pinnacle surpassing all the *monasterium* of the Gael, the *paruchia* of which is spread through the whole land of Ireland and extends from sea to sea.

¹⁷ *Parochia*, in Late Latin, can mean any area of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, although usually 'diocese' or later 'parish'; but the spelling convention of *paruchia*, used by Kenney and retained by Hughes, derives from Tírechán's *paruchia Patricii*, which Sharpe considered was the origin of the term. As with so much else concerning early Irish ecclesiastical history, consideration of the nature of *paruchiae* has undergone some revision in recent years, Sharpe ('Some problems', 243-4) believed that the understanding of the meaning of *paruchia* as a technical term for a non-territorial jurisdiction over all monasteries with a common founder probably stemmed from Kenney (*Sources*, 291-2), but was popularised by Kathleen Hughes. He understood *paruchia* to refer to the jurisdictional rights of an ecclesiastical community ('Some problems', 244, n. 4). Colmán Etchingham pointed out that the evidence for *paruchiae* is contradictory, appearing differently from its usage in canon law and in hagiography – the canons apparently indicate an

dependent spheres of jurisdiction provided the ‘property and political rights’¹⁸ for those houses at the very apex of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to increase their status and press for supremacy. This would account for the apparently contradictory evidence for the nature of *paruchia* in the various sources. The *paruchia* of a *prímthúath*, for example, would consist of several *túatha*, which would be a single, defined territorial entity;¹⁹ while the *paruchia* of one of the greatest religious houses could well consist of several *prímthúatha*, which, while most likely those nearest the community, need not be so – such as Tírechán’s claim for Armagh of all the primary churches of Ireland (*omnes primitiuae æcclessiae Hiberniae*) – and, therefore, could

‘earlier, geographically coherent episcopal *paruchia*, while hagiography depicts the later dispersed “monastic *paruchia*” (‘Implications of *paruchia*’, *Ériu* 44 (1993), 139-62, at 140.). He concluded from the evidence of *CCH* that

the *paruchia* of the canonists was a demarcated sphere of pastoral jurisdiction, normally that of a bishop, in which, however, the presiding official need not himself be a bishop... There is no reason to doubt that the *paruchia* contemplated by the canonists was both a geographically coherent and a relatively compact entity, rather than a federation of widely scattered churches (*ibid.*, 146-7).

For the development of the revision of the meaning of *paruchia*, see Hughes, *The Church in Early Society*, 57-78; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, ‘The early Irish churches: some aspects of organisation’, in Ó Corráin (ed.) *Irish Antiquity*, Cork 1981, 327-41; Sharpe, ‘Some problems’, 130-70; *idem*, ‘Churches and communities in early medieval Ireland: towards a pastoral model’, in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (edd.) *Pastoral care before the parish*, Leicester 1992, 81-109; Thomas Charles-Edwards, ‘The pastoral role of the church in the early Irish laws’, in Blair and Sharpe (edd.), *Pastoral care before the parish*, 63-80; Colmán Etchingham, ‘The implications of *paruchia*’ *idem*, *Church organisation in Ireland AD 650-1000*, Maynooth 1999.

While the evidence for the nature of *paruchia* is indeed apparently contradictory, as Etchingham indicated, these apparent contradictions derive from the emphasis of the particular sources. The canons are concerned with episcopal duties and pastoral provision and so emphasize this aspect of jurisdiction within *paruchia*; while the saints’ lives are concerned to relate the ascetic ideal and holiness of their subject and so emphasize other aspects of *paruchia*. Etchingham has also drawn attention to the fact that there is some overlap in the apparent contradictions, observing that:

While Tírechán’s *paruchia* also seems on a very much larger scale than that of the *Hibernensis*, two important features are reminiscent of the canons. First is the fact that Patrick’s *paruchia* is portrayed as a temporal asset or property which might be claimed, legitimately held, or misappropriated... Secondly, influence over both territory and people, the community of the faithful, is once more what is at issue. The pastoral dimension of *paruchia* is rendered explicit by connecting it with indoctrination and baptism. It is also noteworthy that the passage immediately following [in Tírechán] includes the statement that *ipsius sunt omnes primitiuae Hiberniae* ‘all the primary churches of Ireland are his’ (138 §18.4). It appears reasonable to deduce a link between authority over these and the island-wide sway designated *paruchia*. (*Church organisation*, 115-6).

The sources, therefore, have their own difference in *emphasis* on the nature of *paruchia*, according to their individual requirements, rather than a difference in *meaning* of what a *paruchia* constitutes. It would appear that what was meant by *paruchia* was *any* sphere of jurisdiction by a church over another church or churches and the community or communities to whom they administered.

¹⁸ Sharpe, ‘Some problems’, 264.

¹⁹ The term *prímthúath* is noted in the variant of *Ríagail Phátraic* appended to *Ríagail na Celed nDé: Is se ata [sic ?foratá] anmunna fher nErenn i timna Patraic, co raibe prim-espoc cecha prim-tuathi i nErenn...* (Gwynn, ‘The Rule of Tallaght’, §60).

easily consist of scattered dependencies. As Sharpe noted, 'Disputes between great churches at this level in the structure are about power and about property; they are not about who was responsible for the supervision of pastoral care in local communities.'²⁰

The affiliation of free churches to those principal foundations contesting metropolitan status from the late seventh century led to an increasing centralisation of ecclesiastical authority and a recognised hierarchy within the church. Correspondingly, the 'property and political rights', focussed upon the greatest religious foundations, provided both a concentration of political power and an accumulation of resources that was unprecedented. This is not to suggest that this political power itself was necessarily focussed, for the rivalries among the greatest houses often saw them pulling in different directions to each other; but it was this accumulation of resources through such centralisation of authority which would necessarily lead to 'the separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions', in order to prevent the dilution of the primary, ecclesiastical, duties of senior churchmen who would have needed to spend a proportionately greater amount of time attending to the mundane practicalities attendant upon the administration of the *paruchia*.

A great deal of the misunderstanding concerning the early medieval Irish church has resulted from the bewildering array of titles recorded of ecclesiastical rulers and from confusion over what was meant by these titles. *Abbas*, for example, has, naturally, been interpreted as 'abbot', particularly with the belief that the Irish church was based on monasticism. In both the ninth century *Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii*,²¹ however, and the *vita* of Ailbe of Emly,²² the pope is described as the *abbas*

²⁰ Sharpe, 'Churches and communities', 107.

²¹ Mulchrone, *Bethu Pátraic*. For considerations of the date of compilation of *Vita Tripartita*, see note 20, p. 13, above.

²² W.W. Heist, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Brussels 1965, 118-31. Heist places the compilation of the *vita* in the eighth century. More recently, Richard Sharpe, in *Medieval Irish Saints Lives*, Oxford 1991, and Máire Herbert, 'Hagiography', in Kim McCone and Katharine Simms (edd.), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, Maynooth 1996, 79-90, consider a date in the late eighth or ninth centuries.

of Rome, which ought to give pause to the unquestioned acceptance of the meaning of 'abbot' in the conventional sense. As Thomas Charles-Edwards has recently noted:

Abbas was a more personal term (*abba* 'father') for any superior of a religious community or of an individual. In sixth-century Ireland, it was not yet monopolised by monks: the *abbas* was not always an abbot. When we later meet the pope being described as '*abbas* of Rome', this is not necessarily because the early Irish church was so monastic that it conceived of all ecclesiastical superiors as abbots, but rather because *abbas* preserved an older and wider meaning lost in the rest of Christendom.²³

The question, in this case, would therefore be for how long this wider meaning for *abbas* was understood in Ireland, but the fact that it was so used in the *Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii*, which may perhaps date to the last decade of the ninth century, suggests that during the entire period under study, *abbas* could be used of any ecclesiastical head.

Another term which may be considered ambiguous as to meaning, but was perhaps more specific in the context of its authority, was *comarba*, the Latin equivalent of which, *heres*, was used by Tírechán to describe the head of the *paruchia Patricii*.²⁴ It has been generally understood that the title *comarba*, together with the name of a saint, meant the abbot of the community founded by that saint, so that, by the tenth century, *comarba* was understood as a synonym for 'abbot'. More properly, *comarba* depicted the head of a *familia*.²⁵ However, John Bannerman has pointed out that the use of *comarba* does not occur until the mid-ninth century, a point that is true from the witness of *AU*, and that the original secular meaning of *comarba* concerned the inheritance of land.²⁶ It would seem to follow from this that the earlier references

²³ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 249.

²⁴ The context of Tírechán's use of *heres* is specific: *si quaererat heres Patricii paruchiam illius...* Bieler (ed.), *Patrician texts*, 138, §§ 2, 3.

²⁵ See the discussion by John Bannerman in 'Comarba Coluim Chille and the Relics of Columba', *Innes Review* 44 (1993), 14-47.

²⁶ *ibid.*, 14-5. Bannerman discounts the reference to Failbe son of Guaire as *heres Mael Rubi Apor Crossan* in *AU* 737.2 as 'likely to be a later interpolation' (14, n.5). He makes no comment on the references to the use of *heres/comarba* in *ATig sa* 758 (x2); *AFM, sa* 740 (=AU 745.6, where *prinncipis* is used instead), 813, 818 (=AU 820.1, *prinnceps*), 821, 829 (=AU 831.3, *prinnceps*),

to *heres / comarba* in an ecclesiastical context, such as that of Tírechán, should be understood in reference to the administration of ecclesiastical estates, rather than in any spiritual capacity. This would indicate that *heres Patricii* meant 'heir of Patrick's estates'. However, when Benén became *heres Patricii* at the beginning of Tírechán's account, Armagh may have had little in the way of estates and therefore the original meaning of the term could have been 'heir to Patrick's authority' generally. Bannerman's observations, in regard to the period from the mid-ninth century, however, appear valid and it seems clear that by this time at the very least the term *heres / comarba* had become primarily associated with the administration of ecclesiastical estates.

Wendy Davies stated that, in Ireland, *princeps* 'was used of heads of monastic houses – abbots – and...this constitutes a particularization which is exceptional...it is not normally to be found with this sense in other areas of Europe.'²⁷ Indeed, she goes on to say 'the use of *princeps* for 'abbot' could hardly have become so common without the analogy of the secular ruler in mind.'²⁸ A similar understanding, that the *princeps* was, in effect, synonymous with the abbot, may lie at the root of the common rendering of *airchinnech*, the vernacular equivalent of *princeps*, as 'lay-abbot'. Colmán Etchingham, however, considered that the compilers of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* changed the title of the head of a *paruchia* to *princeps*, 'to

835 (=AU 836.2, *princeps*. This entry in *AFM* is a duplication of the obit of Dúnlán son of Cathusach, which is also noted under 833, but where he is merely referred to as *abb Corcaige*) and 846. Certainly as far as *AU* is concerned, there are no references to *heredes / comarbada* before 851, excepting the reference to the successor of Máel Ruba. It is uncertain, therefore, whether Bannerman considered all these references to be later interpolations to the sources of *ATig* and *AFM* or whether he restricted his investigation to the witness of *AU*. It is impossible to tell from the context of the extant entries of *ATig* and *AFM* whether they were later interpolations to their sources. For *comarbae* as the inheritors of land, see Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, Dublin, 1991, 102-5.

²⁷ Wendy Davies, 'Clerics as Rulers: Some implications of the terminology of the ecclesiastical authority in early medieval Ireland', in N. Brooks (ed.), *Latin and the Vernacular Languages in Early Medieval Britain*, Leicester, 1982, 81-97, at 83. She points out that the meaning of *princeps* is 'first chief' and applied 'not only to the emperor in classical Rome but to all sorts of rulers in early medieval contexts – kings, dukes, counts, heads of households, and so on.' Evidently an 'accurate' translation depends on context, but note that the connotations are entirely secular.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 84.

express more unambiguously than does *abbas*...[the head of a church] who was neither necessarily in major clerical orders nor a conventional abbot.²⁹

Book xxxvii of *CCH*, entitled *De Principatu*, considered the position of *princeps* in detail. In a recent consideration of *CCH*, Etchingham notes that:

The respective profiles of the bishop and the *princeps* in the *Hibernensis* indicates that sacramental power and specific pastoral functions are peculiar to the bishop as a member of the clerical order, but that administration of property may be undertaken by either bishop or *princeps*.³⁰

While Book xxxvii 'affirms that the aspirant *princeps* should himself have been a *monachus*',³¹ it is plain from Book xliii § 6

that the paradigm of the *princeps* is non-clerical, though it is anticipated that some *principes* might be in major orders. Ó Corráin observes that his relationship with his church resembles the secular marriage contract...and this passage also clearly reflects Old Testament models in that the *princeps* provides for the clergy just as Moses, a Levite but not a priest, supplied the material needs of the priest Aaron.³²

Further, Etchingham notes that

Much attention is devoted to the problem posed by *mali principes* 'evil leaders', moved by greed and vainglory, who *cupidatem pecuniae magis exercent quam animarum* 'exercise a passion for riches rather than for souls' and there is a warning against a *laicus* 'layman' who is irregularly tonsured and seizes the principate, while the *subjecti/subditi* are instructed to admonish the wayward superior but to remain obedient.³³

²⁹ Etchingham, 'Implications of *paruchia*', 145.

³⁰ Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 53.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*, 52; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Irish law and canon law', in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (edd.), *Irland und Europa: die Kirche in Frühmittelaltes*, Stuttgart, 1984, 157-66, at 161-4; D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach and A. Breen, 'The laws of the Irish', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 382-438.

³³ Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 51.

The provision of example, precedent and sanction in Book xxxvii certainly gives the impression that the concern of the compilers of *CCH* to provide such precedents was due to the fact that it was a relatively new position, that 'the separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions' described by Sharpe, suggested as being underway by the end of the seventh century, at least in Armagh, by Tírechán's reference to the *heres* of the *paruchia Patricii*, was, by the second quarter of the eighth century, sufficiently widespread to warrant such guidance. In another recent study, Jean-Michel Picard has noted that, while 'the terms *princeps* and *principatus* are well attested in Hiberno-Latin literature from the mid-seventh century, their use in the Annals of Ulster does not become widespread until the end of the eighth century, flourishes between 800 and 940, and disappears after 948.'³⁴ He concludes that the

Hiberno-Latin texts contain enough evidence to show that the *principatus* was a specific and important function in Irish society and not just a variant for *abbatia*. It probably developed during the seventh century and is attested in multiple sources from the 680's. It became a regular feature of Irish society from the mid-ninth century and was maintained as one of the highest social positions, with real political and economical power, at least until the twelfth century.³⁵

While, on the one hand, it may be considered that the term *abbas* and *princeps* were largely interchangeable – an alternate view adhered to by some – it is clear from the conclusions of these scholars that they believe there was a distinction that would have been understood by contemporaries. The problem arises when the same individual is referred to by both titles, thereby blurring any distinction.

It seems to have been the case, however, that the head of a church, responsible for the administration of the resources within his church's sphere of jurisdiction, was generally referred to as *abbas*, even although this term in its wider, familial, sense could equally refer to a bishop or an abbot. The increasing centralisation of

³⁴ Jean-Michel Picard, '*Princeps* and *principatus* in the early Irish church: a reassessment', in A.P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas*, Dublin, 2000, 146-60

³⁵ *ibid.*, 156.

ecclesiastical authority towards the end of the seventh century, however, and the resulting concentration of resources available to those foundations at the apex of the ecclesiastic hierarchy, led to the emergence of specialist administrators of the church's temporalities, the 'separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions'. Correspondingly, subsequent references to the highest of offices of the church, together with *abbas*, become variously noted as *heres / comarba* or *princeps / airchinnech*. While the former title derived from a context relating to the inheritance of land, it does seem to have become restricted to the head of an ecclesiastical *familia* and thus generally limited to the heads of the greatest foundations; the latter, however, appear to have been intended as specialist ecclesiastical administrators, a position which, from the evidence of *CCH*, could be held by bishop, abbot or layman and should not be considered synonymous with the abbot or anyone else.

Jean-Michel Picard has noted a distinction in the use of *abbas* and *princeps / airchinnech*. He draws attention to the fact that

in the case of the well known larger monasteries like Armagh, Clonmacnois, Clonard, Clonfert, Glendalough, *abbas* is the dominant title and *princeps* is used only occasionally, in the case of other ecclesiastical sites, the ruler is always called *princeps* and never *abbas*. This is the case of Castledermot, Errigal and Santry. At Ardstraw, Cork, Derry, Dromiskin, Dunleer, Inishkeen, Kiltroom, Tallaght, Trevet, the preferred title is *princeps* or *airchinnech* rather than *abbas*. On the other hand, sites like Bangor, Nendrum or Connor are not associated with the rule of a *princeps*.³⁶

While this is an interesting demarcation in the record, particularly when considered in conjunction with Bannerman's discussion of the recorded use of *comarba*,³⁷ which, as he indicates, was, by its very nature, restricted to 'the well known larger monasteries' and thus may be considered to have been linked with those sites with a predominant usage of *abbas*, it may be unwise to consider an overstrict distinction between the use

³⁶ *ibid.*, 147.

³⁷ Bannerman, *Comarba Coluim Chille*, 14-47.

of these titles. This would be particularly prudent as Bannerman indicates a number of foundations where the title of *comarba* continues to alternate with *princeps* or *airchinnech* and Picard's own figures indicate that although *princeps* is used only occasionally of the titles recorded in connection with Clonard, it is still used no less than five times during the ninth century. One interesting point, however, is the preference for the use of *princeps* or *airchinnech* in Máel Ruain's foundation of Tallaght and the monopoly of usage in the *céli Dé* foundation of Dísert Diarmata, or Castledermot, which very much tells against O'Dwyer's consideration that the *céli Dé* sought reform against the secularisation of the church personified by the *airchinnech*. It is clear that the 'separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions' was instigated from within the church itself. The question, in this case, therefore, must be what were the motives behind it?

It was also noted in the previous chapter that there has been a common perception that the *céli Dé* were a reform movement emergent in reaction to degeneracy within the church.³⁸ Kathleen Hughes, whose chapter entitled 'Abuses of Power'³⁹ did much to propagate this idea, although she noted, in regard to the examples generally cited as evidence of degeneracy – married clergy, 'lay-abbots', sons succeeding fathers in ecclesiastical appointments and offices held in plurality – that 'None of these customs were necessarily abuses: all were either continuous practices of early usages or direct developments from the social environment.'⁴⁰ Nevertheless, she evidently considered the Irish church to have been in religious decline to some degree during the course of, at least, the eighth century. This decline was, she envisaged, counteracted, to some extent, by the emergence of the *céli Dé*

³⁸ This is not to deny that the eighth-century Irish church itself was aware that individual churchmen could prove seriously failing in the Christian ideal. Book xvii §7 of *CCH*, for example, poses the question of the culpability of the church in regard to any individual who should prove to be a *mali princeps*, tarnishing its reputation. The reply, cited from Jerome and Romans, is that the church, collectively, bears no responsibility for the behaviour of such individuals who ultimately must answer for their own sins. This, and similarly cited examples, should not, however, be mistaken as corroborative evidence for a degenerate Irish clergy, but only that the church itself was well aware such individuals could exist and cited precedents from Continental sources for guidance in the event such circumstances should arise.

³⁹ In *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 157-72.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 166.

which she saw as a 'religious revival', albeit a short term one, without any effective legacy.

The consideration that the *céli Dé* emerged in reaction to a degenerate church essentially derives from *Monastery of Tallaght* (§§4, 26 and 77) and *Teagasg Maoil Ruain* (§§35, 82). These tracts refer to the failings of the clergy of the old churches (*luchd na sein-cheall*) and will be considered in detail below, but, before attempting to examine the basis of these statements, it is important to consider what was meant by this use of the term 'the clergy of the old churches'. It was not, as Hughes, for one, appears to have thought,⁴¹ simply a reference by *céli Dé* scribes to describe the church as a whole, before the emergence of what she believed to be the reforming *céli Dé*. 'Old church' was a term also used by Tírechán, who generally latinized the O.Ir. term *sen chell* as *senella cella*.⁴² The very fact that Tírechán latinized the vernacular term, rather than merely rendering the straightforward Latin translation *æcclesia antiqua*, would suggest that *sen chell* had a specific legal or technical definition for particular churches.⁴³ Richard Sharpe suggested that these old churches formed a particular class of churches depending on their antiquity, but with the caveat that 'one must beware of making the further inference that these "old churches" were necessarily ancient; a church founded only one generation before Tírechán wrote might have seniority, and consequently superiority, over little, local or private churches founded subsequently.'⁴⁴

Sharpe went on to discuss *andóit* as 'another word for church which puts an emphasis on the church's age.'⁴⁵ *Andóit* may be a borrowing from Late Latin

⁴¹ As indicated when she stated that the *óentu Máel Ruain* 'gives a list of twelve men, of whom three are certainly from old foundations, but others are from houses which appear to have been founded by reformers', *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 181. For the *óentu*, see below, pp. 236-42.

⁴² Although he also refers, on occasion, to *æcclessiam senem nepotum Aillello* (§7) and also to a church in Ard Licce as *Sendomnach* (§27).

⁴³ Also, as Richard Sharpe points out, 'Shankill is not uncommon as a placename element'; 'Churches and communities', 93.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

antitatem, where syncopation had occurred before the borrowing into Old Irish.⁴⁶

Damian McManus noted that:

Vendryes derives this OI word from a British form of Late Latin *antitas* (< *antiquitas*), but Greene argues that this is ‘another example of the unjustified equation of British Latin pronunciation with British origin’, and he goes on to point out that the word is not attested in any Neo-British language. The argument that *andóit* need not derive from British as distinct from British Latin, if indeed it is a Lat. loan-word at all, is a valid one, but Greene’s observation cannot exclude this possibility.⁴⁷

There seems, therefore, to be some uncertainty among philologists about the origin of the term. Sharpe, however, noted that *andóit* was glossed in *CIH*, 620.34, with ‘a church which precedes another is a head, and it is earlier, .i. the first.’⁴⁸ Etchingham elaborated on this point, suggesting that the translation of *andóit* as ‘mother-church’ was more appropriate than any etymological derivation for ‘ancient-foundation’ from *antiquitas*:

in view of the following glosses: *Andóit .i. eclais doét [= do·fet] in aili, as cenn 7 is tuiside .i. tús* ‘i.e. a church which takes preference of another, it is head and is pre-eminent, i.e. precedence’, and *annóit .i. a mbí taisí inn érloma* ‘i.e. in which are the relics of the founder’.⁴⁹

These glosses indicate that these medieval scribes understood ‘an etymological analysis of *andóit* as *a ndo-fet*’,⁵⁰ – ‘that which takes precedence’ – rather than from any Latin origin, although the tendency for medieval glossators to rationalise in such a way would mean that this etymological analysis must remain uncertain. The important point here, however, is that these glosses provided this rationalisation to the origins of a meaning that was understood – that *andóit* indicated a pre-eminent church.

⁴⁶ Damian McManus, ‘A chronology of Latin loanwords in early Irish’, *Ériu* 34 (1983), 21-71, at pp. 61, 63 and 66.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 61, n. 118.

⁴⁸ Sharpe, ‘Churches and communities’, 93, n. 35.

⁴⁹ Etchingham, ‘The implications of *paruchia*’, 154.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, n. 30.

It is clear, therefore, that *andóit* was understood to mean a senior church and like the meaning of senior itself can have a dichotomy of meaning between age and position. Tírechán's reference to *omnes primitivae ecclesiae Hiberniae*, 'all the primary churches of Ireland' (§18), which he claims for St Patrick, and thus Armagh, would appear to mean these churches, as Sharpe proposed.⁵¹ The definition of these churches, according to the gloss in *Córus Béscnai – a mbí taisí inn érloma*, 'in which are the relics of the *érlam*' – indicates one of the qualifications, according to §3 of *Bretha Nemed Toísech*,⁵² which ennobled a church. *Andóit*, then, was a noble church, under which were dependent churches. It is clear from the context of references to the term that the various legal and ecclesiastical texts in which it is mentioned 'bind the term *andóit* firmly into a context of local pastoral provision, even if on occasion the "mother-church" in question may have been a larger, monastically-oriented establishment like Clonmacnoise or Iona.'⁵³ The question, then, is whether the term *sen chell*, used by Tírechán or the source for both *Mon. Tall.* and *Teagasg Maoil Ruain*, equates with *andóit*. If *sen chell* is considered a 'senior church', rather than an 'old church', with the emphasis on seniority in position rather than age, then the correlation is clear. The two terms should not necessarily be seen as synonymous, however. The *andóit* was a senior church, but, further, one ennobled by the relics of its *érlam*. This may or may not be true of the class of churches legally defined as a whole as *sen chill* – clearly the senior churches in a pastoral network – but an *andóit* would certainly have numbered among those considered to have been *sen chell*.

The argument that the *céli Dé* were a reform movement emerging in reaction to a secularisation and degeneracy of the church has, to some degree, been somewhat circular. They were perceived as a reform movement because the evidence of *Mon. Tall.* and *Teagasg* decries an iniquitous, defiled and evil clergy; nevertheless, it is true

⁵¹ Sharpe, 'Some problems', 254 ff.

⁵² Breatnach, 'The first third of *Bretha Nemed Toísech*', 8. For the *érlam*, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam: The Patron-Saint of an Irish Church', in R. Sharpe and A. Thacker (edd.), *Local Saints and Local Churches* (forthcoming).

⁵³ T.O. Clancy, 'Annat in Scotland and the origins of the parish', *Innes Review* 46 (1995), 91-115, at 100.

that it often appears the case that the ‘clergy of the old churches’ are depicted in the worst possible light because the *céli Dé* were accepted as reformers and thus needed something to react against. Hughes’ own presentation is a case in point. Despite her awareness that ‘ardent reformers are bad witnesses to the piety of their predecessors’,⁵⁴ she cites in full §35 of *Teagasg*, which explicitly calls the clergy of the old churches evil, then refers to §4 of *Mon. Tall.* as ‘another version’. This ‘more succinct’ account has no reference to evil clergy. It has been seen that these texts are closely related and thus not independent evidence; but Hughes’ context gives the impression that the latter was an abridged version of the former. While neither of the surviving texts of *Mon. Tall.* nor *Teagasg* are original versions, both ultimately deriving from an earlier single source, this impression is misleading. The sole surviving text of *Mon. Tall.* dates from the fifteenth century and *Teagasg*, surviving in a seventeenth-century hand, has evidently been subsequently embellished with exaggerated language. The exaggerated phraseology, which explicitly referred to the clergy as ‘evil’ (*olc*), clearly did not originate with the extant transcription (see above, p. 89, n. 48), but, equally clearly, did not derive from the original source. The sections cited – §§4, 26 and 77 of *Mon. Tall.* and §§35 and 82 of *Teagasg* – are not independent. While there is no direct equivalent section for §77 from *Mon. Tall.* in *Teagasg*, §4 equates to §35 and §26 to §82 (see above, pp. 83, 85). It is worthwhile reproducing these sections here to allow a full textual comparison of what is actually stated.

§35 of *Teagasg* states:

Do fhiafraig Maol dithreib do Elair an bhudh choir ní do thoradh na heagailsi do ghlacadh o cleircibh na sein-cheall ara bfionnfuidhe nach beith beatha mhaith aca. Do freagair Elair do gur chóir, ‘do brigh,’ ar se ‘nach luigheann enní dia n-olc ort-sa muna raibhe cuid agad da ngabaill no do ccongmhail isna ceimionnaibh a bhfuilid no isna hordaigh, 7 ge go mbeiddis-sion coirpthe ar son a ndroc-bheathadh féin, ní coirpthe toradh na cille no an naoimh do bheannaigh innte. As fearr an ceart atá againne

⁵⁴ Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 175.

ar a ghabhail, má gheibmid é, ina ata acasan ar a bheith aca, 7 iad go holc.

Máel Díthruib asked Elair whether it would be right to accept any of the fruits of the church from the clergy of the old churches who were known not to be leading a good life. Elair replied that it was right, 'For,' he said, 'you have no responsibility for their evil ways if you had no hand in receiving or maintaining them in the degrees or orders which they occupy; and even though they be corrupt, by reason of their own bad life, the fruits of the church, or of the saint who left his blessing there, are not corrupt. We have a better right to receive them, if we do receive them, than they have to own them, being evil as they are.'⁵⁵

Here the clergy of the old churches are described as evil and corrupt by reason of their own bad life. It may be argued that there is some ambiguity as to meaning here, but it is surely plain that the reading is intended to refer to only those 'who were known not to be leading a good life' and not as a blanket condemnation of the entire clergy of the old churches. When compared to the corresponding tract - §4 - of *Mon. Tall.*, the extent to which the original meaning of §35 of *Teagasg* has apparently been subsequently misappropriated ought to at least give pause before its citation as evidence of a wholesale reprobate clergy. §4 states:

Iarfacht maoldithruib do helair manipad lor reim iond aosa i senchellaib dús ind gebad ní do thorad ionda cilci huadaib Issed asbert helair a airidiu. arnit corpsiu manibe cuid deid inda gabail nó inda fostud isna hordaib. arced coirpti sium olsessim ní corpat torud ind erlamai. Ar is disliu [sic - ? dilsiu] he dúini olsessim inddas doibsim. Is se arán dobeirti dosom fadesin cid ina insi fadessin amáin arán ruis cree. aran mochue olsesim (.i. elair) be hé dobertar dúin.

Máel Díthruib asked Elair whether, if the folk in the old churches had not properly performed their duties, he ought to accept from them any of the produce of the church? Elair replied that he should accept it, 'for it does not defile thee, if thou have no share in receiving them or in confirming them in

⁵⁵ Gwynn, 'The Rule of Tallaght', 20-1. I have slightly amended the translation.

orders: for', he said, 'though they be defiled yet they defile not the patron's fruits. For', he said, 'that belongs to us rather to them.' The only bread that used to be brought to himself, and into his own island, was the bread of Ros Cré. 'Let it be Mochua's bread,' he said (that is Elair) 'that is brought to us.'⁵⁶

While it is clear that, here, the 'folk of the old churches' nevertheless refers to the ordained clergy, the question regards a situation, not of receiving the fruits of the church from an evil clergy, corrupted by their own bad life, but one of receiving the fruits of the church from those who had not properly performed their duties. This places a somewhat different emphasis on the problem. Presumably, Mochua's old church at Ros Cré, from which the foundation of Elair's new community had been deliberately placed, was not considered failing in this respect. This is a particular useful illustration for, otherwise, the deliberate siting apart of Elair's new *céli Dé* community could be considered as a response to the perceived degeneracy of Mochua's community, who, after all, maintained the new foundation. However, this clearly was not the case and this older version of the text indicates that the problem instead concerned a failing in the standard of *pastoral* care and not debauched monks. This may be compared to §§2-3 of *Riagail Phátraic* in *LB* and §59 of *Riagail na Celed nDé*, where *Riagail Phátraic* has been appended:

Riagail Phátraic:

§2....*Nach fer gráid didiu oc ná bí dlighed ná eolus timthirechta a gráid coná bí túalaing oiffrind ná ceileabarthar ar bélaib ríog 7 epscop, ní dlig sáire ná eneclainn fir gráid i túaith ná i n-eclais.*

§3. *Nach epscop dobeir úasalgráda for nech ná bí túalaing [a] n-airberta eter chrábud 7 léigend 7 anmchairde ná eolus rechta, ná riagla, is bibda báis do Día 7 do dóinib in t-epscoip sin. Ár is imdergad do Críst 7 da eclais a comgráda do thabairt for neoch ná bí túalaing a n-airberta fri nem 7 talmáin, co mbi bráth do thúathaib 7 do ecailsib conid aire dlegar secht mblíadna peinne 7 secht cumail fri henech in Dúileman. Ár is ed foterá galar 7 angessa forsna clanna, eter eltrai 7 milliuda olchena, cen bathius*

⁵⁶ Gwynn and Purton, 'The Monastery of Tallaght', 128. I have slightly amended the translation.

ndligthech 7 cen dul fo láim n-epscoip i n-aimser théchtai, ár ní thic comláine in spirta nóim, cipé a léire baistither in duine, mane té fó láim n-epscoip iar mbathus.

§2...Any ordained man then who is mindful neither of the rule nor of the knowledge of service of his order so that he is not capable of the offering or of celebrating the Hours before kings and bishops, he is not entitled to exemption [i.e. From the privileges of the clergy of exemption from taxes, military service and other social obligation] or to the honour-price of one ordained, in laity or the church.

§3. Any bishop who confers high orders on anyone who is unable to practise them in piety and reading and spiritual guidance, and who has not a knowledge of the law or of the rule, that bishop is guilty of death to God and men. For it is an insult to Christ and to His Church to confer their orders on anyone who is incapable of using them towards Heaven and earth, so that it is ruin to peoples and churches; wherefore seven years of penance and seven cumals are necessary by way of reparation to the Creator. For it is this which causes plague and sickness to tribes, both *eltrai* and other destructions, not having lawful baptism, and not going under the hand of a bishop [in confirmation] at the prescribed time; for the perfection of the Holy Spirit comes not, however fervently a person is baptised, unless he goes under the hand of a bishop after baptism.⁵⁷

The equivalent passage in *Ríagal na Celed nDé* reads:

Nach espoc din dosber uasal grad for neoch na be tualaing nairberta i crabud acas legend acas anmcairdessa, acas eolas pecta acas riagla, acas freipuide cuibde di cec peccad ar cena is bidba do Dia acas duine in tespoc sin, uair is immdergad do Crist acas dia eclais an do roine, et ideo sex annos poeniteret, acas tabrad sect cumala oir fria henech in Duileman beos.

Any bishop, likewise, who confers noble orders upon any one who is not able to instruct in religion, and reading, and soul-friendship, and who has not a knowledge of the law and the rule, and of the proper remedy for all sins in general, that bishop is an enemy to God and man; for he has offered

⁵⁷ O'Keefe, 'The Rule of Patrick', 218, 221. I have slightly amended the translation.

an insult to Christ and his church *et ideo sex [sic - ? recte septem] annos poeniteret*, and he shall also pay seven cumals in gold as a penalty to God.⁵⁸

These tracts indicate that there was a problem concerning priests being ordained who were unable to carry out the obligations of their religious functions. Indeed, the emphasis of the nature of the complaint – where a priest had insufficient ‘knowledge of service of his order so that he is not capable of the offering or of celebrating the Hours before kings and bishops’ – clearly indicates that the predominant problem was that there were ordained priests whose grasp of the ‘law and the rule’, that is of the Liturgy and, perhaps, these tracts would seem to imply, of theology generally, was inadequate to the requirements of their position. *Riagail Phátraic* and *Riagail na Celed nDé*, in those passages cited above, provide an outline of the necessary duties which the ordained clergy were required to perform. In this sense, at least, both texts provide the distilled essence of the relevant tracts in *CCH*. A poor grasp of Latin would have retarded even basic ritual function and it would certainly have hindered the reading of Scripture, rule ‘and the proper remedy for all sins in general’. Simply, a priest without a sufficient grounding in theology, knowledge of liturgical observance or command of Latin could not fulfil the obligations of pastoral provision and the problems cited in these tracts can be readily perceived to stem from an enormous variation in the standard of learning among priests.

There has been a great deal of work undertaken by several notable scholars on the topic of pastoral provision since Sharpe’s re-evaluation of the organisation of the early Irish church.⁵⁹ Scholarly consideration of the monastically based model had, previously, largely neglected this fundamental aspect of the role of the church.

⁵⁸ Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 94-5. I have slightly amended the translation.

⁵⁹ P.J. Corish raised the question of the provision of pastoral care before Sharpe’s revision in ‘The pastoral mission in the early church’, *Léachtaí Cholm Cille* 2 (1971), 14-25. For Sharpe’s re-evaluation and the subsequent progress of the discussions, see: ‘Some problems’, 230-70; *idem*, ‘Churches and communities’, 81-109; Colmán Etchingham, ‘The early Irish church: some observations on pastoral care and dues’, *Ériu* 42 (1991), 99-118; *idem*, ‘The implications of *paruchia*’, *Ériu* 44 (1993), 139-62; *idem*, ‘Bishops in the early Irish church: a reassessment’, *Studia Hibernica* 28 (1994), 35-62; *idem*, *Church Organisation*, 105-238; T. M. Charles-

The primary obligation of the church to pastoral care is indicated in *Bretha Nemed Toisech*, where 'being without baptism, without communion, without mass, without praying for the dead, without preaching' are the first in a long list of 'disqualifications debasing a church'.⁶⁰ There is little apparent consensus among scholars on the effective extent of pastoral provision, with a range of opinion which is framed by Richard Sharpe on the one hand, who considers that the early Irish church had 'one of the most comprehensive pastoral organizations in northern Europe',⁶¹ and Colmán Etchingham on the other, who, although acknowledging the stated ideal of pastoral care for all, considers that in practice it was restricted to the *manaig*.⁶²

The two most important texts concerning pastoral provision are *Riagail Phátraic* and the secular legal tract *Córus Béscnai*.⁶³ The TCD H.3.17 variant of *Riagail Phátraic* closes with the statement: 'For it is this that would be due: an ordained man to every church, since there is not full fine of the Church of God save where there are ordained men and proper novices, and they are innocent, for frequenting the church.'⁶⁴ This can be seen to be in accord with the definition in *Bretha Nemed Toisech* that failure to provide full pastoral care debased a church. The importance placed on such provision is plain in *Riagail Phátraic*: 'For there is no heavenly abode for the soul of a person who is not baptised according to lawful baptism before everything.'⁶⁵ Failure to provide at least basic pastoral care would

Edwards, 'The pastoral role of the church in the early Irish laws', in Blair & Sharpe (edd.), 1992, 63-80; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The Early Irish Churches; Some Aspects of Organisation', in *Irish Antiquity: Essays and Studies Presented to Prof. M.J. O'Kelly*, D. Ó Corráin (ed.), Dublin, 1994, 327-41; T.O. Clancy, 'Annat in Scotland and the origins of the parish', *Innes Review* 46 (1995), 91-115.

⁶⁰ §6 *Coteat mífolad dóertho ecalso? Nihansae: buith cen bathais, cen chomnai, cen oifrend, cen immon n-anmae, cen phrecept, cen áes n-aithrige, cen achtáil, cen teoir; uisce tree for altóir, esáin oíged úaidi; nac, díchmairc, sainchron, fodord, frithairle chéile; athláech inna hairitiu, gillae inna ferthigsiud, caillech do fócrú a tráth; a fodergad co fuil, a cor fo flaith, a tascnam iar fogail, a fothlae fo mnáib, mórad flach fuiri, a fochnam co peccad, a fochraic do flaith nó fini.* Breatnach, 'The first third of *Bretha Nemed Toisech*', 11.

⁶¹ Sharpe, 'Churches and communities', 109.

⁶² Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 249-71.

⁶³ Hancock *et al*, *The Ancient Laws of Ireland*, III, 30.

⁶⁴ §16 *Ar is ed ba dligid fer gráid cecha chille, úair nád bí lándíre na eclaisi Dé acht dú i mbi óes gráid 7 maiccléirig indraice at é endaic fri aithgid n-ecalsa.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, §5. *Ar ní fuil aitreib nime do anmain duine nád baithister ó baithus dligit[h]ech ré cech rét,...*

result not only in the loss of status of individual churches, but also, more significantly, the loss of Christian souls who had not undergone 'lawful baptism'.

Yet, clearly, from the evidence of *Riagail Phátraic* there was a problem with the practical provision of such care. It was with this that the *céli Dé* were concerned in the passages cited above, but it has been mistaken for a blanket condemnation of the degeneracy of the 'older churches'. The first three paragraphs of *Riagail Phátraic* encapsulates the problem. §§2-3 have already been cited in full above; §1 states:

Foratá anmanda fer nÉrenn a timna Pátraic. Prímepscoip cecha túaithe accu fri huirdned a n-óessa gráid, fri coisecrad a n-eclas, 7 fri hanmchairdes do flaithib 7 do airchindc[h]ib, fri nóemad 7 bendachad a clainde iar mbathius.

It is on the souls of the men of Ireland from the Testament of Patrick: - each lay community to have a chief bishop for the ordination of their clergy, for the consecration of their churches, and for the spiritual guidance of princes and chieftains, and for the sanctification and blessing of their children after baptism.⁶⁶

By explicitly emphasising that 'it lies upon the souls of the men of Ireland by the Testament of Patrick', *Riagail Phátraic* makes it clear that the responsibility had been placed upon each lay community to ensure that the pastoral hierarchy within their own *túath* was appropriately staffed. It was, after all, *their* souls at risk otherwise. This, if true, may have been a contributory factor in the problem, as the number of priests required must have been very large, resulting in the ordination and appointment as priests those whose abilities were such as condemned in §§2-3 of *Riagail Phátraic*.

Clearly, the problem was perceived to be that priests were being ordained who, it was considered, could not provide 'lawful baptism'. The prohibition on such individuals undertaking pastoral provision evidently affected a significant proportion of priests, since *Riagail Phátraic* allowed that:

⁶⁶ O'Keefe, 'The Rule of Patrick', 218, 221. I have slightly amended the translation.

§13. *Má beth tra do húaite ind áessa gráid lasna túatha, cia beit trí hecailsi nó a cethair for cubus cech fir gráid acht rosó comand 7 baithius do anmain cháich 7 oiffrend hi sollamnaib 7 féilib for a n-altóir.*

§13. If in the opinion of the lay community the ordained folk be too few, [it is permitted] that there be three or four churches on the conscience of each ordained man, provided that there come communion and baptism for the soul of each and Mass on solemnities and festivals on their altars.⁶⁷

Colmán Etchingham considered, in the most recent contribution to the study of pastoral provision, that this shortage of qualified clergy resulted in a situation whereby ‘a regular ministry and concomitant payments may have applied consistently only to those over whom the church exercised particular authority, the “lawful laity” or *manaig*’, and that the ‘admittedly meagre evidence would lead one to suppose that efforts to give wider effort to the pastoral mission and enforce general liability for tithes and the like were probably rather sporadic.’⁶⁸ Certainly, Etchingham was correct to point out that the detail of pastoral provision in *Riagail Phátraic* revolves around the *manaig*. The principal obligations of pastoral provision are repeatedly stressed in *Riagail Phátraic*: ‘baptism and communion and the singing of the intercession by every church to proper *manaig*’ (§5); ‘an equivalent of baptism and communion and the singing of the intercession to each person whose proper church it is’ (§7); ‘any church in which there is no service to *manaig* for baptism and communion and the singing of the intercession...’ (§8); ‘An *airchinnech* is not entitled to impose [his will] on his *manaig*...unless the reciprocal obligations of the church be fully discharged of baptism and communion and the singing of the intercession’ and, again, in the same paragraph, ‘baptism and communion and the singing of the intercession for *manaig*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 220, 223. I have slightly amended the translation. Note that this is nothing less than sanctioned plurality among the clergy, entirely for the benefit of the laity. It may be possible, therefore, that the plurality of abbacies may also have been sanctioned, for the benefit of the communities involved, although this has been cited as evidence (see p. 122) for the degeneracy of the Irish church in the eighth century.

⁶⁸ Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 271.

both living and dead' (§9); and 'baptism and.. communion and the singing of the intercession of all the *manaig* living and dead' (§12). These clearly indicate a particular relationship with the *manaig*, as would be expected; however, §13, cited above, refers explicitly to the broader lay community – *túatha* – and mentions only 'communion and baptism for the soul of each and Mass on solemnities and festivals on their altars'. It is noticeable that there is no mention of the singing of the intercession. Can this be inferred to mean that this was a particular provision reserved for the *manaig* alone? Baptism, preaching 'to those who would hear' and communion and Mass on solemn and feast days otherwise appear to have been intended as a universally available provision.

Riagail Phátraic and *Córus Béscnai* both stipulate clearly the intent of universal availability of pastoral provision – indeed, there was an awareness of responsibility, in the church generally, of being held answerable to God for every Christian soul lost through the negligence of the church concerning such provision where it was responsible. Yet it is clear that the *manaig* were in a closer, mutually beneficial, contractual relationship with the church. Was this intercessory supplication, for both the living and the dead, the difference in pastoral provision between the *manaig* and the general populace of the *túatha*? The contractual nature of *Riagail Phátraic* and *Córus Béscnai* indicate the dues owed to the church in return for pastoral care and the ministrations of the priest. These are specified as tithes, firstlings, first-fruits⁶⁹ and death-dues, the *tertia Deo*,⁷⁰ as well as labour services. Etchingham points out that while some formulations of *tertia Deo* appear directed to

⁶⁹ Etchingham, citing evidence from *CCH*, points out that the distinction between first-fruits and firstlings was generally considered to be that

first-fruits were envisaged as a charge on the produce of the soil – bread and vegetables – payable annually, while firstlings might be levied of the clean animals – cattle and sheep – and of human offspring, in both cases restricted to males in some formulations. There is a suggestion, however, that *Synodus Sapientium* was prepared to allow that first-fruits, as well as firstlings, could be levied on livestock. The two are distinguished in that the firstling is envisaged as the first-born which 'opens the womb' of a female, whereas the first-fruit is regarded simply as the first offspring of one's livestock in any given year. One opinion cited in *Synodus Sapientium* is that tithes pertain only to livestock, but another, favoured too by both the unpublished texts from the *Hibernensis*, is that tithes may also be taken of the produce of the soil. *ibid.*, 241.

⁷⁰ See the discussion on *tertia Deo* in Etchingham, *ibid.*, 275-8.

the populace in general, *CCH* and later material suggest that the liability was borne by the *manaig* and believes, with some justification, that, ‘as regards the general populace, ministration and the exaction of dues is more likely to have been, at best, patchy, sporadic and largely dependent on the co-operation of lay magnates’.⁷¹ This certainly appears justified from the perspective of the exaction of dues; but if the church had a responsibility, and accepted that it would be held to account for the loss of Christian souls, for pastoral provision to all Christians, what, exactly, were the *manaig* receiving in return for these dues? Baptism, confirmation, preaching and Mass on solemn and feast days were available to all, if §13 of *Ríagail Phátraic* is at all representative, which Etchingham understands ‘outlines a realistic minimum service to be performed in the context of a shortage of clergy’,⁷² and the singing of the intercession appears to be a key differentiation. This is, after all, as its description would appear to indicate, an *active* intercession on behalf of the individual by the church for divine acceptance. Certainly, this is a great deal to build on the foundation of a single passage - §13 of TCD H.3.17 text of *Ríagail Phátraic*. §58 of the variant, LB, text of *Ríagail Phátraic* appended to *Ríagail na Celed nDé*, however, outlines the dues owed to ‘an ordained priest from the minor churches of the laity’,⁷³ for ministration stipulated to be ‘baptism, communion, intercessory prayer for the living and the dead and mass every Sunday and every chief high-day and every chief festival’. If so, this would nullify any suggestion that intercessory prayer was a benefit restricted to the *manaig*, as here it appears due to the laity at large; however, the corresponding section in TCD *Ríagail Phátraic* makes it clear that this passage, again, pertained specifically to the *manaig*.⁷⁴ There is no equivalent passage to §13 in the variant text of *Ríagail Phátraic* with which it may be compared and so the suggestion that the singing of intercessory prayer was a provision restricted to the *manaig* can be no more than tentative, based as it is on such restricted evidence.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 288-9; quote 289.

⁷² *ibid.*, 254.

⁷³ *Cech eclais tra i mbl fer gráid do mhi[n]-eclaisib túaithe.*

⁷⁴ §12. *Aitire dogó fria láim de manchaib cech ecailsi bes for a chubus...*

However, the likelihood that this was the case would certainly resolve some of the apparently contradictory aspects of the material regarding pastoral provision, while shedding some light on the specific benefit for the *manaig* in return for their labour and dues in this reciprocal relationship they had with the church.

Preaching, communion and baptism, otherwise, were available to all. As already noted, *Riagail Phátraic* makes it plain that ‘there is no heavenly abode for the soul of the person who is not baptised according to lawful baptism’ (§5) – lawful baptism, it is made clear elsewhere, must be confirmed by going under the hand of a bishop ‘at the prescribed time’ after baptism (§3). It is clear that it was not confirmation itself, seen as a necessary requirement, which made baptism ‘lawful’, so what, then, constituted lawful baptism, or, perhaps the question more appropriately ought to be, what was it that may have cast doubt on the validity or ‘legality’ of baptism?

Bede recounts an anecdote related to him by Herebald, abbot of a monastery near Tynemouth, who, as a young cleric, had become involved in a horse race having been forbidden to do so by his bishop, John of Beverley. During the course of the race, Herebald was badly injured having been thrown from his horse and lay close to death. Despite the best efforts of the prayers of the community, Herebald’s condition did not improve.

Then, inspired by God – as was soon evident – he [Bishop John] asked me [Herebald] if I knew for certain whether I had been baptized. I answered that I was sure beyond a doubt that I had been washed in the waters of salvation for the forgiveness of sins; and I told him the name of the priest who had baptized me. But he said: ‘If you were baptized by that priest, you were not validly baptized. For I know him. When he was ordained priest, he was so slow-witted that he could not learn how to catechize and baptize. For this reason, I ordered him to cease presuming to exercise this ministry, because he was too ignorant to carry it out properly’.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ HE v 6.

Herebald was then 'validly' baptized and made a full and rapid recovery. Similarly, in outlining the influence of Virgil, bishop of Salzburg (d. 784), one of the many Irish ecclesiastics who had migrated to the continent, Michael Enright relates the fact that, in the early months of 746, 'Boniface ordered Virgil and his like-minded companion Sidonius to rebaptize individuals previously initiated by a poorly educated Bavarian priest who had employed the ungrammatical formula *Baptizo te in nomine patria et filia et spiritus sancti*.'⁷⁶ Clearly, the grammatical form and form of the ritual used in baptism was of a precise and fundamental importance. In such a case it is all too clear how ignorance, or a lack of understanding, could have been considered to place souls at risk – souls for which the church itself would have been held accountable. The need for an accepted and universal standard would have been palpable.

The practical results of this consideration may be reflected in the 'Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations', a text Daniel Binchy suggested was a product of 'the "Tallaght" school' (above, pp. 94-7). Its *céli Dé* credentials, therefore, would appear unimpeachable, but the concerns of this tract, as already indicated in the previous chapter, was not merely the salvation of souls, but concerned with this responsibility of the church for the souls in its care. This is evident from the composition of the text, which opens with various means whereby active intercession by the living could rescue souls of individuals from Hell. These sections are followed by an account of why it is desirable to avoid the imposition of penance over prolonged periods: (§6) 'As the body [which is left] for long periods of time without food and drink perishes, so does the soul [which is left] throughout the whole of its life without the Body and Blood of Christ, without the food of the soul'.⁷⁷ The remainder of the tract then provides examples and directions for intensive penitential acts which would serve in lieu of the much less intensive, but greatly prolonged, periods of penance provided for otherwise. Binchy drew attention to the fact that the term used for such penitential commutation was the OI word *arr(a)e*, which, when used in Latin texts,

⁷⁶ Michael J. Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons: the origin of the royal anointing ritual*, Berlin and New York, 1985, 103-4.

⁷⁷ For a full transcription and translation of §6, see above, pp. 95-6.

was latinized, in the dative case, as *de Arreis*. The fact that an Old Irish word was so latinized indicates that, as Binchy concluded, 'it proves beyond doubt that the practice itself is of Irish origin.'⁷⁸ Binchy's observation that 'the specialised use of O.Ir *arr(a)e* in the sense of a commutation of penance...was originally confined to the religious literature of the Culdees'⁷⁹ led him to ponder whether this system of penitential commutations was a product of 'the "Culdee" movement'.⁸⁰ Despite the indications that this system of penitential commutations did indeed emerge in *céli Dé* texts, Binchy was forced, on the basis of his understanding that the *céli Dé* were an austere ascetic reform movement emerging in the eighth century, to reject this. Since neither the understanding of the *céli Dé* as a movement nor as emerging in the eighth century are any longer tenable, Binchy's objections to his own conclusions are largely removed. It is the final objection – that the *céli Dé* were austere ascetics – which is primarily under examination here.

As those individuals undergoing penance were prohibited from approaching the altar and, consequently, partaking of the Sacrament, prolonged periods of penance could thus place the souls of these penitents at risk. The thinking behind such commutation, reflected in §6, was that prolonged periods of penance could thus do more harm than good, hence the introduction of shorter, but often more intensive, periods of penance for all but the most heinous of crimes. Again, it would seem clear that the motivating factor behind such philosophy was the accountability of the church for the souls of those for whom it was responsible.

This motivation would, even more clearly, appear to be the driving force behind the opening sections of the text which relate sustained intercessory action by which the souls of the dead may be rescued from Hell. It would appear a reasonable assumption that the church generally would not be greatly concerned about the fate of the souls of those whose actions in life would merit the descent into Hell, so the question must be, therefore, for whom was it considered these intercessory actions

⁷⁸ Binchy, 'The Old-Irish Table of Penitential Commutations', 54.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 47.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 53.

were justified? As already noted, §5 of *Riagail Phátraic* is explicit that ‘there is no heavenly abode for the soul of the person who is not baptised according to lawful baptism’, so, in this respect, it could be argued that while moves were afoot to provide an accepted and universal standard in pastoral provision, there was an awareness by the church that there were souls in Hell who were not there by their own failings, but, potentially, by ungrammatical – and therefore unlawful – baptism. Means had to be found, therefore, for the salvation of these souls at least.

The understanding that the *céli Dé* were a reform movement who emerged in reaction to an increasingly degenerate church, corrupted by secularisation, rests on passages from *Monastery of Tallaght* and *Teagasg Maoil Ruain*. These texts are not independent, both deriving from a single source, and a comparison of the language indicates the evolution of the concept of an ‘evil’ clergy. *Mon. Tall.*, the earlier of the surviving texts, indicates, rather, a problem with the fulfilment of the pastoral duties the church was obliged to undertake. The priests required to fulfil these obligations at a local level constituted the bottom layer of the hierarchical pyramid and the numbers required must have been substantial. The church, evidently, had to balance its pastoral obligations with a standard of education which, at times, fell below that the *céli Dé* scribes considered appropriate – no doubt the consideration of accountability for lost souls had much influence in this regard. Hughes suggested that there may have been a heavy mortality among the clergy during the plague outbreaks of the middle of the eighth century, which may have resulted in the ordination of priests who were not sufficiently versed in theology or proficient in liturgical ritual. The *céli Dé*, it would appear, were deeply concerned about the standard of education of some of the priests being ordained, evidently considering, naturally enough, that an insufficient grasp of the basis of the appropriate ritual was resulting in baptismal ceremonies which were not ‘lawful’ and, in effect, equal to no baptism at all. The concern for pastoral provision among the *céli Dé* is reflected in the very fact that *Riagail Phátraic* was appended to *Riagail na Celed nDé*. The attempts to standardise the quality of learning of those ordained – without which ‘there will be no belief, but black

heathenism in the land of Ireland'⁸¹ – is reflected in the texts, together with condemnation of those unsuitable and those who ordain them; and provision for a lack of clergy, with provision for priests to minister three or four churches if they felt they were able, on their conscience, to do so. This solution was intended only as a stop-gap, however, until there would be 'an ordained man to every church'. The concerns of the *céli Dé* were to establish and to maintain standards of literacy and of learning amongst the ordained clergy. This is not to suggest that the standard, hitherto, was wholly inferior – although it is clear that in the cases of many individuals it must have been – but, rather, that the standard of learning of the ordained could be greatly varied. The assertion that the early Irish church was becoming increasingly secularised under a degenerate clergy during the eighth century cannot be maintained when the evidence cited to support this instead indicates that it was concerned with providing a uniformity of standard of pastoral provision.

The belief, therefore, that the *céli Dé* emerged in the eighth century as a reform movement in reaction to a degenerate, evil clergy should be discounted; and the considerations that they were simply concerned with 'ascetic revival',⁸² or with 'restoring monastic studies to their rightful place',⁸³ are misleading. They appear instead to have been concerned to introduce a minimum standard of teaching in theology and of competence in liturgical ritual and Latin literacy, in order to maintain what they considered to be an appropriate provision of pastoral care. The *céli Dé* were not wholly concerned with standards of asceticism – the appending of *Ríagail Phátraic*, one of the most important texts regarding pastoral provision, onto *Ríagail na Celed nDé*, indicates this. They were clearly concerned with all aspects of religious duty and well aware of the obligations of the church generally. Acceptance of the *céli Dé* as a reaction to a degenerate, 'evil' clergy, therefore, is misplaced. If the *céli Dé* are indeed to be considered reformers, and the remainder of this thesis will endeavour

⁸¹ The quotation comes from the variant of *Ríagail Phátraic* appended to *Ríagail na Celed nDé* cited in Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands*, 95.

⁸² Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, heading for cap. 16.

⁸³ O'Dwyer, *Céli Dé*, 192.

to determine the validity of this claim, then the understanding of the meaning of reform has to be carefully defined. Their aims should not be described as 'religious revival' and certainly not as 'ascetic revival', for they were aware of, and very concerned with, the responsibilities of the church in the provision of pastoral care for the population generally. To fulfil even the most basic obligation of pastoral provision throughout Ireland would have required tens of thousands of priests and the *céli Dé*, it is clear, were concerned with the standards of literacy, theology and liturgical practice, necessary for the church to fulfil effectively those obligations. Maintaining this pastoral network at a functional level would also have been expensive, so part of the solution to these concerns, therefore, would require a more efficient marshalling and harnessing of the resources available to the church.

Church organisation and the *Congressio senodorum* of 780.

The *congressio senodorum* held at Tara in 780 was the first such ecclesiastical gathering recorded in Ireland since that of Birr in 697. This, in itself, may suggest an impetus in the church which had taken advantage of the opportunity of such an assembly; and the mere fact that this congress should have been held at Tara, under the leadership of the head of the community which, together with Tallaght, was one of 'The Two Eyes of Ireland' – an association accepted to indicate that Finglas was as prominent as Tallaght in the 'reform movement' and that Dublittir, consequently, was a prominent *céle Dé* – would add to the anticipation that this was an assembly of some importance. However, there is little annalistic notice of it: *AU* records that there was 'A congress of the synods of the Uí Néill and the Laigin, in the fortification of Temair, at which were present many anchorites and scribes, led by Dublittir';¹ *AI* contains no mention of the assembly and the relevant folios of *CS* and *ATig* are, unfortunately, missing. *AClon*, however, also has some notice of the event, but it survives only in a late-sixteenth / early-seventeenth century translation into 'Hiberno-English' from an earlier Irish text. It states (*sa* 773)² that 'There was a Great Convocation in the K.s pallace of Taragh of the o'Neales and Leinstermen & also of the clergie to decide their long-continued controversies, where there was a Reverent assembly of many worthy, Reverent & Venerable anchorites and scribes, of all which assembly Dowlittye was ye cheefest'.

In view of such sparse reference, the potential significance of this ecclesiastical assembly at Tara has generally been overlooked and the majority of historians who have referred to it have done so only in passing. F.J. Byrne emphasised the intermediary role of the church which lay behind the convention, stating that, following the invasion of Leinster by Donnchad Midi, king of the Uí Néill, in which he

¹ *AU* 780.12. *Congressio senodorum nepotum Neill Laginentiumque in op[p]ido Temro ubi fuerunt ancorite 7 scribe multi quibus dux erat Dublittir.*

² The individual entries in *AClon* appear to be faithfully enough preserved, but it appears that there has been a dislocation of chronology and the entries under the specified years for the second half of the eighth century appear to be consistently seven years early to those given in *AU*. The entry relating the *congressio* of 780, therefore, is entered *sa* 773.

defeated the Leinstermen 'and laid waste their territory and churches',³ the 'Céli Dé first asserted themselves on the political stage by mediating between the Uí Néill and the Laigin'.⁴ Professor Byrne may well be correct to believe that this was the reason why there should have been such an assembly of churchmen at Tara in the first place; however, there is some *prima facie* annalistic evidence to suggest that there were several ecclesiastic offices which, although periodically reflected in other, earlier, sources, were first brought to prominence at precisely this time. If so, the evidence could therefore be taken to indicate that such development took place under the auspices of the *céli Dé*.

Robin Flower found the emphasis on the phrase 'anchorites and scribes', in the report of the *congressio*, to be striking.⁵ Dublittir's own obituary in the *Annals of Ulster* states that he was also a bishop,⁶ but there is no indication of his episcopal rank in relation to the congress. Flower examined the ratio of references to anchorites and scribes and noted that the 'record of the obits of men so described only becomes at all frequent in the eighth century, and it is a curious fact that for two centuries they appear in an almost identical ratio'.⁷ He went on to provide figures, by half-century, for the annalistic references for these men, noting that the scribe and anchorite were often combined in the same person:

700-750: 8 anchorites, 7 scribes
 750-800: 12 anchorites, 7 scribes
 800-850: 25 anchorites, 20 scribes
 850-900: 18 anchorites, 20 scribes
 900-950: 6 anchorites, 6 scribes.⁸

Flower considered that these figures indicate that 'we are in the presence of a movement which rises, culminates and declines'.⁹ This movement, he observed,

was already active in the first half of the eighth century, but it appears to have produced its most characteristic literary results towards the end of that century and in the beginning of the next century. It is sometimes called the Culdee

³ AU 780.7: ...*Donnchad...uastaitque 7 combussit fines eorum 7 ecclesias.*

⁴ Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, London, 1973, 158.

⁵ Flower, 'The Two Eyes of Ireland', 66-75.

⁶ AU 796.1: *Dublittir Finnglaissi, 7 Colggu nepo Duinechto, Olchubhur m. Flainn filii Eirc rex Mumhen, scribe 7 episcopi 7 anchoritae, dormierunt.*

⁷ Flower, 'The Two Eyes of Ireland', 68.

⁸ *ibid.*

movement from the *Céli Dé*, vassals of God, by which its participants were wont to describe themselves.¹⁰

As he understood the *céli Dé* to have been a reform movement, Flower considered that the manner by which they preferred to refer to themselves, or be referred to by others, underwent a subtle change in emphasis. He indicated that

With regard to nomenclature one curious point may be noted. In the period from 650 to 800 the current names for a man of letters in the Annals is *sapiens* (OIr, *ecnaide*). The figures here are: 650-700, 6; 700-750, 13; 750-800, 18. But in the ninth century there is a marked drop in the figures, which are for the two half-centuries 4 and 6. As these figures are of obits, marking the end of the activity of the men concerned, we shall probably be safe in asserting that, at any rate for what this class of evidence is worth, the *sapiens* was the dominant figure (or at least his preferred name) in the seventh and the first half of the eighth century, while in the second half of the eighth century the anchorites and scribes were rapidly coming to the front and were almost alone in prominence in the ninth century. We see now why the scribes and anchorites occur in that notice of the congress of 780, which marked the moment of intensest activity in the movement we are considering.¹¹

Flower therefore considered that the appellation of 'scribe' and/or 'anchorite' was the preferred one, even, on occasion, to the exclusion of reference to episcopal or abbatial rank amongst the *céli Dé* at this time.

However he may have understood the terminology employed in the annals, Flower was clearly aware that the *congressio senodorum* in 780 may have been no mere gathering of ecclesiastic mediators and he himself suggested that a penitential was drawn up there. He drew attention to the fact that the introductory paragraph to the variant of the Old Irish Penitential in MS Rawlinson B512 begins with the

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 67. Flower himself preferred the more general description of an anchoritic movement to that of *Céli Dé*. For *sapiens*, see Michael Richter, 'The personnel of learning in early medieval Ireland', in P. Ní Catháin and M. Richter (edd.), *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, Stuttgart, 1996, 275-308, at 283-5.

¹¹ Flower, 'The Two Eyes of Ireland', 68-9.

statement that 'the elders of Ireland have drawn up from the rules of the Scriptures a penitential for the annulling and remedying of every sin, both small and great'.¹² Flower believed that this indicated the likelihood of its compilation at Tara, but added the caveat that while probable, the compiling of the Penitential in 780 cannot be taken as proved. Daniel Binchy, however, cast doubt on the idea that the Penitential was compiled at Tara in 780, on the grounds that 'The Tara meeting was clearly an attempt by the clerical leaders of both states (not all of them necessarily adherents of the "Culdee" reform) to secure an end, or at least a truce, to hostilities; they thus had more urgent matters to deal with than the drafting of a Penitential in the vernacular.'¹³ The problem with both Flower's suggestion and Binchy's objection, however, is the lack of annalistic information concerning the congress of 780. While placing the Old Irish Penitential firmly in the latter half of the eighth century, E.J. Gwynn believed it 'can hardly have been put together much before A.D. 800' (see above, p. 90). The only surviving account of its compilation states it was drawn up by the elders of Ireland, which indicates that it had a broad, consensual input and the annalistic references to the *congressio senodorum* of 780 is not merely the only such ecclesiastical congress in the eighth century, but accords very well with the date of compilation provided by Gwynn's analysis.¹⁴ Nevertheless, both Flower's caveat and

¹² *ibid.*, 69. The beginning of the Old Irish Penitential is missing from the only other extant variant contained in RIA MS 1227, formerly 3 B 23. The translation of the opening to B512 is that of Gwynn, 'An Irish Penitential'.

¹³ D.A. Binchy, in Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentals*, Dublin 1963, 48-9.

¹⁴ The *congressio senodorum* recorded in *AU* in 804 (804.7 – *Congressio senodorum nepotum Neill cui dux erat Condmach, abbas Airdd Machae, i nDun Chuaer*) is the only other instance of a gathering recorded by this name. This congress is explicitly referred to as an insular affair among the Uí Néill, however. Despite the explicit statement that it was held under the leadership of Connmach, it was more likely convened by Áed mac Néill. Connmach was almost certainly installed as abbot by Áed without regard to the community of Armagh (see below, pp. 207-8) – he was certainly supported in the position by Áed. The congress was held at Dún Cuar, the traditional assembly place for the Uí Néill when hosting against the Laigin and the record for the congress is placed between the records of two different expeditions undertaken by Áed against Leinster that same year. It is reasonable to assume, then, that the congress was convened by Áed and assembled at his camp at Dún Cuar during a pause in a concerted campaign against Leinster. The question in this case must be for what purpose. Áed's later actions as king of Tara indicate that he considered the church should be very much subordinate to his concerns. While he had a very particular concern in promoting the interests of Armagh, particularly over his political enemies, Áed seems to have been unconcerned about relations with the church generally, attacking those he considered opposed to his interests (see below, p. 192). His patent attitude to the church certainly indicates that he did not feel bound to treat it any differently from any other

Binchy's objection must be allowed to stand – despite the lack of an indication in the annals of an alternative, there no explicit account to prove that the Old Irish Penitential was drawn up at Tara in 780.

Medieval Ireland has a rich corpus of annalistic record, with the survival of extant manuscripts variously known as the *Annals of Ulster*¹⁵ (*AU*); the *Annals of Inisfallen*¹⁶ (*AI*); the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*¹⁷ (*AClon*); the *Annals of Tigernach*¹⁸ (*ATig*); the 'Annals of the Four Masters'¹⁹ (*AFM*); the *Annals of Roscrea*²⁰ (*ARC*);

power he encountered. His epithet led D.A. Binchy to conclude that Áed must have been the 'first king of Tara to be inaugurated with religious rites' and he suggested that this must have taken place at the *congressio senadorum* recorded in 804 ('The Fair of Taitiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu* 18 (1958), 113-38, at 119. For a discussion of *oirnide*, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'A contract between king and people in early medieval Ireland? *Críth Gablach* on kingship', *Peritia* 8 (1994), 109). A gloss appended to the H2 variant of *AU* notes *Isin bliadain-si dano ro saeradh cleirich Herenn ar fecht 7 ar sluaiged la hAed Oirnigi do bhreith Fathaidh na Canoine* – 'This year, moreover, the clerics of Ireland were freed by Áed *Oirnde*, at the behest of Fothad *na Canoine*, from expeditions and hostings.' This concession may have been considered by the glossator to have also occurred at the *congressio* of 804 and may therefore have been the price exacted for Áed's ordination, if such occurred. If so, it is perhaps notable that the concession was granted at the behest of Fothad, not Connmach. From the current perspective, however, the important distinction is that the *congressio senadorum* of 804 appears to have been an entirely Uí Néill affair, assembled under the secular direction of Áed mac Néill although nominally under the leadership of his appointee in the abbacy of Armagh. It may have deliberately been referred to as *congressio senadorum* in emulation of the congress of 780 – and, if so, is an implicit witness to the significance of that meeting – but, unlike the *congressio senadorum* of 780 this congress appears to have been intended not to benefit the church, but rather to manipulate it.

- ¹⁵ Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (edd.), *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D.1131)*, Dublin, 1983. *AU* has survived in two vellum MSS, which Mac Niocaill designated *H* and *R*. *H* is MS 1282 (H.1.8) in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. It was compiled in 1489, then maintained until 1510, although the entries are missing after 1504. *R* is MS Rawlinson B489 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and is a copy of *H*, although the text is supplemented by later entries extending to 1588.
- ¹⁶ Seán Mac Airt (ed.), *The Annals of Inisfallen*, Dublin, 1951. The MS known as the Annals of Inisfallen is contained in MS Rawlinson B503, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The extant text was transcribed in the final decade of the eleventh century and was subsequently maintained until 1321.
- ¹⁷ Denis Murphy (ed.), *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, Dublin, 1896; reprinted Lampeter, 1993. The extant text of *AClon* was translated into 'Hiberno-English' from an older Irish text by Conell Mageoghagan in 1627. The original translation is lost, but two copies survive – one, copied in 1660, is preserved in Armagh Public Library, but has lost sections of text and the survivals have undergone alteration and amendment. The second copy, made in 1661 by Domhnall Ua Súilleabháin, however, is complete and unaltered and is now British Academy MS Additional 4817 in London.
- ¹⁸ Whitley Stokes (ed.), 'The Annals of Tigernach: fourth fragment', *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896), 337-420; reprinted (2 vols) Lampeter, 1993. *ATig* is a fragmentary fourteenth century text, now MS Rawlinson B488, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The entries between 766-974 are missing.
- ¹⁹ John O'Donovan (ed.), *Annala Rioghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters from the earliest period to the year 1616* (7 vols), Dublin, 1856. Vol. 1 covers up to the year 902.

the 'Fragmentary Annals'²¹ (*FA*); the *Annals of Loch Cé*²² (*ALC*); and the *Chronicum Scotorum*²³ (*CS*). All of the major collections appear to derive from a lost common core source, which Kathleen Hughes called 'The Chronicle of Ireland', and which Kathryn Grabowski demonstrated diverged into two distinct branches after the annal entry for AD 911.²⁴

One copy of this 'Chronicle of Ireland', maintained at Armagh until 1189, then at Derry 1190x1220, provided the basis for *AU*; while another, maintained at Clonmacnoise,²⁵ provided the basis for *AI*, the earliest extant manuscript of Irish annals, *AT* and *CS*, as well as for the early twelfth century literary compilation *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*.²⁶ In addition to these direct derivations, *FA*, *ARC*, *AClon* and *AFM* are all related derivatives, although the relationship itself may be uncertain.

The two main branches of the common core, therefore, are reflected by *AU* and the 'Clonmacnoise-group texts'.²⁷ The latter includes the earliest extant collections, while the 'common substratum is preserved most faithfully within the compilation of the *Annals of Ulster*.'²⁸ Although the divergence of the 'Chronicle of Ireland' took place after 911 – and thus after the end of the period covered by this

²⁰ Dermot Gleeson and Seán Mac Airt (edd.), 'The Annals of Roscrea', *PRIA* 59C (1959), 137-80. *ARC* survives in a seventeenth century MS which is now Brussels Bibliothèque Royale MS 5303. The entries for 782-802 and 896-922 are missing.

²¹ J.N. Radner (ed.), *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, Dublin, 1978.

²² W.M. Hennessy (ed.), *Annals of Loch Cé. A chronicle of Irish affairs from A.D. 1014 to A.D. 1590*, London, 1871.

²³ W.M. Hennessy (ed.), *Chronicon Scotorum*, London, 1866. *CS* is closely related to *ATig*, but is not a derivative of the extant form of *ATig*: as Grabowski puts it, 'CS is an *abbreviated* copy of a text like *AT[ig]*' (*Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales*, 6). *ATig* and *CS* together form the nucleus of the 'Clonmacnoise-group texts'.

²⁴ See her discussion in Grabowski and Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales*, 53-5.

²⁵ This lost 'Clonmacnoise Chronicle' should not be confused with the extant *Annals of Clonmacnoise*.

²⁶ J.H. Todd (ed.), *Cogaidh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: The war of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, London, 1867.

²⁷ For discussions of the textual histories, sources and development of these various collections, see: John Kelleher, 'Early Irish history and pseudo-history', *Studia Hibernica* 3 (1963), 113-27; Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: an introduction to the sources*, London, 1972; A.P. Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals: their first contemporary entries, and the earliest centres of recording', *PRIA* 72 C (1972), 1-48; Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals*, Dublin, 1975; Grabowski and Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales*; Etchingam, *Viking raids on Irish church settlements*.

²⁸ Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals', 1.

thesis – it is clear that there has been a great deal of abbreviation of existing entries in subsequent transcriptions, for, despite Smyth's observation that *AU* preserved the earliest substratum most faithfully,

it is apparent that, as the [ninth] century progresses, the proportion of the total annalistic record preserved in *AU* declines, as Kelleher showed by comparing that text to the *Annals of the Four Masters...*, the fullest of the extant compilations.²⁹

Etchingham's study of Viking raids on the Irish church settlements in the ninth century notes that 'just as *CS*, *AI* and *AFM* are indicative of a somewhat more extensive contemporary chronicling of raids on churches in the last two decades of the [ninth] century than is revealed by *AU* alone, so *C[ogad]* *G[áedel re]* *G[aillaib]* suggests that the record for the period 821 to 850 was originally fuller.'³⁰

The abbreviated record for the second half of the ninth century in *AU*, therefore, may be supplemented from the other extant sources, although, again, not without careful consideration. While entries from other sources may help to offset the lack, they also serve to highlight it at a time when there are lacunae in the entries in *ATig* (between 766 and 973), in *CS* (between 724 and 803) and in *ARC* (782-802 and 896-922).³¹ In addition to this, it must be noted that individual collections of annals themselves may vary in detail and range of original entry, before the question of the likelihood of consistency in subsequent abbreviation may come to be considered. Nor are the annals consistent in their representation of the geographical extent of Ireland. *AU* and *AFM* have the largest geographical coverage. *AU* mostly focusses on the northern half of Ireland, but here, too, is not consistent in the basis of its focus. Bannerman initially outlined the case that *AU* derived from a chronicle originally kept

²⁹ Etchingham, *Viking raids on Irish church settlements*, 5; cf. John Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', *Ériu* 22 (1971), 107-27, at 116-7. *AFM* alone, however, could not be used to demonstrate the abbreviation of *AU*, since the Four Masters also appear to have had access to an Osraige source for ninth-century material (below, p. 149) and that therefore the 'Chronicle of Ireland' was not the only source for the pre-911 entries in *AFM*. The further witness of *CS* and *AI* is required before the subsequent abbreviation of *AU* can be detected.

³⁰ Etchingham, *Viking raids on Irish church settlements*, 9.

³¹ Further, the entries in *ALC* do not begin until 1014.

at Iona until c. 740, which naturally gave the corpus a strongly north-eastern Irish and northern British focus.³² Smyth, however, argued that *AU* subsequently incorporated a set of annals originating at Clonard, c. 775, which resulted in an emphasis on events concerned with Meath and the midlands.³³ Gearóid Mac Niocaill then pointed out that alongside 'the Clonard element there is also a series of records focussed on Armagh... and the surrounding area. It is reasonable to identify this with the Book of Dub dá Leithe.'³⁴ While *AU* does have a broad geographical coverage, it draws upon narrower, detailed sources which provide different emphases in its report at different times. Kathryn Grabowski indicated that *AI* must have drawn on a source originating from a foundation situated on or near the lower Shannon.³⁵ Similarly, Radner indicated that *FA* must have drawn upon a south-eastern source, not reflected in the other extant texts.³⁶ *AFM*, too, clearly drew upon a south-eastern source, but whether this was the same source used independently of *FA*, or whether *AFM* had a version of *FA*, which was originally fuller than the extant text, as a source is uncertain. Most recently, Etchingham, following conclusions of Hughes', but modifying her definitions, indicated that that the heaviest annalistic focus concentrated on the two regions he called 'central-east' and the 'Shannon-Brosna basin', where 'ecclesiastical affairs in general can be shown to be disproportionately well documented.'³⁷

³² John Bannerman, 'Notes on the Scottish entries in the early Irish annals', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 11 (1968), 149-70; reprinted in *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, Edinburgh, 1974, 9-26.

³³ Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals', 23-30.

³⁴ Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster*, xii.

³⁵ She notes that in the period 701-66 there are twenty-three obituary notices unique to *AI*, eighteen of which - twelve ecclesiastics and six kings - came from Munster. Similarly, in the period 767-803, there were thirty-three entries unique to *AI*, over 40% of the whole, of which twenty-two - thirteen ecclesiastics and nine others - were obituary notices concerning individuals from Munster. The period 804 - 911 has sixty-three entries unique to *AI*, twenty-six of which are obituary notices and, again, predominately, concerned with Munster. Grabowski indicates that 'in general, then, for Emly, Inis Celtra, Roscrea, Lorrha, and possibly Inisheer, *AI*'s entries constitute the full record of these houses' activities' during the period 701-66 (*Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales*, 29); however, 'The Emly entries also span the entire ninth century, but are less striking than the Lismore entries' (48). See, *ibid.*, 28-32; 37-42; 45-53. There could conceivably have been an Emly chronicle which incorporated a ninth century text from Lismore and this composite was itself subsequently incorporated into *AI*. Grabowski's work, however, has clearly highlighted the Munster orientation of *AI*.

³⁶ Radner, *Fragmentary Annals*, xiv-xvi.

³⁷ Etchingham, *Viking raids on Irish church settlements*, 17-22, quote at 21; Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, 124-6, 138-9. See also, Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals', 23-30.

The variable geographical focus and the range of extent of detail from the extant annalistic compilations, therefore, inevitably means that the record of events in the eighth and ninth centuries is not uniform, but reflect clusters of detail, both geographically and temporally, which can all too readily distort the focus of attention in any study of the period. Such an awareness does not devalue these fundamentally important sources in any way, but a better appreciation of the limitation of the parameters within which they were compiled – and consequently reflect – would allow a more accurate assessment of the record they provide, even although this assessment may have a much narrower basis of application than we would like.

Colmán Etchingham has recently warned that, in regard to the use of the several annalistic compilations as primary source evidence, scholarly assessments have, hitherto, treated the annals as an unchanging constant, that there has been ‘insufficient account of the changing nature of the sources themselves during this period.’³⁸ Consequently, he points out, ‘commentators are sometimes inclined to draw far-reaching conclusions from crude aggregates of annalistic data. Yet the annals are not homogeneous in character, but undergo developments in their style and content, even over comparatively short periods, which complicate the identification of real change.’³⁹

Etchingham’s topic of Viking raids on Irish church settlements was chosen as an example of just how these variations in style and content can be deceptively simple at face value and that, rather than any attempt to re-evaluate Viking impact on Ireland, it was intended to illustrate that there ‘are wider implications here for the methodology to be applied in using the evidence of the annals for the study of other topics in early medieval Irish history.’⁴⁰ His conclusion pointedly warns that the

emergence of a new feature in the annals, or the disappearance of a new one, are wont to be taken at face value as indicative of real transformation.

³⁸ Etchingham, *Viking raids on Irish church settlements*, preface.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, preface.

However, this may involve an *argumentum ex silentio*, unless proper consideration is given to the possibility that such evidence may betoken change in the annals, rather than in society. The annals, in fact, vary in their content, scope and style over relatively short periods. It is, therefore, essential that as complete a picture as possible of changes in the contemporary character of the annals as a body be formulated as a control upon trends in a particular category of information.⁴¹

This warning is of the most significant relevance for specific reasons to the point in hand, in addition to the broader truth of the observation, since (1) as Etchingham notes, 'reporting of ecclesiastical events (obits excluded) is relatively high in the 740s – evidently a key period in the development of the annals – but this is not sustained in the 750s or 760s. There is a further high point in the record of such events in the 770s and 780s, another period when significant developments in the character and volume of annalistic coverage have been identified.'⁴² The *congressio senodorum* of 780 is, clearly, just at this time. (2) The emergence or increased usage of various ecclesiastical titles in the annals at this period, which can be seen from the table below, was cited by Hughes to illustrate the increasing secularisation of the Irish church at this time.⁴³ While the model of degenerate secularisation can no longer be accepted, the tabulation of the use of ecclesiastical titles does indicate the emergent prominence of several ecclesiastical positions from the 780s. The question which has to be resolved, therefore, is whether this was as a result of the 'intensification' of annalistic coverage at this period, or whether it was indeed a result of innovation in church organisation.

Bearing all these points in mind, an examination of all references to ecclesiastics in the annalistic sources in the period 700-900 was undertaken. The following table reflects the development of the record of title accorded to ecclesiastics on a decade-by-decade basis. If an individual was referred to as connected with an

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 59.

⁴² *ibid.*, 10; see also John Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', *Ériu* 22 (1971), 107-27, at 115; Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, 126-30, 134, 138, 142; Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals', 21-30.

⁴³ Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 210-26.

ecclesiastical institution, but without any given reference to the position he held there, then he has been recorded as 'unspecified'. Otherwise, each ecclesiastic has been tabulated exactly as he has been entered. Any individual recorded as holding more than one position – such as Cenn Faelad, son of Rumán, who was recorded in *AU* 821.4 as scribe, bishop, anchorite and abbot of Áth Truim – has had each individual title entered once under each heading; if, however, an abbot was recorded as holding abbacies in plurality then he has been entered only once under abbot. Similarly, where an individual has been accorded one title in one set of annals and a different title in another set – for example, Dúrchú *princeps* (*AU*, 809.3) or *abbas* (*AFM sa* 804) of Tulach Léis; or Dalach, son of Congus, called *princeps Doim Liacc* in *AU* (820.1) and *comarba Cianáin Doimliacc* in *AFM (sa* 818);⁴⁴ or Robartach, son of Cathasach, called *princeps Cluana Moer Arddae* in *AU* (828.2) and *airchindeach Cluana móir arda* in *AFM (sa* 826) – each of the variant titles has been recorded once under the respective headings. Where, however, *AFM* has provided vernacular equivalents of Latin titles, such as *príoir* for *secnap*;⁴⁵ or *ferthigis* for *equonimus*;⁴⁶ or the instances of Maenach, son of Colggu, in *AU* 805.3, or Torbach, son of Gorman, in *AFM sa* 805, who, among other titles, are called *lector* rather than the more usual *fer léiginn*,⁴⁷ then these have been recorded in the same column, but notice has been provided of these different renditions of title.

⁴⁴ The dating of *AU* has been preferred throughout, therefore Dalach's titles have been recorded under the decade 820-829, rather than 810-819. In all cases, where different decades arise from different annals, the dating of *AU* is preferred.

⁴⁵ For example, Maenach, son of Oengus, is called *secnap Luscan* in *AU* (796.4), but *príoir Luscan* in *AFM (sa* 791). There are many examples of this direct equation, such as *AU* 809.4 = *AFM* 804; *AU* 813.6 = *AFM* 808; *AU* 827.7 = *AFM* 825; *AU* 836.2 = *AFM* 834. There are many more such examples, but these should suffice to illustrate the point. The direct equation of *secnap* and *príoir* is made explicit in *AFM* 891 (= *AU* 896):...*Maolacaid seacnabb .i. príoir Cluana mic Nóis...*

⁴⁶ For example, Echu, son of Cernach, is called *equonimus Airdd Machae* in *AU* (796.3), but *ferthigis Arda Macha* in *AFM (sa* 791). Again, there are numerous direct equations: *AU* 797.2 = *AFM* 792; *AU* 804.4 = *AFM* 799; *AU* 810.1 = *AFM* 805; *AU* 814.5 = *AFM* 809; and *AU* 817.3 = *AFM* 812, to name but few.

⁴⁷ *AU* 805.3 – *Moenach m. Colgen, abbas Luscan, lector bonus, infeliciter 7 lacrimabiliter uitam finiuit*; *AFM* 805 – *Torbach, mac Gormáin, scribhnidh, lechthóir, 7 abb Arda Macha*. Torbach's obit is not recorded in *AU*, but is noted in *AClon (sa* 805) which states only 'Torbach scribe and abbot of Ardmach'. There are no examples of variant titles in annalistic entries to show that *fer léiginn* and *lector* were direct equivalents; however, the accepted rendering of *fer léiginn* is 'lector' in translation – although, as will be seen in the subsequent discussion in regard to the equation of *secnap* and *príoir*, this need not always be the most reliable basis.

Fig. 1. Ecclesiastical titles from all annalistic sources, 700-900.

Decade	Bishop	Abbas	Princeps	Airchlinnech	Herescomarba	Scribe	Saplenslecnadh	Anchorites	Secnap	Tanais abbad	Equonimus	Maer	Priest	Doctor	Fer léiginn	Unspecified
700-709	4	12	1	-	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
710-719	7	15	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
720-729	3	17	-	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
730-739	6	13	-	-	2	5	3	4	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	9
740-749	5	35	3	1	1	3	6	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14
750-759	6	34	1	-	1	1	5	6	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	13
760-769	2	41	1	-	1	1	3	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	6
770-779	6	43	1	-	-	2	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15
780-789	9	50	-	-	-	1	10	2	2 ⁴⁸	-	6	-	-	-	1	9
790-799	10	40	2	3	-	5	1	5	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	10
800-809	2	41	4	-	-	5	4	2	2	-	1	-	-	1	2 ⁴⁹	6
810-819	9	40	8	3	1	9	1	7	3 ⁵⁰	-	3	1	1	1	-	5
820-829	12	36	7	1	2	4	3	7	3 ⁵¹	-	1	-	1	1	-	6
830-839	11	34	10	2	2	7	1	4	6 ⁵²	-	3	-	2	-	-	3
840-849	7	41	-	-	1	5	3	11	4 ⁵³	-	1	-	-	-	-	6
850-859	6	41	7	1	5	4	4	6	-	-	1 ⁵⁴	-	-	1	1	2
860-869	16	31	1	-	-	15	2	6	2 ⁵⁵	2 ⁵⁶	3 ⁵⁷	-	-	1	-	2
870-879	15	49	17	-	1	11	5	5	2	1	-	-	1	1	1	1
880-889	11	51	24	-	3	1	3	2	7 ⁵⁸	-	1 ⁵⁹	1	-	-	1	3
890-899	4	28	11	2	1	3	1	2	2 ⁶⁰	3	1	1	1	-	1	-

⁴⁸ Muiredach son of Uargal, *prioir Ia Coluim Cille* – AFM, sa 777 = AU 782.1, where Muiredach is called *equonimus lae*; Cernach son of Suibne, *prioir Arda Macha*, AFM sa 779 = AU 784.2, where Cernach is called *equonimus Airdh Machae*.

⁴⁹ Consisting of one instance of *lector bonus*, AU sa 805.3; one instance of *lechthóir*, AFM sa 805.

⁵⁰ Including one instance of *prioir* in AFM, sa 807.

⁵¹ Including one instance of *prioir* in AFM, sa 823.

⁵² Including one instance of *prioir* in AFM, sa 836.

⁵³ Including one instance of *prioir* in AFM, sa 839.

⁵⁴ *Ferthigis*, AFM sa 854.

⁵⁵ Including one instance of *prioir* in AFM, sa 863.

⁵⁶ Including one instance of *adhbhar abbadh Arda Macha* in AFM sa 861.

⁵⁷ Including one instance of *ferthigis* in AFM, sa 867.

⁵⁸ Including instances of *prioir* in AFM, sa 886, 888.

⁵⁹ *Ferthigis*, AFM sa 889.

⁶⁰ Including one instance of *prioir* in AFM, sa 891.

Fig. 1a. Ecclesiastical titles from *AU*, 700-900.

Decade	Bishop	Abbas	Princeps	Archinech	Herescomarba	Scribe	Sapienslecnaldh	Anchorites	Secnag	Tandise abbad	Equonimus	maer	Priest	Doctor	Fer leigin	Unspecified
700-709	3	7	1	-	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
710-719	5	10	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
720-729	1	9	-	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
730-739	6	11	-	-	1	5	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	8
740-749	3	25	3	-	-	-	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
750-759	6	26	1	-	-	1	4	5	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	13
760-769	1	26	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	6
770-779	5	31	1	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
780-789	7	41	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	2
790-799	10	27	2	1	-	4	-	5	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	7
800-809	1	29	4	-	-	4	2	2	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	3
810-819	8	30	8	3	-	8	-	7	3	-	3	1	1	1	-	1
820-829	9	20	7	-	-	2	1	5	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	2
830-839	8	21	10	-	-	6	1	4	2	-	3	-	1	-	-	2
840-849	6	26	-	-	-	4	1	9	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
850-859	6	18	7	-	5	4	2	5	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
860-869	9	15	1	-	-	8	-	3	1	-	2	-	-	1	-	-
870-879	12	16	17	-	1	9	1	5	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	1
880-889	7	8	24	-	1	1	1	1	3	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
890-899	2	8	11	1	-	2	-	2	-	3	1	1	-	-	1	-

Fig. 1 illustrates the titles recorded from all annalistic sources within the sample period. The record from *AU* was taken as a basis for this table, to which entries from all other sources not included in *AU* were added. To allow comparison, *fig. 1a* illustrates the record of titles from *AU* alone.

Although these entries are almost exclusively obituaries and therefore subject to the chance circumstance of the death of the individuals referred to, even from the most cursory glance at the table several features are immediately apparent:

- (1) Prior to the 780s, there is no mention of the office of *equonimus* recorded in the annals – the first reference belongs to 781 – but there are no fewer than six references to the position in that decade.
- (2) Prior to the 780s, there is only a single indication of the office of *secnap* recorded in the annals – but, again, the position is referred to consistently from the 780s.
- (3) Although infrequently referred to, there is no mention of the *fer léiginn* prior to the 780s. Similarly, there are only two individuals described as *doctor* in the eighth century, a description which, while far from common, is more frequent in the ninth; and only one individual described as *airchinnech* prior to the 790s. The mention of *fer léiginn* and *doctor*, however, may perhaps be expected, in line with the clear indication of the emphasis upon and expansion of exegetical learning during this period; however, the annalistic notice of the *airchinnech*, the *secnap* and the *equonimus / ferthigis* from the 780s is pronounced.

While there is no instance in the annalistic record of the *equonimus* earlier than the 780s, there is one solitary exception to the position of *secnap* before this decade. This single exception, however, is important. *AFM* (sa 755) records the death of *Ailgnio, mac Gnoí, prióir abbaid Cluana hIraird*; *AClon* (sa 756) has ‘Algnio mcGnoy, the second next abbot of Clonard’; while *ATig* has *Ailgino mac Gnai, secundas abbas Cluana hIraird*.⁶¹ The record of Ailgnio’s obit contained within these three sources make it virtually certain that this was a genuine entry contained within the source text for these compilations – the ‘Chronicle of Ireland’ – and not one of the subsequently misplaced or duplicated entries which occasionally occur. The record of

⁶¹ Ailgnio’s obit is not noted in *AU*, although the names of others contained within the group in which he is included are listed in *AU sa 760*.

the entry is consistent, with *ATig* preserving the presumably Latin original, *AFM* presenting an Irish translation and *AClon* a 'Hiberno-English' translation. As such, therefore, it is clear that the office of *secnap* is reflected in the annals in Clonard, earlier than 780.⁶² This single reference is contrasted with the record after 780, however, when, with the exception of the decade 850-859, every subsequent decade of the sample period to 900 has record of the office. Similarly, from no mention at all, the office of *equonimus*, with again the single exception of a decade, 870-879, is noted in every subsequent decade of the sample. Can this be entirely due to better and more detailed annalistic recording?

These offices were unquestionably in existence before this date. *Secundas abbas*, for example, from which the term *secnap* derived, may have been in existence in the Irish church since the sixth century. Thomas Charles-Edwards has pointed out that the position of 'second abbot' – unlike the Pachomian template of an abbot supported by *decani* and advocated by John Cassian and St Benedict – was evident in the Rule of Basil, a Latin translation of which, to judge from the reference to the 'judgements of Basil' in the *Amra Choluimb Chille*, was available in Iona, at least.⁶³ Even if they were invisible to the annals, these offices were occasionally witnessed in earlier sources. In *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, for example, which Liam Breatnach has suggested was compiled around the second quarter of the eighth century,⁶⁴ there is notice of the *secnap* (§3 – *Cair: cis n-é dagfolad sóertho ecalso? ...áes fognamo airlaithe, eter cet 7 chloc 7 salm 7 secnapaid ocus sacarbaic...*); the *fertighis* (§6 – *Coteat mifolad dóertho ecalso? ...gillae inna ferthigsiud*) and the *airchinnech* (§3 – *...airchinnech etail...*; §5 – *Is forsin n-eglais-sin ní tét míchor míairchinnig*).

⁶² A.P. Smyth had, it is to be recalled, suggested that a source originating in Clonard, c. 775, had been incorporated into *AU*, by which he must surely have intended to mean the ancestor of the extant text. Not all scholars, however, would accept the validity of Smyth's case. It should be stressed that it is not the combination of *AFM*, *AClon* and *ATig* itself which suggests that this entry belonged to the 'Chronicle of Ireland' (because all that proves is its derivation from the putative 'Clonmacnoise chronicle' of the mid-tenth century), but the common inclusion of the Clonard element within it.

⁶³ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 286-7. For the *Amra Choluimb Chille*, see T.O. Clancy and G. Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, Edinburgh, 1995, 96-128.

⁶⁴ Liam Breatnach, 'Canon law and secular law in early Ireland: the significance of *Bretha Nemed*', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 439-59.

Breatnach has indicated that part of §3 of *Bretha Nemed Toisech*, which notes both the *airchinnech* and the *secnap*, drew upon Book XLII of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, citing Jerome and Origen, as a source⁶⁵ although neither position is mentioned within *CCH* itself.

Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium*, promulgated in 697,⁶⁶ closes with the demand that there be 'three guarantors for every chief church for the *Cáin Adomnáin*, i.e. the *secnap* and the cook and the steward, and a guarantor of the *Cáin* from every family in Ireland, and two guarantors of the *Cáin* from the high-chieftains and hostages taken for its payment, if there be sworn evidence of women.'⁶⁷

This same grouping of *secnap*, *coic* and *ferthigis*, together with the *abbas*, are listed in the ninth (?) century 'Rule of Ailbe of Emly':

§42 *Ferthaiges slemon, cobarchar, secnap slemon, gand,
coic soichlech ocus suichlech fo réir n-appad n-and.*

§42: 'A tactful, help-loving, steward, a gentle, sparing *secnap*, a generous cook with a well-stored pantry (?) under the rule of an abbot there.'⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 445-6.

⁶⁶ The extant text, however, dates from the tenth century and the precise dating of the latter, legal portions has not been certainly established. See M. Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The guarantor list of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 178-215; *idem*, 'The *Lex Innocentium*: Adomnán's Law for women, clerics and youths, 697 A.D.', in *Chattel, servant or citizen? Women's status in church, state and society*, M. O'Dowd *et al* (edd.), Belfast, 1995, 58-69.

⁶⁷ §53 – *Teora aitire cacha prím – egalsa fri Cáin Adomnáin .i. secnap 7 coic 7 fertigis*. Kuno Meyer, *Cáin Adomnáin: an Old Irish treatise on the law of Adomnán*, Oxford, 1905; the translation cited above was published by Gilbert Márkus (trans.), *Adomnán's 'Law of the Innocents'*, Glasgow, 1997. A translation by Máirín Ní Dhonnchada is also now available in Thomas O'Loughlin (ed.), *Adomnán at Birr AD 697: Essays in commemoration of the Law of the Innocents*, Dublin, 2001.

⁶⁸ Joseph O'Neill, 'The Rule of Ailbe of Emly', *Ériu* 3 (1907). 92-115. O'Neill does not attempt to date the 'Rule'. Kenney notes (*Sources*, 315) that since the title of this metrical work is *Riagol Ailbi Imlecha oc tinchosc Eogain mic Sarain*, then it 'is a reasonable hypothesis that the poem was written originally by, or rather at the command of, the *comarba* of Ailbe at Emly to Eogan on the occasion of his elevation to the headship of Clúain-Cóiláin, and contained moral exhortations and some account of the customs and practices of his own monastery'. However, as O'Neill notes, nothing more is known of Eógain mac Sarain other than his commemoration in the Martyrology of Donegal under March 13. Correspondingly, there is no further aid to dating the compilation of the work more specifically than the 700x950 indicated by Kenney. The similarity of the stanzas concerning genuflection and vigil to passages from *Mon. Tall.*, however, may perhaps narrow this down to the suggestion of a ninth century date for compilation.

Significantly, the *abbas*, *secnap*, *coic* and *ferthigis* are listed as the four highest ‘functionary grades of the church’ (*gráda uird ecalsa*) in *Uraicecht na Ríar*.⁶⁹ Etchingham draws attention to a gloss in the *Senchus Már* detailing the proportion of *díre* due to the church as compensation:

...i. *Lethcháta airchindig do secnapaid, lethcátu secnapad do aursecnapaid, similiter per omnes gradus.*

...i.e. half the dignity of a church head to a deputy-head, half the dignity of a deputy-head to a sub-deputy-head, similarly through all the grades.⁷⁰

He points out that to the *airchinnech* and *secnap*,

Several lists of the ‘functionary grades’ add the cook, steward, gardener, doorkeeper and miller and one of these credits each, in that order, with half the rank of the preceding grade, in keeping with the principle stated by the Old Irish glossator in the passage quoted above.⁷¹

If these legal tracts are at all representative of the standing of these positions, then it is hardly surprising that, with an eighth of the honour-price of the *airchinnech*, whose own worth was determined by the status of his church, and a quarter of that of the *secnap*, the *ferthigis* should have been invisible to the annalistic witness. Yet while this was clearly, and understandably, the case prior to 780, the *ferthigis* or *equonimus* is consistently reflected in the annals after this date. The fact that in every subsequent decade of the sample period, with a single exception in each case, these offices of *secnap* and *equonimus* are consistently recorded is even more striking when it is considered that, as Etchingham noted, that while decade by decade, the 740s, 770s, 780s, 810s and 830s had a fuller and broader than usual annalistic record, the 750s, 790s, 800s, 820s and 890s had a much more basic reporting and that the 760s, 840s,

⁶⁹ Liam Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar*, Dublin, 1987, 84.

⁷⁰ Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 382.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, see also Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar*, 84.

850s 860s, 870s and 880s were quite sparse in recording detail outwith simple ecclesiastical obits. Yet, references to these offices are continuous. Conversely, the comparatively rich record of the 740s and, particularly, the 770s has no mention of either *equonimus* or *secnap*.⁷² Clearly, therefore, there appears to have been a sudden change in the status, and perhaps function, of the *ferthigis* to reflect this new-found prominence in the annals, perhaps as a direct deputy to the *airchinnech*. It may be worth pointing out that while these earlier eighth-century legal tracts consistently list the cook higher in the list of functionaries, there is not one single instance of the annalistic reflection of a cook in any church at any time within the sample period. It is can be concluded, therefore, that, after 780, the *ferthigis* had a significantly greater standing in the church hierarchy than he had had previously.

If these offices were indeed introduced or brought into prominence at the same time, then the question arises of where these offices were recorded as belonging.

Within the sample period, these were:

<u><i>Equonimus</i></u>	<u><i>Secnap</i></u>
Duleek (781)	Clonard (760, 838)
Iona (782)	Iona (782)
Bangor (782)	Armagh (784, 812, 863, 865)
Ferns (783)	Lusk (796, 839)
Armagh (784, 796, 810, 817, 838, 842, 856, 869)	Cluain (809)
Slane (787, 814)	Clonfert (813, 882, 884*)
	Cell mór Enir (818)

⁷² There is, however, one point regarding these titles which requires some comment. One of the first recorded instances of *equonimi* was that of Muiredach, son of Uargal, recorded as *equonimus Iae* in *AU* 782.1, yet as *prioir Ia Coluim Cille* in *AFM* (sa 777). Similarly, Cernach, son of Suibne, was recorded as *equonimus Airdd Machae* at his death in *AU* (784.2), but as *prioir Arda Macha* in *AFM* (sa 779). It is remarkable that here *AU* is consistent with its attribution of *equonimus* and *AFM* with *prioir*. Unfortunately, no other source mentions either of these individuals to shed any further light on this point. Of the four other individuals recorded as *equonimi* during the 780s, three (*AU* 781.5, 782.2, 783.6) are not mentioned in another source to allow comparison, while the fourth, Robartach, son of Moenach, recorded as *equonimus Slane* in *AU* (787.1), is called *fertighis Sláine* in *AFM* (sa 782). This is the usual vernacular rendition of *equonimus* in *AFM*, indicating that the problem does not arise merely from a misunderstanding of the Latin term by the later transcribers and translators. There is one further, and much later, instance of this dichotomy of record of office – Conmal, *equonimus Tamhlachta* in *AU* (865.6), is called *prioir Tamlachta* in *AFM* (sa 863). This maintains the consistency of the usage of the terms between *AU* and *AFM*. There is correspondingly no indication in any of these three cases that these individuals held both offices – indeed, there is no single instance in the sample period of an individual holding the offices of both *equonimus* and *secnap*, although this would not necessarily indicate that it was not possible. The use of ‘prioir’ in *AFM*, however, is problematic. Whatever the reason for it, the dichotomy of record in these three cases is intriguing, but cannot be definitively addressed.

Equonimus

Clonmacnoise (797, 894)
 Lusk (804)
 Finnubair (829)
 Kildare (835)
 Durrow (839)
 Tallaght (865)
 Clonfert Brendan (869)

Secnap

Ferns (819)
 Fir Rois (827, 847)
 Clonmacnois (823, 835, 836, 839, 871)
 Finnubair (827)
 Kildare (845)
 Durrow (840)
 Terryglass (845, 884*)
 Killeigh (846, 879)

* *secnap* of Terryglass and Clonfert

The sample period carries more than a century beyond the pronounced emergence of these positions and those foundations recorded with the office in the ninth century need not have had a hand in their rise to prominence, but merely have subsequently introduced them. Overall, however, with the exception of Iona, Clonfert and Terryglass, all of which were major foundations,⁷³ and the possible exception of the unidentified *Fir Rois*,⁷⁴ the obits of all those recorded holding the position of *secnap* and *equonimus* were in foundations which lay in the territories of the Laigin and the Uí Néill – the congress of whose elders convened under Dublithir at Tara in 780. Indeed, of the four noted exceptions, individuals within, or the customs of, all four were cited as good practice, worthy of emulation, in the text known as *The Monastery of Tallaght*, the anecdotal material compiled to provide a template for ‘good practice’ within coenobitic *céli Dé* communities.

The very fact, however, that the recorded holders of *secnap* and *equonimus* lay in the territories of the Laigin and the Uí Néill provides an insurmountable problem to proving that the prominence of these offices and their distribution was a consequence of the *congressio senodorum* of 780. As already indicated above, it is precisely these areas within which were situated the ecclesiastical centres where the bases for the extant annalistic compilations were maintained. Despite that lack of mention of these offices in the comparatively rich record of the 740s and 770s, and their continued inclusion in the sparse record subsequent to the 780s, it is simply not

⁷³ Although Iona was, of course an Uí Néill foundation and Terryglass, situated on the Leinster border, would, presumably, have had strong Leinster associations at this time.

⁷⁴ Dr T.O. Clancy has suggested to me that this must presumably intend the main monastery of the *Fir Rois*, perhaps Lann Léire. Whichever foundation was intended, the *Fir Rois* themselves were based in Co. Louth and, therefore, their lands, too, were situated within the territories of the Laigin and the Uí Néill noted by *AU*.

possible to demonstrate that the record of these offices can be detached from the clusters of detail which can distort any analysis based on the annalistic record. It is impossible to establish beyond all doubt that this record from the annals alone is not merely a reflection of specific annalistic detail or even scribal interest.

If, however, these pre-existing offices were raised to prominence under the auspices of the *céli Dé*, who were, after all individuals who numbered among the intellectual and spiritual leaders of the church, is there any indication of innovation in the purpose of these offices insofar as their function can be determined? The *secnap* is usually perceived as a second-abbot, a vice-abbot, and invariably translated as ‘prior’. Colmán Etchingham, however, has drawn attention to the fact that the *secnap* need not necessarily be

a monastic functionary in the conventional sense. He is deputy to an *ap* or *riaglóir* ‘ruler’ in the ‘Rule’ of Ailbe of Emly, but to an *airchinnech* in one of the Old Irish glosses in the *Senchas Már*, which...apportions *lethcháta airchindig do secnapaid* ‘half the dignity of a church head to the deputy head’. In *Uraicecht Bec*, therefore, the *secnap* can be regarded as deputy to the *comarbae* or *ollam mórchathrach*.⁷⁵

As the *secnap* is similarly ‘placed second in line to the *airchinnech* in the...list of “functionary grades” of the church appended to the first section of *Bretha Nemed Toisech*’, Etchingham consequently states, with some justification, that ‘translating *secnap*...as “prior” seems too restrictive.’⁷⁶ In these earlier eighth-century sources,

⁷⁵ Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 73.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 77. Etchingham states his preference to translate *secnap* as ‘the more neutral “deputy-head” to “prior”, which may bear the specific connotation of a conventionally monastic abbot’ (76, n. 1). In earlier Continental Latin or Hiberno-Latin texts, *praepositus*, rather than *secundarius*, is used to denote the ecclesiastical position of ‘prior’. See, for example, §65 of the Rule of Benedict – where the position of prior was discouraged – in Adalbert de Vogüé, *La Règle de Saint Benoît*, Serie des Textes Monastiques d’Occident, no. xxxv (3 vols.), Paris, 1972. There is no mention of *secundarius* in the Rule of Benedict. The position of *secundarius*, however, was addressed in the seventh-century Hiberno-Latin Rule of the Master, §§22, 92-3. De Vogüé, who was unaware that *secundarius* was an Insular term, translated it merely as ‘second’, which may indicate that he, too, considered it to be devoid of any exclusively ecclesiastic meaning (de Vogüé, *La Règle du Maître*, Serie des Textes Monastiques d’Occident, no. xv (2 vols.), Paris, 1964). A subsequent English translation of de Vogüé’s work, by Luke Eberle and Charles Phillippi, *The Rule of the Master*, Kalamazoo, 1977, however, translates *secundarius* as ‘prior’. It is clear from these texts, however, that, at this period at least, *praepositus* and *secundarius* were not the same thing.

therefore, there is an ambiguity of meaning for *secundas abbas*, or *secnap*, just as there is for the term *abbas* itself. While it does not necessarily appear to have been intended to reflect a vice-abbot, or prior, it does appear certain, as will be seen, that the *secnap* would have been recognised as second in rank to the *abbas*. Daniel Binchy, while accepting that *secnap* ought to be translated as ‘prior’, considered that ‘*secndap* is obviously a borrowing of Lat. *secundus abbas* through British’, pointing out that its ‘Welsh equivalent, which has hitherto escaped notice, is *segynabb*.’⁷⁷ He also notes, however, that

‘the term “*secundus abbas*” instead of “*praepositus*” or “*prior*” seems to belong to the Latin of the Celtic Church, so that the monastic scribes may have simply Latinized a native word in order to denote a prior whose office (*unlike that of priors elsewhere*) carried with it the right of succession to the abbacy.’⁷⁸

Binchy thus appears to have identified the significant aspect of the position of *secnap* – that it designated the ‘heir-apparent’ to the *abbas* – but considered that it belonged to the earliest strata of ecclesiastical organisation in Ireland, having been introduced from the British church. Thomas Charles-Edwards has pointed out that the form of John Cassian’s name – *Cassián* – in the *Amra Choluimb Chille*, ‘shows that it was derived from British Latin and this indicates that Irish knowledge of his writings derived initially from the British Church’.⁷⁹ While Cassian was in favour of the Pachomian system of an abbot supported by *decani*, each in charge of ten monks, rather than that of the *secundas abbas* found in the works of Basil and Caesarius of Arles, this may, nonetheless, provide some support for Binchy’s suggestion since there was a demonstrable adoption of ecclesiastical terms into the Irish church from Britain by the sixth century.

⁷⁷ D.A. Binchy, ‘Some Celtic Legal Terms’, *Celtica* 3 (1956), 221-31, at 223.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 224. My italics.

⁷⁹ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 287, n. 28.

In a subsequent paper,⁸⁰ however, David Greene, agreeing that the *secnap* denoted the designated successor to the *abbas*, argued that, from linguistic evidence, the ultimate borrowing must have been in the opposite direction. He understood that

‘Beside the *tánaise rí*g, the expected successor of the king, there was evolved the parallel office of the *tánaise abbad*, a term which is well attested in later documents [see below]. This had to be translated into Latin, and the obvious equivalent for *tánaise* was *secundus*, so that we get *secundus abbas*, and, since this happened in the post-Patrician period, the Latin had its British pronunciation. This common monastic term was borrowed back into Irish by the usual process of dropping the final syllables and treated as a single three-syllable word *secundabb*, of which the second vowel was elided regularly at some period in the sixth-century, thus giving *secndap*, the form attested in Old Irish, from which *W. segynnab*...was borrowed.’⁸¹

Greene’s analysis, therefore, is that the term *secnap* was a direct hibernicization of a title given to an ecclesiastic position which evolved in Ireland, but which was originally provided with a British-Latin title, *secundus abbas*, and that this hibernicized title was subsequently borrowed into Welsh.⁸²

⁸⁰ David Greene, ‘Some Linguistic Evidence Relating to the British Church’, in M.W. Barley and R.P.C. Hanson (edd.), *Christianity in Britain 300-700*, Leicester, 1968, 75-86.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 84. For the most recent discussion of the position of the *secundarius* originating in the concept of the *tánaise rí*g, see Marilyn Dunn, ‘Tánaise rí: the earliest evidence’, *Peritia* 13 (1999), 249-54.

⁸² There is no indication, by either Binchy or Greene, as to when *secnap* was borrowed into Welsh as *segynabb*. It would appear to be significant, however, that neither example cited by Binchy – from the Welsh law tract, where the form used is *segemuab* (*recte* – ?*segennab*), and the fourteenth-century inventory of the temporalities of the bishopric of St Asaph (‘Some Celtic Legal Terms’, 223) – would date earlier than the ninth century. A common point of discussion by both Binchy and Greene was Asser’s description of Alfred as *secundarius* to his brother Æthelred, king of Wessex. Both agree that this must mean Alfred was the designated successor to Æthelred and that the use of the term *secundarius* was a consequence of Asser’s Welsh background. Again, however, this usage dates from the end of the ninth century. There is no indication, therefore, that the borrowing into Welsh of *secnap* / *segynabb* had occurred much before the latter half of the ninth century, by which time it had evidently acquired some significance for the Welsh church that it did not have before. In this respect, a comment by Binchy – which indicates that *secnap* / *segynabb* was not the only borrowing by the Welsh church – may carry more significance than he was aware. While relating the the notice of the *segynabb* in the fourteenth-century inventory of the temporalities of the see of St Asaph, noted above, he states ‘One is tempted to compare his diminished status with the equally steep decline in the position of the Irish *airchinnech*, once the leading figure (*cf.* *W. arbennig*) in the monastic Church, who appears in the Inquisitions of the

Greene's understanding that the form '*secnap*' had emerged by the sixth century was largely due to its appearance in the *Apgitir Chrábaid*,⁸⁴ as he believed this text belonged to the late sixth century. The date of this text has been, and for many scholars still is, accepted to date as early as c. 600 as some variants ascribe its compilation to Colmán moccu Béognae (d. 611).⁸⁵ From a more or less universal acceptance, however, the provision of so early a date has more recently been called into question. Vernam Hull, who had previously argued for a date earlier than 700,⁸⁶ subsequently came to consider that 'In its present state of transmission...A[pgitir] C[hrábaid] represents a composite text which was probably compiled sometime in the first half of the eighth century during the early period of the Culdee movement.'⁸⁷ This defection brought a spirited response from Pádraig Ó Néill, who argued that the *Apgitir Chrábaid* 'demonstrates textual unity indicative of a single author...[and that it] was composed ca. 600. Other references in A[pgitir] C[hrábaid] lend plausibility to the manuscript claim that its author was Colmán mac(cu) Béognae.'⁸⁸ Ó Néill's reaffirmation of the early date and authorship has, again, been generally accepted, although Kim McCone subsequently indicated that while Ó Néill had convincingly argued that the text was the work of a single author, rather than the composite work suggested by Hull, his reaffirmation of the date is much less certain.⁸⁹ In regard to the 'archaic' forms in the text which were the principal supports to Ó Néill's argument,

sixteenth century as a mere administrator of 'erenagh-lands' for the bishop.' *ibid.*, 223 (my italics).

⁸⁴ Vernam Hull, 'Apgitir Chrábaid: The Alphabet of Piety', *Celtica* 8 (1968), 44-89. The reference to *secnap* is in §10: *Cid as imgabthai do duine etal? ...toisam fri secnapaid...*'What should be shunned by a holy man? ...opposition to the *secnap*. Hull translates *secnap* as 'prior'. For the most recent translation of the *Apgitir Chrábaid*, where *secnap* is also rendered 'prior', see T.O. Clancy and G. Márkus, *Iona: the Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, Edinburgh, 1995, 200-207.

⁸⁵ One of the first scholars to argue for so early a date for the *Apgitir Chrábaid* was Thurneysen, 'Irisches', *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung* 63 (1936), 114-17. Consequently, he considered that there was nothing inherently improbable with the attribution of authorship to Colmán.

⁸⁶ Vernam Hull, 'The Date of Aipgitir Crábaid', *ZCP* 25 (1956), 88-90.

⁸⁷ Hull, 'Apgitir Chrábaid: The Alphabet of Piety', 52.

⁸⁸ Pádraig Ó Néill, 'The date and authorship of *Apgitir Chrábaid*: some internal evidence', in Próinseas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (edd.), *Ireland and Christendom*, Stuttgart, 1987, 203-15, at 215.

⁸⁹ Kim McCone, 'Prehistoric, Old and Middle Irish', in K. McCone and K. Simms (edd.), *Progress in medieval Irish studies*, Maynooth, 1996, 7-53, at 34-5.

McCone notes that ‘it is a moot point whether they suffice to establish a seventh- rather than an eighth-century date. What is certain is that they cannot be used to support a dating to the late sixth or early seventh rather than the late seventh century.’⁹⁰

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 35. There were five distinct areas of evidence by which Ó Néill sought to establish the date of compilation of the *Apgitir Chrábaid* to c. 600. These were: (1) the fact that ‘all of the titles of office mentioned in A[pgitir] C[hrábaid] (§§ 9-10) are specifically monastic, and together present a composite of the monastic hierarchy’ is cited as evidence both for ‘its author and his period’ (‘The date and authorship of *Apgitir Chrábaid*’, 206; 207). Ó Néill’s paper was published in 1987 and the apparent indication that the exclusively monastic character of the offices referred to in *Apgitir Chrábaid* was evidence for its date of compilation implicitly reflects the acceptance, before the publication of Sharpe’s revisionist paper in 1986, that Patrick’s diocesan network was supplanted by a monastic organisation which, in turn, was corrupted and subsumed by the laity. No-one now would accept this model, but even before Sharpe’s revision reliance upon reference to an exclusively monastic context, to provide an indication of date, would have been problematic as there was no consensus to the time-scale in the application of this model (see above, pp. 18-27). Such a suggestion has doubtful credibility as evidence for the date of compilation of the text.

(2) Ó Néill considered that ‘A second type of evidence about the authorship and period of A[pgitir] C[hrábaid] are the sources on which it drew’ (*ibid.*, 207). The principal sources upon which he focussed were the works of John Cassian, whose ‘works were cited in Irish texts, prominently so in the earliest Hiberno-Latin works, the Rule of Columbanus, the Penitentials of Finnian and Cummean...[and in the] *Amra Choluim Chille* [c. 597]’ (*ibid.*). It is clearly true that there are texts which date to the sixth and early seventh centuries which cite Cassian’s works, but, equally clearly, it must be considered unsound to believe that any text *must* date to this period *because* it cites Cassian. It may or it may not, but it cannot be considered to be so merely on the strength of its references to particular works cited.

(3) Ó Néill considered that further evidence for the date of *Apgitir Chrábaid* may be gleaned from its reference to the three renunciations made by the aspirant to baptism. These three renunciations were argued to have derived from the ‘Gallican rite.’ The importance of this point lies in the fact that there was but a single object of renunciation – the Devil – in the ‘Roman rite’. Ó Néill argued that the triple structure indicated in the *Apgitir Chrábaid* reflects ‘Gallican influence on Irish liturgy...[which] belongs to the earliest period of the Irish Church before Romanisation’ (*ibid.*, 210). By way of contrast to the triple structure indicated in the *Apgitir Chrábaid*, Ó Néill offered ‘the evidence of the Stowe Missal’s text (late eighth century) of the renunciation, which is entirely Roman’ (*ibid.*). The *Apgitir Chrábaid*, however, has many sections which have such triple groupings (§§ 15, 19, 20, 29, 30) and there are also sections which have groupings of four (§§ 8, 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28), one of two (§ 16) and one of fifteen (§ 17). The section (§ 30) that refers to the triple renunciation also refers, as Ó Néill concedes, to baptism by triple immersion, which is also mentioned in Irish texts known to have been compiled in the eighth century (*ibid.*, 20 n. 37). *Apgitir Chrábaid* states:

Inna téora tonna tlagde tar duine i mbathis, tre fretech fris-toing indib .i. fris-toing don domun cona adbchlossaib; fris-toing do demun cona inntledaib; fris-toing do tholaib colla. Is ed in so immefolgnai duine dend-i bes mac báis combi mac bethad, dend-i bes mac dorchai combi mac solse. Ó chon-abbaing inda tre fretech so isna téoraib tonnaib tlagde tairis, mani tudig tre drilind a frithissi, ní cumaing do-coi i flaith Dé .i. lind dér aithirge, lind tofáscthe fola i pennaind, lind n-aillse i llebair.

‘The three waves that pass over a person in baptism, in them he makes three renunciations: he renounces the world with its pomps; he renounces the devil with his snares; he renounces the lusts of the flesh. This it is that causes a person to be a son of Life from being a son of Death [and] to be a son of Light from being a son of Darkness. Whenever he breaks these three renunciations [that he has made] in the three waves that pass over him, he cannot enter the kingdom of God, unless he pass again through three pools: a pool of tears of repentance, a pool of blood drawn in penitential discipline, a pool of sweat in labour.’ (The translation is that of Hull, ‘*Apgitir Chrábaid: The Alphabet of Piety*’, 74-5).

When read in context, it is unsurprising that the renunciation invoked in baptism is referred to in a triple form, in common with the triple immersion and the triple course of action necessary

Whether the date of compilation of the *Apgitir Chrábaid* can be definitively established from the internal evidence of its language, therefore, has yet to be agreed by philologists and, consequently, it means that there is no indication of the use of the term *secnap* in Irish sources which can be certainly dated earlier than Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium*. Nonetheless, however, the proposal projected by both Binchy and Greene, that reference to the *secnap* indicated the designated successor to the *abbas* and that the term *secundas abbas*, from which it derived, was current in the sixth century, appears essentially sound. Consequently, from the subsequent annalistic

for the sinner to return to the fold. While this need not necessarily refute Ó Néill's suggestion that this form of triple renunciation may have originated from an early continental influence, it is far from providing secure evidence for a specific date of compilation for the *Apgitir Chrábaid*, particularly, as with the case here, the use of such three-fold imagery appears rather as a literary *topos* than one reflecting a specific form of a perceived early rite.

In a similar vein, for (4), Ó Néill cited § 18 of the *Apgitir Chrábaid* which 'presents truth as a virtue which expels *dorchae ngentlechtae* "the darkness of paganism"' ('The date and authorship of *Apgitir Chrábaid*', 211). This sparked his understanding that it must belong to a particularly early period as it contained such 'references to an Irish society still not fully Christianized' (*ibid.*). Again, however, this assumption is not so clearly obvious from the context:

...*Amail do-furgaib lóchrann a soillsi i tegdais dorchaí, is amlaid do-furgaib ind fírinne i mmedón inda hirise hi crídiu duíni. Cethair dorchae ada-[á]rban as a ndu-furgaib and: dorchae ngentlechtae, dorchae n-anuis, dorcha n-amirse, dorcha pectha, conná rogainn na áe and.*

'...As a lantern raises its light in a dark dwelling, so truth rises within faith in a person's heart. When it rises therein, it drives out four darknesses: the darkness of paganism, the darkness of ignorance, the darkness of disbelief [and] the darkness of sin, so that not one of them can find room therein.' (trans. Hull, 'Apgitir Chrábaid: The Alphabet of Piety', 68-71).

By way of comparison may be the reference in the variant of *Ríagail Phátraic* appended to *Ríagail na Celed nDé* already cited (above, pp. 139-40), that without learning 'there will be no belief, but black heathenism in the land of Ireland' (*ní bia cretim, acht duibgenntligecht hi tir nErenn*). No-one would posit a pagan survival in Ireland in the eighth century and, again, this reference to *dorchae ngentlechtae* does not, in itself, provide credible evidence for the date of compilation of the *Apgitir Chrábaid* to c. 600.

The final line of evidence considered by Ó Néill was that the 'use of alliterative rhythmical language in A[pgitir] C[hrábaid] is compatible with a very early date of composition in the late sixth or early seventh century' ('The date and authorship of *Apgitir Chrábaid*', 214). This last point has been addressed directly by McCone, who stated that 'such reasoning has now been invalidated by recent insights...into the nature and chronology of *rosc* or *retoiric* showing that "archaic" compositions of this type were being produced at least as late as the eighth and ninth centuries' ('Prehistoric, Old and Middle Irish', 34. For references to the works marking the development of this understanding, see McCone, *ibid.*, 18-20). While Ó Néill's paper has established that the *Apgitir Chrábaid* was the work of a single author and not, as Hull latterly believed, a composite work, the various strands of evidence he presented from the text to establish its date of compilation to c. 600 fails to convince, either individually or collectively, and, as it stands, the date of compilation of the *Apgitir Chrábaid* must remain an open question. Ó Néill sought to demonstrate that Colmán moccu Béognae was indeed the author of the text: if, subsequently, it can be proved that the *Apgitir Chrábaid* does indeed date to c. 600, there would appear to be no good reason to doubt this attribution; if, however, the text is ultimately demonstrated to belong to a later period, which, if the date is ever established at all, it may be suspected will prove to be the case, then the attribution to Colmán may rather indicate that the *Apgitir Chrábaid* was originally composed in Colmán's foundation at Lynally.

references to *secnap* it may indicate that the participants in the *congressio senodorum* of 780 encouraged the designation of a successor during the tenure of the *abbas*.

By the 860s, however, other terms appear in the annalistic record, evidently as a variant to *secnap* – *AFM* (sa 861) notes the death of Máel Pátraic, son of Finnchú, bishop, scribe, anchorite and ‘potential’ abbot of Armagh (*adhbhar abbadh Arda Macha*). Again in *AFM* (sa 865) notice is provided of the death of Aedacán, son of Finnsnechta, ‘tanist-abbot’ of Cluain (*tanaisi abbadh Cluana*). *AU* 875.1 records the death of Maengal, tanist of Clonmacnoise (*tanisi Cluana M. Nois*), who is called *prioir Cluana mic Nois* in *AFM* (sa 873). There are further examples. In *AU* 891.4, there is mention of a ‘tanist-abbot’ of Clonmacnois (*tanisi Cluana M. Nois*) who is identically referred to in *AFM* (sa 887 – *tanaisi abbaid Cluana mic Nóis*). A reference in *AU* 896.8 – *Mael Achidh, tanusi Cluana M. Nois* – was, however, again, referred to in *AFM* (sa 891) as *Maolachaidh seacnabb, .i. prioir Cluana mic Nóis*; and, finally, the example of Cathusach, son of Fergus, the ‘tanist-abbot’ of Armagh (*tanuse abad Aird Macha* – *AU* 897.1; *tanaisi abbadh Arda Mach* – *AFM*, sa 892). Twice, therefore, *AFM* explicitly equates this ‘tanist-abbot’ with the position of *secnap*. The name *secnap*, given to a position which had emerged in Ireland, had derived from the hibernicization of a Latin title created for it. While there is clear evidence of the existence of the position beforehand, it certainly appears to have become significantly more widespread after 780 and by the mid-ninth century, the Irish title with Latin roots had begun to give way to a wholly Irish appellation – the *tánaise abbad*.

Perhaps the positions of the *airchinnech* and the *equonimus* would allow a more significant impact on the organisation of the church. Although the references to the *airchinnech* are more numerous than the *secnap* or *equonimus / ferthigis*, they are still relatively few in number,⁹¹ but, nevertheless, enough to demonstrate that the term was current, and its use widespread, throughout the eighth century. While there was

⁹¹ For a detailed consideration of the references to the *airchinnech* in early sources, see Etchingam, *Church Organisation*, 63-79.

only one specific annalistic reference to the *airchinnech* prior to the 790s, and that belonging to the more detailed annalistic record of the 740s, it could, however, be objected that some of the references to *principes* were intended to convey the position of *airchinnech*. Even after the 790s, in the sample period, annalistic references to the *airchinnech* are sparse in comparison with the *princeps*, with an average frequency of reference to merely one per decade.

The earliest single reference to the *equonimus* would appear to be contained in Cogitosus, who mentions within the *Vita Brigitae* the incidental detail that some masons and workmen were appointed by the *oeconomus* of Kildare to fashion a millstone. This stray reference, together with the demand in Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium* – although preserved only in a tenth-century text - that the *secnap*, *coic* and *ferthigis* of the church stand as guarantors, clearly show that both the *secnap* and *ferthigis* were ecclesiastical positions of long standing, even if invisible to annalistic record before 780.

The one stanza within the 'Rule of Ailbe of Emly' which specifically relates to the *ferthigis* says nothing at all about his function,⁹² but from the usual understanding of the position as a steward suggests that it was intended as some form of fiscal officer, perhaps, as already suggested, as a deputy to the *airchinnech*. While the church had always had material resources for which it was responsible, and generally, it would seem, administered by the abbot, the *equonimus* appears to have been the introduction of a specialist steward. The concentration of the material resources of the church in the hands of a full-time specialist official would have had a two-fold benefit: it would improve the marshalling of church resources, allowing a better provision of priests, the furnishing of scriptoria and, no doubt, the patronage of the free-standing stone crosses which begin to emerge by the early ninth century; and, while the abbot would maintain the final say in the affairs of the community, leaving the day to day

⁹² §40a: *Ferthaiges umal aurlithe don chumang conicc
bendachad ocus fálte fri cech n-óin dodnic.*

'A steward, humble, obedient, to the extent of his power,
blessing and welcome for everyone who comes to him.'

practicalities in the hands of the *equonimus* would allow the abbot more time generally to focus on spiritual affairs.

One final aspect of this discussion which ought to be considered is who these *sechnáid* and *equonimi* were. In the majority of cases where individuals are stipulated with these titles, they are merely names and nothing more is known of them. In the case of Armagh, however, Máelduin son of Donngal of the Uí Bresail Airthir managed to acquire the position of *equonimus* of Armagh, interjecting himself between the occupancy of that position by the sons of Cernach in what was becoming an Uí Níallain preserve at this time (see below, p. 211, n. 36). Máelduin's father, Donngal (d. 791) had been king of Airthir and, while there was a great deal of political pressure exerted on Armagh by secular rulers (see chapter 7), making the circumstances regarding Armagh unique, this may indicate an alternative suggestion to the apparently sudden acquisition of prestige to these offices – that members of royal dynasties were anxious to control the resources of great churches and secured these offices as a means to this end.

By the end of this sample period, however, there was occasional mention of a further position with fiscal duties, but, it would appear, with perhaps a more focussed remit. In *AU* 814.1, the death is recorded of Feidlimid, abbot of Cill Moine and Patrick's steward of Brega (*moer Breg o Phatraic*). In *AU* 888.3, notice is given of the death of Mael Pátraic, *princeps* of Treóit and steward of Patrick's community for the district south of the Mount (*maer muintiri Patraicc fri Sliabh andes*). This title is repeated six years later with the death of Maelodar son of Forbasach (*AU* 894.1 – *maer muinntiri Patraicc o Sleib fadhes*). Clearly, however, the area of jurisdiction was something different, with an indication of the stewardship of part of the *paruchia* of Armagh, or, perhaps more likely, to do with the administration with *Lex Patricii* (see below, pp. 175ff). Whether or not the *moer Breg o Phatraic* equated with the later and more formal title of 'the steward of Patrick's community for south of the Mount' is uncertain, but was perhaps a forerunner, and, again, it is surely significant that such a position is only recorded in reference to Armagh.

There are two distinct questions which arise from the material in this chapter: (1) was there some form of re-organisation of the administration of church resources in the last quarter of the eighth century and (2) did this take place at the *congressio senodorum* at Tara in 780? If these points could be demonstrated, then they would show that there was a concerted attempt to harness more effectively the material resources of the church through more efficient stewardship; and that this concerted effort was first addressed at a congress under the auspices of a *céle Dé*. The indications are then that while it would appear that there were examples of the offices of *equonimus* and *secnap* found in earlier sources, they acquired an importance significant enough to merit annalistic attention consistently from the 780s. Annalistic references to the *airchinnech*, similarly, became more frequent, but to a lesser extent and are perhaps disguised by the use of *princeps*. While there is nothing explicitly stated to account for this, it appears that this prevalence of usage emerges quite suddenly after the *congressio senodorum* at Tara in 780, a gathering of ecclesiastics organised by Dublithir of Finglas, accepted as one of the most prominent *céli Dé* of his day. Certainly, these offices emphasise 'the separation of the abbatial and coarbial functions' and the more efficient harnessing of the material resources of the church, reflected by the new prominence of these offices, would allow the more widespread provision of priests, trained to a more consistent standard, necessary to maintain basic pastoral care; and maintain the scriptoria responsible for the significant increase in the production of manuscripts and texts witnessed in the late-eighth / mid-ninth centuries. In neither instance, however, can it be said that there is definitive evidence to support the *prima facie* analysis of the annalistic material and, while suggestive, there are valid objections which require to be considered and alternative possibilities which equally take account of the evidence. In neither case, therefore, can these initial impressions be said to be substantiated and that, consequently, any attempt to improve efficiency in harnessing the material resources of the church cannot be shown to have been concerted in this way.

6

The promulgation of the 'laws of saints' in the eighth and ninth centuries.

One particular feature of the annalistic record from the end of the seventh century to the middle of the ninth is the notice of the promulgation of the 'laws of saints.' It is apparent that the record of these promulgations is restricted to this period and, consequently, there is a clear likelihood that these instances were further manifestations of the development of ecclesiastical organisation during this period. Further, the annalistic record, as it survives, indicates that by far the greatest majority of instances of the promulgation of these laws belong to the period from the early eighth to the mid-ninth centuries. As this was also the period in which *céli Dé* influence grew to significance and peaked, the question which naturally arises from this observation is to what extent, if any, were the *céli Dé* involved in the formulation and promulgation of these laws? What, if anything, can be understood with regard to the purpose and implementation of these laws?

The first record of any law connected with ecclesiastical figures promulgated in Ireland belongs to the last decades of the seventh century with *Cáin Éimíne Báin*,¹ *Cáin Fhuithirbe*² and Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium*, later known as *Cáin Adomnáin*,³ in 697. During the course of the eighth and ninth centuries, however, there are references to the laws of Patrick, of Colum Cille, of Ciarán, of Dar-Í, of Comán, of Brendan, of the Úa Suanach and of Ailbe, together with the detached record of the introduction of *Cáin Domnaich*, a somewhat different form of edict, only noted towards the end of the period under study but clearly observed from a much earlier date.

¹ Erich Poppe, 'A new edition of *Cáin Éimíne Báin*', *Celtica* 18 (1986), 35-52. Poppe dates the *cáin* to the late seventh century.

² Dated to 678x83. See Liam Breatnach, 'The ecclesiastical element in the old-Irish legal tract *Cáin Fhuithirbe*', *Peritia* 5 (1986), 36-52.

³ For the details of which, see above, p. 157, n. 67.

Annalistic reference to the 'laws of saints', 700-900

- 721: Inmesach the Religious established a law with the peace of Christ over the island of Ireland – *AU, CS (sa 717), ATig.*
- 727: The relics of Adomnán were brought to Ireland and the law renewed - *AU, ATig.*
- 734: The tour of the relics of Peter, Paul and Patrick to fulfil the law - *AU, ATig.*
- 737: *Lex Patricii* across Ireland - *AU, AClon (sa 734), ATig.*
- 743: *Lex aui Suanaigh* - *AU, AClon (sa 740), ATig.*
- 744: The Law of Ciarán, son of the wright, and the Law of Brendan, simultaneously by Forggus son of Cellach - *AU, AClon (sa 740), ATig.*
- 748: The Law of the Ua Suanaigh enforced over Leth Cuinn - *AU, ATig.*
- 753: The Law of Colum Cille by Domnall of Mide - *AU, AClon (sa 749), ATig.*
- 757: The Law of Colum Cille by Sléibéne - *AU, ATig.*
- (? 757: 'Rules of Saint Sagnus were yett observed' – *AClon, sa 753).*
- 767: *Lex Patricii* - *AU, AClon (sa 761).*
- 772: The Law of Comán and Áedán a second time on the Three Connachta - *AU, AClon (sa 765).⁴*
- 775: The Law of Ciarán on the Connachta – *AI.*
- 778: The Law of Colum Cille by Donnchad and Bresal – *AU.*
- 780: The third promulgation of the Law of Comán and Áedán – *AU.*
- 783: The promulgation of the Law of Patrick in Cruachan by Dub dá Leithe and Tipraite son of Tadg – *AU.*
- 784: The Law of Ailbe in Munster – *AI.*
- 788: The Law of Ciarán in Connacht – *AU, AClon (sa 785).*
- 793: The Law of Comán by Aildobar and Muirgius in the Three Connachta – *AU, AFM, AFM (sa 788), AClon (sa 790).*
- 793: The Law of Ailbe in Munster – *AU,⁵ AFM (sa 788).*
- 799: The Law of Patrick in Connacht by Gormgal son of Dindathach – *AU.*
- 806: The Law of Patrick by Áed son of Niall – *AU, CS.*
- 810: The law concerning cows in Munster by Dar-Í and by Aduar son of Echen – *AI.*
- 811: Nuadu, abbot of Armagh, went to Connacht with the Law of Patrick and his casket – *AU, CS.*
- [811: '...the Céle Dé came over the sea, dry-shod, without a boat; and a written roll used to be given to him from Heaven, out of which he would give instructions to

⁴ *AClon sa 765*; 'The rules of St. Queran & St. Aidan were Practized in the three thirds of Connaught'.

⁵ *AU 793.3*: 'The Law of Ailbe [promulgated] in Munster and Artrí son of Cathal ordained king of Munster' (*Lex Ailbhi for Muman 7 ordinatio Artroigh m. Cathail in regnum Mumen).*

the Gael, and it used to be taken up again when the instruction was delivered; and the Céle Dé was wont to go each day across the sea, southwards, after imparting the instruction.’]

812: The Law of Dar-Í in Connacht – *AU, CS*.

813: The Law of Dar-Í by the Uí Néill – *AU*.

814: The Law of Ciarán was elevated in Cruachu by Muirgius – *AU, CS*.

823: The Law of Patrick over Munster by Feidlimid, son of Crimthainn, and by Artrí, son of Conchobar – *AU, CS, AFM (sa 822), AClon (sa 820)*.

825: The Law of Patrick on the Three Connachta by Artrí, son of Conchobar – *AU, AFM (sa 824), AClon (sa 822)*.

826: The Law of Dar-Í to Connacht again – *AU, CS*.

836: Diarmait went to Connacht with the Law of Patrick and his *uexillis* – *AU*.

842: The Law of Patrick to Munster by Forannán and by Diarmait – *AI*.

[887: A letter, with the ‘Law of Sunday’ and other good instructions, came to Ireland with the Pilgrim – *AU, CS, AFM (sa 884)*]

Within the period 700-900, then, the annalistic reference to the promulgation of these laws of saints is restricted to the period 721-842 and in a breakdown on a decade-by-decade basis can be seen thus:

700s: -

710s: -

720s: 2

730s: 2

740s: 3

750s: 3

760s: 1

770s: 3

780s: 4

790s: 3

800s: 1

810s: 5

820s: 3

830s: 1

840s: 1

[None thereafter]

total: 32

From the combined annalistic sources, therefore, there are references to the promulgation of laws associated with particular saints between 721x842, of which

there are peaks in the 740s and 750s, 770s-790s and 810s and 820s. While it has been recognised that there are peaks of detail in the annalistic record and that this record of the promulgation of these laws must be incomplete, the peak periods of the promulgation of these laws do not entirely overlap with the peak periods of detailed annalistic record: while the 740s, 770s, 780s and 810s have a fuller and broader than usual annalistic record, the 750s, 790s and 820s have a less detailed record (see above, pp. 158-9). This may suggest that rather than be due to more comprehensive recording in the annals, these periods may reflect actual peaks, for whatever reason, in the promulgation of such laws themselves.

The earliest reference concerns an otherwise unknown law introduced by Inmesach the Religious in 721.⁶ This was followed by the renewal of Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium* in 727 and an uncertain entry for 734: 'The tour of the relics of Peter, Paul and Patrick to fulfil the law'.⁷ Which law was intended here? The general assumption appears to be that it was the *Lex Patricii* that was referred to, but this is far from clear and comparisons with the circumstances of the promulgation of *Cáin Adomnáin* may indicate that the law referred to was not *Lex Patricii*. Thomas Charles-Edwards has noted that 'In 727 an entry in what, at this date, are still in origin Iona annals declares that "The relics of Adomnán are taken across to Ireland and the Law is renewed."' This was exactly thirty years since the original promulgation of *Cáin Adomnáin*.⁸ He then goes on to note that

In 737 a meeting was held between Áed Allán, then king of Tara, and Cathal mac Finguinni, king of Munster, at the monastery of Terryglass, close to the frontier. The next entry for that year states that "The Law of Patrick embraced Ireland." The meeting may have secured an agreement that Patrick's relics and Patrick's law should cross the border into Munster. In 697 Adomnán had promulgated his law at Birr, another monastery on the border between Munster

⁶ Dr T.O. Clancy has suggested to me the possibility that the name 'Inmesach' may instead have been an epithet: *in mes(s)ach* 'the noble / honourable one'.

⁷ AU 734.3: *Comnotatio martirum Petir 7 Phoil 7 Phatraicc ad legem perficiendam; 7 occisio Coibdenaigh filii Flainn hui Chongaile* – the context appears to imply that the slaying of Coibdenach was somehow connected to the display of these relics.

⁸ T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, Cambridge, 2000, 564.

and Mide, some fourteen miles east of Terryglass. *Cáin Adomnáin*, therefore, both in its original promulgation in 697 and in its renewal in 727, may have offered a model which Armagh was ready to follow.⁹

This model may have been even more closely adhered to than the suggestion here. *AU* 767.10 states simply *Lex Patricii*. No indication is provided for the reason it was mentioned, but it was exactly thirty years after the first specific mention of *Lex Patricii* in 737 (*AU* 737.10: *Lex Patricii tenuit Hiberniam*) – could it be, then, as Charles-Edwards suggests, that Armagh adopted the model of promulgation of *Lex Innocentium*, but adopted it to the letter and renewed the original promulgation exactly thirty years afterwards? If so then this would suggest that *Lex Patricii* was formulated in 737 and, as such, the reference to ‘the law’ in 734 would not be to that of Patrick. It may have been that of Adomnán himself, or even, given the connection of the relics of Armagh with peace-keeping, that introduced by Inmesach.¹⁰

The next certain reference to any law, following that of *Lex Patricii* in 737, was *Lex aui Suanaigh* reported in 743 and promulgated over Leth Cuinn in 748. This law undoubtedly originated from Rahan, which is explicitly called Rahan of the Uí Suanaich in the entry recording the obit of its anchorite, Fidmuine ua Suanaich, in *ATig*.¹¹ It is very likely, indeed, that this law had been formulated by either Fidmuine (d. 757) or by Fidairle ua Suanaich, the abbot of Rahan (d. 763), or both, perhaps in conjunction with others in the community. In any event, it clearly emerged under their sphere of influence and with this connection, it is therefore possible to connect the formulation and promulgation of this law with individuals influential as *céli Dé* – Máel Tuile mac Noechuire, listed as one of the *óentu Máel Ruain*, was fostered with the Uí Suanaich and almost certainly began his religious life with the community of Rahan (see below, p. 236). In this case, it is unfortunate that the content and aims of this law, as with so many of the others, have not survived.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ The *Bachall Ísu*, the chief relic in Armagh, would have been particularly apt for enforcing Inmesach’s ‘law with the peace of Christ.’

¹¹ *Quies Fidmuine ancorite Rathain Húi Suanaigh* (cf. the more ambiguous entry in *AU* 757.1 – *Quies Fidmhuine ancorite Rathin, id est nepotis Suanaich*).

The reference to the second and third promulgation of the Law of Comán and Áedán over Connacht in 772 and 780, without record of the initial promulgation, and the lack of record in some annals which are recorded in others, indicates that the record of the promulgation of such law is incomplete. Of the 32 references to laws associated with saints 721x842, however, one – Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium* – was international in scope; two – Inmesach's law in 721 and *Lex Patricii* in 737 – were national in scope, or related in terms intended to project a pan-Irish observance; one – *Lex aui Suanaich* in 748 – was stipulated to have been promulgated over Leth Cuinn. It is noticeable that *Lex aui Suanaich* was a watershed in the record of the promulgation of these laws – the record of every promulgation up to and including this one were stipulated to be over areas greater than a single province, whereas every subsequent record which specifies an area of promulgation does so over a single province only. The record of three others, however – the promulgation of *Lex Coluim Cille* by Domnall Mide in 753 and again by Donnchad Mide and Bresal, abbot of Iona, in 778 and the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* by Áed mac Néill in 806 – are not provided with an area over which they were enforced, but as all three kings were kings of Tara at the time of promulgation, it could be possible that it would have been considered that they, too, had been enforced over Leth Cuinn and so this impression of a watershed may be misleading. The promulgation of the Law of Dar-Í in 813, presumably again by Áed mac Néill, was explicitly stated to have been by – presumably meaning among – the Uí Néill.

Five other references do not provide mention of the area over which the law was promulgated. Two of these, however – the tour of relics of Peter, Paul and Patrick to fulfil the law in 734 and the simple reference to *Lex Patricii* in 767 – may be supposed, at least, to pertain to the Airgialla territory around Armagh, but equally may be more substantial in scope. If, as argued above, the reference to *Lex Patricii* in 767 reflects the renewal of an original promulgation in 737, then this may indicate it would have been considered in theory, regardless of the actuality in practice, to again pertain to the whole of Ireland. The political situation at this time, however, makes it

highly unlikely that there would have been a circuit throughout Ireland, as there had been in 737, to renew *Lex Patricii*, which may account for this most laconic of entries in 767. Reference to *Lex aui Suanaich* in 743 may imply promulgation throughout Mide, but this cannot be more than conjecture. The observance that 'The Rules of Saint Sagnus were yett observed' in *AClon*, *sa* 753, may be a corrupt reference to *Lex aui Suanaich*¹² and perhaps indication of a further promulgation *c.* 757-60.¹³ The fifth of these five unspecified enactments was the promulgation of *Lex Coluim Cille* by Sléibéne in 757.

The remaining nineteen references are explicitly provincial in scope. No fewer than fourteen relate to Connacht specifically and five relate to Munster. In Munster, the laws promulgated were those of Ailbe of Emly (x2) – the relevance of which appears to have been restricted to Munster so far as can be seen by the surviving record – of Patrick (x2) and of Dar-Í. The fourteen instances specific to Connacht, however, relate to the laws of five different saints and appears to indicate the ecclesiastic interest of various kings of Connacht with Clonmacnoise, Clonfert, Roscommon, Kildaree¹⁴ and Armagh. However, the frequency of reference, nonetheless, does point to a greater concern with the Laws of Patrick (x5) and of Ciarán (x4) than that, perhaps, of Comán (x3) and certainly than that of Dar-Í (x2) and of Brendan (x1). The laws of Ciarán, Comán and Brendan, like that of Ailbe in Munster, however, appear to have had only a local relevance to Connacht itself.

Thomas Charles-Edwards has provided an outline of the mechanics involved in the promulgation of these laws. He cites the four types of *rechtge* (law, rule) which

¹² The extant text of *AClon* frequently refers to the 'law and constitution' or the 'law and rule' where other annals refer only to 'law' (*cf.* the entries *saa* 734 and 740 for two of several examples.). On other occasions, however, only 'rule' is mentioned when clearly 'law' is meant. For example, the promulgation of *Lex Coluim Cille* by Donnall Mide, noted in *AU* (753) and *ATig*, is entered as 'The Rules of St. Columkill were established in Meath by King Donell' (*sa* 749); and the promulgation of the Law of Comán and Áedán in 772 is reported as 'The rules of St. Queran [*sic*] & St. Aedan were Practized in the three Thirds of Connaught' (*sa* 765). The 'Rules of Saint Sagnus' referred to *sa* 753, therefore, can be accepted to refer to a law.

¹³ The conversion of the chronology in *AClon* to that indicated by the more reliable chronological frameworks of *AU* and *CS* is somewhat more problematic for this period in the extant text.

¹⁴ The church associated with Dar-Í. See Pádraig Ó Riain, 'A misunderstood annal: a hitherto unnoticed *cáin*', *Celtica* 21 (1990), 561-6, at 564-5.

a king can 'pledge upon his peoples', listed in *Críth Gablach*.¹⁵ The fourth of the four is noted as 'a king's *rechtge*', to which

Three other *rechtgi* are then added, which a king may also pledge upon his peoples; perhaps we are to understand them to be examples of a king's *rechtge*:

'A *rechtge* to repel a foreign race, that is against the English, and a *rechtge* to bring in the harvest, and a *rechtge* of faith which kindles [piety], such as the law of Adomnán.'¹⁶

These *rechtgi* were normally promulgated at the óenach, a gathering for 'official business', and the law of a saint promulgated there, Charles-Edwards outlines, would have four levels of surety for its observance:¹⁷ (1) the existing legal guarantors appointed by a kindred who stood surety for that kindred's good behaviour in relation to public order were incorporated as guarantors of their kindred's adherence to the law; (2) there were specific guarantors, the *airtiri cána*, 'hostage-sureties of a *cáin*', appointed, Charles-Edwards suggests, for the duration of the enforcement of the *cáin*;¹⁸ (3) enforcing officers were appointed who collected the penalties for violation of the law. In the specific case of *Lex Innocentium*,

it appears that the 'stewards of the law', appointed by and responsible to the abbot and community of Iona, collected the entire debt 'of the *cáin*', for, say, the killing of a woman. They would then be responsible for paying to the woman's kindred and lords the compensation owed to them for her death...In the absence of a *cáin*, a woman's kindred would still be entitled to compensation or to pursue a vendetta if the terms of compensation were not agreed. The prominent role of the sponsors of the *cáin* and their agents in collecting debts for violation of the terms did not annul the rights of a kindred or a lord. What it did mean was that the sponsors of the *cáin* and their agents had a duty to collect compensation on behalf of lord and kindred...One thing

¹⁵ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 560.

¹⁶ *ibid.*; *Críth Gablach* §38, lines 522-4.

¹⁷ See the detailed outline he provides for these different sureties, *Early Christian Ireland*, 566-8.

¹⁸ He suggests that these laws were enforced for a period of seven years. *ibid.*, 563.

that the *cáin* did, therefore, was to replace the ordinary processes of feud with its own means of enforcing compensation.¹⁹

(4) There were special judges appointed to adjudicate cases concerning that law.

The vernacular equivalent of *lex* was *cáin*, which has the dual meaning of 'law' and 'tax/tribute'. It has perhaps been inevitable, given the scholarly consensus concerning the corrupt degeneracy within the church at this time, that the latter interpretation has been the prevalent one and that the promulgation of these laws were perceived to have been no more than a fund-raising exercise.²⁰ While it is clear that the sponsoring authority of a particular law was entitled to one third of the compensation due from violation of the law - which, undoubtedly, could have provided a significant source of income - this can hardly be considered as primarily a fund-raising scheme for the relevant church or for those kings recorded as jointly promulgating such law - compensation, it ought to go without saying, would only be exacted from those who infringed the law.

The principal aim of *Lex Innocentium* was to protect non-combatants - women, children and clerics - from the worst excesses of the violence of the age. The notes appended to *Félire Óengusso* following the commemoration of Adomnán under 23 September account for the formulation of *Lex Innocentium* and conclude: 'Now these are the four laws of Ireland: Patrick's Law, not to kill clerics; and Adomnán's Law, not to kill women; Dar-Í's Law, not to kill cattle; and the Law of Sunday, not to transgress at all.'²¹ The three laws of saints outlined here are the only ones, other than

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 567-8.

²⁰ Kathleen Hughes was one of the earliest scholars to cast doubt on the automatic assumption that the promulgation of these laws ought to imply nothing more than a financial exercise; however, her valid doubts were perhaps weakened by the fact that her discussion was concerned with the promulgation of these laws but was illustrated by reference to the recorded tours of relics. While it is clear that the promulgation of law did occasionally occur in the presence of relics, it is equally clear that the promulgation of a saint's law and the circuit-tour of a saint's relics were not the same thing and her pertinent points have not subsequently enjoyed the prominence they deserve. See her discussion in *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 167-8.

²¹ *At éat so dono ceithri cána Eirenn .i. cain Patraic gan [n]a chleirchiu do marbad, 7 cain Adamnain gan [n]a mna do marbad, cain Daire ga[n] bú do marbad, 7 Cain domnaig can toirimtecht etir.* Stokes (ed.), *Félire Óengusso Céili Dé*, London, 1905, 210-11. It has to be noted, however, that these notes date much later, perhaps to the twelfth century, than the text of *FO*.

the survival of the peculiar seventh century *Cáin Éimíne Báin*, for which detail of their content has survived. This fact is almost certainly due to their promulgation beyond the provincial level recorded as the geographical sphere in all other specified instances, with the sole exception of the attributed promulgation of *Lex aui Suanaich* over Leth Cuinn. The specific area of interest for these provincial laws are, unfortunately, unknown, which makes it virtually impossible to account for the reason that one such law may have been promulgated at a particular time rather than another. Nevertheless, it is clear that the promulgation of the law of saints was intended to provide a curb to the violent excesses of the age for the benefit of society as a whole.

While these laws were formulated to benefit society, their promulgation could also be of significant benefit to the sponsoring church – not, as has been commonly emphasized, as a fund-raising exercise, but as a means to exert influence beyond its immediate sphere of influence. This was particularly the case for Armagh. The outline provided by Thomas Charles-Edwards, cited above, for the enforcement of *Lex Innocentium* details that the ‘stewards of the law’, responsible for the collection of the penalties due from violation of the law were appointed by and responsible to the abbot and community of Iona. Charles-Edwards’ belief that both the original promulgation of Adomnán’s *Lex Innocentium* in 697 and its renewal in 727 may have offered a model which Armagh was ready to follow has also already been noted (above, pp. 174-5). If the circumstances of the formulation and promulgation of *Lex Innocentium* did indeed provide a template for *Lex Patricii*, then it is reasonable to assume that the means of enforcing its observance, likewise, was adopted. In this case every occasion on which *Lex Patricii* was promulgated in Connacht and in Munster (and, it must surely have been the case even although there is no specific record of it, in Leinster), then it would have been the abbot of Armagh who appointed the ‘stewards of the law.’²² Promulgation of *Lex Patricii* in the provinces of Ireland, then, would not

²² Prior to 900, there are three recorded instances of ‘stewards of Patrick’s community’ in the annals. *AU* 814.1 records the death of Feidlimid, abbot of Cill Moine and Patrick’s steward of Brega (*moer Breg o Phatraic*); *AU* 888.3 notes the death of Máel Pátraic, *princeps* of Trebit and steward of Patrick’s community for the district south of the Mount (*maer muintiri Patraicc fri Sliabh andes*); *AU* 894.1 records the death of Máel Pátraic’s apparent successor, Maelodhar son

merely provide Armagh, or contending rival claimants to the abbacy, with the *kudos* of a law intended for the betterment of society or with the entitlement of a third share of the dues owed as compensation from violation of the law, but with an ecclesiastical infrastructure for its administration which was appointed by and answerable only to the abbot and community of Armagh. The record of the promulgation of law jointly by king and ecclesiastic takes on a greater significance from this perspective – the ecclesiastic appointed the ‘stewards of the law’, whom he may have brought with him from Armagh, while the king sanctioned their authority, independent from his own, within his kingdom.

Lex Patricii provided Armagh, in its attempt to secure recognition as the metropolitan see, with a unique advantage. While the administration of *Lex Patricii* may have been modelled on that of *Lex Innocentium*, there is no record of any further promulgation of *Lex Innocentium* after 727, although it is clear that it was still observed – Caencomrac mac Maeluidhir, abbot and bishop of Derry, is called *maor cána Adhamhnáin* in his obit in *AFM* under 927. The text of *Cáin Adomnáin* itself dates to the tenth century in its extant form, so clearly it was still active or renewed two centuries after the last recorded promulgation in 727. The other law formulated by the Columban *familia*, *Lex Coluim Cille*, no doubt also followed the means of enforcement established by *Lex Innocentium*; but Iona had one insurmountable problem in any presumed rivalry in recognition of supremacy – it lay geographically outwith Ireland. The Law of Dar-Í, unique in being the law of a female saint, had, presumably, been formulated by the community of Kildaree, but they were unlikely to have been able to support such an infrastructure – indeed, the references to the promulgation of Dar-Í are noticeable in that they do not provide the names of anyone

of Forbasach (*maer muinntiri Patraicc o Sleib fadhes*). There is no record of the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* in Brega and, as already noted, there is no record of the promulgation of any ‘ecclesiastical’ law after 842, although it is clear that they were still observed, so it is far from certain that these men were ‘stewards of the law’ of Patrick. However, they certainly appear to have been involved in the administration of justice (see Etchingham, *Church organisation in Ireland*, 211-3), so it is possible that this was indeed what was intended by the title. If so, they clearly attracted little annalistic attention, but are represented in the annals from the turn of the ninth century.

associated with its promulgation except the single instance of Aduar son of Echen noted in the entry in *AI* for 810.²³ It may perhaps have been the case in the promulgation of this particular law that enforcement in any particular region fell more fully upon royal officials. The promulgation of *Lex Patricii*, then, provided Armagh with a unique opportunity to expand and consolidate a position of authority on the ground in more distant regions that must have provided a fundamental advantage in its attempts to secure recognition of metropolitan status. In such a case, too, the advantage in the race to secure political supremacy for the northern Uí Néill kings of Ailech and Tara, in being able to install their preferred candidates in the abbacy of Armagh, was palpable (see chapter 7).

Forggus, son of Cellach, of the Uí Briúin, king of Connacht, promulgated the laws of both Ciarán and Brendan in 744, within two years of the beginning of his reign. The Law of Comán and Áedán was promulgated in 772 by Donn Cothaid of the Uí Fiachrach (d. 773); while the Law of Ciarán was again promulgated in 775 by Forggus' nephew, Flaithrí, son of Domnall. In 783, however, the Law of Patrick was promulgated for the first time in Connacht by Tipraite, son of Tadhg, of the Uí Briúin Aí, and Dub dá Lethe, abbot of Armagh. Thomas Charles-Edwards has noted that

Tipraite's role is interesting in that the current ruler of Tara, Donnchad mac Domnaill, favoured the *familia* of Columba rather than Armagh; in 778 the Law of Columba had been promulgated by Donnchad and by Bresal, abbot of Iona...By this stage there was a clear pattern by which the alternation between Cland Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain kings of Tara was mirrored by an alternation between Iona and Armagh as the most favoured church of the Uí Néill. What Tipraite mac Taidgg did in 783 was to favour the church currently out of favour with the king of Tara. He may have wished to be seen to pursue an independent ecclesiastical policy.²⁴

²³ In regard to Dar-Í and Aduar, son of Echen, Ó Riain noted 'Both of these personages were in fact saints, belonging, in so far as either ever existed, to the so-called Age of Saints (c. AD 500-650)' ('A misunderstood annal', 562). He posits that Aduar himself was identified with a hitherto unknown *cáin* concerning cattle and that the two laws dealing with a similar topic subsequently became conflated.

²⁴ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 563.

The previous year 'Artgal, son of Cathal, king of Connacht took the pilgrim's staff and undertook his pilgrimage the following year to the island of Í.'²⁵ This abdication was presumably 'encouraged' by Tipraite and the joint promulgation of *Lex Patricii* with Dub dá Lethé may perhaps suggest that Tipraite sought consolidation of his position from association with Armagh.

F.J. Byrne had noted that the introduction of the Law of Patrick 'marked the mutual recognition of the claims of Armagh and of the Uí Briúin in Connacht.'²⁶ The Uí Briúin had provided kings of Connacht throughout the eighth century; but not exclusively so – the Uí Fiachrach had also provided Connacht kings. The Uí Fiachrach, however, regardless of how powerful they had been during the sixth and seventh centuries, were being displaced as rulers of Connacht by the Uí Briúin dynasties. Indeed, throughout the eighth century, the kingship of Connacht appears to have been gravitating towards an alternating succession between the descendants of the sons of Muiredach Muillethan of the Uí Briúin: Indrechtach (the Uí Briúin Aí, later the Síl Muiredaig) and Cathal (the Uí Briúin Umail, later the Síl Cathail).

Briefly, Indrechtach, son of Muiredach (d. 723), had been succeeded by Domnall, son of Cellach (d. 728), his father's cousin.²⁷ He was succeeded in turn by Cathal, son of Muiredach (d. 735) and Áed Balb, son of Indrechtach (d. 742). Succession then passed to Forggus, son of Cellach, Domnall's brother (d. 756), who, in turn, was succeeded by Ailill Medraige (d. 764) of the Uí Fiachrach. Dub-Indrecht, son of Cathal (d. 768), retrieved the kingship for the Uí Briúin briefly before Donn Cothaid of the Uí Fiachrach succeeded. He was to be the last Uí Fiachrach king of Connacht. Succession reverted to the Uí Briúin on Donn Cothaid's death in 773; but not to the descendants of Muiredach – it passed to Flaithrí, son of Domnall son of Cellach, who abdicated in 777, presumably under pressure from Artgal, son of Cathal, who was himself apparently pressured by Tipraite and abdicated in 782. On Tipraite's

²⁵ AU 782.2 – *Bachall Artgaile m. Cathail regis Connacht 7 perigrinatio eius in sequenti anno ad insulam Íe.*

²⁶ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 250.

²⁷ See the genealogical tables in Byrne, *ibid.*, 298-301.

death in 786, the Uí Fiachrach made a last bid for the kingship, defeating the Uí Briúin Umail twice in 787. However, both Cathmug, king of the Uí Fiachrach and Dub-Díbeirgg of the Uí Briúin Umail were killed in the first encounter, recorded as the battle of Gola.²⁸ Later the same year, the Uí Briúin Umail were again heavily defeated, when ‘all the nobles, including King Flaithgal son of Flannabra, fell’;²⁹ however, the heavy losses on both sides appear to have ensured that the Uí Fiachrach were unable to follow up on their victories to secure political dominance, for Cináed, son of Artgal, of the Uí Briúin Umail, managed to seize the kingship.

In 788, Ciarán’s Law was promulgated in Connacht, presumably by Cináed, who thus appears to have had a stronger affiliation to Clonmacnoise. However, in 792 Cináed was defeated and killed by Muirgius, son of Tomaltach, of the Uí Briúin Aí, as a result of which the kings of Connacht were subsequently drawn exclusively from either the Uí Briúin Aí or the Uí Briúin Umail until the succession was secured among the descendants of Conchobar of the Uí Briúin Aí at the end of the ninth century and eventually monopolized by the line of Cathal mac Conchobair in the early tenth.

The succession of the kingship of Connacht, then, was not secured within any one dynasty by the end of the eighth century, but it was certainly increasingly gravitating towards two lines of descent within the Uí Briúin – the descendants of Indrechtach son of Muiredach (d. 723) and of Cathal son of Muiredach (d. 735). By acting in concert with Dub dá Lethe in the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* in 783, Tipraite may have been trying to secure an acknowledgement by Armagh, not simply for his own *de facto* position as king, but more importantly for the Uí Briúin Aí as the ruling dynasty of Connacht as part of an attempt to monopolize the kingship.³⁰ Certainly the claim of succession from the Uí Fiachrach and from other lines of descent within the Uí Briúin themselves – the descendants of Muiredach’s cousins –

²⁸ AU 787.4: *Bellum Goli in quo nepotes Briuin uicti sunt. Cathmugh m. Duinn Cothaigh 7 Dub Dibeirgg m. Cathail inuicem ceciderunt.*

²⁹ AU 787.6: *Ar nepotum Briuin Humil apud nepothes Fiachrach Muirsce ubi omnes optimi circa regem Flathgalum filium Flannabrat, ceciderunt.*

³⁰ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 250.

were extinguished by the end of the eighth century and such political ambition by Tipraite in this respect appears to have been possible. It may be, then, that Tipraite looked to secure recognition from Armagh in order to help provide the basis of legitimization in such a claim, or, perhaps more accurately, to provide a considerable obstacle to the rivals of Uí Briúin Aí monopolization. Armagh, with its aspirations to metropolitan recognition, but eclipsed by Iona in the receipt of Uí Néill favour and not yet riven by the contention of rival abbots, was no doubt quick to grasp the opportunity for the expansion of its influence into Connacht.³¹ The joint promulgation of *Lex Patricii* in 783, at least, could be considered as the means by which the respective interests of both parties were furthered to their mutual benefit, whereby the interests of one party was best served by recognition and promotion of the interests of the other.

If Tipraite's aims were indeed to secure exclusive rights of the Uí Briúin Aí to the kingship of Connacht, they failed and monopoly of the kingship was still nearly a century away. Tipraite died in 786 and had his reign been longer, there may have been more tangible results to any efforts to monopolize the succession; however, pursuit of his policy in this respect appears to have been ultimately maintained by his cousin, Muirgius son of Tomaltach. Tipraite himself was succeeded by Cináed mac Artgail of the Uí Briúin Umail, however, and it may be the threat to Uí Briúin Umail claims to the kingship by any possible attempts at monopolization by the Uí Briúin Aí, with support from Armagh, that led to the promulgation of the Law of Ciarán in 788.

Cináed was defeated and killed by Muirgius in 792, following which the Law of Comán was promulgated the next year.³² Muirgius was himself defeated and driven out by the Síl Cellaig in 796, however, and nothing more is recorded until 799, when

³¹ This is not to discount Tírechán's implication that the authority of Armagh was already strong in Connacht in the last quarter of the seventh century, but the fact that there were individual churches in Connacht acknowledging the authority of Patrick and Armagh does not equate to this level of extended influence resulting from the direct appointment of individuals answerable only to the abbot and community of Armagh.

³² Dr T.O. Clancy has suggested to me the possibility, arising from this instance, that, with the fact of Comán being a local Connacht saint, the Law of Comán may have been devised to promote Connacht unity.

Muirgius secured a return to the kingship, and later that same year *Lex Patricii* was promulgated in Connacht by Gormgal, one of the rival claimants to the abbacy of Armagh. The Law of Ciarán was promulgated once by Muirgius, in 814, but this followed the death of Nuadu, abbot of Armagh, in 812, which had sparked a resurgence in the struggle for power in Armagh within which the backing of Áed mac Néill, and thus the furtherance of Uí Néill interests, had become increasingly dominant. To advance the interests of Armagh at this time would equally be to advance the interests of his rival, Áed; otherwise, Muirgius appears to have pursued Tipraite's policy of identifying Uí Briúin Aí interests with that of Armagh.

Gormgal was recorded as abbot of Armagh and Clones at his death in 806.³³ Kim McCone has drawn attention to hagiographic material which provides an indication of 'Significant connections between Airgialla and Connacht or Breifne monasteries on either side of the Erne'³⁴ and suggests that these 'Connacht connections of certain Airgialla churches may help to explain the regularity with which the expulsions of abbots, most of them apparently with western Airgialla leanings, from Armagh seems to have been followed by a trip to Connacht to proclaim the *Cáin Phátraic*.'³⁵ In fact, there is only one instance of the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* in Connacht involving a claimant who was disputing the abbacy of Armagh at the time, that of Gormgal in 799. McCone appears to consider that the promulgation of Patrick's Law, in Connacht specifically, had become an accepted right of the abbot of Armagh and was thus a means to recognition in a claim to the office:

the man actually in Armagh could base his claim quite simply on that fact, whereas the ousted opponent, whether Gormgal, Artrí, Diarmait or Forindán, would take Patrick's reliquary or other insignia of office with him and claim his title on that basis, using proclamation of the *Cáin Phátraic* with the help of sympathetic rulers to raise much needed revenue.³⁶

³³ AU 806.2 – *Gormgal m. Dindagaid, abbas Aird Machae 7 Chuana Auis, obiit.*

³⁴ Kim McCone, 'Clones and her neighbours in the early period: hints from some Airgialla saints' lives', *Clogher Record* II (1984), 305-25, at 324.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*, 318-9.

Such reasoning, however, appears based on the premise that the promulgation of such law was merely a revenue-raising exercise, although, as outlined above, this cannot be said to have been the case. In addition to this objection, there is no record of Forinnán ever having been involved in the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* in Connacht; Dub dá Lethe jointly promulgated the law in 783, at a time when his position as abbot was not in dispute and Artrí mac Conchobair promulgated *Lex Patricii*, as *airchinnech* and later as bishop, in both Connacht and Munster before Eógan Mainistrech was installed as abbot by Niall mac Áeda. Nuadu promulgated *Lex Patricii* in Connacht in 811 and his position as abbot was never in dispute. While the involvement of Gormgal in the joint promulgation of 799 may indeed have been a result of Connacht-Airgialla relations at this time, the record of the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* in Connacht cannot be claimed to be merely a means of revenue-raising for individuals disputing the office of abbot. The frequency of reference to the promulgation of law in Connacht – and not merely *Lex Patricii* – suggests, that for whatever reason, these occasions were instigated from within Connacht itself, rather than by any opportunist outsider.

No fewer than five of the fourteen instances of the promulgation of law recorded in Connacht took place during Muirgius' reign. No other king of Connacht is recorded promulgating any of these laws connected with a saint on more than one occasion, so this frequency of record under Muirgius would appear to reflect his own policy. This impression is reinforced in light of the record subsequent to his death in 815. The political unity which was the source of the power and influence of Connacht under Muirgius appears to have fragmented after his death, resulting in a prolonged struggle for power which was won, ultimately, by Muirgius' brother Diarmait (d. 833). The uncertainty of events in Connacht in these years, due to a lack of record, is itself an indication of the subsequent disruption. In 818, Artrí son of Conchobar, *airchinnech*, later bishop, of Armagh, brought Patrick's shrine to Connacht. Later that year there was a battle between the Uí Briúin and Uí Maine; the victors are

described in *AU* as ‘The kings of the Uí Briúin, i.e. Diarmait son of Tomaltach and Máel Cothaid son of Fogartach’³⁷ It would appear significant that neither of these Uí Briúin kings are called kings of Connacht. Four years later, however, in 822, Diarmait appears to have fought alongside the Uí Maine to defeat the Uí Briúin, killing their leaders (*duces*) Dúinchad, son of Maenach, and Gormgal, son of Dúinchad.³⁸ It would appear from this that Dúinchad and Gormgal were leaders of a line of the Uí Briúin excluded from the succession who had sought to press their claim in the unsettled political situation of the time. If so, the fact that they were recorded in *AU* merely as *duces* may have been as a result of the relationship of the Uí Briúin Aí, begun under Tipraite, with Armagh to secure recognition as the sole rightful royal dynasty in Connacht. In 824, there was another battle ‘between the Connachta themselves’, but without any mention of protagonists.³⁹ It may be significant, however, that Patrick’s Law was recorded being promulgated ‘on the Three Connachta’ by Artrí, son of Conchobar, the following year. Diarmait son of Tomaltach was described as king of Connacht in his obit in 833 (*AU, AD*). It may be, then, if the recent practice of fairly quick promulgation of *Lex Patricii* following the accession of the Uí Briúin Aí kings was maintained, that Diarmait secured the kingship of Connacht following this battle in 824.

The observation that the promulgation of law associated with saints is restricted to the period within the early eighth and mid-ninth centuries, and appears to mirror the expansion and decline in the influence of the *céli Dé*, prompts the consideration of the degree of *céli Dé* involvement in the formulation of these laws. What, in the final analysis, therefore, can be concluded in this respect?

One of the earliest recorded instances of such a law was Adomnán’s *Lex Innocentium*, and Adomnán’s influence on the *céli Dé*, albeit indirectly, was

³⁷ *AU* 818.9: *Bellum actum est in regione Delbhne Lodot, .i. cath Forath ubi nepotes Mani cum rege eorum, id est Cathal m. Murchado 7 alii plurimi nobiles prostrati sunt. Reges nepotum Briuin, id est Diarmait m. Tomaltaigh 7 Mael Cothaigh filius Fogertaigh uictores erant.*

³⁸ *AU* 822.6: *Bellum Tarbgi inter Conachta inuicem; nepotes Briuin prostrati sunt, plurimi nobiles interfecti sunt, ergo duces, id est Dunchad m. Moinaigh 7 Gormgal m. Duncado. Nepotes Mani uictores erant, 7 Diarmait m. Tomaltaigh.*

³⁹ *AU* 824.5: *Bellum inter Connachta inuicem in quo ceciderunt plurimi.*

considerable. However, while the formulation of the *Lex aui Suanaich* in Rahan could be argued to have *céli Dé* connections, through the fostering of Máel Tuile, named as one of *óentu Máel Ruain*, among the Uí Suanaich and his apparent connections with Rahan, the connection can hardly be said to be direct. Similarly, there is only one occasion when one of these laws can be stated with certainty to have been promulgated by a *céle Dé* – the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* by Feidlimid mac Crimthainn in 823.

Otherwise, the entry in *CS sa* 811 provides the single instance of explicit annalistic reference to the active involvement of a *céle Dé* in the dissemination of what is described as a written roll given to him from Heaven. The entry states:

Annus prodigiorum annso. As inte tainig in Cele Dé don fairgi anes cosaibh tirmaib cen culud, et do berthas stuagh scribta do nimh do triasa ndenad procect do Gaoidelaibh, et do berteas suas doridisi í in tan toiged an procect; et tighedh an Cheli Dé gach laoi darsan fairgge fodes, iar toirgsin an procecta.

This was a year of prodigies. It was in it the Céle Dé came over the sea from the south, dry-shod, without a boat; and a written roll used to be given to him from Heaven, out of which he would give instruction to the Gael, and it used to be taken up again when the instruction was delivered; and the Céle Dé was wont to go each day across the sea, southwards, after imparting the instruction.

Underlying this bizarre entry may be reference to the sabbatarian tract referred to as *Cáin Domnaig*.

There is no explicit annalistic reference to *Cáin Domnaig* until 887 (*AU*; *CS*; *AFM sa* 884) when ‘A letter, with the Law of Sunday and other good instructions, came to Ireland with the Pilgrim.’⁴⁰ Five extant texts of *Cáin Domnaig* survive, three

⁴⁰ *AU* 887.3. *AFM* provides the further information that the pilgrim was named Ananloen. *CS* (898) and *AFM* (*sa* 893) note ‘the Pilgrim departed from Ireland’, and *AU* has a subsequent gloss to the entry for 888 noting ‘The battle of the Pilgrim.’

of which are complete and two partial. Vernam Hull pointed out that while the statement in line 39 - 'the fines of the "Law of Sunday" are levied on the basis of a surety of the "Law of Patrick"' - would date the tract to later than 737 and that the warning in line 97 - those who violate *Cáin Domnaig* would be brought into bondage by foreign races into pagan lands - would date it later than 795, this annal entry would appear to date the introduction of *Cáin Domnaig* to 887; however, the language of the tract 'indicates that it was probably composed in the first half of the eighth century.'⁴¹ Kenney believed that *Epistil Ísu*, the Epistle of Jesus, a document 'so very closely affiliated' to *Cáin Domnaig*,⁴² arrived in Ireland 'probably from the Frankish dominions', where it is known to have been widely disseminated by 745.⁴³ That the impetus behind the *cáin* came from overseas is apparent both from this reference in 887 and the entry in *CS* for 811.

Kenney suggested that the entry in *CS* perhaps indicated the introduction of *Cáin Domnaig* to Ireland, as the 'time accords better [than the late sixth century *floruit* of Conall mac Coel-maine, whom *Epistil Ísu* states brought the text from Rome, and than 887] with that from which, on grounds of probability, the vogue of the letter in Ireland may be dated; and the development of a stricter Sabbatarianism appears to coincide with the institution of *Céli Dé*.'⁴⁴ The evidence of the mid-ninth century text *Mon. Tall.* (above, pp. 76ff) certainly points to observance of the Sabbath in accordance with *Cáin Domnaig*: §§13, 26, 27 and 49 of *Mon. Tall.* are concerned with the prohibition of labour and the consumption of anything produced or collected by labouring on a Sunday; while §45 relates an anecdote by the compiler resulting from the fact that 'he chanced to stay in the bath a while after evensong on

⁴¹ Vernam Hull, 'Cáin Domnaig', *Ériu* 20 (1966), 151-77, at 156.

⁴² *ibid.*, 157.

⁴³ See Kenney, *Sources*, 476-7. The first notice of the 'Sunday Letter', or 'Letter from Heaven', in Europe belongs to c. 580, when it was denounced by Licinianus, bishop of Cartagena. It next springs to prominence in the 740s, when a version of it was in the possession of the heretical Frankish priest, Aldebert, who was condemned at the Council of Soissons in 744 and again at Rome in the following year. See Dorothy Whitelock, 'Bishop Ecgrid, Pchtred and Niall', in D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (edd.), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, 47-68.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 477.

Saturday.’⁴⁵ The extant text of *Cáin Domnaig* defines the ‘sanctity of Sunday from evensong on Saturday to the end of matins on Monday’⁴⁶ as its opening sentence. Among the many defined prohibitions it then goes on to list are not only all forms of manual labour, but also a prohibition on bathing. Clearly, therefore, many of the aspects defined in the extant text were current in the first half of the ninth century, when *Mon. Tall.* was compiled, by the latest. Dorothy Whitelock has discussed the notice of ‘the letter written by the hand of God’ in the writings of an Anglo-Saxon monk called Pehfred, which was the subject of a letter of Ecgrid, bishop of Lindisfarne, c. 835. Pehfred’s homily and *Epistil Ísu* appear to derive from the same source and Whitelock suggested Pehfred may have been a monk at Mayo.⁴⁷ Clearly both *Cáin Domnaig* and *Epistil Ísu* were current in Ireland by the first half of the ninth century. It may well be, therefore, given that the linguistic evidence points to the early eighth century as the time when the basis of the extant text of *Cáin Domnaig* was committed to writing, that, as Hull suggested, there were periodic revisions of the *cáin*⁴⁸ and, as Kenney stated, that a stricter sabbatarianism developed with the *céli Dé*. The annalistic records in *CS* (811) and *AU*, *CS* (887) and *AFM* (*sa* 884) may, consequently, reflect stages of external influence which provided an impetus to the development of *Cáin Domnaig*.

Cáin Domnaig, however, differs from the other *cána* considered here in that there is no record of its promulgation and no clear record of its introduction, although there are clearly indications that it was observed and references to agents for its enforcement. It differs, too, in the sense that while the other *cána*, or at least those for which indication of their content survive, were formulated to curb the violent excesses of the age or to otherwise benefit society, *Cáin Domnaig* was a religious law, a ‘Lord’s Day Observance Act’, and, as such, there would undoubtedly have been some form of observance of the Sabbath from the advent of Christianity. In this sense, the

⁴⁵ *Fecht robúi damsae domchaomnacuir airisem hi fothrucad sel bec iar nespertain domnaich.*

⁴⁶ §1. *Soíre Domnuig ó tráth espartai Dia Sathairn co fuine maitne Die Lúain.*

⁴⁷ Whitelock, ‘Bishop Ecgrid, Pehfred and Niall’, 47-50.

⁴⁸ Hull, *Cáin Domnaig*, 157.

cáin itself appears to have evolved, rather than have been formulated; but its dissemination would appear to be the sole instance of explicit involvement by the *céli Dé*.

While the involvement of *céli Dé* can be surmised, to some degree, in the formulation of those laws emanating from foundations with strong *céli Dé* connections, the promulgation of these laws, in many cases, appears to have been instigated by kings. Áed Oirdnide, who sought to manipulate the church and, indeed, violated the *termon* of Tallaght and was excommunicated by the *muinntir Coluim Cille* for an assault on Raphoe and killing its *princeps*, promulgated *Lex Patricii* in 806 and, presumably, the Law of Dar-Í in 813. In these instances, however, Áed's consistent policy of advancing the supremacy of Armagh would account for his promulgation of 806, while the Law of Dar-Í, prohibiting the theft of cattle, was in the best economic interests of all and was equally accepted in Connacht and Munster.

The clearest and presumably most complete evidence of the promulgation of law relates to Connacht however, where the frequency and circumstance of promulgation may provide an insight into the reasons for the enactment of particular laws at certain times. Here, for example, the majority of instances of the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* appear to have been instigated by kings of the Uí Briúin Aí for reasons which, it has to be said, would appear more political than pious. *Lex Patricii* did not monopolize the promulgation of such 'ecclesiastical' law enacted by the Uí Briúin Aí kings, but the Uí Briúin Aí kings monopolized *Lex Patricii*, so that, latterly, the political opponents and dynastic rivals to the Uí Briúin Aí may have advocated the promulgation of Ciarán's Law in the hope that the influence of Clonmacnoise might help to provide a check to their attempts in the monopolization of the kingship of Connacht and the corresponding influence of Armagh.

The example of *Lex Innocentium* in *Críth Gablach* as 'a *rechgte* of faith which kindles' piety and cited, it would appear, as an example of a *rechgte* a king was entitled to pledge upon his people, indicates that the promulgation of these laws were seen, first and foremost, as an act of piety and, no doubt, many such instances took

place for precisely that reason and no other. However, it must have been apparent to some kings, at least, that the particular law enacted could bring additional benefits and this must have had considerable bearing on which law was promulgated in their demonstration of piety. The prohibition on the killing of clerics reputedly stipulated by *Lex Patricii*, for example, would have been covered by the broader terms of *Lex Innocentium*, which prohibited the killing of women, children and clerics, indeed of non-combatants generally, so there must have been further considerations in regard to why *Lex Patricii* would have been promulgated instead of *Lex Innocentium*.

The promulgation of these *cána* belong to the period following the divisions of the Paschal controversy which lingered into the eighth century. It was following the first quarter of the eighth century that the church generally was in a position to be able to take stock and consider its purpose and its role in society. The promulgation of these *cána*, for the benefit of society, should be seen in this respect. They were formulated and promulgated in the same period as the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, which had such an influence in both Ireland and in Europe, and reflected the ideals prevalent in Iona and Dairinis, foundations in the forefront of formulating the aims of the *céli Dé*; as *Ríagail Phátraic*, which carefully outlined the requirements of pastoral provision for the laity and which was incorporated into the *Ríagail na nCeled Dé*; and as Fothad's Rule, a canon which sought to provide a basic outline for the guidance of each free level of the society in which they lived, created by God to allow each individual the means to salvation. In this sense, the canon provides an outline by which all levels of free society may hope to acquire spiritual security. The laws of the saints, or at least those for which any record of their content survives, similarly, had, as their ultimate aim, the betterment of society by attempting to provide physical security and safety, and, indeed, to some extent economic stability, for the most vulnerable in society. There appears little in the way of an explicit connection between the *céli Dé* and the formulation and promulgation of these laws, but this may be due to the fact that so little is known regarding the subject matter of most of these laws, the circumstances of their promulgation and the individuals responsible for their

formulation. This is not to suggest that any explicit connection with the *céli Dé* should be anticipated – as the evidence stands, the only clear instance of *céli Dé* involvement in any law is that of *Cáin Domnaig*, which is, as has been seen, different in several respects to these laws associated with particular saints. All that can be said with certainty is that the formulation and recorded promulgation of these laws took place during the period the *céli Dé* were most influential, but without, necessarily, their direct involvement; however, it is clear that those who were responsible for the formulation of these *cána* were, like the *céli Dé*, deeply concerned with the betterment of society as a whole.

The abbacy of Armagh

In 768, Fer dá Chrích, son of Suibne, abbot of Armagh, died. For the next one hundred and twenty years, until the accession of Máel Brigte mac Tornain in 888, the abbacy of Armagh was more frequently than not under dispute. As with the promulgation of the 'laws of saints' considered in the previous chapter, this contention over the abbacy of Armagh largely took place during the very period the influence of the *céli Dé* was at its peak and, consequently, the question presents itself whether the disputes concerning the abbacy of Armagh could be considered a consequence of, or, conversely, provoked *céli Dé* 'reform'.

The evolution in the understanding of the concept of ordination and the consequent emphasis on divine, rather than popular, sanction as the basis of royal and aristocratic authority had removed the geographical restrictions which had limited the territorial extent of rule by dependence upon popular sanction (see above, p. 112, n. 12). This had resulted in a change in the understanding of the extent of territory over which rule could be *legitimately* claimed. The most powerful of kings could now consider claims of supremacy at a trans-provincial level and, the ultimate objective, as *rí Érenn*. In the eighth century, however, the closest thing to a pan-Irish authority was that of Armagh. Armagh, uniquely, was, through the frequent promulgation of *Lex Patricii*, in a position to put in place, throughout the provinces of Ireland, an infrastructure appointed by, and answerable only to, the abbot and community of Armagh. Control of the abbot and community of Armagh, therefore, would be an invaluable asset in the race for political supremacy.

Developments in ecclesiastical organisation, whether or not they had taken place as a result of the *congressio senodorum* in 780, to which Armagh may have been party (see above, pp. 159ff), would to harness more efficiently the resources of the church for the benefit of both the church itself and the community at large. Those offices brought to the fore to deal with the fiscal responsibilities of the church were

not, in themselves, ecclesiastical offices and, while they could be held by churchmen, they were equally likely to be held by laymen. These offices brought power and influence and an opportunity for lesser dynasties who had been squeezed in the concentration of political power during the course of the eighth century. While the laity who held these positions acted on behalf of the church, they provided an example of the way in which secular interests could be furthered through association with the church. In the case of Armagh, however, the lure of the possibility of the ultimate political prize ensured a significant added dimension to 'association' with the church, one which effectively gravitated around the alternate succession of the kings of Tara, between the Cenél nEógain kings of Ailech and the Clann Cholmáin kings of Mide. Of these two, the proximity to Armagh of the Ailech kings ensured they had some advantage, even when Clann Cholmáin held the kingship of Tara, in applying pressure to guarantee that the abbots of Armagh belonged to dynasties politically dependent on the Cenél nEógain and therefore cognizant of their interests. This chapter will focus on two specific periods of contention over the abbacy within this period: firstly, the twenty-year period 787-807, without doubt the most anarchic in the history of the abbacy, which saw, at one point, 793-4, no fewer than four rivals concurrently referred to as abbot; and, secondly, the period 826-48, in which individuals of whom it will be considered were *céili Dé* can be seen to have been directly involved.

(I) Abbatial rivalry in Armagh 787-807 and the year of four abbots.

The struggle for control of Armagh by rival abbots in the period 787-807 was largely driven by the fact that neither the Clann Cholmáin nor the Cenél nEógain wished to see the political ambitions of the other served through establishing their nominees or political dependants in the abbacy. The church generally and the community of Armagh specifically, who undoubtedly considered that the appointment of the highest ecclesiastical offices should be no concern of secular powers and that the appointment of the abbot should be left to the community, had to cope as best it

could with circumstances which had arisen as a consequence of the influence of the church in the processes of centralisation and concentration of royal power.

Following the death of Fer dá Chrích in 768, it has been suggested that there was a hiatus in the abbacy of Armagh until 775, when Dub dá Lethe, son of Sínach, became abbot.¹ The reason behind, and, indeed, the very fact of, this hiatus, is uncertain. There is no indication of it from the annals. However, Dub dá Lethe's tenure as abbot saw the emergence of a power struggle for control of Armagh which continued, according to Lawlor and Best, until 936,² when the abbacy of Armagh was finally secured in the hereditary possession of the Clann Sínaich, of whom Dub dá Lethe was the first incumbent, and in whose hands it remained until Muiredach, son of Domnall, was dislodged as abbot in 1134.

The abbots of Armagh are listed in the *Comarbada Pátraic*, a text derived from a diptych of names of abbots recorded for commemoration in the church of Armagh. There are four extant versions of this list of abbots: (i) The Yellow Book of Lecan [YBL] (T.C.D., H.2.16), p. 327c; (ii) *Lebar Brecc* [LB] (R.I.A., 23 P 16), p. 220; (iii) Laud Misc. 610, f. 115fb and (iv), the earliest extant version, the Book of Leinster [L] (T.C.D., H.2.18), f.21. YBL, LB and Laud derive from one source, L from a second, both of which are an intermediate stage from the archetype.

Lawlor and Best contend that this exemplar was compiled during the abbacy of Amailgad (1020-49) from the commemorative list in Armagh.³ They also indicate that the compiler must have had recourse to at least two other lists of Armagh abbots, which provided the length of time each individual held office.⁴ Of the extant texts, only L and YBL continue beyond Amailgad's abbacy. L itself was compiled c. 1160, but names continued to be added to this original text until the tenure of Tomaltach,

¹ H.J. Lawlor and R.I. Best, 'The Ancient List of the Coarbs of Patrick', *PRIA* 35 C (1918-20) 316-62. All extant lists of *Comarbada Pátraic*, except that of Laud Misc. 610 which gives fifteen years, agree with the provision of eighteen years for Dub dá Lethe as abbot; and since his death is recorded in the annals under 793, the year of his accession to the abbacy is derived as 775.

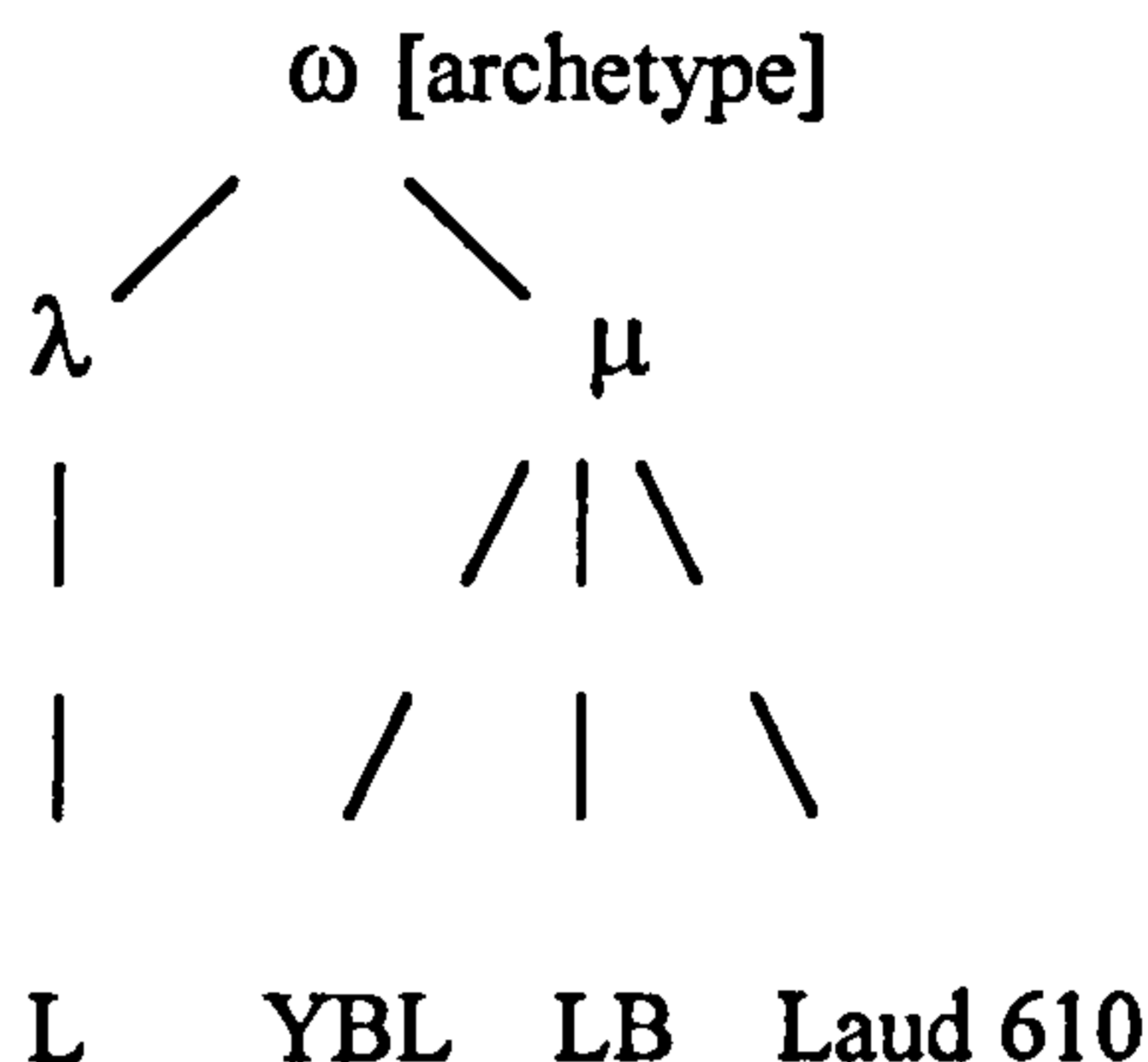
² But cf. Tomás Ó Fiaich, 'The Church of Armagh under Lay Control', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha*, vol. 5 (1969), 75-127, at, 84, who disagrees, with some reason, with the dates 936x1132 proposed by Lawlor and Best (at 343) and instead propose the dates 965x1134.

³ Lawlor and Best, 'Ancient List of Coarbs', 336.

⁴ See their discussion, *ibid.*, 345-55.

abbot in 1181-4. YBL was continued until the 1170's. Two intermediate copies, λ and μ , were made at some point 1049x c. 1160, by which date the extant derivatives from both texts had been copied. Both λ and μ can date no earlier than the second half of the eleventh century.

From Lawlor and Best, the following schema is provided:



In the list of abbots, following the death of Fer dá Chrích (d. 768), L provides the order: Cú Dinisc, Dub dá Lethe, Airechtach, Faendelach, Connmach; YBL, LB and Laud have Faendalach, Dub dá Lethe, Airechtach, Cú Dinisc, Connmach.⁵

Dub dá Lethe, son of Sínach, and his son, Connmach, belonged to the Clann Sínaich of the Uí Ehdach. The Uí Ehdach, Uí Bressail, and the Uí Nialláin formed the Airthir, in whose lands Armagh was sited, and who, in turn, formed a constituent part of the Airgialla. As already noted, it has been argued that Dub dá Lethe became abbot following a lengthy vacancy in the abbacy. His tenure in the abbacy, latterly, was not without opposition.

The first recorded abbot 'in opposition' to Dub dá Lethe was Cú Dinisc, who, according to *Comarbada Pátraic*, was accredited with a tenure as abbot of four years; since his obit is recorded for 791,⁶ this indicates that he was recognised abbot in 787.⁷

⁵ The common order in YBL, LB and Laud indicates that this was the order provided in μ .

⁶ *AU* 791.1; *AI sa* 791.

⁷ In the annals his father is named as Cú Fasaig (*AU*), Cú Ásaig (*AI*), but in *Comarbada Pátraic* as Concas, where *con* appears to have been a representation of the genitive form of Cú in the source and subsequently misunderstood as a personal name.

Airechtach ua Faelan belonged to the Uí Bresail.⁸ He died in 794 and is accredited as being abbot for one year. Lawlor and Best suggest that

Though the Annals call him abbot under that year, it does not follow that he died in office; for it is their habit, in recording obits, to give the title of abbot, or coarb of Patrick, to men who had held the office, but had resigned or been deposed. If we suppose that Airechtach immediately preceded Faendelach, his year as coarb would be 791-2; and 791 is the year of Cú Dinisc's death.⁹

In normal circumstances, this suggestion would be more than reasonable; but these were far from normal circumstances. Lawlor and Best see the periods of Cú Dinisc, Airechtach and Faendelach as a single line of succession in opposition to Dub dá Lethe. While Airechtach, of the Uí Bresail, belonged to a rival Airthir dynasty to the Clann Sínaich, the origins of Cú Dinisc and Faendelach are uncertain. A tradition recorded in *Comarbada Pátraic* concerning Faendelach relates his support to have come 'from the South' (see below), and Kim McCone, for one, believes this to mean he was Donnchad Midi's candidate in the abbacy.¹⁰

The record concerning Faendelach's abbacy gives the strongest indication of a struggle for control of Armagh. He died in 795 and *Comarbada Pátraic* states he was abbot for three years, that is from 792 when Dub dá Lethe was still alive. While his obit in *AI – Quies Foendledaich Bic, abb Aird Macha* – and even that in *AU – Foinelaich mc Meanaigh abbas Airdd Machae, subita morte periit* – give little, if any, indication of rival contention, *AFM* is more explicit: 'Foendalach, son of Maenach, abbot of Armagh, died, after Dubh da Lethe had been in contention with him about the abbacy first, and after him Gormghal.'¹¹ The note attached to Faendelach's name in the L version of *Comarbada Pátraic*, however, provides an

⁸ *AU* 794.1 and *Comarbada Pátraic*. *AU* glosses Faelan interlineally with *alias O Fledhaigh*; *AI* provides no patronymic.

⁹ Lawlor and Best, 'Ancient List of Coarbs', 346-7.

¹⁰ Kim McCone, 'Clones and her Neighbours in the Early Period: Hints from some Airgialla Saints' Lives', *Clogher Record* 2 (1984), 305-25, at 316-7.

¹¹ *AFM sa 794: Faoindealach, mac Maenaigh, abb Arda Macha, décc iar mbeith dó Dhubhdaleithe i nimresain fris cétus imon abbdaine, 7 do Ghormghal ina dheadhaidh.*

account which would appear to make his 'sudden death', noted in *AU*, a distinctly violent one. It states:

*Mac Moenaig Mannachta is é docer la Dub da Lethi oc
Ros Bodba unde dicitur:
Foendelach aness
Is é a less. teclaim sluaig
Dub da Lethi mac Sinaig
Do fail co rigaib a tuáid*

'Son of Moenach Mannachta. It is he who fell by Dub dá Lethe at Ros Bodba, of which it is said:

Faendelach from the South
His advantage is in the mustering of a host
Dub dá Lethe, son of Sínach
Is at hand with kings from the North'¹²

Although this source does not date earlier than the mid-eleventh century, at best, the statement *is é docer la Dub da Lethi oc Ros Bodba* would appear to indicate a tradition that Dub dá Lethe killed his rival at Ros Bodba. It is not possible, however, that this rival could have been Faendelach, whose recorded death in 795 was two years after that of Dub dá Lethe. Nor, indeed, is there an annalistic record of any conflict in which the abbot of Armagh defeated and killed a rival. Nevertheless, the stanza is certain enough with the identification of Dub dá Lethe, son of Sínach – there is little scope for misidentification, or for an interpretation of anything other than Faendelach, backed by a southern host, was faced by Dub dá Lethe and kings from the north.¹³

¹² Lawlor and Best, 'Ancient List of Coarbs', 322.

¹³ All of the rivals who emerged in opposition to Faendelach appear to have belonged to Airgialla dynasties: Connmach to the Clann Sínaich of the Uí Echach; Airechtach to the rival Airthir dynasty of the Uí Bresail. The Airthir, in the locality of Armagh, had been used to providing abbots of Armagh. Dub dá Lethe, whose father was the eponym of the Clann Sínaich, was the first incumbent of the Uí Echach; Fer dá Chrích (abbot 758-68) and his father Suibne (abbot 715-30) belonged to the Uí Nialláin. The Uí Bresail had an even longer interest – the earliest incumbent of this dynasty was Ségéne, son of Bresal (abbot 661-88), followed eventually by Céle Petair (abbot 750-8). To judge from the annalistic entry of 793, Gormgal, son of Dindalach, was supported by the western Airgialla dynasty of the Uí Chremthainn. The *congressio senadorum nepotum Neill*, presided over by Connmach, at Dun Cuair in 804, indicates the relationship of this Clann Sínaich abbot of Armagh and the Cenél nEógain king of Tara, Áed Oirdnide. Correspondingly, it is virtually certain that Áed, as king of Ailech and one of the most powerful kings in the north, was one of Dub dá Lethe's political backers, referred to in the L version of

It has already been noted that there is a difference in the order of the names of the abbots between the two stems of the extant lists of *Comarbada Pátraic*. Lawlor and Best suggested that the order had been amended due to this note in L which states that Faendelach fell by the hand of Dub dá Lethe at Ros Bodba. Since this fact was recorded, they argue, the compilers reasoned that Faendelach must have preceded Dub dá Lethe in the abbacy, and so they merely switched the names of Faendelach and Cú Dinisc in the order of the list.¹⁴ However, the note attached to Faendelach in L is not present in YBL, LB or Laud. Its absence from all derivatives of μ indicates it was not contained within this text and, correspondingly, unlikely to have derived from the archetype, ω . The tradition, therefore, would appear to have been a gloss appended to the text in λ and subsequently incorporated into the main body of text when transcribed into L.¹⁵ If the tradition that Faendelach fell by Dub dá Lethe's hand was unknown to the transcribers of μ , or at least unrecorded, then it would have been unnecessary to doctor the list to account for the chronological difficulties of Dub dá Lethe's death some two years prior to that of Faendelach. The fact that the tradition was a gloss subsequently appended to λ means that the written record of this tradition can date no earlier than 1049, the earliest date by which λ could have compiled. Some caution, therefore, must be exercised in regard to the accuracy of the notes appended to L.

Strictly speaking, neither λ nor μ provide a wholly accurate record of the order in which individuals held the abbacy. This would have been Dub dá Lethe (775-93); Cú Dinisc (787-91); Faendelach (792-5); Connmach (793-807); Gormgal (c. 793-806) and Airechtach (794). However, the source for the archetype was a list of those to be commemorated and would, consequently, have been added to as the individual died. As a result, the order of names for commemoration in chronological order of their deaths would have been: Cú Dinisc (d. 791); Dub dá Lethe (d. 793); Airechtach

Comarbada Pátraic. The other kings, then, may be expected to have those politically subordinate to, or in alliance with, the Northern Uí Néill.

¹⁴ Lawlor and Best, 'Ancient List of Coarbs', 345.

¹⁵ There are very few notes of any kind contained in the derivatives of μ . L, however, preserves a great deal of additional information, suggesting λ was a heavily glossed text.

(d. 794); Faendelach (d. 795) and Connmach (d. 807). This would indicate, then, that λ, reflected by its derivative L, was a more faithful transcription of the exemplar than μ, reflected by its derivatives YBL, LB and Laud.

Lawlor and Best's explanation, that the alteration of the order of names listed was a consequence of the tradition of Faendelach's death at the hands of Dub dá Lethe, therefore, seems improbable as it was preserved only in L. Kim McCone, alternatively, suggests that there were two men, very probably related, called Faendelach who held the abbacy of Armagh. The first, he suggests, was abbot during the period 768-75, when Lawlor and Best propose there had been a vacancy in the office, and that it was he who was killed by Dub dá Lethe. He states:

This Faendelach [i.e., who died in 795] can hardly be the same as the Faendelach killed by Dub dá Lethe some time before 793 and probably in 775. In the *Annals of Inisfallen* 795 he is called Faendelach Bec, abbot of Armagh, suggesting that he had an older relative of the same name, presumably the man killed by Dub dá Lethe earlier. The first Faendelach may have been abbot 668-75 [*sic – recte* 768-75], when there is a quite uncharacteristic gap in the *AU* record of the succession. The existence of two abbots of this name in close proximity and simplification of the doublet in annals and list of coarbs might explain the discrepancy in the two branches of the list's manuscript tradition as to whether Faendelach preceded or followed Dub dá Lethe in the abbacy. Be that as it may, the Southern Uí Néill leanings of the first Faendelach presumably also applied to Faendelach Bec. Does the battle, probably in 775, between Dub dá Lethe and Faendelach mark the first serious or successful Cenél nEógain bid to wrest control of the Armagh abbacy from the Southern Uí Néill and install their own candidate?¹⁶

Such an explanation has advantages. It has already been noted that there is no contemporary suggestion of a hiatus in the succession of the abbacy of Armagh following the death of Fer dá Chrich in 768; and McCone's suggestion of a Faendelach Mór, to complement Faendelach Bec, as an incumbent of the abbacy,

¹⁶ McCone, 'Clones and her Neighbours', 316, n. 20.

could indeed be allowed for at this time. Most of all, it explains how Faendelach could have been slain by Dub dá Lethe, who otherwise died two years before Faendelach's recorded obit.

However, there are also disadvantages. McCone suggests that two Faendelachs could explain why the list preserved in YBL, LB and Laud has Faendelach's name entered before Dub dá Lethe, while L has his name following. The common list from these three sources indicate that it was derived from μ . It appears to have exchanged Faendelach's name in the sequence with Cú Dinisc. This may be no more than a simple scribal error when μ was being transcribed from the archetype ω , for otherwise the list corresponds with L, λ and, therefore, the original in ω : Airechtach's death in 794 and that of Cú Dinisc in 791 demonstrably show that the sequence of abbots contained in these lists is incorrect as it differs from the chronological order that would have been preserved in a contemporary commemorative text maintained at Armagh. Consequently, it is not possible to place any weight on the fact that Faendelach's name precedes Dub dá Lethe in these lists. McCone's suggestion would be much stronger if Faendelach's name alone had been misplaced and entered between Fer dá Chrích and Dub dá Lethe.

McCone's second point, that the line 'Faendelach from the South' must mean that Faendelach's support derived from Donnchad Midi, would appear to suggest that the Southern Uí Néill were defeated by a coalition of northern kings, who, in 775, would have been led by the king of Tara, Niall Frossach (d. 778). This is possible, but there is no annalistic indication of this; although, equally, there is no indication for any such conflict in 795 either, when Faendelach 'suffered a sudden death' (*subita morte periit*). Niall Frossach became king of Tara in 763, following the death of Domnall Midi in that year. He therefore had had the opportunity 'to wrest control of the Armagh abbacy from the Southern Uí Néill' and install a Cenél nEógain candidate after Fer dá Chrích's death in 768. This does not necessarily negate any possibility that an abbot was appointed in 768, whom Dub dá Lethe, with the king of Tara's support, displaced by force in 775; however, and perhaps decisively, there is the

statement recorded in *AFM* that 'Foendalach...died, after Dubh da Lethe had been in contention with him about the abbacy first, and after him Gormghal.' It would therefore appear that, on the balance of probability, there was only one Faendelach, who died in 795. The simple solution to this problem of an apparent hiatus 768x75 may simply be, since there is no contemporary suggestion for it, that the *xviii* years attributed to Dub dá Lethe in *Comarbada Pátraic* was a scribal error for an original reading of *xxvi*. Dub dá Lethe died in 793. If this was his twenty-sixth year as abbot, this would place his accession in 768, thus removing any apparent hiatus. Nevertheless, there is the clear preservation of a tradition, however uncertain it may be in detail, that Dub dá Lethe became abbot after killing a rival at Ros Bodba.

This information, it has been noted, is unique to the *Comarbada Pátraic* preserved in L, indicating that it originated as a gloss to λ , compiled 1049x c. 1160. Certainly the compiler of the archetype must have had additional sources to the commemorative list of abbots he used as his basis,¹⁷ so it may not be unreasonable to assume that the compiler of λ , too, had access to additional material. It may be possible that during the compilation of λ , the compiler, aware of this tradition that Dub dá Lethe had killed a rival at Ros Bodba, had copied the stanza from an additional source and conflated the account with the tradition, in the assumption that the rival who fell at Ros Bodba must therefore have been Faendelach. The patronymic provided in *AU* for Faendelach who died in 795 – 'mc.Meanaigh' – is added only in an interlinear gloss and may not be independent from *Comarbada Pátraic*. *AFM* (*sa* 794) refers to *Faoindealach, mac Maenaigh, abb Arda Macha* which would appear to confirm the patronymic, but this is a seventeenth-century compilation which itself used *AU* as a source. Consequently, since the source of the gloss providing Faendelach's patronymic could well have been *Comarbada Pátraic* itself, the attribution of the patronymic may well derive from a single, uncorroborated source. The stanza which names Faendelach provides no geographical details; nor, indeed, does it explicitly state that a battle took place, which would help explain the absence

¹⁷ See Lawlor and Best, 'Ancient List of Coarbs', 351-3.

of such an encounter. The literary account may, rather, merely have reflected a recognition of the significance of the powerful political backing, outwith the Airgialla, afforded to those rival abbots – Faendelach perhaps from Mide and Dub dá Lethe from northern kings. There would certainly have been little advantage to Faendelach had he been killed.

Even if this suggestion of the conflation of accounts is accepted, however, it still leaves the underlying tradition of a rival – referred to as mac Moenaig Mannachta – being killed by Dub dá Lethe. Consequently, McCone's proposal of an otherwise unrecorded abbot, regardless of his name, in 768-75 being killed and replaced by Dub dá Lethe could still be regarded as a serious option. Otherwise, however, when considering his colourful tenure as abbot, from which he was, ultimately, very likely deposed,¹⁸ there is the possibility that the record of his killing a rival to become abbot in the first place, dating from the mid-eleventh century at the earliest, may be a manifestation of a subsequent blackening of Dub dá Lethe's character, an embellishment of the image of usurper, and a serious distortion of fact. The abbacy of Armagh was the exclusive preserve of the Clann Sínaich from 965 to 1134,¹⁹ and, as such, it would be extremely unlikely that such a calumny concerning Dub dá Lethe, son of Sínach, would be recorded in *Comarbada Pátraic* during this period. This may indicate that it was indeed well known that Dub dá Lethe had slain either a rival or, perhaps less likely, his predecessor in the abbacy. If so, the circumstances of the event cannot be recovered. However, as L was compiled c. 1160, when the gloss to λ was incorporated into the main text, it may have been the case that the tradition was glossed onto λ 1134x c. 1160, after Clann Sínaich had lost the abbacy. The tradition that Dub dá Lethe slew his rival or predecessor may, rather, reflect part of the processes employed by ambitious rivals to undermine the dynastic monopoly of Clann Sínaich in the abbacy in the twelfth century than recount actual events of the eighth.

¹⁸ Ó Fiaich, 'Armagh under Lay Control', 83.

¹⁹ See above, p. 197, n. 2.

Faendelach, then, had contended firstly with Dub dá Lethe, then Gormgal, for the abbacy. In 793, according to *AU*, occurred 'The profanation of Faendelach by Gormgal son of Dindanach; and Ard Macha was entered and invaded, and people were slain in it by the Uí Chremthainn. Faendelach was received again in Ard Macha'.²⁰ The variants of *Comarbada Pátraic* give his tenure as abbot as three years (L), ten years (YBL) or five years (LB). Lawlor and Best, correctly, give precedence to L, which would thus place his accession in 792. The entry in *AFM*, that 'Foendelach...died, after Dubh da Lethe had been in contention with him about the abbacy first, and after him Gormghal', gives the impression, as does the entry in *AU* regarding his 'profanation' by Gormgal, that, to these annalists at least, Faendelach was considered abbot, to whom Dub dá Lethe and Gormgal were usurping claimants. Yet Dub dá Lethe had been abbot since at least 775, if his accredited tenure of eighteen years, in all extant versions of *Comarbada Pátraic* except Laud (fifteen years), is correct, and perhaps since 768 (see above, p. 204). Faendelach and Dub dá Lethe's contention over the abbacy had only a short overlap of 792-3, but Dub dá Lethe had seniority. What may be indicated, therefore, is that Dub dá Lethe had been ousted from the abbacy, or at least no longer recognised as abbot, that for some reason he was considered to have forfeited his position; but that he simply did not retire, or that he did not take this apparent forfeiture lying down, may be reflected by the stanza recorded in the L variant of *Comarbada Pátraic* and by the entry in *AFM*. There is, however, no apparent indication to account for any such action, nor indeed any notice, as there would be in 835, 839 and 848, of an even nominal change of abbot. In opposition to Dub dá Lethe's tenure as abbot since 768 or 775 merely emerges Cú Dinisc, first of all, in 787-91 and Faendelach from 792.

There appears to have been more movement in this respect in 789. Early that year Fiachna, son of Áed Rón, king of the Ulaid died. He had defeated the Uí Néill in the battle of Emain Macha thirty years earlier, which had resulted from the enmity of

²⁰ *Sarugad Faindelaig la Gormghal m. nDindanaigh; 7 eccur 7 innred Aird Machae 7 guin duine ann la Hu Cremhtain. Receptio Foindelaig iterum i nArdd Machae.*

Airechtach, the then *sacerdos* of Armagh and who would hold the abbacy briefly in 794, and Fer dá Chrích, abbot of Armagh.²¹ His death may have provoked some movement, for later that year is reported a 'quarrel' in Armagh, in which a man was killed before the oratory.²² No explanation or detail is provided, but may likely pertain to the fact that there were now rival abbots in Armagh. Towards the end of the same year, *AU* records 'The dishonouring of the Staff of Jesus and relics of Patrick by Donnchad, son of Domnall, at Raith Airthir at an assembly'.²³ *AClon* sheds more light on this 'dishonouring': 'The Relickes of St. Patrick were taken by force at a certaine faire' (*sa* 786). What appears to have happened was that Armagh's artefacts were brought and displayed at the traditional assembly-ground of the *Síl nÁedo Sláine*, when they were seized and removed by Donnchad Midi, king of Tara. If any reliance can be placed on the late note in *Comarbada Pátraic*, that Faendelach came from the south, and be understood to mean, as Professor McCone suggested, Donnchad Midi supported Cú Dinisc and Faendelach in turn, then it could be conjectured that the artefacts seized by Donnchad were then given into the care of Cú Dinisc to emphasize his abbatial authority and lessen that of Dub dá Lethe. This suggestion can remain no more than speculation, however, since there is no evidence to suggest the subsequent fate of these Patrician relics and the suggestion is based on the interpretation of a probably twelfth-century note; but, whatever may have happened, it seems likely that Dub dá Lethe, supported by the *Cenél nEógain*, remained recognised as abbot in Ailech, where, in 793, his son Connmach, was acknowledged in his stead.

Tomás Ó Fiaich indicated that Dub dá Lethe's abbacy 'was perhaps the most disturbed in the whole history of the Church there.'²⁴ Nevertheless, *AU* records that

²¹ *AU* 759.2. *ATig* relates the cause to have been discord between Airechtach and Fer dá Chrích (*Cath Eamna Macha eter Ulltu 7 Hnu Neill in desceirt cogente Airechtach sacerdote Aird Macha per discordiam ad abbatem Fer da crich, ubi Dungal hua Conaing et Dond-bo interfecti sunt. Fiachna mac Aeda Roin uictor fuit.*). See Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 170; F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 118f; and McCone, 'Clones and her Neighbours', 313, who suggests that Airechtach was backed by the *Ulaid* in 759. He may, therefore, have also received their support in 793-4.

²² *AU* 789.8 – *Contentio i nArd Machae in qua iugulatus uir in hostio oratorii lapidei.*

²³ *AU* 789.17 – *Sarugad Bachlu Isu 7 minn Patraic la Donnchad m. nDomnaill oc Raith Airthir ar oenach.*

²⁴ Ó Fiaich, 'Armagh under Lay Control', 83.

Dub dá Lethe and Tipraite, son of Tadg, promulgated Patrick's Law in Cruachu in 783, thus, ostensibly, furthering the interests of Armagh in the province. Dub dá Lethe's abbacy could not, therefore, be said to have been wholly one of neglect; nor, indeed, is there any suggestion of any failing on his part in the annals or *Comarbada Pátraic*. It would appear that if Dub dá Lethe was indeed supplanted in the abbacy, it was because of political motivation rather than ecclesiastical failing, and, if this is true, then it would effectively emphasize that the abbot of the metropolitan church could be appointed or removed by the dominant political power. Correspondingly, when Dub dá Lethe died in 793, his son, Connmach, Airechtach and Gormgal could each stake a claim and could each be recognised by rival factions as abbot in opposition to Faendelach.

Connmach, the son of Dub dá Lethe, held the abbacy for thirteen or fourteen years.²⁵ That he directly succeeded his father is explicitly noted in L:

mac Duib da Lethi is e sin in mac i ndiad a ather ut prophetauit Bec mac De

'Son of Dub dá Lethe. That is the son after his father, as Bec mac Dé prophesied'.²⁶

Lawlor and Best perceived this inherited succession to the abbacy to have been the beginning of Clann Sínaich attempts to secure a monopoly in the position, which they understood to have been largely responsible for events in Armagh during this period, with Clann Sínaich dynastic ambition on one hand and representatives of resistance to such claims on the other. That the Clann Sínaich had acquired such a monopoly by the later tenth century does not necessarily indicate their political aspirations of the late-eighth / early-ninth, however, and this later monopoly was instead a consequence rather than a cause of these circumstances. Nevertheless, the note in *Comarbada Pátraic* relating the fulfilment of prophecy by Bec mac Dé was a potent condemnation

²⁵ L and Laud state *xiiii* years; YBL gives *xui* years; LB, *xiii* years. The attribution in YBL is almost certainly a scribal error in misreading *xui* for *xiii*.

²⁶ Lawlor and Best, 'Ancient List of Coarbs', 324. For the apocalyptic 'Prophecy of Bec mac Dé', see Kuno Meyer, 'Mitteilungen aus Irischen handschriften', *ZCP* 9 (1913), 166-88, which includes the prophecy on 169-71; Mark Zumbuhl, 'Bec mac Dé and the tradition of Irish prophetic poetry', unpublished M.Phil dissertation, Glasgow, 1999.

of Connmach's appointment.²⁷ Its portrayal in such terms indicates that Connmach's appointment to the abbacy was not welcomed among some, at least, of the ecclesiastic community and may indicate that Connmach's installation as abbot was imposed upon the community of Armagh, by Áed mac Néill, king of Ailech. If Connmach was indeed imposed in 793, it helps explain why Faendalach, Gormgal and Airechtach were all able to secure some degree of at least factional recognition as abbot in 793-4.

Other than that he 'profaned' Faendelach in 793, all that is known of Gormgal, which is yet still more than is known of many abbots of Armagh, is that he promulgated the *Lex Patricii* in Connacht in 799²⁸ and that when he died in 806, he was called abbot of Armagh and Clones (*AU; AD*). The *Comarbada Pátraic* does not include him in the list of abbots, but he is mentioned by the compiler as having seized the office in a note following the listing of Eógan Mainistrech (d. 834) (see below, p. 218).

The plurality of Armagh and Clones which Gormgal was recorded holding at his death in 806 is extremely interesting, however, in light of the conclusions reached by Kim McCone in his paper, 'Clones and her Neighbours'. He relates two *Vitae* – that of Eógan of Ardstraw and Tigernach of Clones, noting that 'both Lives stress the Leinster orientations of their subjects and, by implication, their churches [i.e., both churches adhered to Kildare's claims to primacy, in opposition to Armagh, which held some validity until the end of the eighth century²⁹] and completely ignore Patrick in a manner suggesting that neither Clones nor Ardstraw contemplated submission to Armagh's primatial claims at the time of composition.'³⁰ This time of composition, McCone states, is indicated to have been 'a later eighth-century date.'³¹ Clones'

²⁷ The opening lines of the 'prophecy' make it clear that such succession did not meet approval in some quarters:

*Is mairg thairgeubhai a hairisne a luc tiri na nGáidheal
In mac ndíaid a athar a nArd Machai...*

'Sorrowful the news that will come to the land of the Gael
the son succeeding his father in Armagh...'

²⁸ *AU* – *Lex Patricii for Connachta la Gormgal m. Dindataigh*.

²⁹ See McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century: A Saint with Three Lives', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 107-45

³⁰ McCone, 'Clones and her Neighbours', 308.

³¹ *ibid.*, 322.

‘concerted resistance’ to the claims of Armagh³² had led to adherence to Kildare, but by the end of the eighth century, Kildare had ceded her *paruchia* outwith Leinster to Armagh.³³ This submission by proxy at the end of the eighth century, therefore, cannot have been viewed with any great enthusiasm. McCone points out that in the Life of Tigernach, Duach, abbot of Armagh, dies, but is resurrected by Tigernach. He states:

Although this passage obviously claims a close relationship between Tigernach’s foundations and Armagh, it implies equally clearly that this is to be very much on Clones’ rather than Armagh’s terms, since the Armagh prelate here is cast in the role of beneficiary rather than benefactor, the part more usually played by Patrick and his successors in relation to other churches. Propaganda of this type, which insists upon Armagh’s primatial standing but at the same time makes her appear beholden to Tigernach of Clones, would be ideally suited to Uí Chremthainn claims to influence over Armagh, and may have a historical anchor in some fascinating events in the later eighth and earlier ninth centuries.³⁴

This historical anchor would most conveniently be Gormgal’s pluralism, as abbot of Clones and Armagh. It is unknown whether he was abbot of Clones before attempting to seize Armagh with his ‘profanation’ of Faendelach with Uí Chremthainn support, but, if so, it may be conjectured – if it is not too speculative – that he wished to demonstrate that the transferral of Clones from the *paruchia* of Kildare to that of Armagh, Clones’ rival in Airgialla, was not something that Clones intended to accept passively, seeking to forge the relationship on their, and Uí Chremthainn, terms. In any event, Gormgal’s attempt to secure the abbacy of Armagh failed. His claim to the abbacy was no doubt maintained throughout his lifetime and he was certainly recorded promulgating *Lex Patricii* in Connacht, where he was perhaps acknowledged abbot,

³² *ibid.*, 309.

³³ McCone, ‘Brigit in the Seventh Century’, 135-44; ‘Clones and her Neighbours’, 319-323.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 315.

in 799; but following Áed mac Néill's accession to the kingship of Tara in 797, there can have been little doubt that Connmach had the weight of support as *de facto* abbot.

Clann Sínaich had secured Cenél nEógain support in the abbacy; the Uí Nialláin had benefitted from the enhancement of the position of *equonimus*, which they had secured on a hereditary basis almost from the outset.³⁵ Airechtach's claims to the abbacy in 793 may have been an attempt to maintain the Uí Bresail rights concerning the provision of abbots; if so, however, his death in 794 dealt a fatal blow to the Uí Bresail position. The fact that Airechtach was commemorated as abbot in *Comarbada Pátraic* indicates he was indeed acknowledged by some. His support cannot have been great, but, in opposition to candidates supported by hugely powerful kings, it appears to have been briefly effective. However, the Uí Bresail never again provided an abbot of Armagh,³⁶ and their basic failure to secure something from the jostling for office in Armagh in the late eighth century indicates their relative isolation regarding significant political backing from the major powers at this time.

In summary:

Rival claimants for the abbacy of Armagh and their political backers

(i) Clann Sínaich, supported by the
Cenél nEógain:
Dub dá Lethe (7768-93)
Connmach, son of Dub dá Lethe (793-807)

(ii) Abbots supported by Donnchad
Mídi, king of Tara:
Cú Dinisc (787-91)
Facndelach (792-5)

(iii) Candidate of the Uí Chremthainn,
and, possibly, also with Connacht support:
Gormgal (793-806)

(iv) Candidate of the Uí Bresail,
and, possibly, also with Ulaid
support:
Airechtach (793-4)

³⁵ Cernach son of Suibne, the *equonimus* of Armagh who died in 784 was succeeded in the position by his sons Echu (d. 796), Cummuscach (d. 817) and Muiredach (d. 842).

³⁶ Their former rights were never forgotten, however, and Máelduin (d. 810), son of the king of Airthir, Donngal, who had died in 791, succeeded in acquiring the position of *equonimus* of Armagh, interjecting himself between the hereditary occupancy of the position by the brothers Echu mac Cernaig, Cummuscach mac Cernaig and Muiredach mac Cernaig. Máelduin's own son, Muiredach (d. 863), king of Airthir, secured the position of *secnap* of Armagh. These two individuals of the Uí Bresail Airthir, therefore, managed to secure some position in Armagh, the former securing a brief occupancy of what was, otherwise, an Uí Nialláin preserve at this time.

All of these rival abbots were acknowledged as abbot in their annalistic obits – why was this? Even if the annalists sought to remain impartial in the matter, which in itself would be remarkable enough, there was no getting past a situation where the metropolitan see had two, three or even, as in 793-4, four contending abbots in opposition; yet there is the remarkable situation whereby all the contenders were recognised in all sources as abbot. Occasionally, such as in the case of Gormgal and Faendelach – one of the few instances which does provide a suggestion of considered legitimacy, in this case, that of Faendelach – one incumbent could be physically removed by another; but what of Connmach at this point, whose kin-base around Armagh and the support of the Cenél nEógain ought always to have given the Clann Sínaich an advantage in occupying Armagh? Further, who was installing these abbots? Presumably each who was so readily acknowledged as abbot in every source had undergone some form of ceremony which entitled him to legitimately be called abbot, otherwise surely at least one source would have indicated some question about legitimacy concerning someone at some point through possible phraseology as ‘abbot according to some’, or; ‘abbot so-called’, or the like. But there is nothing such indicated by any source. If, therefore, each rival had received some form of recognised legitimacy, why was there no apparent reaction from within the church when two, three or even four individuals were acknowledged as abbots of the metropolitan church?

Much of this projected outline of the events of 787-807 is, necessarily, speculative and it does not answer all of the questions it provokes. One obvious observation, however, is that it could provide the ultimate example of the ‘secularisation’ of the church which has been held to have given rise to the reform movement of the *céli Dé*. Notwithstanding the fact it is hoped has been demonstrated already, that the *céli Dé* were not a movement in any sense and that there had been individuals referred to as, firstly, *miles Christi* and, subsequently, as *céli Dé*, since at least the end of the seventh century, the situation regarding the abbots of Armagh cannot be perceived as a secularisation of the church. Here, the secular interests in the

appointment of the abbots was imposed from outside. They were not instigated by the community of Armagh. The situation regarding Armagh was unique and came about as a result of its emergent position as the metropolitan church of Ireland. The rivalry between the Cenél nÉogain and the Clann Chólmáin to secure the appointment of the abbots, with the hope of securing political domination on the back of ecclesiastical authority, or failing that, to at least prevent domination by their rivals, may not have secured support for every one of the rival abbots, but it had been responsible for the situation whereby, in the period 787-807, the abbacy of Armagh, evidently, had become perceived as something that could be taken and held by coercion and the appointment of the abbot of Armagh had degenerated into a position of one whereby the support of the most powerful kings determined the outcome. Inevitably, therefore, it was the politically dominant power in the north, the Cenél nÉogain, and the regional power in whose territory Armagh lay, the Airgialla, who were most able to take advantage in changes of circumstance or opportunities to exert control. While Donnchad Midi, of the Clann Cholmain, was king of Tara, there was another power, albeit more distant and correspondingly less capable of a swift response to sudden changes of circumstance, concerned with the appointment of the abbot. However, the succession of Áed mac Néill as king of Tara (797x819) effectively brought to an end this period of anarchy in the abbacy of the aspiring metropolitan church, as no rival could effectively run counter to Cenél nÉogain interests.

Following the death of Gormgal in 806, there appears to have been no rival claimant to the abbacy of Armagh, although the rapid turnover of abbots over the next few years can have done nothing to stabilize the position. Connmach died in 807; Torbach, his successor, who commissioned the Book of Armagh, died within the year, as did *his* successor, Toichtach. Nuadu managed to hold the abbacy for three years before his death in 812; however, his successor, Flannus mac Loingsig, held the abbacy for fourteen years before dying peacefully in his bed in 826 and must have brought some much needed stability to the situation.

(II) Leth Cam and its aftermath: the abbacy of Armagh 826-48

Despite the ill-fortune of losing an abbot every year, in 806, 807, 808 and 809, there appears to have been no alternative claimant after the death of Gormgal, despite the plentiful opportunity such a mortality rate provided. The L version of *Comarbada Pátraic* omits Torbach, Nuadu and Flannus, who is consistently referred to as mac Loingsig, and the omission is accounted for by Lawlor and Best as a result of homoeoteleuton. YBL gives mac Loingsig a tenure of *xiii* years; while LB gives *xiii* and Laud 610, *xiiii*. The *xiii* of YBL is, again, most likely an error for *xiiii*, for the fourteen years prior to his death in 826 would see him succeed the abbacy directly on Nuadu's death in 812. Following mac Loingsig in all versions comes Artrí mac Conchobair, accredited with a tenure of two years, followed by Eógan Mainistrech with a tenure of eight years. From this period, too, there are problems with contending claimants, emphasising the degree of political control that Áed (d. 819) had engineered over his rivals circumventing any potential for involvement in Armagh.³⁷

The first annalistic mention of Artrí was in 818, during the reign of Áed mac Neill and the abbacy of Flannus mac Loingsig, when both *AU*, where he is called *airchinnech*, and *CS*, where he is called *princeps*, record that he went to Connacht with the *scrín Pátraic*. Kim McCone understood this to mean that Artrí must have been a rival in contention to Flannus, claiming to be abbot *in absentia*, and that 'we would do well to consider the *cáin Phátraic*'s use as a source of revenue to its promulgators, which would make it invaluable to an ambitious cleric cut off from his church's normal sources of income.'³⁸ There is no mention in the sources of the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* in 818, however, and, while it cannot be categorically

³⁷ Áed divided Mide following the death of Muiredach mac Domnaill in 802 and divided Leinster, similarly, in 805. While neither division lasted any length of time, they were successful from Áed's perspective insofar that the native dynasties, Áed's political opponents, diverted their focus and resources into rival attempts at reunification.

³⁸ McCone, 'Clones and her Neighbours', 317.

stated that it did not take place, given the incomplete record, this understanding rests on the rather uncertain basis that the promulgation of such law was primarily a fund-raising exercise (see above, pp. 179ff). While promulgation of *Lex Patricii* may, perhaps, have involved the presence of *scrín Pátraicc*, it cannot be assumed that the presence of *scrín Pátraicc* indicated the promulgation of *Lex Patricii*. McCone further considered that Artrí's possession of the *scrín Pátraicc* accounted for the entry in *AU* the following year that 'Whitsun was not celebrated at Armagh, nor the shrine taken on tour; and there was a disturbance in which the son of Echaid son of Fiachna fell.'³⁹ This reasoning, while perhaps understandable, would, however, appear to indicate the belief that the record of Artrí's promulgation of *Lex Patricii* in Munster in 823 and over the Three Connachta in 825 equally involved the *scrín Pátraicc* and that Artrí must have had possession of the shrine from, at least, 818-25. While McCone has otherwise provided perhaps the best interpretation to date of what he termed 'the appallingly complex political situation that lay behind the disruptions in Armagh'⁴⁰ in this period, his understanding of Artrí's motivation should be revised. The description of Artrí as *airchinnech* or *princeps* of Armagh in 818 should not necessarily be seen as indicating a rival claim to Flannus' abbacy, or that taking the *scrín Pátraicc* to Connacht represents an independent venture when a more obvious explanation was that he did so as one of the highest officials of Armagh.

There is no mention of the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* by Artrí in *CS*, but *AU* and *AFM* note that in 823 (*AFM sa* 822) Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, king of Cashel, and Artrí, in both sources now glossed as bishop of Armagh, promulgated *Lex Patricii* throughout Munster. In 825 Artrí, again glossed as bishop in *AU* and *AFM*, promulgated *Lex Patricii* over the Three Connachta.⁴¹ Again, these events took place

³⁹ *AU* 819.8: *Cengciges Airdd Machae cen aigi cen tucbail scrine, 7 cumusc ann i torchair m. Ehdach m. Fiachnae.*

⁴⁰ McCone, 'Clones and her Neighbours', 318.

⁴¹ *AU* 825.14; *AFM (sa* 824); and *AClon (sa* 822). In *AClon*, however, the entry reads 'Artry McConnor, K of Connaught, caused to be established the Lawes of St. Patrick in and throughout the thirds of Connaught.' The reference to Artrí as king of Connacht is bizarre. If the entries in *AU* and *AFM* recorded Artrí working in conjunction with the king of Connacht, then it may be thought that conflation of the source entry would be the reason, but, in both instances, Artrí alone is mentioned. Artrí is again called king of Connacht in his obit in *AClon*, under the first entry for

during the abbacy of Flannus mac Loingsig, but such action, particularly if the glosses to his position as bishop are correct, should not necessarily be seen as opposition to Flannus or as an attempt to secure recognition as abbot.

Flannus mac Loingsig died peacefully (*in pace obiit*) in 826⁴² and was followed in the abbacy by Eógan Mainistrech, the *anmchara* of Niall mac Áeda, king of Ailech and later of Tara.⁴³ While there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Artrí was opposed to the abbacy of Flannus, he was most certainly was to that of Eógan. *AU* notes the ‘dishonouring’ of Eógan in Armagh by Artrí and Cumuscach, son of Cathal, in 827.⁴⁴ This was followed by notice of the battle of Leth Cam, in which Niall mac Áeda defeated the joint forces of the Airgialla and the Ulaid and ‘in which fell Cumuscach and Congalach, two sons of Cathal, and many other kings of the Airgialla’.⁴⁵ *CS* and *AFM*, however, have fuller accounts. *CS* records:

[827] *Saruccadh Eogain an Ard Macha la Cumascach mac Cathail, do Rí Airgiáll, ocus la Airtri mac Concupair, conadh uime sin adbert Eogan, ferleiginn Mainistrech, ann rann sa diar cuir a Saimceadluidh dagallam Nell Caille, diarradh comarbus Padraig do cosnamh dho:-*

830, before the missing portion of text, but where it has been subsequently glossed ‘This A. was nor king of C., but bishop of Armagh.’ There can be no suggestion that Artrí was king of Connacht and there is no obvious reason the translator and transcriber of the extant text of *AClon* should have considered him as such.

⁴² *AU* 826.3. The notice of his death is duplicated in *CS* – 823: *Mors Fergusa mic Loingsig, Ab Aird Macha*; 826: *mac loingsich, Ab Aird Macha, moritur* – and *AClon* – 820: ‘flansug mcLoynsya, abbot of Ardmach, died’; 823: ‘The sonn of Longseagh, abbot of Ardmach, Died.’ These entries, related in the same terms and spaced three years apart, clearly indicate that the duplication belonged to the common source of the texts (820 and 823 of *AClon* = 823 and 826 of *CS*). The obit noted in *AFM* (*sa* 825) – *Flanngas, mac Loingsigh, abb Arda Macha* – would also appear to reflect this duplication, but, in this case, the second entry (? *sa* 828) has been removed. That it was 826 when Flannus died is also indicated by *Comarbada Patraic*, which lists him immediately after Nuadu (d. 812) and states his tenure as abbot to have been fourteen years.

⁴³ The L version notes of Eógan: *Eogan mac Anbthig comarba Patraic 7 Finnian 7 Buite anmchara Neill Glunduib*. It is immediately apparent that Niall Glundub (d. 919) is clearly a mistake for Niall Caille and indicates that the attention to detail by the glossator is not what it should be. Eógan is named as a successor of Armagh, Clonard and Monasterboice. He is certainly called abbot of Armagh and Clonard in his obit in *AU* in 834, but the ascription as the successor of Buite probably comes from his epithet. *CS* (827) and *AFM* (*sa* 825) state that he had been *fer léiginn*, rather than abbot, of Monasterboice.

⁴⁴ *AU* 827.2: *Sarugad Eugain i nArdd Machae la Cumuscach m. Catail 7 la Artrigh m. Concobuir*.

⁴⁵ *AU* 827.4: *Bellum Leithi Chaim re Niall m. Aedha for Ihu Cremtain 7 for Muiredach m. Eachdach rig nUlath, in quo ceciderunt Cumuscach 7 Congalach, duo filii Cathail, 7 alii reges multi dinaibh Airgiallaibh*.

*Abair le Niall niamda
Guth Eogain mic Anmchada;
Na biodh san rige arabha
Munab Abb a anmcara.*

Airtri mac Concupair baoi a ccomarbus Padraig anuais sin; mac mathar esidedo Rí Oirgiall .i. do Cumusccach mac Cathail. Ase a cumair, tionoilid na Righ a slóigh, ocus fertar cath Leithe caim a Maigh enir ria Níall mac Aodha for Airgiallibhocus for Ulltaibh, in quo ceciderunt Muiredhach mac Eachach, Rí Uladh, et Cumusccach mac Cathail, Rí Airgiall, et Congalach a brathair, et alii Reges dAirgiallaibh; ocus ro gab Eogan Mainistrech ard comarbus Padraig fri re .ix. mbliadna iarsin, tre nert Nell Caille.

‘The dishonouring of Eógan in Armagh by Cumuscach, son of Cathal, King of Airghiall, and by Artrí, son of Conchobar; and that it was regarding this that Eógan, *fer léiginn* of Mainister, uttered the [following] stanza, when he sent his Psalm-singer to converse with Niall Caille, to ask him to defend the ‘successorship’ [*comarbus*] of Patrick for him:-

Tell to the illustrious Niall
The warning of Eógan, son of Anmchadh:
That he will not be in the power in which he was,
Unless his confessor is Abbot.

[It was] Artrí, son of Conchobar, that was in the ‘successorship’ of Patrick at that time; he was son to the mother of the King of the Airgialla, that is Cumuscach, son of Cathal. The result was that the kings assembled their armies, and the battle of Leth Cam was fought in Magh Enir by Niall, son of Áed, against the Airgialla and against the Ulaid; in which fell Muiredach, son of Eóchaid, King of the Ulaid;⁴⁶ and Cumuscach, son of Cathal, King of the Airgialla; and Congalach, his brother; and other Kings of the Airgialla; and Eógan Mainistrech possessed the ‘chief-successorship’ [*ard comarbus*] of Patrick throughout the nine years afterwards, through the power of Niall Caille.’

It is clear from the accounts in *CS*⁴⁷ and *AFM*⁴⁸ that the battle was a direct result of the expulsion of Eógan and while this defeat of the Ulaid and the Airgialla

⁴⁶ While his presence at Leth Cam is noted in the other sources, Muiredach’s death in the battle appears to have been mistakenly presumed in *CS* as its entry for 839 notes that ‘Muiredach, son of Eóchaid, King of the Ulaid [was] murdered by his brothers, i.e., Áed and Óengus, and others.’

⁴⁷ This is to accept that this account in *CS* is trustworthy. It is clear that this information was not part of the ‘Chronicle of Ireland’, since the common material deriving from it (*cf. AU* 827.4 cited in n. 45, above) is also included in *CS*. The source of the additional detail, however, is unknown.

had enormous and immediate political implications in the north-east of Ireland, it would also result in a permanent change in the balance of power in Leth Cuinn.

The entries in *CS* and *AFM* provide an indication of Artrí's motives in his opposition to Eógan's installation as abbot. The report of the violation of Eógan by Artrí and by Cumuscach son of Cathal⁴⁹ is certainly open to the interpretation that Artrí sought to seize the abbacy for himself, but the question of emphasis is clearer in regard to Eógan than to Artrí. Niall mac Áeda appears to have taken the opportunity, following Flannus' death in 826, to install his own appointee, his confessor, Eógan, in the abbacy. In the L text of *Comarbada Pátraic*, the listing of Eógan Mainistrech is immediately followed by the note:

Trí airchinnig sunna ragsabat abdaine ar ecin nach armiter i n-offriund edón Fland Rói mac Cummascaig, meic Conchobair ro éig assin charpat, et Gormgal mac Indnotaig.

'Three *airchinnig* here who took the abbacy by force, who are not mentioned at mass, i.e., Flann Roi, son of Cummascach, son of Conchobar, who shouted out of the chariot, and Gormgal, son of Indnotach.'⁵⁰

The third *airchinnech* is not named, however, but Lawlor and Best pose the question of whether the third may have Suibne, son of Fernach, who is, somewhat uncertainly, recorded in *AU* as having held the abbacy for two months before his death in 830.⁵¹ It is unknown whether or not the name of Flann Roi's grandfather was indeed Conchobar, so, to add further to the confusion, it could be considered, if *meic* was

⁴⁸ The *Annals of the Four Masters* clearly drew upon *CS* as a source for its abbreviated account, following it closely, but it also appears to draw upon an independent tradition concerning the battle itself which relates that it was fought over three days, during the course of the first two, the Airgialla were gaining the upper hand, but with the arrival of Niall himself on the third day they were overcome.

⁴⁹ *CS* and *AFM* describe Cumuscach as Artrí's uterine brother. The fact that Artrí was supported by the Uí Chremthainn, like Gormgal son of Dindalach a generation earlier, is perhaps the principal reason McCone considered Artrí in the light that he does, describing him as having 'gained notoriety' in 818 and attempting to seize the abbacy in 827. The case is made here that Artrí's motivation in 827 was not to seize the abbacy, but rather to expel Eógan from it. The distinction is important.

⁵⁰ Lawlor and Best, 'Ancient List of Coarbs', 324-5.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 333, n. 3.

amended to *mac*, that the note was intended to read ‘Flann Roi, son of Cummascach; the son of Conchobar, who shouted out of the chariot; and Gormgal, son of Indnotach’ with the obvious understanding that the ‘son of Conchobar’ was Artrí. On the other hand, the fact that the note is inserted following Eógan’s name on the list could be considered an indication that he was meant - Eógan’s name itself follows that of Artrí, where the note could just as easily have been inserted. However, the statement clearly notes that all three were not mentioned at Mass, that is they were not included in the commemorative list, the source for *Comarbada Pátraic* itself. Neither Flann Roi nor Gormgal are listed in *Comarbada Pátraic*, but both Artrí and Eógan are listed and this would appear to indicate that neither would be intended as the third *airchinnech* referred to. The note attached to Eógan’s name in L clearly adds to the problems and, again, detracts from, rather than aids, the understanding of these events.

The account in CS, cited above, both supports the suggestion that, from the outset, Eógan was placed in the abbacy by Niall and provides the motive for doing so – ‘he will not be in the power in which he was / Unless his confessor is abbot’. Clearly control of Armagh was accepted to carry a political advantage. In addition to the spiritual authority deriving from its claim to metropolitan status, there was, following the promulgation of *Lex Patricii*, the physical presence of the ‘stewards of the law’, appointed by the abbot and answerable only to the abbot and community of Armagh, throughout the provinces of Ireland (see above, pp. 180-2). The ability to install dependent candidates in the abbacy would have provided the kings of Ailech and Tara with an enormous advantage in the struggle for political supremacy and acknowledged recognition as *rí Érenn*, a position which, by this point in the ninth century, had become a politically viable objective.⁵² Viewed in such a light, it could be

⁵² The terms *rí Érenn* and *fir Érenn* appear in annalistic entries by the middle of the ninth century. *AU* records the plundering of Munster by Máel Sechnaill mac Máel Ruanaidh *co feraib Érenn* – with the men of Ireland – in 858. Since the target of this aggression was Munster, it can be more readily appreciated that the description of *fir Érenn* was as much conceptual as actual. Máel Sechnaill himself was called *rí Herenn uile* – king of the whole of Ireland – in his obituary notice in *AU* 862.5. This may simply be seen as descriptive of his *de facto* position; but Máire Herbert has indicated that while the ‘kingship of Ireland’ involved not the territorial rule over the island,

considered that the battle of Leth Cam was fought because Eógan's removal from the abbacy directly threatened Niall's political interests; victory, correspondingly, resulted in Eógan's reinstatement in the abbacy and subsequent maintenance 'through the power of Niall.'⁵³

The political advantage to Niall mac Áeda resulting from the insertion of his confessor in the abbacy of Armagh should not, nevertheless, in itself be seen as the basis of Artrí's opposition to Eógan. What may be of much more relevance in this regard was the mere fact that he imposed his confessor in the abbacy without regard to, perhaps even in opposition to, the community of Armagh, that he considered that the abbacy of Armagh was his to appoint. While Artrí's kinsmen and their neighbours may have supported him through their opposition to Cenél nEógain ambition, there is a reasonably sound basis for arguing that his own opposition to Eógan was based, not on covetousness of the position for himself, but on the fact that he, as *airchinnech* and bishop of Armagh, was opposed to any consideration that ecclesiastical office should be subordinate to or dependent upon the secular interests of kings.

Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, king of Cashel, and Conchobar mac Donnchada, king of Tara, held a royal conference at Birr in the aftermath of Leth Cam⁵⁴ (see below, p. 245f). While it is clear that both kings would have been opposed to Cenél

but overlordship over the provincial rulers and the right to mobilize their troops collectively as *fir Érenn*, in this case 'more than mere annalistic tribute is involved, for Máel Sechnaill is also styled *rí Érenn* on High Crosses in the Irish midlands. Indeed, the earliest known inscriptions on High Crosses are those which record Máel Sechnaill's royal appellation together with his royal patronage. Thus, *rí Érenn* evidently represents the king's own approved designation, manifestly proclaimed on the country's most conspicuous Christian monuments.' Máire Herbert, 'Rí Éirenn, Rí Alban, kingship and identity in the ninth and tenth centuries', in Simon Taylor (ed.), *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500-1297*, Dublin, 2000, 62-72, at 64.

⁵³ *AClon* (sa 824) records that 'Owen Manisdreach again was Restored by the clergie to the abbotship of Ardmagh', however another stanza recorded in *CS*, reportedly compiled by an elder of the community of Armagh, states:

<i>Nima rucsam ar mbaire;</i>	'Not well have we gained our goal;
<i>Nima lodman sec Lere (.i. Lann Lere)</i>	Not well have we passed beyond Lere (i.e. Lann Léire)
<i>Nimar gabsamar Eogan</i>	Not well have we taken Eógan
<i>Sech cec ndeoraid in hEre.</i>	In preference to any exile in Erin.'

This stanza would appear to suggest that the community of Armagh had desired that someone from the community of Lann Léire, or Dunleer, in Louth, be considered for the abbacy and this, together with the report that Eógan subsequently held the abbacy 'through the power of Niall', would certainly appear to indicate that Eógan's abbacy had been imposed upon the community.

⁵⁴ *AU* 827.10: *Righdhal occ Birraibh iter Feidlimidh 7 Concobar.*

nEógain control of Armagh, there was little that either could currently do about it. In 831, however, *AU* notes that the *óenach* at Tailtiu was disturbed over the ‘shrine of MacCuilinn and the relics of Patrick and that many died as a result.’⁵⁵ There is no indication of the cause of the dissension or of those involved, but later in the year, ‘Eógan Mainistrech, abbot of Armagh, was dishonoured over a legal decision [? – *hi foigallnaig*⁵⁶] by Conchobar, son of Donnchad, and his followers were taken prisoner, and his horses taken away.’⁵⁷ Again, no detail is provided, but reference to Eógan’s followers may indicate that he was involved in a tour or circuit when he was surprised by Conchobar and arrested, perhaps on some pretext connected with the disturbance at the *oenach Tailten*. No subsequent mention is made of Eógan himself, merely that his followers were taken captive; however, Conchobar seems also have imprisoned Eógan, or otherwise effectively removed him from the abbacy, for he was apparently replaced by Artrí. This would appear to be indicated by the tenure of two years in the abbacy allocated to Artrí in *Comarbada Pátraic*. His name is listed before that of Eógan, although *Comarbada Pátraic* derived from a list of those for commemoration in Mass maintained at Armagh and Artrí predeceased Eógan by two years. However, the fact that Artrí is listed first led Lawlor and Best to consider that he was recognised as *comarba* from 818 until the death of Flannus in 826, even although the list provides a tenure of only two years. The reinstatement of Eógan as abbot of Armagh after Leth Cam in 827, holding the position for nine years afterwards, according to *CS* and *AFM*, or eight years according to *Comarbada Pátraic*, and his death in 834 (*AU*) would mean that the attributed eight years places

⁵⁵ *AU* 831.5: *Oenach Tailten do cumusc oc Foradhaib im scrin M. Cuilind 7 im minda Patraicc condid-aptha ili de.*

⁵⁶ Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster*, were uncertain of the meaning behind *hi foigiallnaig* and suggested ‘over a legal decision.’ The basis of their translation appears to be that the verb *fo-gella* means ‘submit to judgement’ (via ‘to place pledges that one will abide by the judgement’). The entry for *giallna*, *foigiallna* in *DIL* considers the meaning to ‘place under submission’, but also provides an idiomatic example of *i ngiallmus* which, in context, means ‘confinement.’ Alternatively, the term may be a compound of *giallnae*, perhaps ‘servile hostageship’. The precise meaning intended here is unclear, but it would make some sense, in light of subsequent annalistic references, if Eógan had indeed been placed in confinement by Conchobar in 831 and subsequently released, on Conchobar’s death, in 833.

⁵⁷ *AU* 831.8: *Sarugad Eugain Mainisdreach, abbatis Airdd Machae, hi foigiallnaig la Conchobar m. nDonnchada co n-arrgabtha sochaide móra diib.*

his abbatial succession in 826, that is, immediately following the death of Flannus mac Loingsig. How then to account for the two years accredited to Artrí in all versions of *Comarbada Pátraic*, placing him between mac Loingsig and Eógan Mainistrech? The entry in *AU* which records his death calls him *abb Airdd Machae*. This is the only reference to Artrí as abbot and his death, in 833, was two years after the ‘legal decision’ which ‘dishonoured’ Eógan. It would seem likely, therefore, that these were the two years in which Artrí held the abbacy and it could only have been ‘vacant’ following Eógan’s removal.⁵⁸ Niall mac Áeda appears to have been powerless to prevent this. *AU* 831.8 records the defeat of the community of Armagh and the captivity of ‘great numbers of them’ by Vikings; while 832.1 notes their plundering of Armagh three times in one month.⁵⁹ Viking raiders were roaming the area at will and Niall seems to have been unable to prevent it. Whatever the reason for this sudden military weakness, Conchobar appears to have made the most of it in this respect and Artrí held the abbacy for the remaining two years of his life.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ The question which arises, if this scenario is correct, is that if Conchobar mac Donnchada and Clann Cholmáin were opposed to Eógan, then why did he become abbot of Clonard as well as of Armagh? The only reference to Eógan as abbot of both Armagh and Clonard is in his obit (in *AU*, 834.2, for example – *Eugan Mainistrech, abb Airdd Machae 7 Cluana Iraidh*). Both Conchobar and Artrí had died the previous year (*AU* 833.1) and it is possible, therefore, that Eógan had been appointed to, or acquired, the abbacy of Clonard following Niall mac Áed’s accession to the kingship of Tara (*AU* 833.3). If so, however, this would be to presume that the abbacy of Clonard had been vacant since the death of Cormac son of Suibne in 830 (*AU* 830.2), which may be thought to have been unlikely. Alternatively, Eógan may have succeeded Cormac in the abbacy of Clonard in 830. However, Clonard’s geographical situation, in Mide, ensured that it fell firmly under Conchobar’s sphere of influence, so that even if Conchobar did not actively seek to install his own appointee, it may be surmised that it would have been difficult to install as abbot someone of whom Conchobar did not approve. The record of Conchobar’s actions against Eógan in 831 indicate his clear opposition to him, making it extremely unlikely that Eógan was his choice to succeed Cormac in the abbacy of Clonard following the latter’s death in 830. Alternatively, given that kings do not always get their own way, it may have been possible that Eógan was appointed abbot of Clonard, in opposition to Conchobar’s wishes. If so, then this may have been the spur to Conchobar’s actions in 831. The unfortunate fact that the circumstances of Eógan’s acquisition of the abbacy of Clonard are unknown, however, makes it impossible to be certain of any aspect of it.

⁵⁹ *AU* 831.7: *Cath do madhmaid i nAighmechaib re genntib for muinntir nAirdd Machae co n-arrgabtha sochaide móra diib*; *AU* 832.1: *Cétina orggain Airdd Machae o genntib fo tri i n-oenmhís*.

⁶⁰ The L text of *Comarbada Pátraic* states of Artrí that ‘it is he who underwent martyrdom from Eógan and Niall and Suibne, son of Sarnech’ (*Is é rachoid martra ó Eogan 7 ó Niall 7 ó Suibni mac Sarnig*). The patronymic provided in L appears to be a misreading of *Farnig* and intended as the abbot who died in Armagh in 830. The fact that he died in Armagh has led to some confusion over his abbacy. *AU* (830.9) states only that *Suibne m. Fairnig* [with an interlinear gloss at this point *alias mc. Forannan*] *abbas duorum mensum i nArdd Machae, obiit* (‘Suibne son of

Again, however, the question must be asked whether these rival abbots had *céli Dé* connections. Again, it has to be answered that there is no explicit indication of such. If the case to be a *céle Dé* could be made for anyone, it could be thought the most likely would be Artrí. There is no indication, as is often assumed, that he was a rival to Flannus mac Loingsig in the abbacy – indeed, there is nothing at all to indicate that he ever sought the abbacy of Armagh. He most certainly opposed Eógan Mainistrech's appointment to the abbacy, but Eógan was installed in the abbacy by Niall mac Áeda. If the stanza attributed to an elder of Armagh and recorded in *CS* is both accurate and representative, then it would appear clear that Niall installed Eógan without any consideration of or reference to the community of Armagh. It would appear that it was this imposition of an incumbent in the abbacy by the king of Ailech, with the attendant assumption that the abbacy of Armagh was his to appoint, which provoked Artrí's opposition to Eógan, rather than covetousness of the abbacy for

Farnech, an abbot for two months, died in Armagh'). This was translated by MacAirt and MacNiocaill as 'Suibne son of Farnech alias son of Forannán abbot of Ard Macha for two months, died.' That the obit was intended to convey that Suibne was abbot of Armagh was also understood to have been the case by Lawlor and Best who have included the entries from *AU* and *CS* relating Suibne's death into the list of the successors of Patrick, even although he is not listed as abbot in any version of *Comarbada Pátraic*. They accounted for this by referring to the gloss appended to Eógan's name which stated that three *airchinnig* who took the abbacy by force were not commemorated, but which apparently names only two (see above, p. 218) and considered that Suibne was the third of the three. The reading is ambiguous, however, and in *AU* the entry has been marginally glossed *abb. aird macha* at some subsequent point (MacAirt and MacNiocaill, *The Annals of Ulster*, 286, note b for 830). Lawlor and Best also took the mention of what they believed to be a reference to the *comarba Buti Bronaig* in the LB version of *Comarbada Pátraic* to mean Suibne, although neither the meaning of the reference nor the identification is certain. Suibne's obit in *CS* calls him abbot of Daiminis: *Suibne mac Fairnigh, Ab Daiminsi, a nArdmacha quieuit*. The entry in *AFM*, by contrast, notes *Suibne mac Farnig, abb Arda Macha fri ré dá mhís, do écc*, which is unambiguous in the fact that Suibne was two months in the abbacy of Armagh. In such a conflict of information, however, the entry in *CS* is to be preferred to that of *AFM*. His death, indeed, was during Eógan's first tenure as abbot and it is difficult to perceive when Suibne could have been abbot in Armagh. It certainly seems that Suibne was a supporter of Eógan's abbacy and the natural reading of the gloss contained in L is that Eógan, Niall and Suibne had brought about the death of Artrí in 833. The principal problem with this reading, however, is the fact that Suibne died in 830 and could not therefore have been involved in Artrí's death. Nothing is known of the circumstances of Artrí's death, but there is absolutely no indication of his 'martyrdom', or of anything other than death by natural causes, in any of the annalistic sources. Given the contemporary ideas of different forms of martyrdom, however, Artrí's 'martyrdom' may instead be a reference to the situation following Niall's victory at Leth Cam when he would have been effectively exiled from Armagh, his episcopal seat. The description of martyrdom reflects a sympathetic view of Artrí's circumstances, which would again be unlikely if he was merely an opportunist upstart looking to seize the abbacy for personal aggrandisement, and indicates an underlying support for his actions.

himself. Artrí did become abbot, almost certainly in 831 after Conchobar seized Eógan and his followers, but this need not imply that he pursued the position – if he had indeed championed the right of the community to elect their own abbot in 827, he himself may, subsequently, have been the choice of the community. This, it has to be said, can only be conjecture, but it takes no less account of the known facts than the assumption that Artrí was an opportunist rival claimant to ‘legitimate’ abbots. He was the *airchinnech* of Armagh when he took Patrick’s shrine to Connacht in 818 and, if the subsequent gloss to the annals is correct, bishop by the time he jointly promulgated the *Lex Patricii* in Munster with Feidlimid mac Crimthainn in 823. He promulgated *Lex Patricii* in Connacht in 825, perhaps jointly with, or at the behest of, Diarmait mac Tomaltaich (above, p. 188). There is not the slightest indication that these actions by the bishop and *airchinnech* of Armagh were taken to undermine or oppose the abbot of Armagh, Flannus mac Loingsig – indeed, it is highly unlikely that Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, king of Cashel, who himself appears to have been a *céle Dé* and was named as one of the *óentu Máel Ruain* (see below, pp. 236-43), would have acted in concert with Artrí if he was a rival contender to the legitimate abbot of Armagh. In just these circumstances in 836, Feidlimid blockaded and seized one of the two rival abbots of Armagh (below, p. 254). It is clear, therefore, that Artrí had extremely strong views about proper appointments to, and deep concern about the qualifications for, high ecclesiastical office. As argued in chapter 4, concern about proper qualification and the standards of literacy, theology and liturgical practice is clearly apparent as a deep concern of the Tallaght texts. It could be expected, therefore, that there would have been deep concern over political interference in the abbacy of the metropolitan church; however, it cannot be claimed that such concerns would be restricted to the *céli Dé*, or that the fact that Artrí’s actions in this respect indicate that he himself was necessarily a *céle Dé*. He may, or may not, have been, but the only thing that can be said in this respect is that nowhere is he ever referred to as such.

Conchobar and Artrí died in the same month, early in 833,⁶¹ and Niall mac Áeda succeeded Conchobar as king of Tara. Eógan was reinstated in the abbacy of Armagh, but died the following year (*AU* 834.2). *AU* notes that there was a change of abbots the following year, when Forannán replaced Diarmait ua Tigernáin.⁶² There is no record of the installation of Diarmait as abbot. Subsequent events indicate the connection between Niall and Forannán, so it may be conjectured that Diarmait had been the choice of the community of Armagh, but Niall's preference was for Forannán who was thus imposed on the community as Eógan had been. Certainly Forannán was blockaded and seized in Kildare by Feidlimid mac Crimthainn in 836, indicating that Feidlimid, for one, did not recognise that he held the abbacy legitimately.⁶³ In 838, there was a meeting between Feidlimid and Niall, while, in the following year, Diarmait was briefly reinstated as abbot. It could be conjectured that Diarmait was reinstated as part of the terms of this agreement between Feidlimid and Niall, but, if so, it appears that Niall quickly reneged on the terms of the agreement and Forannán was re-established as abbot. It is certainly the case that when the abbot of Armagh is next referred to in the annalistic record, in 845, it was Forannán who was abbot⁶⁴ and it seems most likely that Diarmait was again replaced in the abbacy in 839-40, shortly after he was noted as again holding the abbacy (below, pp. 254-7).

Niall was drowned in the River Calann in 846. Forannán and the *minna Phátraicc* returned from Munster later in the same year, but by 848, with his royal patron now dead, Diarmait had again replaced Forannán in the abbacy and, it appears,

⁶¹ *AU* 833.1: *Artri m. Concobair abb Airdd Machae, 7 Concobur m. Donncotha rex Temhro, uno mense mortui sunt.*

⁶² *AU* 835.6: *Coemhcludh abad i nArd Macha, .i. Forindan o Rath Mc. Malais i ndon Dermota o Thighearnan.*

⁶³ Both Forannán and Diarmait died in late 851 or early 852 and their obits are recorded together in *AU* 852.1 (see n. 65, below). Both are referred to, in this obit, in terms by which, it may be thought, that Feidlimid, from the perspective of a *céle Dé*, would have approved. Yet Feidlimid's actions in 836 clearly indicate that he was opposed to Forannán. It is clear from the entry in *AU*, 835.6, that Diarmait had been replaced as abbot by Forannán and so it would appear fairly certain that Diarmait had been appointed abbot following the death of Eógan Mainistrech in 833. While Forannán could be expected to have been an individual of whom Feidlimid would have otherwise approved, Feidlimid's opposition would thus appear to have derived, so far as can be seen, from this fact that Diarmait was ousted from the abbacy of Armagh in order to make way for him.

⁶⁴ *AU* 845.1: *Forindan, abbas Aird Machae, du ergabail du genntibh i Cloen Comardaicona mindaibh 7 cona muinntir, 7 a brith do longaibh Luimnigh.*

remained abbot until his death in 852. The obits of both Diarmait and Forannán are recorded in the same annal entry,⁶⁵ indicating that their deaths had occurred quite closely together, and with their passing the worst of the periods of rival contenders for the abbacy, promoted by rival political interests came to an end. It was not until the abbacy of Máel Brigte mac Tornain (888-927), however, that the position of abbot of Armagh acquired much needed stability, although, by this time, the concept of the position of *rí Érenn*, which had made control of the appointment in the abbacy so desirable, was well established and less dependent on the precedent of ecclesiastical authority. Correspondingly, it would appear that there was less pressure of secular control over the abbacy and the community was the more able to select those whom it felt appropriate.

The struggle over the abbacy of Armagh at this time was seen by Lawlor and Best as little more than a fairly insular and localised affair, for they conclude that

for a century and a half [i.e.775-936] a determined effort was made to establish the right of the Clann Sinaich to provide abbots for Armagh, and that for nearly the whole of that time the claim was vigorously resisted. It is obvious that the hereditary succession was not maintained in the family of which Sinach was the ancestor while this struggle lasted.⁶⁶

While this latter point is true, the emphasis is misleading. The struggle over the abbacy of Armagh had a significance and political importance which went far beyond the ambition of the Clann Sínaich, who, indeed, were essentially the beneficiaries, rather than the instigators, of this struggle. Rather than the impression of a fairly localised affair which this otherwise excellent discussion provides, the contention over the appointment of the abbots of Armagh inevitably held serious ramifications throughout the whole of Ireland – which was, indeed, exactly the point: Armagh was

⁶⁵ *AU* 852.1, where a subsequent gloss claims that both men were bishops of Armagh: *Duo heredes Patricii, da epscob Ard Macha .i. Forinnan scriba 7 episcopus 7 anchorita, 7 Dermait sapientissimus omnium doctorum Europe, quieuerunt.*

⁶⁶ Lawlor and Best, 'Ancient List of Coarbs', 353.

significant, politically rather than ecclesiastically, precisely because it was the closest thing in late eighth-century Ireland to a nationally recognisable authority.

The struggle for the control of the abbacy of Armagh was essentially undertaken by the rival Uí Néill dynasties of the Cenél nEógain and the Clann Cholmain, principally in the race for political supremacy, but perhaps also through fear of exclusion from the alternating succession in the kingship of Tara should their rivals become too powerful. It can be readily perceived that whoever controlled the abbacy of Armagh would have an enormous advantage in any attempt to claim both *de facto* and *de jure* recognition as *rí Érenn*. At a secondary level to this, rival dynasties within the Airgialla, in whose territory Armagh lay and from whom, previously, the abbots had been drawn, competed to maintain their interests in Armagh. Ultimately Clann Sínaich, who had shrewdly linked their fortunes to that of the Cenél nEógain, would be major beneficiaries, but this would not be readily apparent until the middle of the tenth century by which time their hereditary succession in the abbacy would be established. The attempt to control the appointment of the abbot of Armagh was of a more fundamental importance than dynastic aspiration to exclusively provide abbots. The church had developed itself into a key element in the processes of centralisation and concentration of royal power, but, having done so, found itself subjected to those interests. Individuals, who may or may not have had *céli Dé* connections, sought to resist secular appointment to ecclesiastical positions and to maintain the prerogatives of the church, but they were destined to fail. The power and interests of the church were subordinated to the more powerful ambitions of the greatest kings. Any individual, whether or not he happened to be *céle Dé*, who wished to overturn these circumstances could only hope to do so through control of a military power to rival that of the kings of Tara.

Feidlimid mac Crimthainn and the *óentu Máel Ruain*

One of the best documented individuals connected with the *céli Dé* was Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, king of Cashel 820-47, but who, like so much else concerned with the *céli Dé*, has endured too narrow an emphasis in consideration of his relationship with the church. Kathleen Hughes, for example, noted that 'Feidlimid king of Cashel (i.e. Munster) was responsible during his reign (820-47) for more violence towards the church than any other Irishman',¹ which, given the surviving annalistic record, was perhaps an understandable view, although whether he was responsible for more violence towards the church than even his contemporary, Áed Oirdnide, is questionable. She continued 'He must have patronised the anchorites, but the annals provide a long list of profanations'² and thus considered him a personification of the degeneracy within the church. F.J. Byrne considered that

In Feidlimid mac Crimthainn we meet one of the most enigmatic figures in Irish history. King and ecclesiastic, overlord of Leth Moga and aspirant to the high-kingship of Ireland, a pious ruler who solemnly proclaimed the Law of Patrick in Munster and who is gratefully remembered in the *Vita Tripartita*, a friend of the Céli Dé ascetics, even a member of their order and regarded later as a saint, a renowned warrior. At a most critical era in Irish history, when devastating Viking raids were succeeded by permanent base-camps and settlements, Feidlimid never once devoted his arms to attacking these heathen foreigners but distinguished his martial career by burning and plundering some of the greatest of Irish monasteries – Kildare, Gallen, Durrow, Clonfert, and above all, Clonmacnoise – captured and maltreated the abbot of Armagh, allowed the abbot of Cork to die without the comforts of religion in his prison at Cashel, and was finally struck down by the vengeance of St. Ciarán.³

¹ Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 192.

² *ibid.*

³ F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 211-2. Feidlimid's career is considered in some detail, pp. 202-29.

This, in summation, has remained the perception of Feidlimid. Paradoxically, however, Feidlimid was acknowledged to have been a scribe and anchorite ‘and the best of the Gael’ in his obit in *AU*⁴ and regarded as a saint among the *céli Dé* with his death being commemorated under 28 August in the Martyrology of Tallaght. This would be remarkable if he should have been regarded by his contemporaries as merely a despoiler of churches. Clearly, therefore, whatever his connections with the *céli Dé* this could not have been the case.

Byrne noted that ‘Feidlimid’s motives and character must be assessed from a tantalisingly scanty number of annalistic entries supplemented by the reputation he enjoyed among later generations.’⁵ While the annalistic references to Feidlimid are, in fact, relatively rich, if frustratingly lacking in detail – a point far from unique in regard to Feidlimid – it may be that the annalistic entries should not necessarily be taken at face value. Feidlimid’s repeated harrying of Clonmacnoise is a case in point. According to the annalistic accounts he burned Delbna Bethra in 826, Clonmacnoise and Delbna Bethra thrice in 832, Clonmacnoise, together with Durrow, in 833 and again, when he was struck down by Ciarán, in 846. The Munster-oriented *AI* is wholly silent on these events. *CS* records that Delbna Bethra was devastated thrice and records the burning of Clonmacnoise by Feidlimid.⁶ It then records in the following year the slaughter of the *muintir* of Clonmacnoise and the burning of the *termon* as far as the door of the church by Feidlimid and the same treatment for the community of Durrow.⁷ *AFM* also records both assaults, under the years 831 and 832;⁸ *AClon*, too, in the first section for the year 830, records that ‘ffelym mcCrewhynn Burnt, spoyled, & preyed the lands belonging to St. Queran called Termynlands & Deluyn Bethra

⁴ *AU* 847.1: *Feidhlimidh .i. mc. Crimthainn rex Muman, optimus Scotorum, pausauit, scriba 7 ancorita.*

⁵ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 212.

⁶ *CS* 832 - *Inradh Bethra fo trí la Feidlimid. Losccadh Termainn Cluana Ciaráin la Feidlimid mac Crimthainn.*

⁷ *CS* 833 - *Iugulatio muintire Cluana muc Nois, ocus losccadh a Termainn corice dorus cille la Feidhlimidh Rí Caisil. Faen cuma cedna muintir Duirmagh, co dorus a ccille.*

⁸ *AFM* sa 831 – *Losccadh termainn Ciaráin lá Féidhlimidh, mac Criomhthainn. Inradh Bethra fo trí lais bheós; AFM* sa 832 – *Drong mór do muintir Cluana mic Nóis do mharbhadh lá Feidhlimidh, mac Criomhthainn, ri Caisil, 7 ro loisceadh a ttermonn uile lais do dorus a cille.*

three times' and in the second section for 830 that 'Felym mcCriowhaine killed & made a great slaughter upon the clergy of Clonvickenois & burnt & consumed with fier all Clonvickenois to the very Doore of the church, & did the like with the clergy of Dorow to their very Doore also'. These accounts are clearly derived from a common source and are therefore not independent. *AU*, by contrast, has only one entry, for 833, but the report of which has phraseology similar to the second reports of the others.⁹ There is no mention of the burning of the *termon* of Clonmacnoise or the triple devastation of Delbna the previous year and this must be explained either by omission in the record of *AU*, or, conversely to the more usual conflation of entries which can occur from the transcription of accounts, to the expansion of the record and that the accounts for the previous year in these records in fact refer to the same event. Clearly, the record in *AU* derived from the common source to the others, but equally clearly, there must have been an additional, intermediate, source used as a basis to *CS*, *AFM* and *AClon* which is not represented by *AU* and from which originated an entry for the burning of Clonmacnoise in 832 in addition to that of 833.¹⁰

Feidlimid is again reported plundering the *termon* of Ciarán in 846 and consideration of this entry may help in determining whether or not the initial report of the burning of Clonmacnoise in either 832 or 833 does indeed reflect two separate assaults or whether it is a 'duplicated' entry. This latest assault is noted in *CS sa* 846, *AFM sa* 844 and *AClon sa* 843. Significantly, it is not recorded in the otherwise relatively full entry for 846 in *AU*. Again, there is no record at all in *AI*. The entries in

⁹ *AU* 833.7 - *Iugulatio muinntire Cluana Moccu Nois 7 loscudh a termuinn co rici dorus a cille la Feidhlimidh righ Caisil. Fon oencumai muinnter Dermaighi co dorus a cille.*

¹⁰ For aspects of the interdependence of the annalistic collections, see the various discussions in Grabowski and Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales*, esp. 42-66. Grabowski notes 'There is no doubt that *CS* and *AU* are closely related throughout the ninth century. In general, down to their annals for 904, the common material tends to occur at the beginning of each annal in both *CS* and *AU*, with the material unique to each source occurring, in most cases, at the end of each annal as a block of entries' (53-4). This fact would appear to indicate that these entries were subsequent additions to the common core. The entry relating Feidlimid's assault on Clonmacnoise in 846 is the final entry in *CS*, other than the notice of the accession of Máel Sechnaill mac Máel Ruanaid to the kingship of Tara, indicating that the reference to this assault was not contained within the common source for *AU* and *CS*.

CS, AFM and AClon are worth relating in full, as they provide the likely reason for inclusion in the annalistic record at this time, the year before Feidlimid's death.

CS: (846) *Orgain Termainn Ciaráin ó Fedhlimidh mac Crimthainn. Ciaran, dno, do tocht na diaigh a Mumain, agus Forgom da bacaill [do thabhairt] do inn, corgabh guin meadhoin é.*

'The plundering of the Termon of Ciarán by Feidhlimidh, son of Crimthann. Ciarán, however, followed him to Mumhan, and [gave] him a thrust of his crozier, so that he received an internal wound'

(847) *Feidhlimidh, Rí Muman, optimus Scotorum scriba et ancorita, quievit.*

Dursan a Dé dFeidhlimidh,

Tonn báis barom rodbáirdhe;

Fodeara brón dEirennchaib

Nad mair mac Crimthaind Claire.

'Feidlimid, king of Munster, the best of the Gael, a scribe and anchorite, died.

Alas! O God! For Feidlimid;

The cold wave of death has drowned him;

It is a cause of grief to the men of Ireland,

That the son of Crimthann of Clare lives not.'

AFM: (844) *Orgain termainn Ciaráin lá Feidhlimidh, mac Criomhthainn, 7 Ciarán dna do theacht ina dheadhaidh, andar lais, 7 forgamh dia bhachail do thabairt ind, go for gabh guin medhoin, co nar bo slán go a écc.*

'The plundering of the Termon of Ciarán, by Feidhlimidh, son of Crimthann; but Ciarán pursued him, as he thought, and gave him a thrust of his crozier, and he received an internal wound, so that he was not well until his death.'

(845) *Fedhlimidh, mac Criomhthainn, ri Mumhan, angcoire 7 scribh-neóir ba deach dErennchaibh ina aimris, décc 18 August, dia ghuin mhedhoin, tria mhiorbhaile Dé 7 Ciaráin. ba do bhás Feidhlimidh ro ráidheadh:*

Dursan a Dhe dFeidhlimidh,

tonn báis bá romh rod báidhe,

Fo dearna brón dEirionnchaibh,

nad mair mac Criomhthainn Cláire.

Ar suaithnid do Ghaoidhealaibh

tan do anic an dedenbhaidh,

Ro scaich ár a nErind uaigh

on uair atbath Fedhlimidh.

*Ni deachaidh irredh righi
marbhan bad innigretar,
Flaith fial fo righ nailbine
cobrath nochon gignethair.*

‘Feidlimid, son of Crimthann, king of Munster, anchorite and scribe, the best of the Irish in his time, died on the 18th of August of his internal wound, [inflicted] through the miracle of God and Ciarán. Of the death of Feidlimid was said:

Alas! O God, for Feidlimid;
the cold wave of death has drowned him!
It is a cause of grief to the Irish
that the son of Crimthann of Clare lives not.

It was portentous to the Gaedhil
when his end arrived;
Slaughter spread through sacred Ireland
from the hour that Feidlimid died.

There never went on regal bier
a corpse so noble;
A prince so generous under the king of Ailbin
shall never be born.’

AClon: (843) ‘All the Termynlands belonging to St. Queran were preyed and spoyled by Felym mcCriowhainn without respect of place, saint, or shrine.’

(844) ‘After his returne to Munster ye next year, he was avertaken by a great disease of the flux of the belly, which happened in this wise. As king felym (soon after his return into Mounster) was takeing his rest in his bed, St. Queran apeared to him with his habitt and bachall, or pastorall stafe, & there gave him a push of his Bachall in his belly whereof he tooke his disease and ocation of Death, and notwithstanding his great irregularity and great desire of spoyle he was of sum numbered among the scribes & anchorites of Ireland. He died of the flux aforesaid A° 847.’

These accounts may be compared with the record of *AU*: (847) *Feidhlimidh .i. mc. Crimthainn rex Muman, optimus Scotorum, pausauit, scriba 7 ancorita* - ‘Feidlimid son of Crimthann, king of Munster, a scribe and anchorite, and the best of the Gael, died.’ *AI* has an even simpler note: (847) *Fedlimid mc. Crimthainn dormiuit*.

The displacement of the chronology of *AFM* and *AClon* would indicate that the respective entries should belong under 846 and are thus consistent with *CS*; however, the similarity of the report with that of the burning of the *Termonn Cluana Ciaráin* in 832 and 833, together with the absence of a report in *AU*, and the clear confusion in certain records and duplication of entries, most apparent in *CS*,¹¹ at this time should indicate some caution against the simple and uncritical acceptance of the record.

The record of the raid on Clonmacnoise in 846, then, relates that on this occasion, Ciarán pursued him and gave him a thrust of his crozier, so that he received an internal wound from which he died the following year – or in the case of *AClon*, three years, where, despite its record under 844, it ends (? from a gloss to the source) that Feidlimid ‘died of the flux aforesaid’ in 847, the correct year of his death. The similarity of accounts in *CS*, *AFM* and *AClon* indicates clearly that it came from a common source, although that contained in *CS* has been heavily curtailed. That common source would almost certainly have been the lost ‘Chronicle of Clonmacnoise’ which, it would appear, accounted for Feidlimid’s contracting and dying from the ‘Bloody Flux’ – a disease frequently reported in the annals – as the vengeance of Ciarán. This reasoning can also be seen reported in *AFM sa* 843, when a Viking raid led by Turgéis burned Clonmacnoise, Clonfert, Terryglass, Lothra and other churches close to the Shannon, but was defeated and captured by Niall mac

¹¹ For example, the entry for 823 in *CS* appears to be particularly confused. The note that *Congalach mac Irgalaich, tanaisi Abbad Cluana muc Nois [quieuit]* in *CS* 823 is repeated with an identical entry under 843; the record of the drowning in the Shannon of Flann son of Flaithbertach, the Munster *sechnap* of Clonmacnoise, is noted under 823, but the provision of the *sechnapóite* of Clonmacnoise to the Munstermen for the first time is noted under 827; Feidlimid’s defeat, at Magh Aí, by Cathal, son of Muirgius, is placed under 823, but belongs to 837. The report, in *CS*, that Muiredach, son of Eochaid, king of the Ulaid, fell in the battle of Leth Cam in 827 is contradicted by the entry under 839 in which ‘Muiredach, son of Eóchaid, king of the Ulaid, was murdered by his brothers, viz., Áed and Óengus, and others’. Muiredach’s participation at Leth Cam is noted in other annalistic reports without any indication that he died there, an assumption unique to *CS*. There may be other examples of inconsistency, but these will serve to indicate that there has been a great deal of corruption regarding the record of this period. This corruption is most apparent in *CS*, but it is, to some extent, reflected in *AFM* also. Since it can be seen that the Four Masters used *CS* and *AClon*, or their common source, for their own compilation, they evidently were aware of some, at least, of these duplications and have, for the most part, removed them. There are, however, still some duplicate entries which have escaped the editing process. See, for example, the entries in *AFM saa* 810 and 817.

Áeda ‘and he was afterwards drowned in Loch Uair, through the miracle of God and Ciaráin and the saints in general’ (*a bhádhadh hi Loch Uair iaram, tré mhiorbhaile Dé 7 Ciaráin 7 na naemh archena*). Here justice was swift, however – Turgéis was defeated, captured and drowned while still raiding. In Feidlimid’s case, however, the question is whether he did indeed again burn the *Termonn Cluana Ciaráin* in 846, or whether the Clonmacnoise claim for the retribution of Ciarán was actually related to the clearly serious assault by Feidlimid in 833 when the *termon* was burned to the very door of the church and many of the community were put to death. It would appear strange if Ciarán should be thought of as being roused to action after a raid in 846, when he had left unpunished the burning of *Termonn Cluana Ciaráin* and the slaughter of his community in 833. There are clear problems with the record of the Clonmacnoise-group texts, most clearly reflected in *CS*, which, unlike *AFM* and *AClon*, has not undergone the same degree of interpretation by subsequent editing in the intermediary stages of transmission to the present day. There must be at least the strong suspicion that the tradition of the raid in 846 preserved in *CS*, *AFM* and *AClon*, almost certainly deriving from the common source of the ‘Chronicle of Clonmacnoise’, may have been due to the fact that when Feidlimid contracted the Flux in 846, this was attributed to the vengeance of Ciarán for his raid in 833 and that an outline of these actions which had warranted such vengeance may have been included in the original entry or subsequently added as a gloss. This was subsequently recorded as a further raid in all three annalistic compilations which drew upon the ‘Chronicle of Clonmacnoise’. This interpretation, by its very nature, however, cannot be demonstrated beyond doubt and can only be put forward as a suggestion, but, as the evidence stands, there must be at least strong suspicions that the annalistic accounts of the raids on Clonmacnoise in 832 and 833, deriving from a single branch, have their origins in a single event, occurring in 833, and that the record, in the same sources, of the assault in 846 has itself been duplicated from the account for 833.

The career of Feidlimid as it is recorded in the annals, therefore, could perhaps be amended to the following:

820: Took the kingship of Cashel (*AU, AI, CS, AClon sa 816*).

823: *Lex Patricii* promulgated over Munster with Artrí, son of Conchobar (glossed bishop of Armagh) (*AU, CS, AFM sa 822, AClon sa 820*).

826: Delbna Bethra harried (*AU, AFM sa 824*).

827: [Battle of Leth Cam]

Feidlimid and Conchobar, son of Donnchad, king of Tara, meet at Birr (*AU, AFM sa 825, AClon sa 824*).

[The *sechnapóite* of Clonmacnoise was given to the Munstermen, which was never done before (*CS*)].

830: Burning of Foire (*AU, CS, AClon sa 827*).

Defeats the Southern Uí Briúin (*AU*: defeats the Connachta and Uí Néill, *AI*).

831: 'Came to plunder Brega' with the men of Munster and Leinster (*AU, AFM sa 829, AClon sa 828*).

833: [? Munster *sechnap* of Clonmacnoise drowned by Uí Maine (*CS, sa 823*)]

Delbna Bethra repeatedly harried. Burned the *termon* of Clonmacnoise and put to death many of its community. Burned the *termon* of Durrow (*AU, CS sa 832-3, AFM sa 831-2, AClon sa 830(i)-830(ii)= 830-1*).

835: [? Munster *sechnap* of Clonmacnoise drowned by Uí Maine (*CS, sa 823*)]

836: [Dúnláng, *princeps* of Cork, died without communion in Cashel (*AU*)]

Feidlimid took the abbacy of Cork (*AI*).

The oratory of Kildare seized by force of arms from Forannán, abbot of Armagh, and the congregation of Patrick who were taken prisoner (*AU, CS, AFM sa 835, AClon sa 833*).

837: Cenél Cairpre Cruim [of the Uí Maine] plundered (*AU, AFM sa 836, AClon sa 834*).

[Cathal, son of Muirgius, defeated the Munstermen (*AU*); Munstermen defeated by Connachta (*AFM sa 836*)]

Feidlimid defeated by Cathal in Magh Aí (*CS sa 823*).

838: Royal meeting between Feidlimid and Niall mac Áeda, king of Tara (*AU, AI, AFM sa 837, AClon sa 835*).

Feidlimid occupied the abbot's chair of Clonfert (*AI*).

840: Harries Mide and Brega and 'encamped' (*AU, CS, AFM sa 839, AClon sa 837*), 'was checked' (*AI*), at Tara. Seized Niall's queen, the daughter of the king of Leinster, with her train (*AI*).

841: Defeated by Niall mac Áeda (*AU, AFM sa* 840). (Came to Wexford with a great army and was met by Niall with another great army - no mention of outcome, *AClon sa* 838).

847: Feidlimid died of the Bloody Flux, contracted the previous year.

It can be seen, therefore, that while Byrne considered this to have been ‘a tantalisingly scanty number of annalistic entries’, it is, even after some revision, a comparatively full record for the period 820-41.

One significant piece of evidence which is often noted, but rarely considered, is that Feidlimid is listed among *óentu Máel Ruain* – the unity of Máel Ruain – preserved in the Book of Leinster.¹² It notes:

Lucht oentad Mael Ruain in so .i. iar Patraic 7 iarsna da apstal déc Insi Fail .i. Mael Ruain Tamlachta. Mael Tuile mac Noechuire. Mael Anfaid Darinse Máre. Fland Find m Fairchellaig i nDaire na Fland. Fland m Duib Thuinne i nDaire na Fland. Flannán m Tairdelbaig i Cill da Lua. Mael Dithrub .i. anchorita Tiri da Glas. Dimman Arad. Dalbach Cule Collaing. Feidlimid mac Crimthainn. Diarmait in Disirt. Eochaid epscop Tamlachta. Oengus .h. Óibleáin. Et nosfiurad in ballán dia ro chan Cormac mac Culennain Ballan barrglas 7c.¹³

The names provided by the *óentu* have been looked at most closely by Peter O’Dwyer.¹⁴ He notes that Máel Tuile established *Disert Maeltuile* on the bank of Lough Aininn. He may possibly have begun his religious career in the community of Rahan, being fostered among the Uí Suanáigh whose anchorite of Rahan and abbot of Rahan, who died in 757 and 763 respectively,¹⁵ were ‘active members in the ascetic

¹² The Book of Leinster, vol. 6 (ed. Anne O’Sullivan), 1683.

¹³ There is a second variant of the *óentu Máel Ruain* contained in the Book of Leinster, vol. 6, 1686:
Cormac mac Cuilennain .cecinit.

*Mael Rúain Mael Tuile im gním ngle.
Mael Anfaid na Darinse.
na triFlaind Mael Dithreib dil.
Dimman Dalbach Feidlimid*

*Diarmait Eochaid ard a scél
7 Oengus .h. Oiblén
luch na hoentad sin uile
im Mael Rúain in Mael Tuile.*

¹⁴ O’Dwyer, *Céli Dé*, 36–46.

¹⁵ *AU* 757.1: *Quies Fidmhuine ancorite Rathin, id est nepotis Suanáich; AU* 763.2 ...7 *Fidairle oa Suanáich abb Raithin, mortui [est].*

movement'.¹⁶ Máel Tuile, *abbas Benchair*, died in 820.¹⁷ If *Benchair* was Banagher in Offaly, then it is possible that this may have been the same individual, but it cannot be determined whether or not this was the case. Máel Tuile had been exiled in 817, but whether this had been voluntary or enforced, and if so for what reason, is not recorded.¹⁸

O'Dwyer considered that the Máel Anfaid who is named in the list was the founder of Dairinis, whose *floruit*, he suggested, belongs to the first half of the seventh century. He considered that Máel Anfaid was 'most probably' included in the *óentu* because of this fact, as Máel Ruain himself had first entered religion in Dairinis under Fer dá Chrích's tutelage.¹⁹ This suggestion is perhaps understandable, but it should not be uncritically accepted before any consideration of the intended purpose of the *óentu*, even if this purpose need be no more than a record of those most closely associated with Máel Ruain. In regard to the question of the identity of Máel Anfaid, it is surely significant to note that all of the others named in the *óentu*, who can be identified, were contemporary with Máel Ruain himself. When the question arises as to why these individuals were included in the *óentu*, particularly when consideration is made of those who were omitted (below, p. 242), the assumption that the Máel Anfaid listed in the *óentu* was the founder of Dairinis, and included for that very reason, becomes less secure. It would appear more reasonable that the Máel Anfaid included in the *óentu* was also a contemporary of Máel Ruain and, consequently, a different individual from the founder of Dairinis. Following the obit of Fer dá Chrích

¹⁶ O'Dwyer, *Céli Dé*, 36-7. He notes, too, the Law of the Uí Suanáich in 743, promulgated over Leth Cuinn in 748, indicated above, p. 175.

¹⁷ *AU* 820.4.

¹⁸ *AU* 817.6 – *Mael Tuile, abbas Benncair, exulat* (one variant noted by MacAirt and Mac Niocaill has *exultat*) – 'Mael Tuile, abbot of Benncair, goes into exile.'

¹⁹ The understanding that Dairinis, on an island in the Blackwater estuary, was founded by Máel Anfaid derives from early references to the church as Dairinis Máel Anfaid (anglicized as Molana) or as Insula St Molanfide. A. Gwynn and R. N. Hadcock, in *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland*, London, 1970, however, state that Máel Anfaid founded Dairinis in the sixth century. Neither they nor O'Dwyer provide any indication of the reasons for stating these respective dates, which merely serves to emphasize the lack of knowledge concerning the foundation of Dairinis. That said, however, there appears no good reason to discount the fact that, in the ninth century, Dairinis was known, or accepted, to have been founded by an individual named Máel Anfaid, however little is known about him now.

in 747, there is only one other certain notice of any abbot of Dairinis in the period to 900, the obit of Daniel ua hAithmit.²⁰ *AFM sa* 819 (? = 822) notes the death of *Flann Dairinsi*, whom O'Dwyer suggests may have been Flann mac Duib Thuinne, listed in *óentu Máel Ruain*, and this may be intended to indicate that Flann was also abbot of Dairinis. There is ample scope, therefore, that there was an individual named Máel Anfaid who was a contemporary of Máel Ruain. There is a reference to Máel Anfaid in *Félire Óengusso*, however, which states merely *Mael-anfaid ainm remain* – 'Máel Anfaid, a name pre-eminent' – but which has been glossed that he was abbot of Dairinis. This reference with its glosses states only 'Máel Anfaid, i.e. abbot of Dairinis, i.e. at Mochuta's Lismore, where a great river flows into the sea'.²¹ If the Máel Anfaid referred to in *FO* is the same individual as the Máel Anfaid mentioned in *óentu Máel Ruain*, then it would indicate his death had occurred prior to 803.²² The Máel Anfaid listed in the *óentu Máel Ruain* may possibly, therefore, have been abbot of Dairinis from c. 782 (following the death of Daniel ua hAithmit) to sometime before 803 (allowing his commemoration in *FO*).

The next two individuals named in the *óentu* are Flann son of Fairchellach and Flann son of Dub Thuinne, both of whom belonged to Daire Eidneach and which subsequently became known as Daire na bFlann due to their renown. Nothing is otherwise known of Flann son of Dub Thuinne,²³ but Flann son of Fairchellach became abbot of Lismore in 814 and is called abbot of Lismore, Emly and Cork in his obit in *AI* in 825. Nothing is known about Flannán mac Tairdelbaigh other than the gloss linking him with Cell dá Lúa in the *óentu*.²⁴ Kenney suggested that 'it appears

²⁰ *AFM sa* 777 (? = 782).

²¹ *Mael anfaid .i. ab Dairinnsi .i. ic Lis mór mo Chuta ata Dairinis, ubi abann more in mare exiit.* Stokes, *FO*, Notes, 54.

²² Haggart, 'The date of composition of the *Félire Óengusso*', *Ériu*, forthcoming.

²³ O'Dwyer, reasonably, suggests that he may have been the Flann mac Duibchonna who appears in *Mon. Tall.* and that he was the *Flann Dairinsi* whose obit is recorded in *AFM sa* 819, *Céili Dé*, 38. Flann mac Duib Thuinne in *óentu Máel Ruain* is called Flann mac Duib Chonna in the poem now referred to as '*óentu Feidlimthe*'.

²⁴ The two twelfth century *Vitae Sancti Flannani* relate the life of the founder of Killaloe, in Co. Clare, and have been examined by Donnchadh Ó Corráin ('Foreign connections and domestic politics: Killaloe and the Uí Briain in twelfth-century hagiography', in D. Whitelock *et al.*, *Ireland in Medieval Europe*, 213-31). While he notes that 'It can be assumed that the dossier of Flannán contains no historical material on the saint himself but rather is a product of

probable that the church was founded in the sixth century and that Flannán flourished in the seventh', but concedes that the 'chronological *data* are slight and fictitious'.²⁵ O'Dwyer, however, points out the entry in *AI*, *sa* 778, that notes *Quies Flannáin Cille Aird*, a church he identifies as Ibricken, Co. Clare,²⁶ and although he does not claim this to be the Flannán of the *óentu*, he does consider it to be 'very enticing'.²⁷

The next name listed in the *óentu* was that of Máel Díthruib, anchorite of Terryglass. The text now known as *Monastery of Tallaght* was largely compiled during his lifetime (above pp. 81-2) and it is around his discourses with Máel Ruain that the anecdotal nature of the text essentially revolves. His obit is recorded in *AFM sa* 840 (? = 841). Dimmán, the anchorite of Ara, in the barony of Uaithne, Co. Tipperary, died in 811;²⁸ Dalbach of Cúl Collainge, Co. Cork, died in 800 (*AI*), but nothing beyond these obituary notices is known of these individuals. Next in the list is Feidlimid himself, followed by Diarmait ua Áeda Roin, founder of Dísert Diarmata in 812 (*AI*), and described as 'anchorite and teacher of religion for all Ireland' at his death in 825.²⁹ The penultimate name in the *óentu*, although omitted by O'Dwyer in his discussion, was that of Eóchaid, bishop of Tallaght, who died in 812. Again, little is known about him, but the highly effective blockade of Taitiu by the community of Tallaght recorded in 811, in retaliation for the violation of the *termon* of Tallaght,³⁰

ecclesiastical and secular legend-building', he evidently believed Flannán's father was Tairdelbach Ua Briain (d. 1086). Consequently, he considers 'It is interesting to note that our *Vitae*, despite or in ignorance of the chronological impossibility, bring Flannán into contact with Feidlimid' (227). He does not refer to *óentu Máel Ruain*, however, which indicates that Flannán mac Tairdelbaig lived before the eleventh century. Gwynn and Hadcock instead suggest an identification of Flannán, the founding saint of Killaloe, with the Flannán of Cill Ard who died in 778 (*AI* 778.1: *Quies Flannáin Cille Aird*), *Medieval Religious Houses*, 86. Ó Corráin discusses the etymology provided in the later *vita* for the name of an associate of Flannán called Bracanus as part of his consideration of the origins of the scribe. Could this Bracanus be the same individual as the Brocán referred to in the '*óentu Feidlimthe*'?

²⁵ Kenney, *Sources*, 404.

²⁶ O'Dwyer, *Céli Dé*, 39.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ O'Dwyer, *ibid.*, 40, notes that 'Maelruain learned certain prayer patterns from a nun in Coill Uaithne'

²⁹ *AU* 825.2 – *Diarmait hue Aedha Roin, anchorita 7 religionis doctor totius Hibernie, obiit.*

³⁰ *AU* 811.2 – *Derbaid aige Dia Sathairnn oinigh Tailten connarecht ech na carpat la Aedh m. Neill, id est muinnter Tamlachta dod-rorbai iar sarugad termainn Tamlachtae Maele Ruain du U Neill, 7 postea familiae Tamlachtae multa munera reddita sunt.*

'The fair of Taitiu was prevented from being held on Saturday under the aegis of Áed son of Niall, neither horse nor chariot arriving there. It was the community of Tallaght who caused the

would have taken place during his tenure as bishop. Finally listed is Óengus ua Óibleáin, the man to whom *Féilire Óengusso* is attributed, the Preface to which provides virtually all that is known about him. From the tradition contained within the Preface, Óengus was brought up in Cluain Eidneach and subsequently connected with the communities of Cúl Bennchuir and Tallaght itself, before returning to Cluain Eidneach where he died. While the year of his death is unknown, he is commemorated in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* under 11 March and a poem attached to the Preface of *FO* states he died on a Friday, which led Stokes to suggest that he died in 819, 824 or 830.³¹

Discounting Feidlimid for the moment, the eleven others named with Máel Ruain in the *óentu* were clearly churchmen. With the possible, if unlikely, exception of Máel Anfaid, due to the lack of certainty of identification from his glossed attribution to have been the Máel Anfaid who founded Dairinis, the others listed in the *óentu*, including Feidlimid, were contemporary with Máel Ruain. The number of individuals listed in the *óentu* must surely be significant. Just as an abbot with twelve monks was considered the ideal for a monastic community, in emulation of Christ and his twelve disciples, here Máel Ruain is listed with twelve adherents. The twelve listed, were presumably, therefore, those held to be the most closely connected with his work. If so, this would indicate that (1) Máel Anfaid, too, was a contemporary of Máel Ruain and not, therefore, the founder of Dairinis and (2) Feidlimid himself was an ecclesiastic. This fact, indeed, is indicated by the reference in Feidlimid's obit that he was a scribe and anchorite and the best of the Gael, despite the doubts expressed in this case by O'Dwyer in regard 'to the value one must place on annalistic praises such as scribe and anchorite. Were they merely stereotyped phrases that had to be put in with the obit? Or had he intimidated even the news media!'³²

boycott after the Uí Néill had violated the sanctuary of Tallaght of Máel Ruain; and many gifts were subsequently made to the community of Tallaght'.

³¹ Stokes, *FO*, xxvi.

³² O'Dwyer, *Céli Dé*, 43.

Despite Byrne's earlier belief that 'we do not know ...[what Feidlimid's] earlier clerical connections may have been',³³ his later work indirectly helped to provide some important indications towards Feidlimid's ecclesiastical background when he examined the history of Daire na bhFlann.³⁴ He pointed out that the Life of Rúadán of Lorrha stated that Daire Eidneach subsequently became known as Daire na bhFlann because of the influence of Flann Find, son of Foirchellach, and Flann, son of Dub Thuinne. Both of these individuals, as already seen, are listed in *óentu Máel Ruain*. Independently, Nollaig Ó Muraíle, in an article published in the same year as that of Byrne,³⁵ also noted this fact and drew attention to the significance in this respect of the stanzas in the Book of Leinster which are now known as '*óentu Feidlimthe*'.³⁶ The fifth stanza of this *óentu* appears to indicate the connection between five of those named in *óentu Máel Ruain*:

Fland mc. Fairchellaig ro fess
Fland m. Duib Chonna ra chness
Flannan is Mael Díthruib dil
is Feidlimid mac Crimthain.

The eighth and ninth stanzas relate this connection to have been the monastery of Daire Eidneach. They state:

Nobitís ní sáeb int sreth
maroen i nDaire Eidnech
ic denam chrabuid cen gus
ic crossigill i corgus.

³³ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*. 213.

³⁴ F.J. Byrne, 'Derrynavlan: The Historical Context', *JRSAI* 110 (1980), 116-26.

³⁵ Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 'Doire na bhFlann alias Doire Eidhneach: An historical and onomastic study', *Studia Hibernica* 20 (1980), 111-40.

³⁶ The Book of Leinster, vol. 6 (ed. Anne O'Sullivan), 1708. For a translation of the stanzas themselves, see Kathleen Hughes, 'The distribution of Irish *scriptoria*', 263. See also Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 226-7, who cites Hughes' translation of these stanzas as evidence 'that Feidlimid was a powerful champion of the Céli Dé' (226), but does not appear to recognise that the stanzas indicate that Feidlimid was himself a member of the community of Daire Eidneach.

*Do Daire Eidnech co becht
tecait do denam a fert
co toraig a techta thair
arin licc i Tamlachtain.*

‘They used to be together in Daire Ednech, no false order, practising devotion without extravagance, at cross vigil in Lent.’

‘They come precisely to Daire Ednech to work their miracles, until their journeying arrives in the east, on the flagstone in Tallaght.’³⁷

Feidlimid, clearly, was firmly associated with Daire Eidneach and it is very likely, therefore, that he emerged from this monastery as scribe and anchorite, to take the kingship in 820.

It would appear, however, that there was also some tradition of a connection between Feidlimid and Tallaght. Certainly those others listed in *óentu Máel Ruain* can be seen to have had associations with Tallaght or churches closely associated with Tallaght, yet the criterion for inclusion in the *óentu* cannot merely be a connection with Tallaght. Airfhinnán, Máel Ruain’s successor at Tallaght – perhaps even chosen to be his successor by Máel Ruain himself – and who died in 803,³⁸ is not listed; nor was Áedán, abbot of Tallaght, who died in 825;³⁹ nor, again, was Échtgus, *princeps Tamlachtae*, who died in 827.⁴⁰ These three men all died within the period covered by the range of obits of those who are listed – 800x47 – and were all heads of Tallaght, but none are included in the *óentu Máel Ruain*. Only twelve individuals, it would appear, *could* be included and, while the question of what could have been considered the necessary criteria for inclusion can be no more than conjectured, it is nevertheless clear that all those who were included, Feidlimid no less than the others, could not only be considered to be *céli Dé*, but among the foremost of the *céli Dé*, those twelve

³⁷ Translation from Hughes, ‘The distribution of Irish *scriptoria*’, 263.

³⁸ AU 803.1: *Airfinnan, abbas Tamhlachtae Mael Ruain, pausauit in pace.*

³⁹ AU 825.3: *Aedan, abbas Tamhlachtae, [moritur].*

⁴⁰ AU 827.1: *Echtgus, prinnceps Tamlachtae, dormiuit.*

individuals it was considered most appropriate to be named as 'at one' with Máel Ruain.

That Feidlimid himself should have been a *céle Dé* should not necessarily be seen as surprising: in the period from c. 786-944, six of the kings of Cashel were abbots or bishops *before* becoming king, and presumably remained so thereafter, while there are also examples of lesser kings who were either abbots or bishops beforehand.⁴¹ This situation, the opposite of royal appropriation of clerical office, was unique to Munster.⁴² Indeed, Thomas Clancy has suggested⁴³ that their high clerical office may have been the justification of their kingship, since they did not all belong to the main royal lines⁴⁴ and that, further, the symbol of their royal office, at least during the ninth century, appears to have been the crozier.⁴⁵

Feidlimid himself, however, was neither abbot nor bishop when he became king of Cashel in 820 and so does not conform entirely with this criterion; however, if

⁴¹ The ecclesiastic kings of Cashel were: Ólchobur mac Flaind (c. 786-796/7), abbot of Inis Cathaig; Feidlimid himself; Ólchobur mac Cinaeda (848-51), abbot of Emly; Cenn Faclad úa Mugthigirn (861-72), abbot of Emly; Cormac mac Cuilennáin (901-8), bishop (perhaps, as T.O. Clancy has suggested to me, of Inis Cathaig); Flaithbertach mac Inmainén (c. 908-c. 940, d. 944). Other cleric kings in Munster were: Fogartach mac Suibne, 'sage of philosophy and theology', king of Ciarraige (d. 908); Cormac mac Mothlai, bishop and *secnap* of Lismore, abbot of Cell Mo-Laisse, king of Deisi (d. 920); Fínnechta mac Loegaire, chief *ainmchara* of Ireland, king of Clarraige Luachra (d. 929); Rebachán mac Mothlai, abbot of Tuaim Gréine and king of Dál Cais (d. 934).

⁴² See Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, chs 9 and 10.

⁴³ In a personal communication.

⁴⁴ Ólchobur mac Flaind belonged to the Uí Fidgeinte who never otherwise provided a king of Munster. Ólchobur mac Cinaeda belonged to the Eoganacht Locha Léin who, although providing a king in the person of Máel Duin mac Áeda in 786, were not normally in the frame for the kingship of Munster. Cenn Faclad belonged to the Eoganacht Airthir Cliach, a distant branch of the main royal line. Cormac mac Cuilennáin was described as an outsider of base-birth in *Cath Belaich Mugna*, Radner, *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland sa 908*, p. 153.

⁴⁵ Byrne drew attention to the fact that in the *Vita Tripartita* it was stated that twenty-seven kings of Cashel up to and including Cenn nGécán (d. 902), who was known not to have been a cleric, had ruled 'under a crozier', a statement that he found 'obscure' (*Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 190). Similarly, the stanza recorded in *AU* and *AFM* relating Feidlimid's defeat at the hands of Niall mac Áeda in 841, states:

*Bachall Feidhlimidh fighligh
fo-racbadh isna draighnibh
dos-fuc Niall co nert n-atha
a cert in catha claidhmigh*

The crozier of vigil-keeping Feidlimid
was abandoned in the bushes
Niall, mighty in battle, took it
by right of victory in battle with swords.

This has led to the natural, but mistaken, assumption that Feidlimid had been the bishop of Cashel as well as king. Clancy's suggestion that the crozier was the Munster royal insignia at this time would therefore make sense of otherwise puzzling statements. It would also add a deeper significance to the claim by Clonmacnoise that Feidlimid died as a result of a crozier thrust from St. Ciarán.

the understanding that inclusion in the *óentu Máel Ruain* indicates that Feidlimid was considered to be among the foremost of the *céli Dé* is correct, then these were his clerical credentials. Unlike the other cleric-kings of Munster, however, Feidlimid belonged to a line of the Eoganacht Chaisil which periodically provided kings of Munster,⁴⁶ although, prior to Feidlimid, the last incumbent it had provided had been Cormac, son of Ailill, who had died in 713. While Feidlimid was, therefore, perhaps acceptable because of his lineage, the fact that his lineage had not provided a king for more than a century strongly indicates that it was his ecclesiastical connections which were the more important.⁴⁷ Since he was neither abbot nor bishop, these ecclesiastical connections are most readily explained as those indicated by his inclusion in the *óentu Máel Ruain*, that is that Feidlimid himself was a *céle Dé*.

While the annalistic record of Feidlimid's actions between 820-41 is not so 'tantalisingly scanty' as Byrne suggested, his description, in regard to detail, is frustratingly appropriate. The first recorded action of his reign, the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* jointly with Artrí, son of Conchobar, is understandable enough, both in his role as king and as *céle Dé*. While the record of the promulgation of the Laws of Patrick, of Ciarán, of Ailbe and of Dar-Í are concentrated in the late-eighth and mid-ninth centuries and thus correspond to the period of greatest influence of the *céli Dé*, the annalistic records of the promulgation of these laws are most usually noted jointly between the provincial ruler and the relevant ecclesiastic.

The circumstances behind the burning of Gallen, in the kingdom of Delbna Bethra, the same year, however, and the harrying throughout Delbna Bethra itself three years later are unknown. Whether or not the lands of Clonmacnoise were included in this harrying of Delbna Bethra is equally uncertain. Although the assumption may be implicit, the specific mention of the burning of its *termon* alongside the harrying of the kingdom in 833 prompts the impression that

⁴⁶ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 292.

⁴⁷ Although Feidlimid's dynasty had intermittently provided kings of Munster, he, personally, in terms of lineage, could barely have been acceptable: neither his father nor his grandfather had been king, emphasizing the fact that it was his ecclesiastical connections which were the more important.

Clonmacnoise itself was untouched in 826. The monastery at Gallen had reputedly been founded by St. Canoc (Mochonoc) with an early school of some repute founded by emigrant Welsh monks.⁴⁸ Why this should have been a target for Feidlimid is unknown – nothing more is known of the foundation before the twelfth century, which may, perhaps, indicate its relative unimportance⁴⁹ and this complete lack of knowledge prevents any valid comment. Whatever may have been Feidlimid's motivation, it is not now possible even to hazard a guess at his purpose.

Following the battle of Leth Cam in 827, there was a meeting between Feidlimid and Conchobar mac Donnchada, king of Tara. Who instigated the meeting is unrecorded, but the heavy swing in the balance of power towards the Cenél nEógain threatened the interests of both kings. CS does not record this royal meeting, but following its account of Leth Cam it notes, uniquely, that 'The *secnapóite* of Clonmacnoise was given to Munstermen, which was never done before'.⁵⁰ What was this intended to mean? The position of *secnap* may only relatively recently have become one of significance and, if so, there could have been no more than half a dozen holders of the office and very likely fewer. Although there is no annalistic record of any *secnap* of Clonmacnoise, it is difficult to see how the appointment of a Munsterman should have been remarkable, with the note that this had never been done before. However, the statement concerns not the allocation of *secnap* to an individual, but 'to the Munstermen' (*do Muimnechaibh*). Does this entry convey the situation whereby the position of *secnap* – the designated abbatial successor – in Clonmacnoise was to have become an acknowledged monopoly within the hands of Munstermen? This would explain the comment that this had never been done before – not that the position was held by an individual Munsterman, but that the position was to be the exclusive preserve of Munstermen. The notice of this arrangement, in a foundation so firmly under the sphere of influence and patronage of the kings of Tara

⁴⁸ Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, 176.

⁴⁹ Despite the fact that there is no annalistic record of Gallen at this time, its physical remains would, however, appear to indicate that it was not necessarily as insignificant as this lack would suggest.

⁵⁰ CS 827: *Secnopote Cluana muc Nois do tabairt do Muinnechaibh na raba riam.*

and so soon after the meeting of 827, certainly invokes the impression that the arrangement came about as a direct consequence of this meeting. The new circumstances of Niall mac Áeda's position in the north following the subjection of the Airgialla and the Ulaid, the former on a permanent basis, more directly threatened Conchobar. Since the death of Muirgius, son of Tomaltach, in 815, the Connachta had largely fragmented with the resulting dissipation of their military power and Clonmacnoise, the largest ecclesiastical foundation in Ireland at this time, had subsequently been drawn more heavily under the influence of the kings of Tara. Conchobar's position in the late 820s was relatively weak and he may, therefore, have sought an alliance with Feidlimid, one of the terms conceded being that 'the *secnapóite* of Clonmacnoise was given to the Munstermen.'

If it is accepted both that the *secnapóite* of Clonmacnoise was to have become the preserve of Munstermen and demanded by Feidlimid as part of the agreement with Conchobar following the change in political circumstances with Niall's decisive victory, then it is more likely to have been a concession sought by Feidlimid *céle Dé* rather than Feidlimid *rí Muman*. Nevertheless, what he appears to have sought was nothing less than a Munster monopoly in one of the highest offices in the greatest foundation in Ireland. If the assumption that this was sought by Feidlimid *céle Dé*, rather than Feidlimid *rí Muman*, is correct, then it would evidently indicate that Feidlimid was deeply concerned with matters in Clonmacnoise, considering it to be lacking in some regard, and took steps to remedy the deficiency by ensuring that there would always be a Munster-trained – hence, he would presumably consider, more suitable – appointee as *secnap*.

This appointment would appear to have some bearing on the reasons behind Feidlimid's clearly severe assault on Clonmacnoise in 833. Both *CS* and *AFM* record the drowning of the *secnap* of Clonmacnoise, Flann son of Flaithbertach of the Munster dynasty of the Uí Forga, by Cathal son of Ailill, king of the Uí Maine. In both sources the entry is apparently linked with a defeat of Feidlimid by Cathal, son of

Ailill, in the plain of Mag nAí. However, there is clearly a problem of chronology: CS records these events in 823, while *AFM* does so under 834.

Following notices of the promulgation of *Lex Patricii* over Munster by Feidlimid and Artrí son of Conchobar and the resignation of Rónán, abbot of Clonmacnoise, from the abbacy and before an entry relating the burning of Bennchair Mór by Vikings – all correctly placed in 823⁵¹ – CS notes:

Saruccad Cluana muc Nois do Cathal mac Aililla, Rí H. Maine, for secnabad Muman .i. Flann mac Flaithbertaig, do Uib Forga, contard isin Sinainn contorcair. Dliged .uii. cell ind. Maidm ria Cathal mac Oililla for Fedlimid mac Crimthain a Maig Hí ubi multi ceciderunt:-

Robtar trena Connachta a Maigh Ní [sic]

Nibdar fanna ria Fedlimid

‘The profanation of Clonmacnoise by Cathal, son of Ailill, king of the Uí Maine, against the Munster *secnap*, i.e. Flann, son of Flaithbertach of the Uí Forba, whom he threw into the Shannon, so that he was drowned. Seven churches were adjudged in atonement. A victory by Cathal, son of Ailill, over Feidlimid, son of Crimthainn, in Mag nAí, in which many fell:-

Strong were the Connachta in Mag nAí,

They were not weak against Feidlimid.’

This can be compared with the entry in *AFM sa* 834:

Sárucchadh Cluana mic Nóis do Cathal, mac Ailella, tigherna Ua Maine, for Fhlann, mac Flaithbhertaigh, dUibh Forggo, prior a Múmhain, con do tard isin Sionainn, co ndorchair. Dlighedh uii. Ceall do Chiarán 7 mainchine mór. Maidhm ria cCathal, mac Ailealla, for Fedhlimidh, mac Criomhthainn, ri Caisil, hi Maigh ní, bhail in ro marbhait sochaidhe, conadh dó ro ráidheadh:

Roptar trén Connachta, hi Maigh ní niptar fanna,

Abradh nech re Feidhlimidh, cid dia ttá loch na calla.

⁵¹ Witnessed by the entries under 823.5, 823.6 and 823.8 in *AU*.

‘The profanation of Clonmacnoise by Cathal, son of Ailill, lord of the Uí Maine, against Flann, son of Flaithbertach of the Uí Forba, the Munster prior, whom he threw into the Shannon, so that he was drowned. Seven churches were adjudged in atonement for Ciarán, and a great consideration. A victory by Cathal, son of Ailill, over Feidlimid, son of Crimthainn, in Mag nAí, in which many fell and of which it was said:-

Strong were the Connachta, in Mag nAí they were not weak,
Let anyone ask of Feidlimid, why the loch of Shouting is [named].’

Clearly, these two entries, again, derive from a common source. The entry in *CS*, normally a reliable witness in terms of its chronology, is clearly misplaced, while that in *AFM* is included in a series of entries which, from the witness of *AU*, belong solidly to 835. This may be thought to be fairly conclusive, but the very fact that the paired entry in both *MSS* evidently originates from a common source, yet has been misplaced in an otherwise reliable record, ought to give pause before any acceptance of its position in a witness which is generally less certain chronologically. Another problem is the attribution of both the drowning of the *secnap* of Clonmacnoise and the defeat of Feidlimid to Cathal son of Ailill of the Uí Maine. This is clearly mistaken. Cathal son of Ailill was king of the Uí Fiachrach, not the Uí Maine, and his death is recorded in *AU* in 816.⁵² The second incident, Feidlimid’s defeat, may shed some light on this problem, however, as *AU* notes that, in 837, Cathal son of Muirgius, king of Connacht, defeated the Munstermen.⁵³ The attribution of Cathal son of Ailill, therefore, appears, in this respect, to have been an error for Cathal son of Muirgius and Feidlimid’s defeat in Mag nAí properly belongs to 837.⁵⁴ Cathal son of Muirgius belonged to the Uí Briúin Aí, however, not the Uí Maine, although Feidlimid is recorded plundering the Cené Cairpre Cruim of the Uí Maine in 837, during or following the course of which he was defeated by Cathal, and this may account for the confused attribution of his defeat at their hands. Given that Feidlimid’s defeat by the

⁵² *AU* 816.9: *Mors Cathail m. Ailillo regis nepotum Fiachrach.*

⁵³ *AU* 837.8: *Roiniudh for Muimnechu re Catal m. Murgusso.*

⁵⁴ See also Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 222.

Connachta appears to have occurred in 837, it could be considered that this may indicate that Flann's drowning also occurred in that year; however, the source of the account in *CS* and *AFM* is clearly confused and there is nothing, other than that they are listed consecutively in both *CS* and *AFM* and that both events are attributed, wrongly, to Cathal son of Ailill, to connect them. It can be accepted as reasonably certain that Feidlimid's defeat in Mag nAí was at the hands of Cathal son of Muirgius in 837 – whether Flann was, therefore, also drowned by Cathal son of Muirgius or whether he was indeed drowned by the Uí Maine is not so clear, however, and neither is the year in which his drowning occurred.

If the note in *CS*, that the *secnapóite* of Clonmacnoise was given to the Munstermen, is correctly placed under 827, then it is tempting to think that the drowning of Flann son of Flaithbertach properly belongs to 833 and that this triggered Feidlimid's vicious assault on Clonmacnoise in that year. It could be conjectured that the Uí Maine of Connacht had vested interests in neighbouring Clonmacnoise which could well have been affected by the prospective monopoly of a Munster *secnapóite* established in or soon after 827. It could be further conjectured, therefore, that when Niall mac Áeda succeeded Conchobar as king of Tara in 833, he may well have encouraged the Uí Maine to move against Flann, personifying Munster interests in Clonmacnoise. It could also be speculated that the removal, if not necessarily the drowning, of Flann may also have been supported by the *muinntir* of Clonmacnoise, which would account for the ferocity of Feidlimid's assault and the recorded execution of some, at least, of the community.

If, however, as an alternative to such speculation, it is understood that the list of entries in *AFM*, within which notice of Flann's drowning is found, indicates that it, too, occurred in 835, then, clearly, this cannot have provoked Feidlimid's assault in 833. Other than wariness induced by the demonstrable confusion in the entry for 823 in *CS* (see above, p. 233, n. 11), there appears no good reason to consider that, in an otherwise reliable source, the entry concerning the *secnapóite* of Clonmacnoise is anything other than correctly placed under 827. Consequently, if it is considered, from

its context in *AFM*, that Flann's drowning did indeed occur in 835, then we are left with the circumstance that Feidlimid's severe assault on Clonmacnoise in 833 occurred at a time when a Munsterman who, presumably, was his own appointee was *sechnap* there. While clearly not impossible, this seems unlikely, unless it is considered that Feidlimid's assault was the result of the community rejecting Flann's authority – although this authority would have been subordinate to that of the abbot and there is no indication of such motivation in any of the accounts. To further complicate matters, *AU* notes the death of Cumuscach, son of Óengus, *sechnap* of Clonmacnoise in 835.⁵⁵ Presumably he was Flann's successor. While the record of Cumuscach's death should not affect any consideration of the date of Flann's death, for it is possible he could have held the *sechnapóite* of Clonmacnoise for only a few months before he died, it is again tempting to speculate that, on the balance of probability, Flann was drowned in 833 and that this was the spur to Feidlimid's actions against Clonmacnoise. Clearly, however, the source evidence relating these actions is far from complete and, where evidence does survive, is certainly confused. This makes for an extremely uncertain outcome when trying to determine what provoked the burning of Clonmacnoise and the execution of many of its community by Feidlimid in 833 and, as a result, any attempt to uncover his motivation, inevitably, will be largely speculative.

But why should Feidlimid have such an evident concern with Clonmacnoise? Byrne noted that, at this 'most critical era in Irish history, when devastating Viking raids were succeeded by permanent base-camps and settlements, Feidlimid never once devoted his arms to attacking these heathen foreigners.' This is perfectly true and appears surprising, given Feidlimid's reputation and ability in both warfare and politics. It is clear, too, that Feidlimid was hardly reticent in taking up arms and so his apparent lack of action against these heathen invaders, especially once they had begun to establish settlements which, in contrast to the earlier highly mobile hit-and-run assaults on the Irish, resulted in the Scandinavians themselves becoming vulnerable to assault through these bases. This evident lack certainly requires some attempt at

⁵⁵ *AU* 835.4: *Cumuscach m. Oengusa, sechnap Cluana Moccu Nois, moritur.*

understanding. The question of Feidlimid's perception of the Vikings may, again, be more readily understood in relation to his background as Feidlimid *céle Dé* than to his position as Feidlimid *rí Muman*: the Old Testament Book of Isaiah provided an explicit precedent of such punishment for those who were failing in their Christian duties.⁵⁶ This scriptural illustration is reflected in the early eleventh-century homily of Wulfstan, archbishop of York, when the Danes ravaged Æthelred's England at will. For Wulfstan the remedy was clear:

how can greater shame befall men through God's anger than often does us for our own deserts?...the English have been for a long time now completely defeated and too greatly disheartened through God's anger; and the pirates so strong with God's consent that often in battle one puts to flight ten, and sometimes less, and sometimes more, all because of our sins...and therefore it is very necessary for us to take thought for ourselves and to intercede eagerly with God himself. Let us do as is necessary for us, turn to the right and in some measure leave wrong-doing, and atone very zealously for what we have done amiss; and let us love God and follow God's laws and perform very diligently what we promised when we received baptism, or those who were our advocates at our baptism; and let us order our words and our deeds rightly, and eagerly cleanse our thoughts, and keep carefully oath and pledge, and have some loyalty between us without deceit. Let us often consider the great Judgement to which we all must come, and save ourselves from the surging fire of hell torment, and earn for ourselves the glories and the joys which God has prepared for those who do his will in the world.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Isaiah 1.4 outlines the cause of divine displeasure: 'Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel into anger, they are gone away backward'. 'Oh Assyrian,' God told Isaiah (10.5) 'the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.' 'I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.' (Isaiah 10.6)

⁵⁷ Dorothy Whitelock (ed.) *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, Exeter, 1976; for a translation of Wulfstan's text, see Dorothy Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, London, 1955, no. 240, 855-9.

For Feidlimid *céle Dé*, too, the scriptural illustration must have been clear and if, as Alex Woolf has recently suggested,⁵⁸ he consequently perceived the Vikings as a scourge sent from God, then this may help to explain his actions in regard to particular churches. Just as did Wulfstan in the early eleventh century, Feidlimid may have believed that only by rectifying the perceived failings of his own people could the Vikings be removed from the country. While Feidlimid *céle Dé* may thus have understood the root cause of the problem, Feidlimid *rí Muman* had the political will and the military resources to attempt its resolution.

It may be more appropriate, therefore, to consider Feidlimid's actions in regard to Clonmacnoise and other churches, and his apparent lack of action in regard to the Vikings from the perspective, of his understanding as a *céle Dé*. If he did perceive the Vikings as a scourge sent from God – and he would certainly have been familiar with the scriptural precedent – then he would have understood that the way to remove this scourge was not to fight the Vikings themselves, but to remedy that which was displeasing to God. The fact that the first recorded raid occurred in 794, within two years of Máel Ruain's death, may well, as Woolf suggests, have reinforced this belief in Feidlimid's mind. As already noted, Feidlimid was listed as one of the twelve individuals who constituted the *óentu Máel Ruain*. If the understanding advocated above – that these individuals were considered (by the compiler of the *óentu* at least) the twelve most in accord with the practices and teaching of Máel Ruain – is correct, then Feidlimid would surely have accepted that Máel Ruain reflected the ideal in asceticism. That others had perhaps lapsed from his example may have been perceived to have provoked this scourge from God – the presence of the Vikings after all had to be accounted for. Thomas Clancy has suggested that the Rechtgnia mentioned in the '*óentu Feidlimthe*' was Rechtgnia, abbot of Clonmacnoise (d. 785).⁵⁹ If this is correct, then this abbot of Clonmacnoise may once have been thought of as numbering among the innermost band of *céli Dé*, but the community

⁵⁸ Conference paper, Edinburgh, 2001. I am grateful to Dr Woolf for providing me with a draft copy of his paper.

⁵⁹ In a personal communication.

itself had subsequently become detached. This may have been perceived by Feidlimid as something akin to apostasy by the *muinntir* of Clonmacnoise. Armagh, with its claims to metropolitan jurisdiction, had had no fewer than four rivals contesting the abbacy in 793. While the first Viking raid was recorded in 794, the Viking presence only became significant by the 830s: clearly, therefore, his perception must have been that there was a progressive failure of moral leadership at the top. While God's displeasure with the Irish was therefore becoming increasingly apparent, evidenced by the fact that the Vikings were now over-wintering in Ireland, then ever more severe remedies would be required to bring the Irish back into God's favour. Clonmacnoise and Armagh, as the two greatest churches in Ireland, were clearly in most need of attention. While his recorded actions would show that his concerns regarding Armagh were no less acute, taking action when he could, it was effectively beyond the range of Feidlimid's active intervention. The focus of his initial concentration, then, lay in the region of Delbna Bethra.

This projection for the motivation for Feidlimid's actions is founded upon an understanding that the *óentu Máel Ruain* reflected the general acceptance among contemporaries that the listed individuals were those most closely 'at one' with Máel Ruain and no mere whimsy of the compiler. It is, inevitably, largely conjecture, but, nonetheless, may go some way to help provide an understanding of 'one of the most enigmatic figures in Irish history.' Something, clearly, provided a powerful motivation for Feidlimid's actions towards these churches.⁶⁰

While Feidlimid had certainly acted decisively in his raid on Clonmacnoise in 833, the annals are silent on his activities for some years afterwards, which may suggest that his immediate objectives had been achieved. Following his succession as king of Tara, however, Niall mac Áeda spent much of his time campaigning in

⁶⁰ Even if this line of reasoning is accepted, it may still appear odd that Feidlimid did not seek to oppose the Vikings by force of arms at least until his ecclesiastic 'policy' took effect. However, if the understanding that Feidlimid believed the Vikings to have been a scourge sent from God is an accurate assessment, then presumably it was accepted that those who bore the brunt of the assault must have been ungodly – they would, after all, be undergoing such a scourge for a reason. Secondly, it may have been perceived that to seek to oppose the instruments of divine will would be (a) fruitless and (b) no less than opposing divine will itself.

Leinster, where he had established Bran, son of Faelán, as king by the turn of 835.⁶¹ When Feidlimid next receives annalistic attention, in 836, he seized Forannán, abbot of Armagh and the 'congregation of Patrick' (*samadh Patraic*) in Kildare (see above, p. 225). What exactly Forannán and the congregation of Patrick were doing in the oratory of Kildare is not recorded, but very likely it implies some attempt to gain control of Kildare, with Forannán attempting to impose ecclesiastical domination in Leinster just as Niall had done politically the year before. Eógan Mainistrech had been succeeded as abbot of Armagh, it would appear, by Diarmait ua Tigernaig, who may perhaps have been the choice of the community themselves, but he had been displaced by Forannán in 835. It can be surmised, therefore, that Forannán may also have been dependent upon Niall mac Áeda, now king of Tara, hence his presence in Kildare the following year. Consequently, opposition from Feidlimid must surely have been expected, as, indeed, did transpire, but it had evidently been considered that Forannán and the congregation of Armagh would have been safe enough in Leinster, an indication of the relative strength of Niall's position in the province 833x36.

In 838, there was a meeting between Feidlimid and Niall mac Áeda at Cluain Conaire. *AU* and *AFM* (*sa* 837) relate only the 'great royal meeting', *CS* not even that. *AI*, however, while placing the meeting at Clonfert, notes that 'Niall son of Áed, king of Tara, submitted to Feidlimid, son of Crimthann, so that Feidlimid became full king of Ireland that day' (*corbo lánri Hérend Fédlimid in lá sein*). The Munster provenance of *AI* led Byrne to suggest that 'the statement that the high-king of Tara submitted to him speaks more for the patriotism of the Munster annalist than for his historical veracity.'⁶² There is no indication of the purpose of the meeting, nor of any event which may have provoked it, nor of who instigated it, but it would appear that the terms of the resultant agreement, whatever they may have been, heavily favoured

⁶¹ *AU* 835.1: *Slogadh la Niall co lLaighniu coro digestar ri foraibh, .i. Bran m. Faelan.*

⁶² Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 225. *AClon*, however, notes that following the meeting 'Felym mcCriowhayne went all over Ireland, and was like to depose the king and take the kingdome to himself' (*sa* 835). Does this report suggest a circuit of Leth Cuinn by Feidlimid to take hostages following this meeting? Or is it perhaps more likely to have been a misplaced report of the known taking of hostages by Feidlimid in 840?

Feidlimid, a fact which the Munster annalist interpreted as submission. It is therefore intriguing that, under the entries for the following year, *AU* reported 'A change of abbots in Ard Macha, i.e. Diarmait <grandson of Tigernach>, instead of Forannán <from Ráith Meic Malais>' (*AU* 839.8: *Coemchloadh abbad i nArdd Machae, .i. Dermait h. Tigernaigh i ndon Forindain o Rath Mc Maluis*). If Forannán was indeed Niall's appointee, could the demand for his subsequent removal from the abbacy of Armagh have been prominent in Feidlimid's terms?

In 840 Feidlimid invaded Mide and Brega and halted at Tara. As is usual, no pretext is given, but by the next mention of an abbot of Armagh, in 845, it must be significant that it is again Forannán who is abbot.⁶³ That Forannán's title of abbot was not merely courtesy, and Diarmait was not abbot during this period, is apparent from the entry in *AU* (848.8), after Niall's drowning in the Calann, when Diarmait again was appointed abbot.⁶⁴ There is no notice, therefore, of when Forannán replaced Diarmait as abbot 839x45. Was it perhaps the case that Niall reneged on any agreement soon after it was made, removed Diarmait and re-appointed his nominee, Forannán, that provoked Feidlimid's invasion of Mide and Brega and occupation of Tara? This is inevitably conjectural, but something, clearly, must have provoked Feidlimid's actions. As Byrne noted, Feidlimid's halt at Tara announced 'his ambitions in the clearest possible manner.'⁶⁵ Yet there is no indication that Feidlimid had held any ambition to seize the kingship of Tara at any time in the previous twenty years he had been king of Cashel. That he suddenly, and clearly, intended to take the kingship of Tara in 840, so soon after his meeting with Niall, requires an explanation other than simply 'ambition'. After Feidlimid met with Conchobar mac Donnchada in 827, *CS*, which does not mention the royal meeting, records that the *secnapóite* of Clonmacnoise was given to the Munstermen, which had never been done before. After

⁶³ *AU* 845.1 notes he was taken prisoner by the Vikings 'with his relics and following' – *Forindan, abbas Aird Machae, du ergabail du genntibh i Cloen Comardai cona mindaibh 7 cona muinntir, 7 a brith do longaibh Luimnigh*. The following year (*AU* 846.9) 'Forannán returned from Munster with the relics of Patrick'.

⁶⁴ *AU* 848.8: *Coemchloadh abbad i nArd Machae, .i. Diermait in uicem Forindain*.

⁶⁵ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 225.

Feidlimid met with Niall, there was a change of abbots in Armagh – Diarmait replaced Forannán, whom Feidlimid had seized in 836. The significance of these actions become clearer when it is remembered that Feidlimid had been a *céle Dé* longer than he had been *rí Muman*. His primary concern appears to have been to ensure the Irish returned to the devout practice he must have believed lacking since the death of his mentor, Máel Ruain, manifest through the presence of the *gentiles* who were clearly a punishment sent from God for the Irish failure to follow the godly path laid out by Máel Ruain and others. This would have included a church free from the imposition of royal appointees in high ecclesiastical office. While the meeting with Conchobar may have resulted in the prerogative of a Munster, and, therefore, what Feidlimid evidently considered acceptably devout, *secnap* in Clonmacnoise, Conchobar appears to have stuck to this agreement. He may even have endorsed it, since it was not until after Conchobar's death in 833 that the Uí Maine, whose vested interests in Clonmacnoise may have suffered as a consequence, acted to remove the Munster *secnap*. Feidlimid would surely have expected the same commitment to keep his royal word from Niall, but when Niall reinstated Forannán in the abbacy of Armagh, Feidlimid must have considered this nothing short of perfidy. Just as *fir flaithemon* resulted in blessings from God, *gau flaithemon*, such as that so openly demonstrated by Niall, preserved and strengthened the scourge sent from God. It must have appeared to Feidlimid, then, that Niall could not be trusted and that the only solution would be to remove him from the kingship of Tara and that he, Feidlimid, would unite the Irish and lead them to a devotional life more pleasing to God. This outline, necessarily, is, yet again, sheer speculation, but something, clearly, following this meeting between them in 840, had specifically occurred between Feidlimid and Niall to provoke Feidlimid's actions and this, it may be conjectured, could have been the reason Feidlimid invaded Mide and Brega and halted at Tara,⁶⁶ seizing Niall's queen in the process.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, while the report in *AU*, *CS*, *AFM* and *AClon* note that Feidlimid halted or encamped at Tara (*conid-deisigh i Temhraigh*), the account in *AI*, otherwise more favourable to Feidlimid, states that he was checked there (*a chostud i Temraich*). He certainly seems to have fought at Tara. *AI* notes that Indrechtach, son of Máel Dúin, was killed by him there; however, none of the other sources provide any indication of fighting.

It would appear that Connacht certainly submitted to him, indicated by the surrendering of hostages, but *AU*, *CS* and *AFM* record that Niall plundered Fir Chell and Delbna Bethra, almost certainly in retaliation, although Niall's activities are recorded before those of Feidlimid in *AFM* (*sa* 839).⁶⁷ The fact that Niall retaliated by attacking Delbna Bethra must surely be significant – it must have been the case that by attacking here, Niall hoped to draw Feidlimid away from Tara and perhaps indicates that Clonmacnoise, and possibly also Durrow, Rahan and Lynally, if Byrne's identification is correct, were, by this point, securely under Feidlimid's influence.

Whether or not Niall's attempt to draw Feidlimid away from Tara worked, or, if not, for how long he was encamped there, is unrecorded. The next year Feidlimid led an army into Leinster, but was surprised and routed by Niall at Mag Óchtar, the occasion when 'the crozier of vigil-keeping Feidlimid was abandoned in the bushes'. While the surprise was complete, neither the annalistic record nor the satirical poetry provides any indication of heavy casualties. Nonetheless, unless one is to accept as fact the report of his assault on Clonmacnoise in 846, there is no further record of Feidlimid's activities at all before his death six years later. The psychological impact of the defeat appears to have been much more substantial than the physical.

Whatever may be made of Feidlimid's actions, his motivation becomes less enigmatic when considered from the perspective of his *céli Dé* background. The focus of his martial efforts were normally aimed against ecclesiastical foundations, yet contrary to the accounts of Feidlimid's career, they were not plundered. It was not the churches themselves that were the target, but the individuals within them. The entry in *AU* relating the death of Dúnlang, *princeps* of Cork, in Cashel without communion⁶⁸ itself provides the clue to Feidlimid's treatment of him. By denying him communion,

⁶⁷ Byrne identified Fir Chell – 'the men of the churches' – as the Uí Néill kingdom of Cenél Fiachrach, which bordered Delbna Bethra, 'since most of its lands were under the control of the great monasteries such as Durrow, Rahan and Lynally', but he mistakenly stated this raid to have been undertaken by Feidlimid, even although the annals are clear enough in stipulating Niall. *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 225. Why should Niall ravage this Uí Néill kingdom? Does it indicate that it too had submitted to Feidlimid?

⁶⁸ *AU* 836.2: *Dunlang m. Cathusaigh, princeps Corcaighe Moire, mortuus est sine communione i Caisiul regum.*

Feidlimid was, in effect, stating as clearly as he could that he evidently considered Dúnlang's actions, whatever they may have been, not only to be inappropriate for someone in his position, but even un-Christian.⁶⁹ Consequently, Christian comfort was denied him. While historians may note that Feidlimid never once devoted his arms to attacking the Vikings, he appears to have spent most of his reign trying to coerce a level of religious observation that, if he did indeed view the Vikings as a scourge sent by God, he would have believed would rid Ireland of them. Clearly, therefore, the Irish must have been insufficiently devout and this progressive failing required to be dealt with. Byrne noted (above, p. 228) that Feidlimid burned and "plundered" 'some of the greatest of Irish monasteries – Kildare, Gallen, Durrow, Clonfert, and above all Clonmacnoise' – yet this was not wholly accurate. None of these houses appear to have been plundered. Kildare was not burned – the target was an abbot of Armagh who appears to have been an imposed appointee of Niall mac Áeda, who had, it would seem, been a party to the removal of his predecessor and who may have been attempting to impose a nominee in Kildare, just as Niall had interposed his nominee into the Leinster kingship only months before.

There is no record, either, of the burning of Clonfert, merely that Feidlimid 'sat in the abbot's chair.' It is not even known whether this implies that in doing so, Feidlimid removed the previous incumbent – it may have become vacant through the previous abbot's death, although it is clear that Feidlimid would have had no compunction in removing the abbot had he wished. Once he 'sat in the abbot's chair',

⁶⁹ Dúnlang's fate, however, would appear to have been at odds with the practice cited in §56 of *Mon. Tall.*:

Is sed dano is choir la colchin sacrafic do tabirt dond aos bis illobrae fri huar mhbáis acht doratat fretech cech espi Lecsiu immurgo ildeth nde mess for a menmainsom dús ind fircomtúid acus mad ed ón rombeir ind sacrafic sláne doib den chursin.

'This is what Colchu approves, to give the sacrament to those that are lying sick at the hour of death, provided they have made a renunciation of every vanity. Leave it to God, however, to judge the mind of such, whether it is a true conversion; and if it be so, the sacrament can bring salvation to them in that moment.'

It may be thought that, in Dúnlang's case, Feidlimid evidently did not consider he had 'made a renunciation of every vanity'. Feidlimid's actions, however, pre-date the compilation of *Mon. Tall.* and, correspondingly, it could be the case that some of the instances cited in *Mon. Tall.* had been formulated as a result of specific circumstances, such as Dúnlang's fate, which had occurred fairly recently beforehand.

it appears that he then appointed another, so it was clearly not the position itself he was interested in, but the quality of the holder of the position.

Gallen was burned early in Feidlimid's reign, although the reason is not recorded, preventing any useful comment on his motive. Durrow, too, was burned, apparently in conjunction with Clonmacnoise and presumably for the same reasons. If the identification of the Cináed and the Rechtgnia listed in '*óentu Feidlimthe*' as Cináed mac Cumuscaig, abbot of Durrow (d. 788), and Rechtgnia, abbot of Clonmacnoise (d. 785), is correct, then it may indicate that Feidlimid perceived that Durrow, and more particularly Clonmacnoise, the greatest church in Ireland, had lapsed from Máel Ruain's example, and were now seriously failing in their responsibilities. Even so, there are, at the very least, extremely strong suspicions that the annalistic record of Feidlimid's assault on Clonmacnoise has been duplicated on more than one occasion, exaggerating the frequency although not the severity.

The motivation for Feidlimid's actions has often been perceived as an attempt to acquire the kingship of Tara or recognition as the king of all Ireland. Again, this is to distort the evidence. There is no evidence to indicate that Feidlimid sought the kingship of Tara prior to 840, fully twenty years after he became king of Cashel. This hardly points to burning ambition and, even here, may have been the result of Niall mac Áeda's overturning an agreement between the kings and re-establishing his own imposed nominee, Forannán, as abbot of Armagh.

While Feidlimid's association with the *céli Dé* has often been noted, there seems to have been an unwillingness to accept that he was himself *céle Dé*. The reason for this appears to derive from the facts that he was king of Cashel, and hence, by implication, must be a layman; and that he plundered churches and slew churchmen and that he vigorously pursued the kingship of Tara. These points can be seen to be false assumptions – from the evidence of the '*óentu Feidlimthe*' Feidlimid was an ecclesiastic, a scribe and anchorite in the community of Daire Eidneach, a community firmly associated with the *céli Dé*. His inclusion as one of the *óentu Máel Ruain* indicates that he was held in high esteem among the *céli Dé* and considered to have

numbered among those most closely adhering to the teaching of Máel Ruain. It was these *céli Dé* connections, indeed, which appear to have led Feidlimid into the kingship of Cashel. What has been claimed to be enigmatic behaviour becomes immeasurably less so when it is accepted that Feidlimid was a *céle Dé* prior to, and throughout, his reign as king of Cashel. His entire policy was driven by his ideals as a *céle Dé*, whether in relation to the church, the other kings of Ireland or to the Vikings. To state that Feidlimid never opposed the Vikings while brutally oppressing the church would, therefore, be to entirely fail to understand and to misrepresent the man, both as *céle Dé* and as king. He would have recognised the biblical precedent, thus believing the Vikings to be the instrument of God's vengeance. He would have accepted that God must believe the Irish to be morally and spiritually lacking because of the physical presence in Ireland of the Vikings. To oppose the Vikings on the battlefield would be futile, since they were there by divine will. Only by bringing the Irish back into proper respect and worship of God would the Vikings be brought to leave Ireland in peace. This is not to suggest that the Irish church should be considered as degenerate or morally or spiritually failing, any more than the Vikings should be regarded as a *de facto* instrument of divine wrath, but Feidlimid's *céli Dé* discipline and training would very likely have led him to perceive of the Vikings in this way. Those he would have perceived opposed his efforts to ensure the more rigorous observance of the teaching of Christ, whether ecclesiastic or lay, must therefore be contemptuous of the divine will of God, and, since it was such contempt which sustained the Vikings, they must also be opposed to the best interests of the Irish people for whom they were responsible before God. As such they would merit the strongest treatment appropriate for such perfidy.

Feidlimid, by his very position as king, cannot be considered a typical *céle Dé* – he was in a position to muster considerable military power to pursue his policies. This very fact may have further convinced him that he was intended to help the Irish to, once again, find the path God had intended them to follow. His belief in this purpose may perhaps be perceived in the fact that following his defeat by Niall mac

Áeda, one of those whose perfidy was palpable, in 841, the annals are silent regarding any subsequent activity by him, unless the uncertain account of an assault on Clonmacnoise in 846 is accepted as fact. This may indicate an enormous psychological blow as a consequence of the defeat, hugely disproportionate to the scale of the military outcome. God had upheld this false prince over one of his own *miles* – how then to judge what was truly divine will?

If Feidlimid's actions are considered from the basis that they were driven by *céli Dé* ideals, then it certainly lends a somewhat different perspective to his motivation. Much of this examination of his motives has, necessarily, been deeply speculative, but, nonetheless, it takes no less account of the surviving evidence than the conventional understanding of this otherwise enigmatic king of Cashel. This position as king may have made him atypical of the *céli Dé*, but his inclusion in *óentu Máel Ruain* would appear to indicate that Feidlimid was considered as one of those closest in attitude to Máel Ruain himself and, as such, any attempt to study and understand the motivation behind his actions may help to reflect the very heart of *céli Dé* ideals.

Conclusion and aftermath

This thesis set out to answer two questions: who were the *céli Dé* and to what extent can they be validly considered a reform movement. It has examined particular aspects of Irish ecclesiastical history for any indication of the influence of the *céli Dé* in the period between roughly the middle of the eighth century and the middle of the ninth. This has been deliberate, although it is far from being, and does not claim to be, an exhaustive examination of the history of the *céli Dé*. The study itself has been prompted by the fact that while the understanding of the organisation of the early Irish church has developed to the extent that the old model, of a monastic church supplanting Patrick's diocesan system but succumbing to an avaricious laity, is no longer accepted, the understanding of the *céli Dé* as a reform movement, an understanding entirely dependent on the old model, essentially remains intact. More recently still, both the degenerate laxity of the church during the course of the eighth century and the reflection of the rise, culmination and decline of an anchoritic movement in the same period which it was thought to have provoked, have been seen as resulting, not from actual conditions, but due to changes and developments in the contemporary keeping of annalistic record. Correspondingly, the perception of the *céli Dé* as a sudden and distinct 'movement' in the later eighth century is less likely than continuous development of an austere tradition.

Brian Lambkin discussed, and rejected, the understanding of the *céli Dé* as a vernacular rendition of the Latin term *servus Dei*. The case he made for the *céli Dé* as an ecclesiastical elite, God's retinue on earth, challenged the understanding of the *céli Dé*, in the late eighth-early ninth centuries, as simple servants, or even slaves, of God. While this understanding may have been influenced by evidence for communities of *céli Dé* at a later period who existed within larger ecclesiastical communities and who tended the sick and the poor, this was certainly not true for the period under discussion. However, Lambkin's revised understanding of the *céli Dé* was based on

an analagous comparison with the *céli* of the early Irish law tracts and built on an assumption that the term *céli* in this case denoted an elite that could be perceived, in effect, to indicate an ecclesiastical 'nobility'. Notwithstanding the flaw in its basis, this approach to understanding the meaning of the term *céli Dé*, and the implied purpose, role or position for any individual bearing the appellation, appears to be from the wrong direction. The term *céli Dé* appears instead to have been a vernacular rendition of the Latin term *miles Christi*, rather than an Irish construct, and thus seeking delineation of the meaning of *céli* from the law tracts would prove to be misleading. The fact that there can be seen to have been a variety of terms applied to these ecclesiastics, even within those texts which can be seen to have a Tallaght provenance, in which *céli Dé* is not even the most common appellation, indicates that the translation of the term *miles Christi* by *céli Dé* is approximate. This term *miles Christi* itself may not have been singularly in use in its application to particular ecclesiastics. The most common, 'alternative', usage is *mac / meic bethad* and this, together with the instance of *mac solse* and their negative *personae mac báis* and *mac dorchai*, provides a further, distinct, range of descriptive terms which, from the various instances of use, appears applicxable to very general and, paradoxically, very precise contexts.

Nevertheless, the term *miles Christi* does appear to have had some degree of 'formal' designation. It is attested no fewer than thirteen times in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and reflected in contemporary annalistic sources, or of the less common variant *miles Dei*. Among those individuals called *miles Christi* by Adomnán are priests, anchorites and the founder of a monastery – all, in addition, clearly belong to a coenobitic environment. Those mentioned in the annalistic record are most commonly also bishops. While the term *céli Dé* itself is not attested before the eighth century, this vernacular rendition therefore emerges during the period when ecclesiastical texts written in the vernacular become increasingly common. It is to be noted that all of the texts associated with the *céli Dé* and demonstrably with Tallaght connections were written in Irish, not Latin. This further supports the indication that

the term *céli Dé* was an Irish rendition of *miles Christi* and in such a guise these individuals are well enough attested in the seventh century.

If, then, *céli Dé* was a rendition of *miles Christi*, this introduces the question of who these individuals were and by what criteria they could be considered *miles Christi* and, subsequently, *céli Dé*. Herein lies the greatest problem – the identification of these individuals to allow any sensible analysis. Those individual ecclesiastics named by Adomnán as *miles Christi* provides a litany of names which greatly outnumbers those individuals who are referred to as *céle Dé*. Indeed, Óengus mac Óibleáin, the putative author of *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé*, is the only individual explicitly referred to as such and even here the appellation is unlikely to be contemporary. It may be possible to identify those it may be thought were *céli Dé* – Máel Ruain, Dublithir, Elair of Ros Cré, Diarmait of Iona and Máel Dithruib of Terryglass, those named in the *óentu Máel Ruain* and, perhaps by association, the additional names contained in the ‘*óentu Feidlimthe*’. But how secure are these identifications as *céli Dé*? Those listed in *óentu Máel Ruain* and, perhaps, ‘*óentu Feidlimthe*’ are accepted as *céli Dé* because of their association with Máel Ruain, but nowhere is Máel Ruain ever referred to as *céle Dé*. It may be accepted that he, and the others named in *Mon. Tall.*, together with those in their respective and contemporaneous communities, were those thought of by the compiler of the text when he referred to *céli Dé* or *meic bethad*, but this, in effect, is as far as the *céli Dé* can be stretched from the historical evidence for the period. There are others referred to in the course of this thesis – Artrí son of Conchobar and Nuadu, abbot of Armagh, as merely two instances – who may, perhaps, have good claims to be called *céli Dé*, but there are no references to justify this. It cannot be claimed that the motivation attributed to them here, with whatever degree of conjecture, was unique to, and therefore indicative of, the *céli Dé*. Even the claim of one who was included in the *óentu Máel Ruain* – Feidlimid mac Crimthain – to have been *céle Dé* requires some degree of acceptance of faith in the value of the ‘*óentu Feidlimthe*’ as a source for the

detail to substantiate it and a considerable amount of speculation as to how this coloured his motivation as king of Cashel.

If it is not possible to identify those individuals who would have been referred to as *céli Dé*, what then of the influence they may have had on the direction of the church? From the examples of the individuals cited by Adomnán and *Mon. Tall.* a good claim could be made that these ecclesiastics were indeed influential among their peers. It is clear from the Tallaght texts that the *céli Dé* were concerned in all aspects of the church and its responsibility to society and was not merely restricted to particular aspects as has been understood was the case in the past.

From a broader perspective, however, it is clear that while there were developments in ecclesiastical organisation, these perhaps may appear more likely to have largely evolved than been applied as concerted measures. By the second quarter of the eighth century, by which time the Paschal controversy had been resolved, the Irish church was in a position, for the first time, to be able to turn to other matters, including addressing other outstanding problems. It was at this time the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* was compiled by Rubin of Dairinis, the church in which Máel Ruain was taught, and Cú Chuimne, who had been a monk at Iona under Adomnán. It was at this time, too, that there is a notable expansion in the promulgation of ecclesiastical *cána*, the promotion of which, it is clear, was primarily intended for the benefit of society. Similarly, from the evidence of the Tallaght texts themselves, there were concerns to establish a common level of basic pastoral provision by addressing anomalies in the standard of those ordained as priests. From this perspective, then, Nora Chadwick was correct to state that this was 'not an Age of Reform, but of Formulation'.

The *céli Dé* themselves should be considered from this perspective. The understanding that they were a reform movement who emerged in the later eighth century to counter an increasing secularisation of the church is inaccurate in virtually every regard. They can be considered a movement only to the extent that the church itself can be considered a movement and Kathleen Hughes' description of them as

'like-minded individuals' is to be greatly preferred in this regard. Neither, clearly, did they emerge in the later eighth century. The one potential claim to accuracy in this accepted view derives only from the interpretation of the word 'reform'. Again, however, the understanding that the *céli Dé* emerged in reaction to a degenerate clergy is clearly false – if the description as reformers can be applied at all, it is only in the sense that they, presumably, were a party to the developments that took place in ecclesiastical organisation at this time. From the evidence of the Tallaght texts, the *céli Dé* were clearly influential individuals and indoubtedly included the foremost ecclesiastical minds of their day, men well versed in Scripture and devoting much time to exegesis within the bounds of the rigorous discipline they maintained. As the greatest amount – although not all – of the evidence concerning the *céli Dé* derives from Tallaght, however, the extent of this influence and the extent to which they represented the ecclesiastical hierarchy of their day is difficult to determine. Nonetheless, if they are to be considered in this light at all, it would be more accurate to regard them as developing, rather than 'reforming', the church at this time.

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, has been to re-examine the *céli Dé* in light of the revision of the organisation of the early Irish church which completely undermined the accepted understanding of these ecclesiastics. This thesis has sought to examine the extent of this connection and influence from various angles and, as will have been clear, these attempts have met with varying success. Some of these angles of approach have necessarily invoked the employment of some judicious speculation and, again inevitably, any attempt to understand the motivation of individuals can only be conjectured; but the considered use of such judicious speculation has been necessary in order to get away from the older, unworkable models that developments in the understanding of early medieval Irish ecclesiastical organisation have clearly invalidated. Nonetheless, any suggestion based on reasoned speculation or conjecture can only be tentative and, consequently, many of the suggestions, solutions or conclusions arrived at may not meet with universal approval – it is simply not possible to provide conclusive proof or definitive conclusions when faced with such jejune

sources. Nevertheless, while conclusive proof regarding many of the aspects examined here may not be forthcoming, it is clear that, at the very least, it is no longer satisfactory to continue to treat this key period of the greatest influence of these associated individuals as one of degeneracy followed by reformation. Clearly, there were many facets of Irish society and politics that impacted on the development of ecclesiastical organisation at this time and consideration of individuals like Feidlimid, or the contested abbacy of Armagh, serves to highlight the complexities involved in attempting to examine ecclesiastical government in the eighth and ninth centuries.

By the early tenth century, the *céli Dé* appear significantly different in form and function to those recognised as *céli Dé* only decades earlier. Indeed, it is only from this period, outwith that covered by this study, that the *céli Dé* can be pointed to as a recognisable historical entity. *AU* 921 and *AFM sa* 919 record the pillaging of Armagh by Gothfrith grandson of Ivar, but note that he ‘saved the houses of prayer, with their complement of *céli Dé* and their sick’ (*AU* 921.8: *na taigi aernaighi do anacal lais cona lucht de cheilibh De 7 di lobraidh*). The terms of this annalistic reference appears to suggest that the *céli Dé* had, by the early tenth century, come to represent a distinct community within the larger ecclesiastical community of Armagh and one, it would appear, responsible for the maintenance of a hospital. This raid took place towards the end of the abbacy of Máel Brigte mac Tornain (d. 927) who, in addition to being *comarba Pátraic* was also *comarba Coluim Cille*. Máel Brigte had become abbot of Armagh in 888, by which time this change in the function of the *céli Dé* may have already been under way. The impression of the *céli Dé* forming a distinct community within a community is even clearer at a later period. *AFM* notes that in 1032, Conn na mBochd, the head of the *céli Dé* and anchorite of Clonmacnoise (*AFM sa* 1031: *...cend Celedh ndhé acus ancoiri Cluana mic Nóis...*) appears to have established some kind of refectory for the poor at Iseal-Chiarain, to which he donated twenty cows of his own. In the entry for 1073, there is a report of ‘a forcible refectory’ (*trén coinnmhedh*) taken from the *céli Dé* at Iseal-Chiarain, ‘so that the steward of the poor was killed there’ (*AFM sa* 1072: *...go ro marbhadh na mbocht*

ann). There are further annalistic references, all obituary notices, to the head of the *céli Dé* of Clonmacnoise in *AFM sa* 1132; *AFM sa* 1170 and *AFM sa* 1200. There is also notice of the head of the *céli Dé* of Iona in *AU* 1164 and to the prior of the *céli Dé* of Daiminis in *AFM sa* 1479. The terms of reference in these entries certainly indicates that by the early tenth century, the *céli Dé* formed distinctive communities within the communities of churches and were concerned with care of the sick and the poor. It is clear, therefore, that the description *céle Dé* meant different things at different times. The *céli Dé* of the early tenth century were certainly different from the *céli Dé* of the late eighth and, although further study is required to established the full extent to which it was the case, different from the *céli Dé* of, say, the thirteenth, fourteenth or fifteenth centuries.

During the period under examination, the *céli Dé* numbered among the intellectual and spiritual leaders of a confident, dynamic, assertive and proactive church. Consequently, they were undoubtedly involved in the development of both ecclesiastical and secular organisation and highly influential in processes that would ultimately provide the foundation for an embryonic state in both Ireland and Scotland. It is hoped, in the future, to undertake a similar study of the important influence of the *céli Dé* in Scotland that will allow a comparative study of the two, but the purpose of the present work has been to try to provide some indication of the extent to which the influence of the *céli Dé* contributed to one of the most important and formative periods in Irish ecclesiastical and political history.

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