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Chelsea Shields-Más

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THE IRISH CHRISTIAN HOLY MEN: DRUIDS REINVENTED?

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	5
I. Pagan Irish society and the role of the druid	7
II. Three Irish Saints: Columba, Cuthbert and Patrick	15
III. Conversion tactics used by Christian saints and missionaries	39
Conclusion	70
Works Consulted	73
I. Works Cited	73
II. Bibliography	76

INTRODUCTION

Irish Christianity and its brand of monasticism are very different from Christianity anywhere else in the world. This is a result of the deeply embedded warrior hero and paganistic culture that had been a part of Ireland for hundreds of years. Christianity was relatively late in making its advances upon this far-flung, wild part of the world, which had never become a part of the Roman Empire which had conquered most of the known world at the time. The brave warrior was a central figure in the pagan Irish society, gaining fame and prominence through valor and great deeds. The exploits of perhaps the greatest warrior of them all, the mighty Cúchulainn, are detailed for time immemorial in the famous epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. The druids as members of the pagan “priestly class” were an important, high-status force in Celtic society. This class of druids was one of the most formidable groups that early Christian saints and missionaries had to face and overcome in order to establish firmly the roots of Christianity in pagan Celtic Ireland. But the powerful druids faced a challenge that would ultimately overcome them, with Christian missionaries and their strategies to defeat their pagan rivals, the Celtic priests.

This research attempts to understand some aspects of the process of Christianization in pagan Ireland in the 5th and 6th centuries AD. To further this goal, it examines the society of the Celts in order to understand what exactly the

Christian missionaries faced in confronting powerful indigenous cultural traditions and beliefs. Celtic culture was a vibrant society centered on the feats and daring of mighty warriors and the teachings and judgments of the prominent druids. As we shall see, not even the kings were exempt from the druids' authority. This was a culture which had been a part of Ireland and its people since late antiquity and was thus firmly entrenched there.¹ With a picture of the culture and societal organization of the Celts in place, we can begin to understand the many formidable obstacles Christian missionaries had to overcome to establish Christianity in Ireland. This understanding also permits an appreciation of some of the well-calculated conversion strategies implemented by the Roman Church. The popes and missionaries learned quickly that while many of their proven conversion tactics could be employed, the only way in which Ireland was going to embrace Christianity was if many of these powerful Celtic traditions and ideas could be retained and transformed in the new religion. Thus what follows in this paper is a study of the various conversion methods utilized by the Church, their efficacy, and their assimilation with many traditions of ancient Ireland.

¹ Joseph Raftery, "The Archaeology of the Celts in Ireland" in Joseph Raftery, (ed.), *The Celts* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1964), 65.

I. PAGAN IRISH SOCIETY AND THE ROLE OF THE DRUID

The Irish heroic age did not last long. It was but a wisp in the mist of time; yet it had a tremendous and lasting impact on Ireland and its people. The heroic age, or the Early Iron Age as it is also referred to, in Ireland is generally given the dates 300 BC – AD 450 by historians.² This was a period in which the Irish countryside was dotted with many autonomous tribes, or *tuáths*, which were governed by kings or chieftains who mediated over gatherings and assemblies and led their people in battle.³ Most people lived on farms within their tribe's territory and were protected by its authority from outside threats.⁴ Thus it would seem appropriate that the warrior-hero tradition was central to pre-Christian Ireland and it virtually dominated many aspects of life there. The heroic age was a time and place in which warriors ruled the land. The warriors occupied a place near the top of the aristocracy and wielded a great deal of power and influence. Bravery and honor were essential to their way of life. Irish pagan society was one in which a man's achievements defined him, and it was a culture in which the king desired only the very best warriors in his hall. Like many early warrior aristocracies Ireland, too, had the great halls, fragrant with the smoke of roasting

² Joseph Raftery, "The Archaeology of the Celts in Ireland" in Joseph Raftery, (ed.), *The Celts* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1964), 65.

³ Philip Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland, A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 82 - 83.

⁴ F.J. Byrne, "Early Irish Society: 1st – 9th Century" in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, (eds.) *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 28.

meat and filled with a group of loud, boisterous men, drinking together and boasting of their great deeds:

This was a society ... where an aristocracy of champions, eager for fame, spent their time in fighting one another in single combat. The young warrior, on reaching manhood, was given a spear and a shield, and an important part of his initiation rite was the ceremonial mounting of a chariot. He would then proceed to battle, and would cut off the heads of his defeated opponents and bring them home as a trophy, and at the celebratory feast afterwards he would try and claim the champion's portion in the presence of his fellow-warriors in some great banqueting hall.⁵

It is evident that it was vital for the warrior in pre-Christian Ireland to strive to be the toughest and bravest in battle; it was for these qualities alone that a king would want to have the warrior in his service. This was because, as fighting men the warriors were above all the protectors of the lands and people, willing to lay down their lives for their king without question. Evidence for the centrality and value of the warrior caste is obtained from the reading of the great Irish epics, such as the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, which centers on the deeds of the formidable warriors of two great houses of Ireland: Ulster and Connacht.⁶ The text of the *Táin* is riddled with the exploits, boasting and feats of the illustrious Irish warriors, most notably, Cúchulainn of Ulster, arguably the greatest hero of them all:

⁵ Peter Harbison, *Pre-Christian Ireland: From the First Settlers to the Early Celts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 166.

⁶ Thomas Kinsella, "Introduction" in Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), x.

‘Alas Ferdia! Woe for you, before we fought together, that you didn’t listen to somebody who knew my high, brave deeds. ...’

Cúchulainn got up from beside Ferdia’s head.

‘Well, Ferdia,’ Cúchulainn said, ‘it was a great doom and desolation that the men of Ireland wished on you when they sent you to do battle and combat with me. It is no light thing to struggle and strive with Cúchulainn on the Táin Bó Cuailnge.’⁷

Here we see Cúchulainn mourning the loss of a friend while at the same time reminding the dead man and anyone else in hearing that he is a man of great valor and no one can vanquish him. Even in his remorse at the death of this man, Cúchulainn still exalts his own status as a remarkable warrior. This further illuminates the value of noble, heroic feats and the idea that boasting of them was a common activity amongst warriors and fighting men.

Pagan Irish society was one in which class and status held great significance and where the family and the tribe were the two most important social entities.⁸ A cow was reckoned as the standard unit of wealth and one’s standing in this culture was reliant upon wealth and possessions almost as much as birth; the learned class, as we shall see, occupied a different position in this social structure altogether.⁹ The learned class was generally made up of priests called druids, though people also filled the roles of bards and filidh, or poets.¹⁰ Of the learned class, the druids, the native priests of Ireland, wielded the most power and

⁷ Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 199.

⁸ F.J. Byrne, “Early Irish Society: 1st – 9th Century” in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, (eds.) *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 32.

⁹ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁰ Miranda J. Green, *The World of the Druids* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1997), 124.

influence.¹¹ The druids were not only priests, mediating between this world and the mysteries of the next, but they also held the power of prophecy, being able to foretell future events, they kept track of time and dates; and they wielded power over the natural world, over such mysterious happenings such as snowfalls.¹²

Additionally, the druids presided over legal matters and passed judgments:

For as a rule they settle all public and private disputes and, if some crime has been committed, or if a slaying done or if it concerns inheritance or a border dispute, the same Druids decide: they settle the compensation and punishment; if a private person does not yield to their decision they are prohibited from sacrifices.¹³

In possessing the authority to pass judgments and mete out punishments, the druids were invested with a vast amount of power in Celtic society. They were the ones who decided what morally correct and acceptable behavior was and they even held the authority to appoint kings. This was done through a ritual in which the druids chanted over a sleeping man who had just eaten a sacrificed bull; the sleeper would then dream of the man who was to hold the kingship.¹⁴ In addition to divining the name of the new king, the druids also occupied the special and influential position of advisors to the king in both political and religious matters.¹⁵

¹¹ Diodorus Siculus, 5.27-32 in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 14.

¹² Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Celts: A History* (Cork, Ireland: The Collins Press, 2002), 26.

¹³ Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 6.11-20 in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 21.

¹⁴ Philip Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland, A Biography* ((New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 85.

¹⁵ Miranda J. Green, *The World of the Druids* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1997), 132 – 133.

According to the classical author Dion Chrysostom writing in the early first century, the kings were in essence the pawns of the druids, unwilling to take actions or make decisions without the input of their priests.¹⁶ In accordance with their illustrious position in Celtic society, the druids did not pay taxes and “...have immunity from military service and are exempt from all lawsuits.”¹⁷ This is reminiscent of the privileges granted to the Christian clergy in the medieval period. Thus, one familiar with the power and influence enjoyed by the medieval Church might begin to develop an idea of just how the druids wielded authority amongst the Celts.

Like Celtic secular society, druidic society was also stratified, with the group being governed by one who was selected as the most high-ranking among them.¹⁸ In order to gain admittance into the cult, the druids also spent as much as twenty years in learning and training, the details of which are unknown even to this day, as they never committed their knowledge to writing.¹⁹ This aided in preserving their status as more powerful entities because they were the sole members of society who possessed the wisdom of the ancient rites. The exact number of students in a particular druidic school at any given time is unknown, though we can gain an estimate in looking at the activities of one of the major druids of the

¹⁶ Dion Chrysostom, *Orations 49* in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 30 – 31.

¹⁷ Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico 6.11-20* in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Myles Dillon, “Celtic Religion and Celtic Society” in Joseph Raftery, (ed.), *The Celts* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1964), 92.

Táin, Cathbad: “He had one hundred studious men learning druid lore from him – this was always the number that Cathbad taught.”²⁰ This does seem rather a high number, but at the very least it serves to indicate that there appeared to be no shortage of pupils looking to dedicate themselves to the druidic cult.

In considering the druids, one must not forget the importance of the Celtic ceremonial sites. These were often linked with important royal sites around the county, such as Tara and Emain Macha.²¹ Tara, located in Leinster, was long viewed as the seat of the high kingship of Ireland, though in actuality there were few men who could ever have claimed to rule the entire nation.²² Emain Macha was situated in Northern Ireland and was the domain of the kings of Ulster, as well as being the territory of the hero Cúchulainn of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*.²³ Patrick’s church at Armagh, founded in AD 444 close to the royal site, can be seen as a sort of successor to the pagan seat of power.²⁴ Tara in particular has been regarded as a significant cult site of early Ireland as a result of having the *Lia Fáil*, or Stone of Destiny, within its precincts.²⁵ A 12th century text, the *Dindshenchas*, describes a ritual in which the *Lia Fáil* would cry out if it “...accepted the inauguration of a legitimate king...if he was rejected the stone

²⁰ Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84.

²¹ Barry Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland: The Enigma of the Irish Iron Age* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1994), 65, 74.

²² Peter Harbison, *Pre-Christian Ireland: From the First Settlers to the Early Celts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 191.

²³ *Ibid*, 157.

²⁴ David Robert Howlett, “Patrick” in Seán Duffy, (ed) *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 369.

²⁵ Barry Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland: The Enigma of the Irish Iron Age* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1994), 67.

remained silent.”²⁶ This ritual most likely would have required the presence of a druid to mediate, and it underscores the importance of the spiritual and hence, the druids during the pagan heroic age in Ireland.

Finally, we turn to the druids’ teachings in regards to death and the afterlife. In accordance with the role of spiritual leaders, the druids practiced a belief in the afterlife, which encompassed the teaching that life was an eternal cycle, with the souls of the deceased passing from their old body to a new one.²⁷ It has been speculated by some classical authors that one of the reasons for this teaching was to encourage warriors to fight more bravely in battle and be generous with their lives, as their time on earth would surely come again.²⁸ Suetonius tells us that some Celts believed so firmly in this druidic teaching that they would voluntarily put themselves onto the funeral fires of their loved ones and even put off the repayment of debts until the next life.²⁹ Diodorus Siculus also discusses this particular Celtic belief: “...the souls of humans are immortal and that after a certain number of years they will live again, with the soul passing into another body. Because of this belief, some people at funerals will throw letters into the funeral pyre, so that those having passed on might read them.”³⁰ The belief in a cyclical succession of life is an intriguing one, and was also a teaching in many

²⁶ Barry Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland: The Enigma of the Irish Iron Age* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1994), 67.

²⁷ Philip Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland, A Biography* ((New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 98.

²⁸ Suetonius, *Claudius* 25 in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 31.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 32.

³⁰ Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 5.28 in Philip Freeman, *War, Women, and Druids: Eyewitness Reports and Early Accounts of the Ancient Celts*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 37.

other ancient cultures.³¹ The Christian missionaries taught the Celts of their own version of eternal life after death: that of enjoying the glories of Heaven with the Lord. Their version of the afterlife offered warriors even greater rewards. It appears that there was a concerted effort to create an appeal in this new idea, in the hagiographers' descriptions of saints who worked their entire lives preparing for and aspiring towards the heroic glory of Heaven.³² As we shall see, the Christian missionaries employed a great number of techniques and tactics like these to effect the conversion of pagan Ireland to Christianity. Through the study of this evangelization process, it should become evident how carefully the conversion scheme was constructed upon the knowledge of Celtic religion and society, and how (as we are led to believe by our hagiographers) well it succeeded by the omnipotent hand of God working through his holy warriors like Patrick, Cuthbert and Columba.

³¹ Philip Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland, A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 98 – 99.

³² Adomnán of Iona, trans. Richard Sharpe, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 229.

II. THREE IRISH SAINTS: COLUMBA, CUTHBERT AND PATRICK

One of the great “warrior-monks” of Early Ireland was Columba, a formidable patron saint of medieval Ireland. In AD 521, Columba was born into the wealthy and noble family Cenel Conaille, which was related to the powerful Uí Néill family of Northern Ireland. He had the best “pedigree” possible, and by all rights could have been high king of Ireland. Lineage and status were vitally important in pre-Christian Ireland. The saint’s impeccable lineage gave him added legitimacy as a leader in the eyes of the Irish. Columba was educated in a Leinster monastery by a monk named Gemman; and in 546, Columba founded his first church, the renowned monastery of Kells in County Meath. Later, Columba, leaving Ireland in AD 562, founded the famous monastery at Iona, off the coast of Scotland. He did this with the permission of the ruling family there, the Dal Riata. The island of Iona was an ideal setting for the location of a monastery, having rich resources to allow the monastery to be self-sufficient. The island of Iona also provided an ideal jumping point to Scotland and England, making it easier to found monasteries and spread Christianity in Britain.

Columba's reasons for leaving Ireland continue to be debatable to this day.³³ According to legend, he left voluntarily, seeing the journey as a way to practice *peregrinare pro Christo*, or a pilgrimage for Christ. This *peregrinare pro Christo* was seen as a method of practicing white martyrdom, because in his day red martyrdom (being killed for the sake of the Lord) was no longer possible or necessary. In fact, in the Christianization of Ireland, not one Christian missionary ever won the "crown of martyrdom." Ireland has no martyrs. Eventually, leaving one's homeland to go on religious missions became a standard and unique feature of Irish monasticism. Leaving Ireland itself represented a kind of irrevocable break with one's tribe and family, the beginning of a completely new life.

One of Columba's major attributes was his power to perform miracles in the name of God. In the contest to convert Ireland's pagans, the Christian holy men had to surpass the strength of their counterparts, all the while referring their strength to God, thus making the Christian God appear all the more powerful and awe-inspiring. Columba, too, was a man of many visions, and was even given the primary power to anoint two kings, a privilege exercised by the clergy from the seventh to the ninth centuries (prior to the practice we find among the Franks). In pre-Christian Ireland, druids held positions at the top of the social hierarchy, and "such practitioners of the sacred played a leading part in political matters, and the appointment of a king would depend in no small degree on the support of a

³³ Richard Sharpe, "Introduction" in Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 12.

druid”.³⁴ Clearly, the crowning of kings by clergy during the Middle Ages was the result of the transference of druidic power to the Christian holy man. There are also traditions suggesting that the druid Cathbad was perhaps the father of Conchobor, who was the high king of Ireland in the time of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. This is a literary reference from pre-Christian Ireland that emphasizes the power and influence possessed by the druids, evidence that they were indeed closely tied to the royal line, as we note in the life of Columba. Classical sources too serve to illuminate the power and influence enjoyed by the druids among kings.

...the Celts have men called Druids, who deal with prophecy and every division of wisdom. Even kings would not be so bold as to make a decision or take action without their [the Druids’] counsel. Thus in reality it was they [the Druids] who governed. The kings, who sat on golden thrones and lived luxuriously in their great residences, became mere agents of the decisions of the Druids.³⁵

This agreement between Celtic and classical sources strongly suggests the great influence the druidic caste exerted over not only their society but over their society’s rulers. These were the agents who not only held the authority to appoint and counsel kings, but they (in some instances) fathered them as well. Their power radiated down from the very pinnacle of the warrior society, which in itself serves as an indicator as to how deeply druidic authority extended into pagan Celtic society.

³⁴ Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Celts: A History* (Cork, Ireland: The Collins Press, 2002), 27.

³⁵ Dion Chrysostom, *Orations 49* in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 30-1.

Adomnán of Iona, Columba's hagiographer, wrote the *Life of St. Columba* over one hundred years after the saint's death, and hence had the great advantage of (piously) embellishing the many feats of his life, especially the great druidic skill of prophecy. Adomnán presents Columba as a dynamic, powerful individual, capable of fantastic miracles and feats. The *Life* presents Columba as a "super druid" having beneficent (pagan) powers, and utilizing them for the good of the people, and the spread of Christianity. In one instance, Columba foretells to Abbot Comgall a battle fought, years in the future, and that kin of his would perish there:

'The day will come, Comgall, when the spring from which this water was fetched for us will be unfit for men to use.'

'For what reason will the water be tainted?' said Comgall.

'Because it will be filled with human blood. For my near kindred and your kinsmen according to the flesh (that is the Uí Néill and the Cruithin) will make war on one another, fighting a battle at this fort of *Dún Cethirn* near here. One of my kindred will actually be killed in this spring, and his blood with that of others will fill the site of the spring'.³⁶

Following the record of this prophecy, Adomnán writes of a young monk describing to two older monks a battle he had witnessed, and they proclaim what a great prophet Columba was, for he had foretold to them that very event years ago.³⁷ Columba was renowned for his ability to see into the future, and Adomnán's *Life* is replete with examples of this talent. Another prophecy that

³⁶ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 151.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 152.

Adomnán records in the *Life* is one which Columba makes on the isle of Skye concerning a pagan man:

‘Strange to tell, my dear children, today, here in this place and on this patch of ground, an old man – a pagan but one who has spent his whole life in natural goodness – will receive baptism, and will die and be buried.’

Only an hour later – look! – a little boat came in to land on the shore, bringing in its prow a man worn out with age. He was the chief commander of the warband in the region of *Cé*. Two young men carried him from the boat and set him down in front of the blessed man. As soon as he had received the word of God from St. Columba, through an interpreter, he believed and was baptized by him. When the rite of baptism was finished, as the saint had predicted, the old man died on the same spot and they buried him there ...³⁸

Here Adomnán has laid out for us again another example of Columba’s infallible predictions. The impact value of this account is heightened by the fact that in addition to proving Columba’s capacity for predicting the future, it recounts the conversion of a pagan leader, who believes and accepts the tenets of Christianity solely upon hearing the saint’s words. Thus, not only has Columba’s power been validated, but the narrative also showcases a pagan’s denunciation of his own religion and his subsequent unhesitating acceptance of Christianity. Accounts of this nature would have served as a potent means to assert Christianity’s superiority to the pagan audience as well as to recent converts.

Not surprisingly, the druids too were said to have possessed clairvoyance and the ability to foresee future events. According to several ancient authors on the Celts and their society, the druids were highly regarded for their knowledge of

³⁸ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 136.

nature and the universe, their wisdom and their ability to predict the future.³⁹ One such example of druidic prophecy comes to us from Vopiscus:

...Diocletian was once staying at an inn in the region of the Tungri tribe in Gaul. He was at the time still at a lesser rank in the army. He went once to settle the day's bill for his accommodation with a Druidess. This woman said to him, 'You are excessively acquisitive and stingy with Your money, Diocletian.' As a joke, he replied to that, 'I shall be more generous when I am emperor.' After these words the Druidess responded, 'Don't joke, Diocletian, for you *will* be emperor when you have slain The Boar.'⁴⁰

The reference to the boar in this account is significant, because these animals were highly charged with symbolism in the ancient world, as they were very dangerous to hunt and thus a prize piece of meat. The druidess could have been alluding to Diocletian's future ascension to the position of emperor after completing a difficult feat or task. This account suggests that there were instances when the druids' prophecies and predictions of the future were indeed impressively accurate. Such successes would aid in promoting and maintaining them as individuals worthy and deserving of the position of religious leader. Though on the other hand, according to Cicero, these predictions were sometimes made by conjecture,⁴¹ which may suggest that the druids' prophecies may not

³⁹ Suetonius, *Claudius* 25 in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 31.

⁴⁰ Vopiscus, *Numerianus* 14, in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 35.

⁴¹ Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.41.90 in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 31.

always have been precise. This idea that there may have been some error in the druids' predictions would only have aided in making the unfailing accuracy of Columba's predictions more stunning. Furthermore, here we have evidence for women druids. Philip Freeman refers to the druidic cult as an "equal opportunity priesthood," open to both men and women; though historians are unsure as to whether women were allowed to occupy all the various positions.⁴² Additionally, Miranda J. Green states that both classical (as we have seen) and Irish texts mention the existence of female druids.⁴³ In considering powerful pagan Celtic women, we must also take into account Scáthach of Ulster, a formidable woman who was a prophetess skilled in the arts of war and who was also the great Cúchulainn's teacher.⁴⁴

Columba also possessed the power to heal people and animals. In one instance, Adomnán writes of Columba healing a large group of people and livestock with bread that he blessed dipped in water at his command.⁴⁵ Healing was not an area that the druids were described as having any authority over. Perhaps this offered the saints a clear opportunity to 'best' their pagan opponents. Adomnán describes how the saint was able to change water into wine, "still storms at sea," bless a well which had been polluted with demons, and he also had powers over animals and other elements of nature, such as the power of the winds. Many of these miracles recall feats that Jesus had performed. Adomnán's

⁴² Philip Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland, A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 99.

⁴³ Miranda J. Green, *The World of the Druids* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1997), 93.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁵ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 157.

mention of Columba's ability to change water into wine must have been a clear reference to Jesus and the wedding at Cana. In this, as in the other feats, it appears as though Columba was Christ himself, come among the Irish. This idea would also serve to link Columba to Christian tradition, reminding readers that the saint's power originated in a force far greater than that given the druids.

Another example of the influence held by Columba is mentioned by the medieval monk and scholar, the Venerable Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*: "Iona is always ruled by an abbot in priest's orders, to whose authority the whole province, including the bishops, is subject, contrary to the usual custom. This practice was established by its first abbot Columba, who was not a bishop himself, but a priest and monk."⁴⁶ Columba held such authority during the course of his life that he was able to establish traditions that were to continue long after his death; just as he was also given the power to conduct activities such as ordaining kings. This is a very important example of the sway this influential and charismatic monk possessed, and it is prominently emphasized in documents that mention him. The writing of saints' lives as hagiographies by other monks was intended to showcase the accomplishments and powers of these saints, and make them appear more impressive and influential than the druids of the old, pagan traditions. An example of Columba's saintly power over the natural world comes to us from Adomnán; Columba, upon giving a stake to a beggar man said: "Keep this sharp stick carefully. It will not harm any men, I

⁴⁶ Bede, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 149.

believe, nor any cattle, but with it you may kill wild animals and fish. As long as you have this stake, your house will never be short of game for the table.⁴⁷ Here, Columba demonstrates his power over the life and death of beings in nature, namely, wild animals. This account also demonstrates Columba's ability to provide sustenance to the hungry. This event offers us yet another example of how effortlessly Columba was able to manipulate and master the natural world. Nature and the earth were such intrinsic elements in the Celts' pagan religion that incorporating them into the Irish Christian tradition became a prominent feature of the conversion strategy.

Another great and noteworthy saint was St. Cuthbert, born in AD 634. Although his life was spent in England, Cuthbert was very much a part of the Irish tradition, and as such he provides the historian with an example of the characteristics of the Irish saint. In his early years, Cuthbert was educated by Irish monks at the monastery at Melrose.⁴⁸ Subsequently, Cuthbert spent many years at Lindisfarne as prior, followed by some years spent as a hermit, until AD 685 when he was elected the bishop of Lindisfarne.⁴⁹

In AD 721 the Venerable Bede wrote *The Life of Saint Cuthbert*, which incorporated much material from an earlier *Life* of AD 700.⁵⁰ Bede's *Life* is replete with evidence of the saint's holiness and provides many characteristics which may be linked back to the Irish tradition. From his earliest years, Cuthbert

⁴⁷ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 185.

⁴⁸ D.H. Farmer, *The Age of Bede* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 16.

was marked out as special and as having been ordained for great things by God. Bede takes care to illustrate many instances throughout Cuthbert's life in which the saint's holiness is affirmed by other, influential members of the Church. Many miracles are also related in order to affirm Cuthbert's place within the already lengthy tradition of Christian saints, as well as his identification with Christ and Moses.

A close study of the life of Cuthbert strongly suggests how this saint was constructed as sacred propaganda for the Church, directly targeting the pagan populations of the British Isles. From early boyhood, Cuthbert is presented to us as a fiercely competitive individual, always far out-doing his companions in games, and subsequently boasting profusely about the triumph:

He was naturally agile and quick-witted and usually won the game. He would often still be fresh when the rest were tired and would look round in triumph, as though the game were in his hands, and ask who was willing to continue. He used to boast that he had beaten all those of his own age and many who were older at wrestling, jumping, running, and every other exercise.⁵¹

His behavior is greatly reminiscent of the Irish warriors, particularly of the greatest hero of them all, Cúchulainn, the celebrated warrior of the famous epic the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. Like Cuthbert, Cúchulainn too is presented as a superior athlete from a very young age, possessing the impressive ability to best “the boy-troop of three times fifty boys” when they engaged in sport:

⁵¹ Bede, *Life of Saint Cuthbert* in D.H. Farmer, (ed.), *The Age of Bede* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 45-6.

When they played Shoot-the-Goal it was Cúchulainn who filled the hole with his shots and they were helpless against him. When it was their turn to shoot against the hole, all together, he turned them aside single-handed and not one ball got in. When it was time to wrestle he overthrew by himself the whole three fifties of them: and there wasn't room around him for the number needed to throw him. When they played the Stripping-Game he stripped them all stark naked. They couldn't even pluck the brooch from his cloak.⁵²

As we can see here, Cúchulainn bests his opponents, all one hundred fifty of them, with surpassing ease. His boastful nature is manifested through his continual challenging of the boy-troop described in the *Táin*, in spite of the fact that he knows that they cannot beat him. Cúchulainn is the greatest athlete who is destined to mature into the greatest warrior, and in pagan Irish society such precocious behavior was fitting for such a remarkable warrior. As a boastful champion, Cuthbert was simply being presented in a manner in which Bede's audience could readily understand. The Irish Christian holy man would seem much less of a foreign threat to the suspicious Irish if he possessed characteristics that they traditionally valued. Right from the outset Bede sets forth Cuthbert as having a competitive, heroic and war-like spirit – a nature that the pagan Irish could sympathetically accept. This detail also placed Cuthbert within an established tradition of warriors and heroes, alongside legendary men such as the great Cúchulainn.

As with many other saints of the Irish tradition, Cuthbert was described as having wielded power over animals and the natural world. This was a particularly

⁵² Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 82.

important aspect of the tradition, as animals and nature were central to Celtic pagan beliefs. The druids possessed a great degree of influence over nature and if the Christian missionaries wanted to have any degree of success, then their saints had to display an even greater show of power. In recounting episodes in which Cuthbert both brought forth water from barren rock and drove away birds from eating his crop of barley with just the sound of his voice, Bede accomplishes two things. First, he establishes Cuthbert as one who exercised control over the natural world, particularly birds, which were considered lucky and prophetic by the Celts. Second, he also firmly places Cuthbert within the tradition of two great saints of the Church: Benedict and Antony. Thus, with two accounts, Bede has managed to give Cuthbert both legitimacy in the eyes of the pagan Irish and to associate Cuthbert with the traditions of the Church for the edification of his Christian audience.

‘The place I have chosen, as you can see, is without a well. Pray with me, I beseech you, that He ... may, “giving glory not unto us but to His Name”, open a spring of water for us on this rocky ground.’ ... They dug a pit and found it next morning full of water springing up from beneath. Without a doubt it was the prayers of the saint that had brought forth water from ground of the driest, hardest kind. ...

The barley was brought long past the proper time for planting, when there was no hope of it growing, but it soon sprang up and brought forth a very good crop. When it began to ripen the birds came down and set about devouring it. ... They flew off at his first word and did no further damage. These two miracles of the venerable servant of God are reminiscent of the doings of the two fathers. In bringing water out of the rock he reminds one of a similar miracle performed by St. Benedict – only he brought it forth more abundantly because there were more people in need – and in driving away the birds he was following the example of St. Antony who, by words alone, restrained wild asses from trampling his

little garden.⁵³

Thus, in the space of two short narratives, Bede has succeeded in establishing Cuthbert's position in both Irish tradition as well as his status as one of the great Christian monastic saints.

In legend and myth, the heroes of pagan Ireland were marked as special from the time of their youth. Part of the heroic tradition involved the early recognition of latent greatness in these individuals, whose adult lives would be woven into the fabric of legend. The singling out of these future heroes in their youth served to spread their fame; by the time they reached manhood, they were well-known across Ireland. The recognition of excellence also served to secure for them the best and most noble upbringing and training at arms that could be provided. This would ensure that the leaders of the land would be able to capitalize upon their talents and potential. One such example of a pagan hero who was recognized early in life was Cúchulainn, said to be perhaps the greatest hero of them all. The episode surrounding his birth was chronicled as part of the text of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*: "The men of Ulster were assembled in Emain Macha when her son was born, and they began arguing over which of them should rear the boy. They went to Conchobor for a decision."⁵⁴ The nobles of the great houses of Ulster recognize the heroic future within Cúchulainn as soon as he is born, and thus all

⁵³ Bede, *Life of Saint Cuthbert* in D.H. Farmer, (ed.), *The Age of Bede* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 69 - 71.

⁵⁴ Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23.

of them want to have a hand in his development and his life. As a result of their arguing, they appeal to the king for a satisfactory solution. But even the wise king is unable to come to the right answer. Therefore Conchobor decides to pass the burden of this weighty decision to the judge, Morann:

He should be given to Conchobor, for he is Finnchaem's kin. Sencha can teach him eloquence and oratory, Blai Briuga can provide for him, Fergus can take him on his knee, Amargin can be his teacher, with Conall Cernach as foster-brother. The teats of a mother Finnchaem can supply. In this manner he will be formed by all – chariot-fighter, prince and sage. He will be cherished by many, this boy, and he will settle your trials of honor and win your ford-fights and all your battles.⁵⁵

Morann's decision is a wise one, for now, being raised and taught by the greatest warriors and learned men of Ulster, Cúchulainn would become the best possible version of himself, and the hero he was born to be. He will also integrate the community, as well as become a self-sacrificial hero. In taking pains to ensure that the boy was brought up properly, the men of Ulster were paving the way for the existence of the greatest and most famous hero Ireland had ever known. This idea of many people being involved in the development of a child was not a new one – the Irish had long practiced the idea of fostering. This was an important custom that was a deeply embedded tradition in Ireland by the Christian period.⁵⁶ It has also been documented that this was a formal arrangement beneficial to both

⁵⁵ Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 25.

⁵⁶ Brónagh Ní Chonaill, "Children" in Seán Duffy, (ed) *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 79.

families involved, which was taken very seriously.⁵⁷ At a certain age, a boy would be sent away to live with and learn from another noble family. The idea of Cúchulainn's fostering with several individuals thus was just a part of a long-established Irish tradition of educating and raising children. In order for this to take place, it was essential that the hero be recognized as early as possible, so training might begin.

Fostering was also an important and "Irish" tradition, as was the concept of the noble and brave Irish hero of the pagan legends. These were aspects of Irish culture that the Christian missionaries could not afford to ignore when they set their sights upon Ireland. Therefore, we tend to see many of these cultural aspects reproduced in the more sanitized lives of the saints. Cuthbert was one such saint who very much embodied the Irish heroic mentality. Although his life was spent in Northumbria, England, Cuthbert was educated and trained by Irish monks, and as such deserves a place in Irish monastic tradition. Cuthbert is another example of a saint whose latent greatness was recognized early on, just as Cúchulainn's was. But the chronicle of Cuthbert's life goes a step further – this recognition was also accompanied by a prophecy, which was proven to be accurate in the course of time. The news is delivered while Cuthbert is on the field of play with other young boys:

Suddenly a child no more than three years old ran up to him ...
he cried out: 'Why, most holy priest and bishop Cuthbert, do you

⁵⁷ Brónagh Ní Chonaill, "Children" in Seán Duffy, (ed) *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 79 – 80.

persist in doing what is so contrary both to your nature and your rank? How ill it befits you to play with children, you whom the Lord has marked out to instill virtue into your elders!’ ... From then on he showed himself more mature and earnest, as the Spirit, who had spoken to him through the mouth of an infant, spoke to him now in the recesses of his heart.⁵⁸

In this episode, not only has Cuthbert been publicly ear-marked for great things at a very young age, but it has also been prophesied that he will later become both a priest and a bishop. Already, just in the beginning of his *Life* by Bede, Cuthbert is out-doing the pagan heroes. While they were indeed recognized as people who were going to do great things, there was never any specificity as to what those might be. Yet in his account of Cuthbert, Bede has detailed two positions that Cuthbert was to attain during his lifetime. Bede has also presented this prophecy from the unlikely mouth of a small boy, a three-year old. Surely someone that young would have had to have obtained his words from the Lord, for how could so small a boy fabricate such a tale? This also tells us that Cuthbert’s greatness was so profound that he didn’t need to hear the prophecy from the mouth of a pagan wise man – a small child and the word of God sufficed. Further edification for the narrative is provided in Cuthbert himself, who heard the words of the Lord in his heart. These early indications of great power were an integral aspect of the pagan heroic tales; and by applying and embellishing this tradition in regard to the early saints, missionaries were creating histories and “legends” in their hagiographies that the Irish people would find interesting and convincing. Seeing

⁵⁸ Bede, *Life of Saint Cuthbert* in D.H. Farmer, (ed.), *The Age of Bede* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 46.

their own age-old tradition taking on further developments would, we might imagine, surely catch their attention. It was no doubt the hope of the Church that the peoples' hearts would be won over as well.

Another saint who was particularly influential in the evangelization of Ireland is the famed Patrick. Fairly little biographical detail is known of Patrick's life, though historians generally agree he was born around AD 390, was abducted as a young man and taken to Ireland as a slave around 415, escaping in about 421, and subsequently returning to Ireland as a missionary in 432, and dying around 461.⁵⁹ It is thought that although Patrick claimed to have been a bishop, he undertook the mission to Ireland entirely on his own; this action may have been a result of a vision he claimed to have had in which he was told to bring Christianity to Ireland by "the voice of the Irish."⁶⁰ Dáibhí Ó Cróinín states that Patrick's mission was not authorized by the Church and that his own family begged him to remain in Britain; yet Patrick returned to Ireland, naming God as the reason for his motivation.⁶¹ Whatever his motives, Patrick's mission to Ireland was so instrumental in the Christianization of the Irish that he has been referred to as the Apostle of Ireland and as the founder of Christianity there.⁶² This reference attracts our attention, especially in light of the conversion strategies associated with his missionary activities. Historians believe that Patrick viewed himself as a

⁵⁹ David Robert Howlett, "Patrick" in Seán Duffy, (ed) *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 369.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400 – 1200* (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1995), 25.

⁶² Brian de Breffny, *In the Steps of St Patrick* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1982), 7.

pioneer in the mission to Ireland; in his writings, Patrick refers to himself as the first missionary to Ireland, and never discusses the activities of any other clergy there.⁶³ As dates are subject to some uncertainty, it is indeed possible that Patrick was the first Christian to attempt to evangelize the Irish. Ó Cróinín mentions the AD 632 Paschal letter of Cummin which cites Patrick as, in essence, the father of the Irish Church.⁶⁴ Despite Patrick's conviction that he was doing God's will and his assertions that he was indeed the first Christian missionary in Ireland, some anxiety over his role there can be detected in examining his *Confessio*, or *Confession*.⁶⁵

In the *Confessio*, written as a response to allegations made against him by ecclesiastical superiors, Patrick is careful to construct himself as a humble personality, stating that he has not had the opportunity to study like other clerics, as he was obliged to write in a foreign language.⁶⁶ Patrick also emphasizes that in his mission to Ireland he was solely in obedience to the divine will of God, though he admits he became a better person as a result:

...I did not go to Ireland of my own accord, ... but this was really rather to my own good, since as a result I was reformed by the Lord, and He fitted me to be today what was once far from me, that I should be concerned and busily active for the salvation of others, whereas at that time I took no thought even for myself.⁶⁷

⁶³ Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, "Palladius" in Seán Duffy, (ed) *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 361.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Brian de Breffny, *In the Steps of St Patrick* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1982), 37.

⁶⁶ A.B.E. Hood, (ed., trans), *St. Patrick: His Writings and Muirchu's Life* (London and Chichester: Phillimore, 1978), 46.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

Patrick portrays himself as a selfless person who has given of himself tirelessly to bring others to the enlightenment of the faith. It would appear with his *Confessio* that Patrick was looking to legitimate his missionary work in Ireland to those who laid accusations against him. In the text of his *Confessio*, Patrick displays a decidedly humble air, which poses quite a contrast to the attitude taken by his two biographers, Muirchú and Tirechán, though they of course were writing hagiography very much in the tradition of Christianizing pagan peoples that we see elsewhere – such as Boniface in Germany.

Patrick's two main biographers were contemporaries of each other. Both wrote about two hundred years after the saint's death and used various written and oral sources, some of which are now lost.⁶⁸ It is thought that one of these lost lives of Patrick was written by St. Columba of Iona.⁶⁹ While both the surviving accounts of Patrick's life must be treated with some degree of skepticism, owing to their purpose as hagiographies, Brian de Breffny states that Muirchú was a "professional historian," while Tirechán was working under more of an ecclesiastical agenda.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, as hagiographies these two chronicles serve to illuminate Patrick's miracles, which would have been vitally important as a part of the conversion strategy of pagan Ireland. Another surviving life of Patrick is *The Tripartite Life of Patrick*, thought to have been compiled mainly from early sources and written down in the ninth century, though that is not to say that an

⁶⁸ Brian de Breffny, *In the Steps of St Patrick* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1982), 35.

⁶⁹ David Robert Howlett, "Patrick" in Seán Duffy, (ed) *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 370.

⁷⁰ Brian de Breffny, *In the Steps of St Patrick* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1982), 39, 53.

earlier or even a somewhat later date is impossible.⁷¹ Historian J.B. Bury notes that the identity of the author of *The Tripartite Life of Patrick* is not known, though Bury does credit the volume with containing significant amounts of “ancient material” as well as selections from both the works of Muirchú and Tirechán.⁷²

In *The Tripartite Life*, in the tradition of the pagan hero, Patrick is presented as being imbued with excellence right from his birth:

Now, when Patrick was born, he was taken to the blind flat-faced son to be baptized. Gornias was the priest’s name, and there was no water by him wherewith he could perform the baptism. So with the infant’s hand he made the sign of the cross over the earth, and a well of water brake thereout. Gornias washed his face (with that water), and his eyes were opened, and he read the (order of) baptism, he who had never learned letters. God wrought for Patrick a triple miracle in that place, namely, the well of water out of the earth, and his eyes to the blind son, and his reading of the order of baptism without knowing his letters until then. And Patrick was baptized thereafter.⁷³

This account provides evidence that Patrick was believed to have been singled out early by God for greatness and that he was endowed by God with the facility to perform miracles in His name. It is evident here the hagiographer was aware of the Celtic tradition of heroes’ excellence being recognized in their boyhood, though the account of Patrick goes a step beyond in having miracles wrought by a

⁷¹ J.B. Bury, *The Life of St. Patrick and His Place in History* (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1905), 270.

⁷² *Ibid*, 272.

⁷³ Whitley Stokes, (ed., trans.) *The Tripartite Life of Patrick, with other Documents Relating to that Saint, Part I*. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), 9.

newborn. This would also seem to indicate a phenomenal amount of supernatural power latent within Patrick, especially considering that the druid priests had to be trained for twenty years before they could perform fantastic feats. In one brief account, the hagiographer has managed to place the infant Patrick in a more powerful position than both the pagan heroes and the wise druids.

In the lives, Patrick often appears to be physically battling the druids in some manner, whether laying curses upon them, competing with them in feats or even striking the druids dead where they stood. While this type of competition is certainly reminiscent of the pagan Celtic warriors, here we also see possible evidence for the resistance Patrick might have met with in his efforts to spread Christianity in Ireland. This would not seem entirely unbelievable if it is indeed true that Patrick was the first Christian missionary to Ireland, as he would have us believe; the druids had good reason to react in a visceral manner to the prospect of losing their revered place and status in pagan society. Patrick himself recounts in his *Confessio* how he gained converts among the Irish elite class: *fili Scottorum et filiae regulorum monachi et virgines Christi esse videntur* or “sons and daughters of Irish under-kings are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ.”⁷⁴ The druids may have begun to have special concern for Patrick’s activities when he began to have success in converting those of higher status in Irish society, and thus the pagan priests were spurred to action.⁷⁵ If there was, in fact, any violence

⁷⁴ Christina Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church: Ireland 450 – 1150* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 33.

⁷⁵ Philip Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 95.

against Patrick through the agency of the druids, the hagiographers certainly were careful to chronicle Patrick's defeat of the offenders through the use of divinely endowed powers:

(The wizard) Lochru went angrily and noisily, with contention and questions, against Patrick; and then did go astray into blaspheming the Trinity and the catholic faith. Patrick thereafter looked wrathfully upon him, and cried with a great voice unto God, and this he said:

“Lord, who canst do all things, and on whose power dependeth all that exists, and who hast sent us hither to preach Thy name to the heathen, let this ungodly man, who blasphemeth Thy name, be lifted up, and let him forthwith die!” When he said this, the wizard was raised into the air and forthwith again cast down, and his brains were scattered on the stone, and he was broken in pieces, and died in their presence. The heathen were adread at that.⁷⁶

This account must have come across to the pagan Irish as especially potent; as this leader of a new religion was able to strike down their revered spiritual leader with only his words. This must have been a truly terrifying prospect, which must have engendered doubts regarding the druids' powers, as well as consternation amongst the pagans. Patrick must have seemed absolutely frightening when he was angry and shouting curses invoking the name of God that resulted in the deaths of his opponents. This account would have served the twofold purpose of dismissing the druids and the pagan religion as completely powerless while showcasing the vast might of the Christian God through the authority bestowed upon His servant, Patrick.

⁷⁶ Whitley Stokes, (ed., trans.) *The Tripartite Life of Patrick, with other Documents Relating to that Saint, Part I.* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), 45.

In another account in *The Tripartite Life*, Patrick is demonstrated to have possessed power over aspects of the natural world which would have been especially meaningful to the Celts, given their reverence for, and close connection with, nature. Here, Patrick and a druid compete on the plain of Tara, working miracles in front of many men of Ireland:

“Let us,” said Lucat-moel [the druid], “work miracles before the host in that great plain.” Said Patrick: “Which be they?” Said the wizard: “Let us bring snow on the plain til the plain be white in front of us.” Said Patrick to him: “I have no desire to go against God’s will.” Said the wizard: “I will bring the snow on the plain although it be not thy desire.” Then he began the chants of wizardry and the arts of devilry, so that the snow fell til it reached men’s girdles. They all saw and marveled greatly. Said Patrick: “We see this. Put it away if thou canst.” Said the wizard: I cannot do that til this hour to-morrow.”

“By my God’s doom!” saith Patrick, “it is in evil thy power stands, and not in good.” Patrick blessed the plain throughout the four quarters. Quicker than speech, at Patrick’s word the snow vanished, without rain, without sun, without wind.⁷⁷

In this account Patrick demonstrates the ability to complete feats when the druid fell short. This is a glaring example of the druids’ power and that of the pagan religion not being potent enough to stand up to the capabilities of the awesome Christian wonder-worker. Patrick also reinforces the notion of the pagan religion as being malevolent in referring to the druid’s power as “devilry” and as evil. Another important aspect of this account is the fact that Patrick makes it evident to observers that he too possessed control over natural elements, even surpassing

⁷⁷ Whitley Stokes, (ed., trans.) *The Tripartite Life of Patrick, with other Documents Relating to that Saint, Part I*. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), 57.

the druid in his ability to remove the snow when the druid was rendered completely ineffective. Yet again the hagiographer has supplied an example of the ineptitude of the pagan priestly class in the face of the forces of Christianity, while also neatly delivering evidence that the Christian God, too, possessed sway over nature.

While we may never know whether Patrick was indeed the very first missionary to reach Ireland, what remains undoubtedly clear is the great effect he had upon the Christianization of Ireland. We do know that he arrived early in the evangelization process for several reasons: the dating of his life to the early 5th century, his own writings, and the fact that it appears as though he encountered more animosity from the druids than the subsequent missionaries who followed in his footsteps. Patrick was influential in establishing the foundation of a great church at the site of Armagh, near Ulster's Emain Macha in AD 444, and for gathering many converts to the new faith, many of them, importantly, among the elite.⁷⁸ Christina Harrington hails Patrick as an important figure also for the fact that he is the first person in Ireland from whom there remains a surviving narrative document.⁷⁹ It is apparent for many reasons that Patrick played a vital role in paving the way for Christian missionaries in subsequent centuries to follow his model; he was immortalized for this work as the patron saint of Ireland.

⁷⁸ David Robert Howlett, "Patrick" in Seán Duffy, (ed) *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 369.

⁷⁹ Christina Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church: Ireland 450 – 1150* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23.

III. CONVERSION TACTICS USED BY CHRISTIAN SAINTS AND MISSIONARIES

The druids, as members of the pagan “priestly class,” were an important force in Celtic society; they enjoyed prominent status in the social hierarchy, and were considered to be the intermediaries between this world and the next.⁸⁰ Druids underwent some type of formal training, the details of which are unknown even to this day, as they never committed their knowledge to writing.⁸¹ Their training aided in promoting them as more powerful figures because they were the sole members of society who possessed the esoteric wisdom of the ancient rites, and this wisdom we believe was never committed to writing. The training of druids often could take as long as twenty years, which ensured that the individuals were firmly invested and committed to the cult. This class of druids was one of the most formidable forces that early Christian missionaries had to contend with in their efforts to establish firmly the roots of Christianity in pagan Celtic Ireland. But in the Christian missionaries powerful druids faced formidable opponents that would ultimately overcome them. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the various strategies they employed to defeat the pagan priests.

⁸⁰ Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Celts: A History* (Cork, Ireland: The Collins Press, 2002), 26.

⁸¹ Myles Dillon, “Celtic Religion and Celtic Society” in Joseph Raftery, (ed.), *The Celts* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1964), 92.

The guardians of these deeply instilled pagan traditions were not going to give up the fight for Ireland easily. The druids had long enjoyed powerful prominent positions, along with the trust and faith of the Irish people, who were also highly suspicious of these Christian newcomers. Why should they abandon the beliefs and traditions that their ancestors had held since time immemorial? Christianity would have to give the Irish overwhelmingly convincing reasons to accept its doctrines. As we shall see, to combat the social and political hold the druids had in society, the Celtic monks, and later the monk-bishops, adapted many of the characteristics not just of the druids themselves but also of the fabulous warriors of the bygone heroic age. These monks, in a word, would claim powers and authority that would “out druid” the druids; that is, they would lay claim to those superhuman abilities endowed by God that made them far more powerful than their adversaries, the pagan druids. In fact, as monks, the Irish would engage in many of the same activities as the druids, displaying all the same powers – but “sanctified” for the Christian Church.

Though we have no historical documents that lay out in any form a grand strategy for the conversion of pagan peoples, we can see that creating in the monk someone more powerful than the pagan priests was one part of a larger program or strategy to aid Christianity in converting Ireland. As the agency of the religion of the powerful Roman Empire, the Roman Church made ready to provide the kings and people of Ireland with a new and even more powerful cadre of divinely inspired religious leaders. In the Roman Church itself, this idea of new powerful

heroes, or holy men, stretches back many centuries, to Antony of Egypt and the Desert Fathers, to Martin of Tours, Benedict of Norcia, and an army of powerful heroic monk-bishops. These holy men take on a new configuration on Irish soil in confronting the druidic caste, which visibly dominated political and cultural affairs. The venerated Celtic warrior also comes to be displaced by monks who are able to perform even greater feats than any of Ireland's mighty heroes, which in turn would greatly help the Christian Church promote its agenda. Hagiographers depict the monks as endowed by God with many special powers that even the druids could not claim to have. The great St. Columba was said by Adomnán of Iona, his hagiographer, to have held the power of life and death over animals (which were especially important and venerated by the Celts), as well as complete control over the elements, and the gift of prophecy. One such instance of Columba's power over animals and the natural world was the saint's encounter with a wild boar. This was significant because the boar was an animal sacred to the Celts, both as a prized piece of meat, and also as an animal of great power and strength -- an animal that was also exceedingly dangerous to hunt. St. Columba easily masters this beast, coming across it one day in the forest as it was being hunted:

Seeing this, the saint stood still and watched it from a distance. Then he raised his holy hand and called on the name of God with earnest prayer, and said to the boar:

'Go no further, but die where you are now.'

The saint's voice rang out in the forest, and the beast was unable to move any further but at once collapsed dead in front of him, killed

by the power of his terrible word.⁸²

The Celts venerated the saint's power over this beast because it confirmed his position against the druids, who also held sway over aspects of the natural world, such as snowfall. Dáithí Ó hÓgáin argues that the druids were considered to have held a role similar to that of shamans, having the powers of seers, being able to mediate between worlds; they were also referred to as being "experts in the science of nature".⁸³ Yet it is obvious through the many miracles described by Adomnán of Iona that Columba, and in turn, God, who was the source of his power, was by far more powerful than the druids ever were.

As hagiographers represent the past, in every account the druids come up short and are bested by the holy monks. From their accounts we can infer that the druids' prophesizing must have been quite accurate, because it was written by Adomnán that people were often stunned by the accuracy of Columba's predictions.⁸⁴ So, all the more accurate are the monks' predictions, for they can see things inaccessible to the druids. Columba's predictions, moreover, are infallible. Monks, in their role as "soldiers of Christ" wielded the crosses and talismans of Christianity to "fortify" themselves.⁸⁵ But these were actually of secondary importance since the monks are described as being "... armed with the shield of faith and wearing the helmet of salvation. . . ."⁸⁶ The powers of the Celtic

⁸² Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 175.

⁸³ Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Celts: A History* (Cork, Ireland: The Collins Press, 2002), 27.

⁸⁴ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 151-52.

⁸⁵ Dom Louis Gougaud, *Christianity in Celtic Lands* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1932), 71.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

monks did not rely on external symbols and amulets but were generated by the inner spirit that flowed from their union with God. The hagiographers knew that conversion tactics incorporating the heroic ideal would be one of the key factors in winning the Irish people over to the Christian faith.

Another aspect of the strategy of the Christian missionaries can be seen in exploiting the power of one's name. The name Columba was bestowed upon him by Celtic Christian tradition, as his birth name, Crimthann, had been rather inappropriate for a holy man, having meant "fox," which implies a sly, deceitful nature.⁸⁷ Changing the saint's name provided the opportunity to impart all of the desired Christian qualities to Columba, thereby alluding to his greatness even before the people of Ireland had seen his many miracles. In his second preface, Adomnán speaks of the appropriateness and importance of Columba's name: "What it says in Proverbs is appropriate here: 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.' From the days of his infancy, our abbot was enriched with this appropriate name by God's gift."⁸⁸ Clearly Columba's name was crucial, as Adomnán addresses it in his second preface, before he has even begun recounting the saint's life. Although we don't think this way, then names were believed to have mystical significance: there was a profound reason why one was given a name. Think of the Bible's emphasis on the names of Jesus, Peter and Paul, for example. Upon beginning his work for God, Peter's name was changed from

⁸⁷ Richard Sharpe, "Notes" in Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 243.

⁸⁸ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 104.

Cephas, and Saul to Paul. In the name is mysteriously vested God's design for that person's life and mission. So it was with Columba – before all time God had singled him out as His messenger. The Celts, too, understood the power invested in the name. This is evident in the reading of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, in which the druid Cathbad proclaims the boy Sétanta to be thereafter known as Cúchulainn:

“‘Cúchulainn shall be your name, the Hound of Culann,’ Cathbad said.

‘I like that for a name!’ Cúchulainn said.”⁸⁹ Even at the young age of seven years old, the boy Cúchulainn is already being regarded as a burgeoning hero and has thus been named appropriately. The champion's heroic future is further alluded to in light of the fact that the new name was bestowed upon him by a druid.

Following in both the traditions of the Church and of the Celts, Adomnán establishes St Columba's authority and calling as a man of God through his name, which meant “dove.”⁹⁰ The dove was an established symbol in Christian iconography, connected with the actions of the Holy Spirit, which descended from Heaven in the form of a dove. Another function of this name would have been the confirmation of new converts and even of convinced believers in their faith, for they would grasp the religious significance of the dove, and therefore that Columba was directed by the Holy Spirit.

Columba's association with the dove served a twofold purpose. Birds were considered to be prophetic and lucky creatures in Celtic religion and lore,

⁸⁹ Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84.

⁹⁰ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 104.

and often druids and other trusted religious leaders were associated with birds.⁹¹ Thus the saint's connection with a bird placed him firmly in the same tradition as the druids, though the dove itself was a part of the new Christian tradition.⁹² This seems to have been a particularly perceptive technique for the purposes of conversion by the Christian missionaries and hagiographers, and it would have required at least some understanding of the pagan traditions.

Another continuity between the pagan and Christian traditions is the presence with saints and some heroes of a type of halo (*nimbus*), or divine light about the person's head. This would serve as further indication that the individual had been singled out for greatness by a superior power. Both Columba and Cúchulainn exhibited this attribute. Adomnán recounts an event in which others saw the heavenly light shining about Columba's head:

There, while the sacrament was celebrated, St. Brendan moccu Altae saw a radiant ball of fire shining very brightly from St. Columba's head as he stood in front of the altar and consecrated the sacred oblation. It shone upwards like a column of light and lasted until the mysteries were completed. Afterwards St. Brendan disclosed what he had seen to St. Comgall and St. Cainnech.⁹³

This account by Adomnán describes Columba as having the great light upon him while he was performing the sacraments of the Mass. This would serve to indicate that the light had heavenly origins and was a device used by God to indicate the saint's greatness and evidence the fact that he was invested with

⁹¹ Mary Low, *Celtic Christianity and Nature: Early Irish and Hebridean Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 111.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 219.

divine power. The inclusion of this incident involving the light may have also been instrumental in connecting Columba with the pagan traditions. It appears as though the Celts told of some sort of special light which would shine from the foreheads of the great heroes, marking them as exceptional. Cúchulainn was described in the Book of Leinster as one who was endowed with this light: “Then the Liath Macha came to protect Cúchulainn as long as his soul remained in his body and the *lon láith* [?’hero’s light’] still blazed from his forehead.”⁹⁴ We can see from this account that the light surrounding a person’s head was considered a feature that distinguished the individual as unique and distinctive. This was something that was also a feature of the great heroes of the *Iliad*. This was not a new symbol for the Christian Church, though its use aided in advancing the Church’s cause in its missionary work with the Irish people through the application of an easily recognizable symbol that held both pagan and Christian connotations.

Creating a new hero in the form of the Christian monk was only one of many tactics employed by Christian missionaries to Ireland. Redefining the druid and the warrior-hero alone would not have been enough to convince the people of Ireland to put their trust in this new faith; further techniques were required. The Venerable Bede, writing in his 8th century AD *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, allows us a glimpse at other conversion strategies drawn on by

⁹⁴ The Book of Leinster, *The Death of Cúchulainn* in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 140.

Christian missionaries in the British Isles. Bede can be considered a reliable source on the conversion of Ireland, as he frequently wrote on Northumbria, a region of England to which the Irish had brought Christianity and still had considerable influence. In this work, Bede includes a copy of a letter dating to AD 601, sent by Pope Gregory to Abbot Mellitus, who was heading for Britain.

...when by God's help you reach our most reverend brother, Bishop Augustine, we wish you to inform him that we have been giving careful thought to the affairs of the English, and have come to the conclusion that the temples of the idols among that people should on no account be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. For if these temples are well-built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way, we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God.⁹⁵

The pope states plainly in his letter that the pagan people will be much more inclined to accept conversion if they are allowed to continue their old customs and practices, with of course the substitution of the crucial elements of the Christian cult. It is clear from the existence of this letter that the Christian missionaries knew that conversion by force and the destruction of pagan sites and altars could never eradicate the deeply rooted pagan religion and beliefs in the British Isles. Missionaries needed to learn how to co-opt and adapt the elements of paganism to attract pagans to a spiritual force perceived as far greater than their idols and shrines.

⁹⁵ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 91-2.

Bede offers yet another striking suggestion in his account of a pagan priest who confesses paganism as worthless and destroys his own altars and confesses that Christianity is the true faith. In Book II, Chapter 13, King “Edwin holds a council with his chief men about accepting the faith of Christ:”

Coifi, the chief Priest, replied without hesitation: ‘Your Majesty, let us give careful consideration to this new teaching; for I frankly admit that, in my experience, the religion that we have hitherto professed seems valueless and powerless. Now, if the gods had any power, they would surely have favoured myself, who has been more zealous in their service. Therefore, if on examination, you perceive that these new teachings are better and more effectual, let us not hesitate to accept them. ...I submit that the temples and altars that we have dedicated to no advantage be immediately desecrated and burned. ...I will do this myself; for now that the true God has granted me knowledge, who more suitably than I can set a public example and destroy the idols that I worshipped in ignorance?’ So he formally renounced his empty superstitions...⁹⁶

This pagan priest’s admission of the superiority of the Christian faith becomes a ‘practical argument’ employed by the missionaries in their conversion efforts. Stories like this one reinforce a belief in the obvious superiority of Christianity. The pagan priest acknowledges his own religion’s worthlessness in a series of statements to the king and his men. Coifi’s willful public destruction of the pagan idols creates a resonating example, which serves as ideal propaganda for the Christian faith. What better way could this new religion be advertised than to have the pagan priests themselves renounce their own religion and embrace Christianity?

⁹⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 129-30.

The druids had been a powerful force in pagan Irish society from generation to generation, venerated and respected as religious leaders by the population.⁹⁷ The idea presented by the hagiographers that these revered priests came to the conclusion that their beliefs were unfounded and erroneous must have been seen as one of the most convincing reasons for accepting the truth of the Christian monks' claims. This would certainly have given pause to even the most vehement protestors against Christianity, especially if they had been accustomed to respect the actions and decisions of the druids. If the druids themselves renounced the pagan ways, then what possible reason could there be to hold onto them? In the writing and telling of these accounts Christian monks were exceptionally clever in using the authorities of the old faith to aid in attracting converts to the new one.

In addition to the 'practical arguments' approach, hagiographers also chronicled instances in which the Christian saints came across as great heroes against the [dark] forces of paganism. One such event is St. Patrick's encounter with a group of druids in the Irish wood of Fochloth, which is mentioned in both Patrick's *Confession* and in Tírechán's narrative of Patrick's journeys.⁹⁸ Presently there is no scholarship on just why the wood of Fochloth was well-known, though historian Mary Low deduces that it must have been a rather important druidic cult center or grove; for Ireland at the time was made up largely

⁹⁷ Miranda J. Green, *The World of the Druids* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1997), 10.

⁹⁸ Mary Low, *Celtic Christianity and Nature: Early Irish and Hebridean Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 83.

of wooded areas, so for one in particular to stand out it must have held special importance.⁹⁹ Patrick is described as having met the druids alongside the river Moy, "...and there is a brief but decisive confrontation in which Patrick uncannily identifies their leader and calls down curses upon him. The druid drops dead, his followers scatter, and a large number of people are baptized."¹⁰⁰ This short account presents yet another way in which Christian missionaries attempted to discredit the druids. Low refers to this as the "heroic approach," which she claims was also favored by Tírechán in his works on the saints and druids.¹⁰¹ In this account Patrick is portrayed as superior by means of his decisiveness and the swiftness with which he is able to render the druid powerless, and indeed lifeless as well. The narrative presents Christianity through the saints as a formidable force superior in every way to the paganism endorsed by the druids. The heroic approach envisions a titanic battle between the forces of light and darkness, good and evil. An early Anglo-Saxon example of such a struggle survives in the epic tale of *Beowulf*, a great hero who fought and won against the evil monster Grendel. There are similar heroic elements in the descriptions of the Irish saints and their struggles to overcome the darkness of paganism. The hagiographers are clearly deliberate; they knew that they were dealing with a people whose legends and history were steeped in heroic tales of great deeds and uncommon valor. Clearly the heroic ideal had to become a part of the Christianity that was being

⁹⁹ Mary Low, *Celtic Christianity and Nature: Early Irish and Hebridean Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 83-4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

preached in Ireland, if the missionaries were to have any chance in winning over the Irish people.

Another vitally important tactic relied upon by the Christian missionaries was the conversion of the secular leaders. In the centuries after the birth of Christ, the conversion of peoples' leaders continually played a key role in Christianity's success in establishing itself across Europe. This was effected in many ways, often through employing a series of standard tactics. One approach was through the wives of the pagan kings or chieftains, who were often Christians. It had been useful for pagan kings to marry these women despite their Christian faith, for they often gained powerful political alliances through the union, with the stipulation that their wives would be allowed to worship as they pleased. Bede describes to us how King Ethelbert of Kent was married to a Frankish Christian woman:

For he had already heard of the Christian religion, having a Christian wife of the Frankish royal house named Bertha, whom he had received from her parents on condition that she should have freedom to hold and practice her faith unhindered with Bishop Liudhard, whom they had sent as her helper in the faith.¹⁰²

As a result of this marriage union, the king was willing to consider a message of conversion from the missionary Augustine when he and his company arrived in Kent in AD 597. This condition for the marriage would prove particularly advantageous to the Christian missionaries, for through the queen they now had access to the king's household. However, the chroniclers never allow the voice of

¹⁰² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 75.

the queen to be the sole agent of the king's conversion, as this would place far too much power and importance upon the voice of the woman, and diminish the power of God. Thus the role of the queen is presented as just one of the many elements that comprised the scheme of conversion. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede includes a letter dating from AD 625 from Pope Boniface to Queen Ethelberga, wife of Edwin, king of Northumbria, urging her to encourage her husband's conversion. The letter gives us a useful glimpse into papal schemes of conversion:

We have been greatly encouraged by God's goodness in granting you, through your own profession of faith, an opportunity to kindle a spark of the true religion in your husband; for in this way He will more swiftly inspire not only the mind of your illustrious Consort to love of Him, but the minds of your subjects as well. ... Our paternal responsibility moves us to urge Your Christian Majesty, imbued with the force of divine inspiration, not to avoid the duty imposed on us in season and out of season, in order that, with the assistance and strength of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the King may also be added to the Christian fold. Only in this way will you enjoy the full privileges of marriage in perfect union; for the Scripture says, "*The two shall become one flesh.*" But how can it be called a true union between you, so long as he remains alienated from the daylight of your Faith by the barrier of dark and lamentable error? ... If you do this, the witness of the Holy Spirit will most certainly be fulfilled in you, that "*the unbelieving husband shall be saved through the believing wife.*"¹⁰³

From the excerpts of this letter, it is clear that Pope Boniface viewed it as the queen's sacred and wifely duty to see that her husband was "saved from the error and darkness" of paganism. Boniface makes clear that even though the queen may practice her religion as she pleases, her husband's pagan beliefs stand

¹⁰³ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 123-4.

in the way of a perfect marriage union and that for the sake of herself and her people she must do her best to convince Edwin to accept Christianity. Having a letter directly from the pope himself, the earthly head of the Roman Church, must have been a powerful motivation for the queen. And there were also obviously weighty political concerns, we might imagine, that Boniface did not need to mention.

The hagiographer's goal in the life of the Christian saint was to detail the wonders of God's power in his holy men. In the case of the conversion of Ireland, this meant that his holy men had the ability to out-perform the druids in every way imaginable. One of these feats was the miraculous performance of a saint's remains after his death. Not even the powerful druids could claim to effect miracles or alter events from the grave, and it demonstrated yet another facet of the saints' overwhelming superiority. One saint whose remains, or relics, performed many miracles was the English patron saint Cuthbert. Bede details one instance of the saint's relics working a miracle when he recounts the tale of a paralyzed man healed at Cuthbert's tomb:

Acting on this resolve and supporting his feeble limbs with a staff, he entered the church and prostrated himself before the body of the man of God, earnestly praying that at Cuthbert's intercession our Lord would show mercy. As he prayed, he fell into a deep sleep and, as he used afterwards to relate, seemed to feel a great, broad hand rest on the seat of the pain in his head. At this touch, the entire area of his body affected by the disease was gradually eased of its pain, and health was restored right down to his feet. He soon awoke and rose completely cured and after giving thanks to God for his recovery, told the brethren

what had happened to him.¹⁰⁴

In the recounting of these incredible miracles worked by saints sometimes long after their deaths, the hagiographers bestowed upon the holy men an unsurpassable potency – the power to effect changes after death. Bede also recounts an instance when a man's eye tumor was healed through the power of Cuthbert's relics. This story had added legitimacy because Bede claims to have heard the account from the afflicted man himself, and so validates its authenticity. While these narratives serve to exemplify the awesome power attributed to the saints through the Christian God, they also serve to illustrate the unwavering faith in Christianity possessed by its followers and believers.

A common thread connecting many ideas of true martyrdom is that the saintly martyr decides when he or she dies. True heroic martyrdom lay in the martyr's ability to choose the moment of one's own death. Death is not imposed on the saint: it is the saint's will that determines the moment. A Christian parallel with pagan tradition is that great heroes of the past like Achilles and Cato knew their death was on the horizon and were in complete control of the circumstances of their death and accepted it willingly. Even saints who were not martyred were known to predict the very moment in which they would depart their bodies. Both Columba and Cuthbert are described as having known the moment of their death

¹⁰⁴ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 264.

and embracing it fully. The great hero Cúchulainn is perhaps the best example of the noble pagan hero who dies well.

The death of Cúchulainn was recorded in the Book of Leinster, and according to John Carey, co-editor of *The Celtic Heroic Age*, some selections of this fragmentary episode remain untranslated, as they were written in obscure diction.¹⁰⁵ In the details and events surrounding Cúchulainn's death, there lie many similarities to the Christian saints' abilities to predict their death and embrace it with full volition as a call to them directly from God. In the beginning of the account, Cúchulainn is preparing for battle, though he knows it is to be his last. Many people of Emain Macha try to restrain him, but he shrugs them off and nobly goes forth in the face of death, like a true hero: "'Woman,' Cúchulainn said, 'though I am doomed, conscience does not overtake me (?) which has protected my honour. Loss does not frighten me; I do not avoid my wounding.'"¹⁰⁶ Here Cúchulainn is completely aware of his fate, and yet continues heading for the battle he knows will bring his demise. He is depicted as the noble hero who fights battles for his people and is not afraid to die for their cause. He is therefore a sacrificed victim who knows when his time has come. Cúchulainn brushes off people's fears and warnings, as he reserves no compassion for himself and moves steadfastly forward, demonstrating courage and fortitude in the face of death. Cúchulainn is presented as a truly self-

¹⁰⁵ John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 134.

¹⁰⁶ The Book of Leinster, *The Death of Cúchulainn* in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 135.

sacrificing individual, giving freely of his life to protect his people and their lands. This is a quality we see reproduced in the hagiographies of the Christian saints, who live their lives in the pursuit of the spiritual salvation of others.

Prophecy is another common link between the account of the death of Cúchulainn and the deaths of the Irish holy men. Often, in hagiographies, a higher spiritual authority foresees and predicts the death of the saint, lending the account the authority of a higher spiritual agent. In the case of Cúchulainn, the goddess Morrígain is the authority who forecasts the hero's doom: "Cúchulainn went to him; and the horse turned his left side to him three times. And the Morrígain had broken the chariot the night before; for she did not wish Cúchulainn to go to the battle, for she knew that he would not come back to Emain Macha."¹⁰⁷ Here, the Morrígain authenticates Cúchulainn's own prediction of death, as well as indicates his greatness by making an effort to stop him and thus prevent his demise. The very idea that one of the gods deigns to become involved in human events is an indication of how important and special a person Cúchulainn is. This passage also illuminates the importance the pagan Celts placed upon omens and signs. The left part of a duality has long been considered to be a bad sign, from antiquity to the present; for example, the Romans referred to the left hand as *sinistra*, or unlucky and unfavorable. The fact that the horse, the warrior's most important and valued possession and partner in

¹⁰⁷ The Book of Leinster, *The Death of Cúchulainn* in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 136.

battle, presented his left side three times as the hero prepared for battle, could only have been viewed as a bad omen. The Christian saints also embrace the idea that omens from nature are signs from God portending some major change in society.

Despite the omen, the prophecy and his own knowledge, Cúchulainn fights in the battle. Unsurprisingly, he is mortally wounded by his enemies. Yet, even in the last moments of his life, the great warrior stands every inch a champion, not allowing death to overtake him until he was ready.

Then Lugaid cast the spear at Cúchulainn so that it pierced him, so that what was in his midriff came out onto the chariot's upholstery. ... Then he gathered his entrails up in his bosom, and went off to the lough. As he reached the lough he pressed his hand against his belly, so as to keep his entrails in his belly. He drank a drink then, and washed himself. ... Then he leaped away, and called out to them to come for him. A broad territory extended westward from the lough, and he cast his eye upon it, and went to a stone pillar which is in the plain. And he put his belt around it, so that he might not die sitting or lying down, but might die standing up.¹⁰⁸

It is clear that Cúchulainn has been mortally wounded, yet he calmly and methodically gathers up his innards, takes a drink of water and manages to wash himself. There is no display of cowardice or weakness as he goes about activities that must have been routine for him all the days of his life. There is an absolute calmness about his demeanor and his dignified approach to death, though he must have been tortured by the intense pain and agony of having his innards spill from

¹⁰⁸ The Book of Leinster, *The Death of Cúchulainn* in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 140.

his body. The great hero also showed himself to be honorable to the last, calling out for his enemies to come and get him once he was finished washing. The Christian saints, too, conduct themselves well at their end, often displaying joy at finally being free of their earthly bodies and able to join God in heaven at last.

Although the saints' greatness could not be tried by the dangers and pains of battle, they often battled long and painful illnesses at their end. The ordeals they underwent, often with great dignity and calm, seem to parallel the violent death of pagan heroes, as well as those who endured red martyrdom. Cuthbert is an example of one who suffered a great deal in body before his death.

... he was suddenly felled by disease, to be prepared by the fires of internal pain for the joys of everlasting bliss. ... 'After being racked by three weeks of continual illness, he met his end ... he raised his eyes heavenwards, stretched out his arms aloft, and with his mind rapt in the praise of the Lord sent forth his spirit to the bliss of Paradise.'¹⁰⁹

Cuthbert followed in the pattern of the great pagan hero by suffering immense agonies before his death, a test of sorts to prove he was indeed as great a man as was said. Like Cúchulainn, Cuthbert endures this final torment calmly and with grace. He does not afford himself pity, nor does he want it from anyone else. Like the great hero of old, the saint does not allow mere bodily pain and anguish to break him; he remains strong and sound of mind to the very last. Unlike Cúchulainn, however, Cuthbert is eager to pass from this world and join the Lord in heaven. This difference reflects the crucial idea that the Christian monks and

¹⁰⁹ Bede, *Life of Saint Cuthbert* in D.H. Farmer, (ed.), *The Age of Bede* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 91, 95.

missionaries preached that there was indeed a place for souls to go when they died, rather than the pagan concept of a soul taking up its place in an endless transmigration of souls. The saint's enthusiasm to join the Lord thus serves to reinforce the notion that heaven was a place to which good people would want to aspire, especially in light of the intense suffering Cuthbert tolerated in order to gain his entry. Like the pagan hero, the saint's life served as an example to follow, though with a more concrete goal at its end.

Interestingly, Cúchulainn's death does not end his story. Though he did not possess the power to change events on earth once he had left it, he was able to show himself to his people in an act of reassurance, like the image of Columba, Aiden and others.

The Ulaid did not consent [to return (?)] in triumph to Emain Macha that week. But the soul of Cúchulainn consented, so that he appeared to the fifty queens whom he had spurned on that day before going into battle. Something was seen: Cúchulainn in his phantom-chariot in the air above Emain Macha. Then Cúchulainn chanted to them, saying after his death: 'Emain, Emain', &c.¹¹⁰

The fallen hero, selfless even beyond death, returns for one last gesture to his people before he goes to his rest. He reminds them that Emain Macha is worth fighting and dying for, and that that must not be forgotten. This appearance is his last gift to his people, for Cúchulainn is not capable of interceding on behalf of his

¹¹⁰ The Book of Leinster, *The Death of Cúchulainn* in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 143.

people upon earth once he has died. In this capacity, the saints have outdone the pagan heroes. Even after death, the saints work miraculously for their people; their presence hovers, especially near the location of their relics, always ready to enact miracles and restore faith. In their ability to effect actions and work miracles after death, the saints have truly bested the stupendous power of their honored warrior-heroes, whose mighty swords have fallen.

Another facet to the conversion techniques employed by the Christian missionaries was one of the methods in which they captured the attention of the pagan Celts. This was done through use and display of the rich, elaborate trappings of the Church: fancy and luxurious liturgical jewels and vestments. Celtic society was one which placed substantial importance upon gifts and giving, a quality which thus paved the way for the pagan people to be impressed by the Church's wealth. An account by Posidonius mentions the Celts' intense fondness of money and gold: "They [the Celts] have sanctuaries of their gods throughout the country at which they dedicate large amounts of gold to their divinities. Because of the sacred nature of these places, no one would dare touch this gold, even though the Celts are great lovers of money."¹¹¹ While this Classical account serves to reinforce the notion of the Celts' fondness for wealth and gold, it also tells us that at least in some instances, they placed these items of great worth and value in their own religious shrines. Thus they would have been able to identify

¹¹¹ Posidonius (via Diodorus Siculus), *Library* 5.27 in Philip Freeman, *War, Women, and Druids: Eyewitness Reports and Early Accounts of the Ancient Celts*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 37.

with the Christian practice of investing the Church and the clergy with gorgeous and costly trappings. The popes often bestowed gifts upon those whom they wished to convert or, those whose faith they desired to reinforce. This would have been one area in which the missionaries found it a simple matter to dazzle and impress the Celts. In this pagan society wherein the most generous king was the one who indeed wielded the most power and attracted the best warriors, the Church was guaranteed to attract interest with the practice of gift-giving. Bede details two examples of such gift-giving by Popes Gregory and Boniface. The gifts are bestowed upon King Ethelbert, a recent convert to the faith (AD 601) and Queen Ethelberga, the Christian wife of the pagan King Edwin (AD 625). Pope Gregory writes to Ethelbert in an apparent effort to ensure that the king remains true to his new faith, giving gifts to possibly demonstrate the vast wealth of the Church. “Pope Gregory also sent a letter to King Ethelbert with many gifts of different kinds, wishing to bestow earthly honours on this king who by his exertions and zeal, and to his great joy, had been brought to knowledge of heavenly glory.”¹¹² This giving of gifts to the formerly pagan king speaks to the Church and its missionaries’ knowledge of a particular aspect of Celtic taste and culture. Clearly the Church recognizes the investiture of symbolism in the notion of the gift in both the secular and spiritual spheres of Celtic society. Marcel Mauss discusses the fact that many Indo-European societies were based around the clan unit; thus, “externally at least, they were or are more generous, more

¹¹² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 94.

liable to give than we are.”¹¹³ Hence the giving of gifts in some societies, such as early Ireland, came to symbolize trust and hospitality: “This occurred when groups paid visits to one another at tribal festivals and at ceremonies where clans confronted one another and families allied themselves or began ‘initiations’ with one another.”¹¹⁴ Pope Boniface’s mission in writing to Ethelberga is to inspire desire in the queen’s heart to effect the conversion of her husband. The gifts were most likely intended again to showcase the Church’s generosity and wealth, an entity with which Edwin would surely want to ally himself. “We impart to you the blessing of your protector, blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles. With it we send you a silver mirror, together with a gold and ivory comb, asking Your Majesty to accept these gifts with the same goodwill as that with which we send them.”¹¹⁵ With these two accounts recorded by Bede, it becomes clear that the Christian missionaries were quite astute in their recognition of aspects of Celtic society which could be adapted for their own uses. In their conversion efforts, the missionaries left no tactics unexplored. It is only when the modern historian examines the full breadth of the tactics and methods employed by the Church that one can begin to understand the depth of knowledge the missionaries of the Church had, as well as the sheer massive effort which was put into the evangelization of Ireland.

¹¹³ Marcel Mauss, W.D. Halls, trans., *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (London: Routledge, 1990), 81.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 125.

The saints' lives are riddled with examples of miracles and other feats which showcase their excellence, and therefore the greatness of the Christian God. Often, the saints and men of the Church are described as taking part in many activities in which the druids also participated. Of course, the Christians are always portrayed as more incredible and more powerful, as they had the power of God behind them. One such activity for which there is evidence of both Christian and druidic participation is battle and warfare. In late antiquity and the early medieval period, armed conflict was often the norm for resolving disputes. But death shadows the battlefield from the first crossing of swords and thus heroic is the individual who can stop the struggle and end the loss of human life. The druids were said to have been endowed with the power to end wars, as were the Christian holy men. To this end, Bede describes an account in which two bishops obtain God's help in a battle, and with it, were able to win the battle for the Christian army (ca. AD 430s):

...the Saxons and Picts joined forces and made war on the Britons, ... and since the latter feared that their strength was unequal to the challenge, they called on the saintly bishops for help. ... Suddenly Germanus [the bishop], raising the standard, called upon them all to join him in a mighty shout. While the enemy advanced confidently ... the bishops three times shouted, 'Alleluia!' The whole army joined in this shout, until the surrounding hills echoed with the sound. The enemy column panicked, thinking that the very rocks and sky were falling on them, and were so terrified that they could not run fast enough. Throwing away their weapons in headlong flight, they were well content to escape naked ... So the innocent British army saw its defeats avenged, and became an inactive spectator of the victory granted to it. ... So the bishops overcame the enemy without bloodshed, winning a victory by

faith and not by force.¹¹⁶

It is clear from their shouts that the bishops want the enemy to know that the power of the Christian God is behind the Britons. Then this power is proven and demonstrated to the reader as the two bishops are able to drive away the entire enemy host without the drawing of a single sword. The idea that the word of God is potent and mighty enough to end a battle before it even begins is a powerful and alluring concept, though it must be remembered that is the manner in which the hagiographers present events. These were accounts chronicled with the Christianizing agenda of the Church behind them. Bede's specific account, written in AD 731, stands as proof for the disbelieving pagan of God's power alive in his holy men.

This event may be compared with the notion that the druids were said to be so wise that they too had the power to end battles and stop wars. Diodorus Siculus briefly mentions the Celts' reverence and trust in the druids which caused them to obey them even in wartimes:

Not only during peacetime but also in war, the Gauls obey with great care these Druids and singing poets, both friend and enemy alike. Often when two armies have come together with swords drawn these men have stepped between the battle-lines and stopped the conflict, as if they held wild animals spell-bound.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 69 – 70.

¹¹⁷ Diodorus Siculus, 5.27-32 in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 14.

The druids are indeed described here as having the same ability to end battles and wars as do the Christian bishops. What this account lacks however is specificity, which is something that endows Bede's account with more credulity. While it is entirely possible that there were indeed occasions in which the druids were able to put an end to fighting, surviving accounts do not always paint such an impressive picture. When we turn to a more specific account in regards to the druids and their capability to end battles we encounter failure, as Tacitus relates:

Standing on the shore was the opposing army, a dense formation of men and weapons. ... Around them, the Druids, lifting their hands upwards towards the sky to make frightening curses, frightened [the Roman] soldiers with this extraordinary sight. And so [the Romans] stood motionless and vulnerable as if their limbs were paralysed. Then their commander exhorted them and they urged one another not to quake before an army of women and fanatics. They carried the ensigns forward, struck down all resistance, and enveloped them in [the enemy's own] fire.¹¹⁸

Here we have the record of a failed attempt by the druids to drive away the enemy force and prevent the battle from taking place. This account rings very similar to the two bishops' successful effort to stop a battle from happening, though the druids' power is revealed as ineffective. This text could perhaps also be considered to be subject to less bias in regards to the druids' power, as it was not written by a Christian. As a Classical historian, Tacitus' interest would have been in demonstrating the Roman military's might, though he would have been careful not to portray the Celtic forces as too inconsequential. While they were most

¹¹⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.30 in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 34.

assuredly depicted as barbaric and different from the Romans, the Celts were also described with respect for the worthy adversary. Describing them as such not only served a purpose from a historian's point of view, but it also glorified the Roman victory, for there was much more honor to be had in conquering the 'noble enemy.' Also in Tacitus's account we see another feature that is shared by the Christian missionaries and the pagan druids: the use of the curse. Lester Little states that the Christian holy men such as Columba and Patrick delivered powerful holy curses, but the druids' curses are shown to fail.¹¹⁹ An example of the impotence of the druids' curses is detailed in the above account by Tacitus. Little also summarizes the qualities assumed by Patrick as an Irish saint:

...Patrick the provincial Roman Christian missionary had been absorbed into and transformed by traditional Celtic culture; he had become a superwizard who could outwit, outmaneuver, outrhyme, and outcurse a "merely" pagan druid. The virtues of the druids became saintly virtues. Cursing became a virtue of the saints.¹²⁰

Clearly the ability to effectively deliver maledictions upon enemies and wrongdoers had come to be regarded as a crucial skill of the Irish Christian saints.

One very important detail about druidic power, influence and training is the fact that they never committed their wisdom to writing. All knowledge of nature, the cosmos, philosophy and anything else deemed relevant to the practice of their art was to be committed to memory. Thus as a result of the vast amounts

¹¹⁹ Lester K. Little, *Benedictine Maledictions: Liturgical Cursing in Romanesque France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 162 – 164.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 166.

of learning that went into druidic training, this education could often last for up to twenty years. Julius Caesar comments upon the druids' training and the lack of writing in his *Gallic Wars*:

They are said to commit to memory a great number of verses. And they remain some 20 years in training. Nor do they judge it to be allowed to entrust these things to writing ... It seems to me there are two reasons this has been established: neither do they wish the common people to pride themselves in the training nor those who learn to rely less on memory and thorough learning through the help of writing.¹²¹

In this account, Caesar has truly pinpointed one of the reasons the druids wielded such great power and influence in pre-Christian Celtic society. In restricting their wisdom only to their minds, with entrance into a druidic school being the only method of gaining such knowledge, the druids placed themselves in an unattainably high position in society. Possessing the wisdom and knowledge itself endowed them with status and influence and allowed them to maintain a hold upon society by restricting access to knowledge.

Christian missionaries and monks possessed a special wisdom of their own: knowledge of nature, sciences, history and of distant places that the Celts had never heard of before. They had the understanding of the written word, which also presented the possibility of attaining far greater amounts of education and experience of many different subjects that could never be encompassed within

¹²¹ Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 6.11-20 in John T. Koch, and John Carey, (eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2000), 21 – 22.

one's memory. This also created the opportunity for studying the works of the great historians and naturalists of the classical world. Indeed, without the scrupulous copying and preserving of texts we so often encounter in the medieval monastic sphere, many of the works of the great Greek and Roman authors would now be lost to us. When the Christian missionaries came to Ireland with their literacy and their splendid, illuminated books – the likes of which the Celts had never seen - the pagan Celts were enveloped in a whole new level of awareness of their world. Monasteries were to become the new centers of learning in Ireland, replacing the sacred druidic groves. These were now the institutions to which parents would send their children to be educated, rather than committing them to the investment of twenty years in druidic training. In fact, according to historian Nerys Thomas Patterson, monasteries were to become institutions akin to the new ringforts in Ireland, having a very similar layout within an enclosed space, with these new monastic foundations often located close to early royal sites as well as places of pagan worship.¹²² The great secular centers of the pagan kings were slowly giving way to these spiritual foundations, though it has been claimed that the monasteries themselves were simply Christianized forms of the pagan clans.¹²³ Patterson also goes on to suggest that it was from the early monastic communities that the first towns in medieval Ireland arose.¹²⁴

¹²² Nerys Thomas Patterson, *Cattle-Lords and Clansmen: The Social Structure of Early Ireland*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 100.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 339.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 101.

Another intriguing idea which would have almost certainly added to the appealing nature of monasteries was the fact that the monastic life offered an alternative to “non-inheriting males,” who would have found few occupational options for their lives during the pagan heroic age in Ireland.¹²⁵ These men who formerly had few good future prospects could now turn to the monastic way of life and be assured that they would be clothed, housed and fed, in addition to the valuable boon of education and literacy. Monasteries were rapidly becoming the new centers of Irish society and with a new religion they also brought learning and eventually organization that led to towns. Patterson also suggests that as a result of the development and spread of monastic institutions in Ireland, the country experienced substantial population growth; this may perhaps be attributed to more widespread farming as well as “...the introduction of more sophisticated techniques.”¹²⁶ The very many advantages associated with Christianity were beginning to outweigh the reasons for clinging to the fading pagan beliefs.

¹²⁵ Nerys Thomas Patterson, *Cattle-Lords and Clansmen: The Social Structure of Early Ireland*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 293.

¹²⁶ Nerys Thomas Patterson, *Cattle-Lords and Clansmen: The Social Structure of Early Ireland*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 370-371.

CONCLUSION

Celtic Christianity and the monasticism that developed in Ireland are different from Christian traditions anywhere else in the world. This was the result of the concentrated effort made by the early Christian church to evangelize Ireland and its people, despite the fact that there existed stubbornly embedded, unique pagan traditions, which had been practiced for hundreds of years. These were deeply engrained in the Irish mentality, for it was the tradition that their ancestors long before them had believed in, and the culture that had long integrated these beliefs in daily life and rituals. The central text of the Irish used in this study is the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*; and while it was not actually written down until around the 12th century, when the heroic age was long over, it was based upon an ancient oral tradition.¹²⁷ The reason this text may be trusted as a fairly accurate representation of early Ireland is that it was important to the Irish to preserve the cultural heritage and stories of their own people. According to Thomas Kinsella, Ireland was fairly isolated before the arrival of the Christian missionaries, which also afforded the opportunity for the preservation of ancient

¹²⁷ Thomas Kinsella, "Introduction" in Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), ix.

stories and traditions.¹²⁸ Additionally, the monks who were responsible for compiling and writing the text would have wanted to be familiar with the pagan traditions and heroes, for in this way they would be equipped with a better understanding of how to evangelize Ireland and minister to its people. One can get an understanding of how the Irish monks understood their Celtic pagan legacy in a quote from the monk Óengus, dated to AD 800:

The strong fortress of Tara has perished with the death of her princes, with its quires of sages great Armagh lives on.

The rath of Cruacha has vanished together with Ailill the victorious; fair above the kingdoms is the majesty in the city of Clonmacnoise.

The proud fortress of Allen has perished with her boastful host; great is victorious Brigit, beautiful her crowded city.

The fortress of Emain has faded away; only its stones survive; crowded Glendalough is the Rome of the Western world.¹²⁹

This passage suggests that the monk was well aware of the proud pagan traditions of Ireland, but that he acknowledges the fact that Christianity has supplanted them. Though Christianity succeeded in becoming the dominant religion in Ireland, from this monk's bittersweet words he allows us to see those vestiges of the pagan era that have survived into the new Christian society. This again illustrates for the modern historian that with the advent of Christianity the heroic age did not entirely perish – rather it took on a transformation. The vestiges of

¹²⁸ Thomas Kinsella, "Introduction" in Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), ix.

¹²⁹ F.J. Byrne, "Early Irish Society: 1st – 9th Century" in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, (eds.) *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 28.

pagan Celtic society survived in the unique Celtic Christian (and pagan) culture which would develop in Ireland.

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