

The Basis for *The Lyric of Lafracoith*

PART II. Social, Legal, Ecclesiastical, Theological and Philosophical Considerations

In the preceding paper, it was described how Muirchertach Ua Briain propagandized his bid to be Ard Rí, both by commissioning the panegyric on his ancestor Brian, *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh (The War of the Irish against the Vikings)*, and by having his juridical scholars work out interpretations of the *Lebor na Cert (The Book of Rights)* as well as the applicable laws within the **Brehon** tradition deemed most favorable to his cause.

Brehon Law.

In historical notes to the ratiocinative fiction of Sister Fidelma, whose stories unfold more than four hundred years before Lafracoith flourished, Novelist Tremayne writes:

Ireland, in the seventh century AD, was governed by a system of sophisticated laws called the Laws of the Fénechus, or land tillers, which became more popularly known as the Brehon laws, deriving from the word *breitheamh* –a judge. Tradition has it that these laws were first gathered in 714 BC by order of the High King, Ollamh Fódhla. Over a thousand years later, in AD 438, The High King, Laoghaire, appointed a commission of nine learned people to study, revise and commit the laws to the new writing in Latin characters. One of those serving on the commission was Patrick, eventually to become patron saint of Ireland. After three years, the commission produced a written text of the laws which is the first known codification.¹

The Encyclopedia of Ireland informs readers that Brehon Law was the legal system of medieval Ireland gradually supplanted by English Common Law after the Anglo-Norman invasion. Brehon Law began to be laid down in texts in the seventh century but the most extensive compilation, conducted between 650 and 750 CE came to be known as the *Senchas Már (The Great Collection of Ancient Learning)*:

The law described in these texts is remarkably sophisticated....

Most brehon law texts deal with a distinct topic. There are texts on legal procedures, such as distraint and the giving of pledges and appointment of sureties; on the proper methods of pleading in court and the seating arrangements; on the enforcement and dissolution of contracts and the regulation of loans; on theft, arson, and the compensation to be paid for deliberate and negligent injury. There are tracts that set out the rights of an injured person to be provided medical care, and the fees due to doctors, and others that discuss damage caused by livestock...rights to access to water, and the trapping of wild animals. Other texts deal with various social relationships (marriage, fosterage, lordship, status, and

the rights of family members). Brehon family law recognized divorce as well as polygyny....²

Church Law: Celtic Rite and Roman Rite

Brehon Law, then, antedated church traditions which in themselves were divided according to Roman Rite, in process of developing canon law, and Celtic Rite which had received the message of Christ in assimilative, accommodative and transformative modes that allowed pre-Christian beliefs and traditions to persevere. Citing overt quarrels about the religious role of women, the practice of baptism, the observance of Easter and the preferred pattern of tonsure, *inter alia*, Historian Markale (p.149) sees these as punctuating “a virtual schism” (comparable to the schism between the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Rite), which existed over centuries between the Church in Rome and the Celtic Church. The deeper conflict he attributes to original structural differences: the Roman Church appropriated administrative channels long in use within the Roman Empire “... That is why ecclesiastical administration was divided into provinces and dioceses and why the bishop of Rome immediately assumed such an important role in the hierarchy.” Whereas (p.142):

The basis of Celtic Christianity and the only source of spiritual satisfaction for the Celtic soul was monasticism, which originated in the East. The monk was the Christian druid officiating in the middle of forests. Then when it became customary to group monks together in communities, the monastery followed directly in the footsteps of the druidic *bangor* or college.

That is why the monk took precedence over the priest, the monastery over the diocese, the abbot over the bishop. The monasteries became the cornerstone of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and of the cultural life of the new society. As there were virtually no towns in Ireland, the monasteries were both places of refuge and centers for intellectual and economic development.....³

Church Reform and Crusades

Enlarging both the geographical scope beyond the Irish Sea and the historical timeline beyond the first century of the second millennium CE, one can discern in the late 11th and early 12th centuries an era of profound changes across continents. Some were initiated by reforming popes who fostered the rise of the papacy as a powerful political force.⁴ Through the penumbra of time falling before the drama, there had been a succession of reforming popes beginning with Leo IX (1049-1054) who was first concerned about clerical marriage, simony and lay investiture of bishops. Gregory VII (1073-1085), his protégé, insisted upon authority to depose kings rather than the converse as the Emperor Henry IV desired.⁵ Certainly supremacy of the papacy is one theme clearly discernible in Pope Gregory’s letter, which greets Terdelvachus (i.e. Toirdelbach Ua Briain) but addresses clergy and the people of Ireland reminding them of the Pope’s world-wide jurisdiction.⁶ Urban II (1088-1099) preached the first crusade, which may be seen as pilgrimage with an attitude and/or a particularly pernicious form of reform, which touches upon the drama as loss incurred by the Montgomery family (Antioch, the action

in which Arnulf's brother Philip the Grammarian died, fell in 1098; Jerusalem was captured by the crusaders in 1099).⁷

The first crusade is a project contrary to her pacific nature, *for certes*, but one which Lafracoth also views with political prescience giving way, over time, to a heightened sense of foreboding. The manifest fervor for the conquest of Jerusalem, she knows, can easily be matched by the latent fervor she has discerned among the Anglo-Normans for conquest of Eriu. Moreover, she reasons, crusading zealotry directed against infidels in the Middle East, will be just as easily rationalized against infidels in Eriu. In the penumbra of time falling after the drama, a second crusade would be launched 1147-8 sanctioning actions against pagans in the Baltics as well as infidels in the Holy Land, followed by the third 1189-92.⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) who "... became a maker and breaker of popes, a vigorous opponent of ecclesiastical corruption, the driving force behind the Crusades and a major political power in the Europe of his day" is Lafracoth's contemporary [as is Bernard's nemesis Peter Abelard (1079-1142)]. In his writings Bernard shows intolerance of any departures from orthodoxy as well as any rationalistic pretensions to which philosophers succumb. Well before the *Laudabiliter* issued by Pope Adrian IV in 1155 authorizing Henry II to utilize the force necessary to convert Irish into an orthodox Christianity, Bernard's depictions of the Irish in the *Vita S. Malachie* (*The Life of St. Malachy*) readily provide pretext for the Anglo-Norman pre-emptive invasion in Ireland. Famously, Bernard records this account of St. Malachy:

When he began to administer his office, the man of God understood That he had been sent not to men, but to beasts. Never before had he known the like, in whatever depth of barbarism: never had he found men so shameless in their morals, so wild in their rites, so impious in their faith, so barbarous in their laws, so stubborn in discipline, so unclean in their life. They were Christians in name, in fact they were pagans....⁹

Assertion of a hierarchy which acknowledged the primacy of Rome and which would also ensure a clear cut chain of command within the British Isles, had been a principal and contentious occupation of the Archbishop of Canterbury *vis à vis* the Archbishop of York. Lanfranc, who hailed from Lombardy, was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury in 1070. Four years later he had to deal with the vacancy in the see of Dublin by appointing that Hiberno-Norse community's second bishop. He availed himself of the opportunity to extract a formal promise from the candidate that he would obey Lanfranc and his successors in the archbishopric of Canterbury, which he styled *Britanniarum primas*.¹⁰

By the arrival of the period in which the drama occurs, ecclesiastical reformation of the Celtic Church had already made a start with the first Synod of Cashel. Working from sources including the *Senchas Sil Bhriain* (genealogies of the O' Brien family) Historian Gwynn neatly characterizes the synod presided over by a papal legate, Maol Muire Ua Dunáin with full authority from Pope Paschal II (1099-1118) and assembled around Muirchertach Ua Briain: 'a great gathering and convention of the men of Ireland, laymen

and clerics and the learned for the purpose of constituting all Ireland's rule and law as follows'. Decrees were made against simony, for freedom of the church from duty of paying any cess or rent or tribute, that no layman should be *airchinnech* (anglicized as *erenagh*, meaning 'head', 'leader' or 'superior', considered in some periods to be interchangeable with *comarba*, also rendered *comarb* or *coarb* by historians) in Ireland, that no *erenagh* of a church in Ireland should have a wife, that there should be right of sanctuary, that there should be clerical privilege in receiving dues [comparable to privilege of a *file* (poet) over against that of the layman] and that specified impermissible degrees of consanguinity in marriage (the translation of this latter decree occasioned controversy).¹¹

The next synod(s) to occur in Lafracoth's life time, in which she is depicted in the drama as exerting the influence denied her at Cashel, is in the year 1111. According to Historian Moore, the first synod "of which neither the objects or acts are clearly specified" took place at Aengus' Grove, "in the neighborhood of the famed hill of Usneach, * where, of old, the Druids held their rites." He continues:

At this convention, besides Murkertach and the nobles of his kingdom, there attended also Moelmurry [i.e. Maol Muire Ua Dunáin], Archbishop of Cashel—this see having been lately elevated to archiepiscopal rank—50 other bishops, 300 priests, and 3,000 persons of the clerical order. Shortly after this meeting, there was another great synod at Rath Breasail, presided over by Gillibert, Bishop of Limerick, who was then apostolic legate in Ireland, and the first, it appears, appointed to that high office. By this synod a regular division of the dioceses of Ireland was made, and their respective boundaries fixed....¹²

Writing a century later, Historian Gwynn adduces evidence in the form of an interlinear explanatory notation in the **Annals of Inisfallen** [which contains a contemporary record of the synod(s)] to the effect that the Synod *Fiad mac nAengussa* [i.e. Aengus' Grove] was one and the same with the Synod Rath Breasail. He highlights the presence, not mentioned by Historian Moore in the foregoing account, of Cellach, coarb of Patrick [from Armagh]. The significance of Cellach's presence consists in his being foremost among the representatives from *Leath Cuinn*, the north of Ireland. It was in the person of Cellach too that a unity was first achieved in combining the roles of coarb and bishop.¹³ He also argues

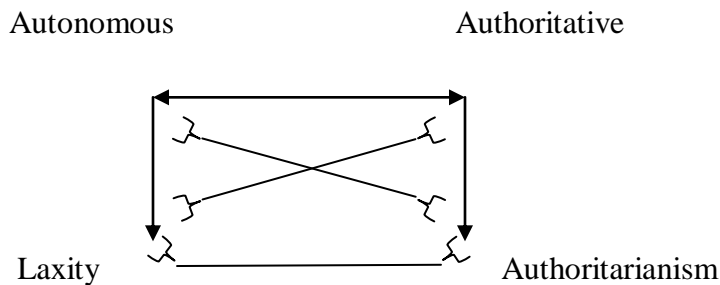
... that a local synod was held at Uisneach in Meath within a few months of the synod of Rath Breasail, and that a new division of Meath was approved, by which the western territory of Meath was given to a bishop of Clonmacnoise, whilst the eastern territory was given to the bishop of Clonard.¹⁴

The reader subsequently learns that this assembly met under the presidency of Murchad Ua Maelsechlainn, king of Meath (husband of Mór who, it is proposed, was Lafracoth) and Eochaid Ua Cellaig, king of Brega. Historian Gwynn informs the reader that their purpose was to rectify the slight that had been given to Clonmacnoise at Rath Bresail and create for it a diocese.¹⁵

* Elsewhere spelled "Uishnech" pronounced ISH-nah.

Lafracoth as depicted in the drama becomes engaged as an important if informal emissary from her father to Domnall in the peace of 1099 and to Cellach, ten years later in the peace of 1109. While it is Lafracoth's lot to be almost married or married in fact to warriors, peacemaking resides deeply among her values. She welcomes each 'semblance of peace' as God's gift and optimistically strives to make the verisimilitude more genuine, durable and enduring. She is therefore willing 'to pass over without comment' differences of doctrinal import, which, if allowed to become the focus, might impede progress towards peace. In return for her forbearance she has been able to earn the respect and the friendship of both eminences from Armagh. On the other hand it has become well known at the monastic schools where she has 'engaged in elenchus' and at court where she has matched wits with her father's advisors that she upholds values, which have and may continue to prove troublesome. Indeed, as preparations for the Synod at Cashel near completion, Muirchertach is motivated to marry her off quickly and to someone faraway as much to protect her from charges of heresy as to spare himself considerable embarrassment, some of which may linger in popular memory after his generous gift of Cashel to the church is forgotten. Her second marriage to the King of Meath affords her a second opportunity, at the Synod of Rath Breasail (or at the pre and post conferences, as it were) to influence outcomes in church reform, which she perceives (correctly) will have far-reaching consequences. Lafracoth is described in the drama as being outspoken on the several key points: in defense of the Celtic Rite of Christianity, in support of diversity and in freedom of inquiry. At Aengus' Grove, Lafracoth promotes 'a bottom up' approach to spirituality (she pleads: "the verdure of our spring begins softly, close to earth, 'ere greenery is detected aloft in canopies against the sky. So neither does our worth proceed from mandates, handed down, with condescension from human beings who have set themselves on high.") which entails a respect for each soul as a person of conscience, susceptible of discovery of intrinsic values through interpersonal encounters as well as self-examination. If the term had been in vogue in 1111, 'free-thinker' would cross the minds of her more charitable opponents, 'wanton' the minds of others who would nonetheless guard their tongues around her father and her husband. In any event, Lafracoth's libertarian arguments do not carry the day at Aengus Grove. That part of the proceedings at Rath Breasail is expunged from the annals by order of Muirchertach.

Lafracoth at this stage in her life finds herself resisting polarization in the upper left hand corner of an externalized *square of common cause* (adapted from *the square of opposition* in syllogistic logic and the representation of maintenance the therapeutic frame), vis à vis *religieux*, which can be represented, in political as follows¹⁶:



The square maintains integrity only if the strength of the concordance at the top (represented by the bi-directional vector) plus the work done effectively to prevent excesses on either side (represented by unidirectional vectors) together exceed the disintegrating forces generated at the base by the contrarities at antipodes, plus those distortions of perception diagonally directed from corner to corner. Hence if the authoritative community fails to prevent its deformation into authoritarianism, or the autonomous party fails to prevent its deformation into licentiousness or if either side demonizes the other, failing to respect the best reasons for common cause, then the alliance cannot hold.

Lafracoth is generally able to engage in positive, productive relations with members of authoritative communities, and they with her. This is true not only in peace keeping missions, famine relief, and health care ministry in which they at times partner, but also in her creative collaborations with *religieux* within the scriptorium. However, on each side there remains the latent fear that a tendency to an evil will be followed: laxity or permissiveness attributed by them to her, abuse of power by her to them. Then there are, as well, very real and irreconcilable differences.

At the Synod of Rath Breasail, Lafracoth learns that the integrity of *the square of common cause* is not always sustainable. Here the dialectical conversation about ethics, in which, Lafracoth envisions, persons of conscience might eagerly engage is suspended in favor of politics. Here instead circulates the organizational chart that once imposed will permit top-down promulgation of procedure and policy, as well as the propagandistic campaigns in words (crafted by, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux or, later still, Giraldus Cambrensis, the grandson of Nest) which will prefigure and promote more sinister campaigns in deeds, including the suppression of heresy and the crusades, which of course will have the object of eradicating opposition altogether. Lafracoth opposes the program of reform presented by the papal legate Gille Easpuig, Bishop of Limerick, which in an *imago generalis* sets forth the hierarchical organization to be adopted:

In the earlier of our two extant manuscripts (Durham, Chapter Library B.ii.35) this *imago* is somewhat primitive in character, and seems to be more or less faithful copy of the text which was circulated in Ireland at the time of the synod of Rath Breasail. The later of the two manuscripts (Cambridge Univ. Ff.1.27. pp. 239-42) contains a very much more attractive drawing, which is plainly a Gothic elaboration of the earlier *imago*. It illustrates very vividly the division of the Church's members into married laity, monks and canons; with a series of 'pyramids' designed to show the subordination of each degree in the whole hierarchy. On one side of the *imago* is the parish, with its priest, deacon, subdeacon, and four minor orders; and there is a three-fold division of the parishioners into those who pray (*oratores*), those who plough (*aratores*) and those who fight (*bellatores*). All three divisions are marked as including men and women, since women, who neither plough nor fight, are married to ploughmen and to soldiers. A second pyramid illustrates the monastic community, with an abbot at its head, and beneath him the same six degrees as in the parish. The abbot is a priest; and his community includes only *oratores*, not *aratores* or *bellatores*. There is a special note that it is not the duty of monks, save in cases of necessity and on orders from a bishop, to baptize, give communion or administer any sacrament (*aliquod ecclesiasticum*) to the laity. Their vocation is to withdraw from all worldly cares and pray to God. Bishop Gilbert is here plainly thinking of the predominantly monastic character of the earlier Irish church.

Above these two pyramids there rises a loftier pyramid, entitled *pontificalis ecclesia*. At the top of this pyramid stands the bishop; and the *imago* indicates he has the jurisdiction over various degrees included in the two lower pyramids. Gilbert is careful to point out that this does not mean that the bishop's authority is limited to two churches; on the contrary he should have at least ten, and at most a thousand churches within his jurisdiction. The plan is continued with two bishops subject to an archbishop, whose church is described as a diocese. As a rule he has at least three, at most twenty bishops in his diocese (or in our more usual terminology, his province). The archbishop in turn is subordinate to a primate, who has at least one archbishop beneath him, and at most six. And at the head of the whole pyramidal structure stands the Roman pontiff, with at least two primates under him, and with authority over the whole Church (*generalis ecclesia*).¹⁷

Marriage, Divorce and Women's Rights

The background picture emerging thus far is one of a social order that is relatively permissive and, in some aspects, relatively favorable to women (particularly those women among the elite) in which Brehon Laws and autonomous monastic traditions are, at times, allowed to trump canon law reforms being promulgated within a church hierarchy, become increasingly structured along imperial lines and more and more expansive in power. An appreciation of the foreground of *The Lyric of Lafracoth* must take specific account of marriage, divorce, women's rights and the practice of fosterage at the time. Writing in the mid nineteenth century, Historian Moore recommends an explanation offered by his colleague, Dr. Lanigan, that there were:

...two different sorts of sponsalis, or espousals, distinguished by the old canon law; one called *de praesenti*, and the other *de future*. The latter form of contract, called in English *betrothment*, is what was chiefly practiced by the Irish: and that their marriages were by high authority considered legitimate, appears from the language used on the subject by Lanfranc and Anselm....¹⁸

Over one century later, surveying the field, Gwynn is concerned to understand the Synod of Cashel's action or inaction on the whole question of marriage laws. He observes:

...No text seems to have survived which defines the degree of kinship within marriage within which marriage was forbidden in ancient Ireland; and there is, on the whole, very little about the actual marriage ceremony....
... [O]ne text suggests the end of the fourteenth year as the age at which a girl could marry, whilst boys could marry at the end of the seventeenth year....

Whereas,

If the texts of the Brehon Law...are surprisingly detailed in their definition of the purchase money (*coibche*) which the man was expected to offer at the time of his marriage, and the dowry (*tinchor* or *tinól*) which the wife was expected to bring with her. There is also a clear-cut distinction in the Old Irish law between the *cétmuinte* (or principal wife) and various classes of secondary wives, for whom the general term *adaltrach* is used. Full compensation (*éric*) was due for the violation of the *cétmuinte*, half compensation for the violation of an *adaltrach*. And the commentators on the older legal texts recognize various types of concubines (*airech*, *carrthach* and so forth) whose status was inferior to the status of an *adaltrach*....¹⁹

According to **The Encyclopedia of Ireland:**

Eighth-century Irish law recognized three main types of sexual relationship: formal marriages, informal marriages, and unauthorized relationships, such as elopement and rape. A formal marriage involved a betrothal before witnesses and the payment of a bride-price...Informal marriages were especially suitable for concubines. Polygyny was allowed in early Ireland and the offspring of betrothed concubines were legitimate. The Irish maintained their practices concerning divorce, polygyny, and incestuous relationships, which by the eleventh century were considered contrary to Christian teaching by outsiders and which formed one of the pretexts for the Anglo-Norman intervention.²⁰

Historian Gwynn first asserts "that marriages were validly contracted as between two Christians at this period without any intervention of the clergy"; then, amidst regrets that little is known about the marriage ceremonies of ancient Ireland, he reproduces an

account of marriage custom in West Meath which he believes may have been as true in the period of Lafracoth as when it was recorded in the seventeenth century:

In their marriages, especially in those counties where cattle abound, the parents and friends of each side meet on the side of a hill, or if the weather be cold, in some place of shelter, about midway between both dwellings; if agreement ensue, they drink the agreement bottle, as they call it, which is a bottle of good usquebaugh (*uisce beatha*) and this goes merrily round; for payment of the portion, which generally is a determinate number of cows, little care is taken, only the father or next of kin to the bride sends to his neighbours and friends, *sub mutuae vicissitudinis obtentu*, and everybody gives his cow or heifer, which is all one in the case, and thus the portion is quickly paid; nevertheless caution is taken from the bridegroom on the day of delivery for restitution of the cattle, in case the bride die childless within a certain day limited by agreement, and in this case every man's own beast is restored; thus care is taken that no man shall grow rich by often marriages; on the day of bringing home, the bridegroom and his friends ride out, and meet the bride and her friends at the place of the treaty; being come near each other the custom was of old to cast short darts at the company that attended the bride but at such short distance that seldom any hurt ensued...²¹

Turning to the subject of divorce, Gwynn writes:

No student of Old Irish history would maintain that the highly artificial arrangements and classification that are to be found in these curious texts actually existed in ordinary life. The lawyers of ancient Ireland, like their modern day counterparts, were fond of casuistry; and a great deal of what has survived in the commentaries of the Brehon Law is quite obviously casuistry of a most artificial kind. None the less, it is clear that Irish law of the pre-Christian period recognized more than one type of wife; and the effects of this ancient tradition, in a society that has always been tenaciously conservative of ancient custom, was bound to produce a situation in which the older traditions of the country were in open conflict with the more recent but well-developed claims of the Christian faith. The conflict is no more apparent than in the contrast between the texts of Old Irish law on the question of divorce, and the known legislation of the Irish Church on the same matter....

As against [the] plain teaching of Irish canon law the commentators on the Brehon law recognize divorce as lawful for a surprisingly large number of reasons – many of which favor the woman no less than the man. Childlessness is the first cause for divorce; it can justify the woman in separating from the husband; the husband's absence abroad on a military expedition; his departure to visit a friend beyond the country; his admission to priest's orders; his criminal conduct; insanity; an incurable disease: all these are named in one or other text of the Irish laws as justifying a wife in divorcing her husband.... Divorce by mutual consent is also admitted in these texts of Irish law, and one commentator recognizes the introduction of an *aldaltrach* or secondary wife into the house as cause for

divorce by the *cémuinter*, since the husband is here recognized as guilty of adultery....²²

Writing some decades later than Historian Gwinn, on the subject of women's rights in the context of religious service, Historian/Mythologist Markale writes:

... [T]he story of Saint Bridget and the monastery at Kildare does raise the question of *conhospitae*, a custom peculiar to the Celtic Church. During times of strife, Irish girls could shelter from persecution and the threat of rape by entering the monasteries and living alongside the monks, their only hope of safety. These women probably took part in monastic worship.

The custom even spread to Celtic Brittany where it was denounced in a letter from bishops in Tours in 515 or 520:

‘You [the offending priests] continue to carry from hut to hut among your countrymen certain tables on which you celebrate the divine sacrifice of the mass with the assistance of women whom you call *conhospitae*. While you distribute the Eucharist, they take the chalice and administer the blood of Christ to the people. This is an innovation, an unprecedented superstition.’

Attributing attitudes towards women prevailing on the continent at the time to the patriarchal societies, infrastructures and institutions to which Christendom had acceded, Markale continues:

Celtic attitudes were quite different. In Gaelic and British society women played a far more important part than Mediterranean women. A wife was not merely the mother of the family but shared fully in the life of the couple. She could reign in her own right and had her own area of responsibility, as we can see from the story of Queen Medb [Maev] and Tacitus' account of Boadicea.^ξ Heroes are often known as the son of such and such a woman, and this is evidence of matrilinear descent is indicative of Celtic ideas about women in general. It therefore comes as little surprise to learn that many of the priestly duties were actually fulfilled by women in pagan times....

The Celts, therefore, were quite willing to include women in Christian ceremony and worship. The letter from the bishops of Tours is proof that the custom of *conhospitae* existed and that such women formed what amounted to a female diaconry. There is no evidence that they held any church office, but the indignant response of Roman orthodoxy to whatever position women were

^ξ In a chapter subsequent to the one under consideration (pp.161-3), Markale gives a complete account of the rebellion by the Britons led by Queen Boadicea against the Romans as they attempted an expansion from occupied South East Britain. In her defeat, she took poison rather than being taken prisoner.

accorded was fierce enough to make relations with the Celtic church very strained.²³

Novelist Tremayne writes of the seventh century:

Under [Brehon Laws] women occupied a unique place. The Irish laws gave more rights and protection to women than any other Western law code at that time or until recent times. Women could, and did, aspire to all offices and professions as co-equals with men. They could command their people in battle as warriors, be political leaders, local magistrates, poets, artisans, physicians, lawyers and judges....

Women were protected by law against sexual harassment, against discrimination, against rape. They had the right of divorce on equal terms from their husbands, with equitable separation laws, and could demand part of their husband's property as a divorce settlement; they had the right of inheritance of personal property and the right of sickness benefits when ill or hospitalized.... Seen from today's perspective, the Brehon Laws seemed to enshrine an almost ideal society.²⁴

Introducing contrast by several shades, the entry in the **Encyclopedia of Ireland**, regarding the status of women in Ireland in the era 800-1200 informs the reader:

... [A] woman was always under the authority of a male guardian the head of the family (father, brother, or uncle), her husband, or if a religious, her abbot. A woman could not inherit family property permanently, and her status depended on that of her guardian. He had to authorize her business with others, except if the terms of her marriage decided otherwise.... Though women could not rule territories, they could still exercise influence by their personality. Queens were usually held in high esteem. The twelfth century list of Irish Queens, the *Banseanchas* [The Lore of Women], is unique in medieval Europe. In literature, figures such as Queen Méabh [Maev]^ζ in the *Táin* and St Brigid are two examples of different roles women could assume.²⁵

Yet the very next entry by a different historian tracing developments from 1200-1700, conveys the impression circumstances were almost as favorable to women during that era as those, according to Novelist Tremayne, which obtained in the seventh century. However there is in the encyclopedia entry the caveat that the women being described were among the *elite*:

...Politics in medieval Ireland was based on dynastic alliances, in which women from aristocratic families played a pivotal role. In native Irish areas elite women might marry a number of times, as their families entered into new

^ζ For an account of Queen Maev of the *Tain bo Cuailgne* (pronounced *thawn bo quel'gny* translated *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*) and other lore, see T Rolleston (1917/1990): **Celtic Myths and Legends**, Dover Publications Inc, New York, pp. 202-46, or **The Táin** translated by T. Kinsella, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969/2002.

alliances and abandoned old ones. Divorce was permitted in Irish law, though it was forbidden by the church²⁶

With an understanding tempered by the foregoing considerations, one can envision an ethos, perhaps in less idealized and pervasive form, not unlike the one in which Novelist Tremayne situates the fictional Sister Fidelma. Such an *ethos*, one holding promise for fulfillment may have operated to shape the expectations of the woman history knows as Lafracoth. If so, her thwarted personal, familial and professional ambitions would understandably bring to her mind the *mythos* of a much earlier time in bitter counterpoint. Among the tales of the *Tuatha De Danaan*, preserved in the *Ultonian Cycle*, there is the striking story of Macha. She is forced to run a race against the king's prize winning horses because of her husband's boast she could best them:

So messengers went for Macha, and she was brought before the assembly; and she was with child. The king bade her prepare for the race. She pleaded her condition. "I am close upon my hour," she said. "Then hew her man in pieces," said the king to his guards. Macha turned to the bystanders. "Help me," she cried, for a mother hath borne each of you! Give me but a short delay till I am delivered." But the king and all the crowd in their savage lust for sport would hear of no delay. "Then bring up the horses," said Macha, "and because you have no pity a heavier infamy shall fall upon you." So she raced against the horses, and outran them, but as she came to the goal she gave a great cry, and her travail seized her, and she gave birth to twin children. As she uttered that cry, however, all the spectators felt themselves seized with pangs like her own and had no more strength than a woman in her travail. And Macha prophesied: "From this hour the shame you have wrought on me will fall upon each man of Ulster. In the hour of your greatest need ye shall be weak and helpless as women in childbirth, and this shall endure for five days and four nights – to the ninth generation the curse shall be upon you."²⁷

Perhaps, while close upon her own hour in Pembroke, all the time fearful of the retribution to be exacted by Henry I because her husband, Arnulph, had backed the wrong horse, Lafracoth has occasion to recall Macha, and envy her the potency of her legendary, talionic curse.

Lafracoth's Mind

The marketplace of ideas in which Lafracoth makes her purchases and trades includes those shaped by brehon law, *senchas*, myth and legend. Her appreciation of brehon law may mostly be attributed to her mother and, later by each juridical colloquium or practicum that her father sponsored, while her familiarity with the *senchas* of the O'Brien sept owed mostly to her paternal grandmother. Perhaps, definitive attributions can not be made to those agents of acculturation who exposed her to myths and legends, but she was steeped in all of them. The compass of lore takes in the Mythological Cycle, especially tales of the *Tuatha de Danann*, the people of the god Dana (and their treasures such as the *Lia Fail*³), which she insisted be told over and over by most of the adults who figured prominently in her childhood, the Ultonian cycle of course with tales of Maev and Cuchulain, and, in the Ossianic cycle, notably the *Chase of Slievegallion*, in which Finn mac Cumhal⁶ comes upon the mountain lake

...and saw by its brink a lady of wonderful beauty, who sat there lamenting and weeping. Finn asked her the cause of her grief. She explained that a gold ring which she dearly prized had fallen from her finger into the lake, and she charged Finn by the bonds of *geise*⁸ that he should plunge in and find it for her.

Finn did so, and after diving into every recess of the lake he discovered the ring, and before leaving the water gave it to the lady. She immediately plunged into the lake and disappeared. Finn then surmised that some enchantment was being wrought on him, and ere long he knew what it was, for on stepping forth on dry land he fell down from sheer weakness, and arose again a tottering and feeble old man, snowy-haired and withered, so that even his faithful hounds did not know him, but ran around the lake searching for their lost master.

Meantime Finn was missed from his palace...and a party soon set out on the track on which he had been seen to chase the deer. They came to the lake-side on Slievegallion, and found there a wretched and palsied old man, whom they questioned, but who could do nothing but beat his breast and moan. At last, beckoning Keelta to come near, the aged man whispered faintly some words in his

³ See T Rolleston, p. 105:

[T]he *Lia Fail* or The Stone of Destiny, on which the High-Kings of Ireland stood when they were crowned and which was supposed to confirm the election of a rightful monarch by roaring under him as he took his place on it. The actual stone which was used at the inauguration of a reign did from immemorial times exist at Tara, and was sent thence to Scotland early in the sixth century for the crowning of Fergus the Great...This is the famous Stone of Scone, which never came back to Ireland, but was removed to England by Edward I. in 1297, and is now the Coronation Stone in Westminster Abbey.

⁶ Pronounced: 'mac Cool'

⁸ Spelled today: 'Geis' in **Foclóir Póca [Irish Dictionary]**. Pronounced: 'Gaysh', in plural 'gaysha' meaning, according to Rolleston (p. 165): "a bond, a spell, a prohibition, a taboo, a magical injunction, the violation of which led to misfortune and death."

ear, and lo, it was Finn himself! When the Fianna had ceased from their cries of wonder and lamentation, Finn whispered to Keelta the tale of his enchantment, and told them that the author of it must be the daughter of Cullan the Smith, who dwelt in the Fairy Mound of Slievegallion. The Fianna, bearing Finn on a litter, immediately went to the Mound and began to dig fiercely. For three days and nights they dug at the Fairy mound, and at last penetrated to its inmost recesses, when a maiden suddenly stood before them holding a drinking horn of red gold. It was given to Finn. He drank from it, and at once his beauty and form were restored to him, but his hair remained white as silver. This too would have been restored by another draught, but Finn let it stay as it was, and silver-white his hair remained until the day of his death.²⁸

As a young woman subject to the vicissitudes of marriage of alliances, Lafracoth had also become familiar with Norse and Cymric myths and legends. In the play, the interest she has cultivated in comparative mythology is nearly as conspicuous as her interest in comparative theology. Along with Greek Christian Platonism conveyed to her in the writings of John Scotus Eriugena, she has acquired some knowledge of the Eleusinian mysteries celebrated in memory of the abduction and return of Persephone as well as the dithyrambs and dramatic spring ceremonies in honor of the god, Dionysus which pose a menace to the established, hierarchical (and hiemal) order. Her own culture's vanishing druidical tradition is given new currency by her friendship with Nest who (as conceived and depicted) is able to relate bardic esoterica extant in Wales. These include, perhaps "The Circles of Being" which strikes a responsive chord among Lafracoth's pre-philosophical intuitions.²⁹ Her eagerness to invent a fusion of such celebratory imagery with Nest leads to trouble with the Anglo-Norman men of the household. Ecstatic transformations, even when suspended in the imaginative play of two women, become friends during their lonely and dangerous child bearing years, are something to be feared and suppressed in the patriarchal-military-pre-industrial-ecclesiastical complex of the time.

Lafracoth and Philosophy

Conor may be Lafracoth's *anam cara* but while she gives Conor her heart, her body and her soul, she is most decidedly the intellectual intimate of John Scotus Eriugena. The curiously passionate relationship of reader to writer was, in this case, consummated while Lafracoth contributed her efforts to the project of translating and distributing his writings to the monastic centers of learning in Eriu centuries after his period of flourishing on the continent in the court of Charles the Bald. She has by no means been entirely uncritical of Eriugena, although, it must be quickly added, the faults she finds in his thinking are neither pantheism nor Pelagianism (further discussion to follow), as will occasion his condemnation in years to come. Instead, she perceives a failure of his dialectic to accomplish its aim and finds fault with his extreme realism. There are other influences upon her thinking, of course: too much Plato from most of them, and too little Aristotle. Her mind flourishes in a time between Augustine and Aquinas. She is really too contemporaneous with Abelard to be fully aware of his work on the problem of universals but she is his fellow traveler in terms of moving away from the realism of her

beloved Eriugena.³⁰ She is fond of the *insolubilia*^α and wonders what these puzzles have to tell her about limits imposed upon any intelligence in making sense of *clear mystery*^β. She knows about the distinction between *conscientia* and *synderesis*^ζ, but has passed beyond the usual medieval conception of moral nature to anticipate, via a looking glass darkly, the moral psychological domains of conscience: *moral imagination, moralized attachment, moral emotional responsiveness, moral valuation and moral volition*. She is in fact mesmerized by Anselm's *a priori* ontological argument for the existence of God, but is perhaps even more susceptible to Anselm's earlier *a posteriori* argument from degrees of perfection which appears in the **Monologium**.³¹ A similar *a posteriori* argument from the allure of value to God has been forming in her mind. Still, ruled by her philosophical rigor and a deep personal appreciation of the problematic nature of *theodicy*^δ, she must ultimately reject both *a priori* and *a posteriori* lines that Anselm follows along with all the other lines of argument for the existence of God, as contrary to the *apophatic* approach. Yet, in contradistinction to Bernard of Clairvaux, she cannot despise any aspect of the *faith/reason controversy* as it finds expression during her period of history. While she harbors ambivalence towards Anselm's attempts as much as she does towards the dialectics of Eriugena, her ambivalence tilts more often in favor of approbation. She would readily agree that constant struggle characterizes a religious philosopher's *geise*. She would affirm that struggle with each defeat and new beginning.

Lafracoth and Heresy

According to Historian of Philosophy Jones, Pelagius gave his name to one of the four major heresies of the medieval period^ε:

... [I]nstead of beginning with the properties of God, Pelagius began with man's moral needs.... Pelagius' practical attitude is expressed very clearly in a letter he wrote to a friend:

^α plural of *insolubiliūm*, the medieval term for a logical paradox, such as: "The sentence I am about to write is true. The sentence I have just written is false."

^β this phrase is employed in the **Annals**, compare the more modern notion of 'a brute fact' which defies further explanation.

^ζ Mautner, pp. 420-1:

synderesis... the immediate grasp of the principles of right and wrong.... distinctions between *synderesis* and *conscientia* (conscience) were made in various ways. Usually *synderesis* was understood as the insight into the general and fundamental principles of right action, and *conscientia*, in contrast, was the faculty of applying moral principles in deliberation: it was possible for conscience to err.

The Greek word *syneidēsis* occurs in St. Jerome's (c. 340- 420) commentary on Ezekiel, to designate a conscience of which a spark remains even in a sinner like Cain. The word in Jerome was later mistranscribed as *synteresis* (= observance of a law or principle).

^δ Mautner, p. 425:

Theodicy... explanation of how God's perfect goodness, justice, wisdom, power and other perfections are compatible with the existence of evil in this world.

^ε See Jones, pp. 60-65. The others were Gnosticism, Arianism and Manicheism (peaking in the second half of the fourth century and recrudescing during the later Middle Ages as the Albigensian heresy). Of these, the Manichean heresy addressed theodicy by denying the omnipotence of God.

Whenever I have to speak concerning moral instruction and holy living I am accustomed to point out first the force and quality of human nature and what it is able to accomplish and then to incite the mind of the hearer to many kinds of virtue, since it is not without profit to be summoned to those things which perhaps he has assumed are impossible to him. For we are by no means able to tread the way of virtue unless we have hope as a companion.

In subsequent analysis, Historian of Philosophy Jones discusses, as is commonplace in treatments of Pelagianism, the heresy from the standpoint of its emphasis on free will and accountability but also points out:

[T]he fundamental issue in the Pelagian heresy goes even deeper. The orthodox determination to exalt God led inevitably to the conclusion that man is worthless, for to allow any value or significance to humanity was to derogate by just that amount from the majesty, perfection, and supreme value of God.³²

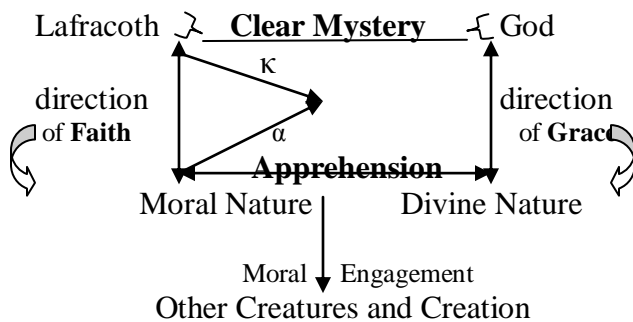
According to Historian Markale, Pelagius was born in Britain around 360 C.E. traveled to Rome and there met Paulinus and Augustine. He died in Egypt about 422 C.E.

The essence of Pelagian doctrine is that there is no such thing as original sin. Being mortal Adam was subject to concupiscence. Human nature has not been corrupted, the will of man is unimpaired and he is capable of doing good when he wills it. . . . “Grace” denotes only those natural good things God gave to man, particularly freedom, together with the teachings provided by the revelation and the words of Jesus Christ.

According to this doctrine, then, man has complete freedom. If he has a duty to avoid sin it is because he is able by nature to do so. . . .

Pelagianism has been regarded as an attempt on its author’s part to syncretize Christian teaching with druidism which had no concept of sin and saw individual freedom as the basic principle of its tradition. . . .³³

Historian Markale discerns strains of the Pelagian heresy in Eriugena’s corpus of work.³⁴



Originally strong Pelagian leanings towards free will, whether these derived from her intimacy with Eriugena's thought or from a more direct connection to druidism, become subject to some erosion over time as Lafracoth finds that there are truly many circumstances beyond her control, beyond her ken and beyond what degrees of freedom she has been allotted. Indeed, as she becomes increasingly aware of natural constraints upon human beings (which among post-modern minds might be appreciated in terms of psychobiological modulations of gene-environment interactions), she often wonders if there are any degrees of freedom at all beyond choosing how she will be disposed to the constraints. Clear Mystery or Absolute Paradox, however, compels some souls like Lafracoth, Eriugena and Anselm to hold the Mystery, clearly impenetrable, in creative tension with their desire to understand God's nature by whatever cognitive means available – be that means *apophasis* (α) or *kataphasis* (κ) or both though neither method anything but a deeper *aporia*.^Ω Indeed for each *omni* posited among the divine attributes, which figure in *kataphatic* theology and arguments for the existence of God, Lafracoth has suffered personally a life lesson of inversely proportioned diminution: she has been a hostage, kept in ignorance, rendered powerless over her destiny, and confronted with overwhelming evil, yet she responds to Grace with Faith, finding freedom, wonder, and power enough to love and care for others and, somehow (it's a mystery just how) draw closer to her God. In this respect, her heresy persists: she believes human beings have a moral **nature**, which either can be nurtured or repudiated, but in either case, unlike divine nature, *can be understood*. A like-minded person in today's world would be compelled to say more: moral nature, unlike divine nature, is *meant to be understood*, but such a person would readily admit that in saying just this much and no more, she has already become poetical. The bi-personal field between Lafracoth and her God admits of no rational explanation. It cannot be cognized but it can be cultivated so that seeds of conscience, the intrinsic values, are allowed to take root and hold fast. As the holding fast progresses and the roots penetrate ever more deeply, the bi-personal field between Lafracoth and God must inevitably expand and *recognizably* become a multi-personal one, with fullest engagement of conscience. In her life and lyric, Lafracoth witnesses a transformation of her compulsion to understand God (or at least to understand why she

^Ω *Kataphasis* is Aristotle's term for an affirmative categorical proposition. It is applied here to a theological approach in contradistinction to an *apophatic* one. See T. Mautner **Dictionary of Philosophy**, p. 24 and p. 223. In *kataphatic theology*, God is characterized as Creator with omniscience, omnipotence with perfect freedom, omni-benevolence, and omnipresence. Cf. Swinburne R (2004): *The Intrinsic Probability of Theism*. In **The Existence of God**, second edition. Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 93-109. Note that Swinburne believes that omnipresence, being Creator and being perfectly good all follow from (are entailed by) three: omnipotence, omniscience and perfect freedom. In *apophatic theology* – that of Kierkegaard is a model (Kangas, 1998), the emphasis is upon limitations of human intellect and the impossibility of saying anything of God except what [God] is not. *Aporia*, according to Mautner, p.24, is a seemingly insoluble difficulty; a puzzle or paradox; a condition of being at a loss what to think. Notice in the schematic that only the direction and not the destination of either *apophatic* or *kataphatic* approach is realized. And they appear to oppose progression beyond a point central to the bi-personal field. Psychobiologically understood, *kataphasis* may be an operation of part of our human nature in which we are evolutionarily prepared for encounters with someone a) with whom we may have joint attention to our world, b) who shows signs of agency and c) about whom we may have a theory of mind; but the operation is directed (or misdirected) to the Divine instead of embodied (or otherwise observable) sentient beings. *Apophasis* 'dialectically' opposes every *kataphatic* enterprise conducted in the belief that God's attributes are somehow more susceptible to comprehension than The Person who possesses them. This 'dialectic,' to the extent it is permitted to proceed, arrives at the 'synthesis' of deeper *aporia*.

cannot understand God) into prayerful adoration, piety and service to others even if these be *sans* canonically regulated dogma.

Endnotes

¹ P Tremayne (2001): **Smoke in the Wind, A Mystery of Ancient Ireland**, *Historical Note*, p.xiii.

² N McLeod (2003): Brehon law. **The Encyclopedia of Ireland**, edited by B. Lalor, p.121-2

³ J Markale (1976/1993): **The Celts, Uncovering the Mythic and Historic Origins of Western Culture**, pp. 138-142.

⁴ A Jotischy & C Hull (2005): **Historical Atlas of the Medieval World**, p.40.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ A Gwynn, SJ (1980/1992): *Gregory VII and the Irish Church*. In: **The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th Centuries**, edited by G. O'Brien, pp. 84-98.

Cf. *The First Synod of Cashel* p.157 in the same volume:

The conflict between Pope and Emperor over the question of lay investiture had been fought out for the past thirty years. Urban II and Paschal II still maintained the extreme claims of Gregory VII, who had forbidden all bishops, abbots and other prelates to do homage for any land belonging to their see or church. This extreme claim was modified – first in England, where a compromise was negotiated in 1107 which ended the dispute between Anselm and Henry I; then in the Empire, where the long struggle which had commenced in 1074 was finally settled by the concordat of Worms in 1122....

Cf; Extract From a Letter From Gregory VII to Archbishop Lanfranc , appearing in the Appendices to Munch's Chronicle of Man , No. 1 AD 1073, p. 146. footnote *a* accessed at <[http:// www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/manxsoc/msvol22](http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/manxsoc/msvol22)>

But though, indeed, you need no admonition, yet impelled by our deep solicitude, we admonish you, Brother, that you strive to eradicate the more grievous vices; and that, among other things, you use every exertion to put an end to that crime, of which we have heard concerning the Irish (Scoti), that forsooth many not only abandon their own wives, but even sell them. For to this end We will that you be invested with Apostolic Authority, that you may severely punish this crime, not only in the Irish (Scoti, but in any others that you may know to be of the same sort in the island of the English, and that you delay not to root out so great an evil with the prudent hoe of correction.

⁷ Jotischy & Hull, p.12.

Nota Bene: The author has quoted directly in the play translations of Urban's proclamations provided in: Asbridge T (2004): **The First Crusade, A New History, The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam**, Oxford University Press, Oxford., an indispensable background reference for the (d)evolution of Christianity from pacific creed to just war to sanctified violence to holy war.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 98-99 and 106-07.

Cf: D Lazare (12/11/06): *God's Willing Executioners*, review of **God's War: A New History of the Crusades** by Christopher Tyerman. Harvard, appearing in **The Nation**. pp. 45-49:

...By 1060 Norman adventurers were campaigning to take Sicily from the Arabs, who had taken it two centuries earlier from the Byzantines. Then in 1095, came the climax, an immense human tide that poured out of France, Flanders and other provinces and began making its way east with the purpose of liberating, so to speak, the Holy Land from the Seljuk Turks.

This was the opening salvo in the Crusades, a century and a quarter of invasions and assaults not only against Palestine but Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and even Constantinople, the Byzantine capital that was the Latin West's supposed ally. Tyerman does not limit his account to those expeditions, however, but also throws in the Albigensian crusade of 1209-29 against a heretical group of "dualists" in the south of France known as the Cathars; the campaigns by the Teutonic Knights against pagan tribes in the eastern Baltic; and the Christian reconquest of Spain....

Cf: T Cahill *The Peaceful Crusader* an op-ed contribution in **The New York Times**, 12/25/06. This piece is about St Francis of Assisi's attempts at peace-making in the early 13th century during the **Fifth** Crusade. At great peril to himself, Francis has visited al-Malik al-Kamil the nephew of Saladin, the sultan who, according to the timeline provided by Jotischy & Hull (pp. 12-13) had re-captured Jerusalem in 1187. In 1291 the kingdom of Jerusalem, was established by the crusaders in the Levant. Historian Cahill writes in his editorial:

Trying to proselytize a Muslim was cause for on-the-spot decapitation, but Kamil was a wise and moderate man, who was deeply impressed by Francis' courage and sincerity and invited him to stay for a week of serious conversation. Francis, in turn was deeply impressed by the religious devotion of the Muslims....

Francis went back to the Crusader camp on the Egyptian shore and desperately tried to convince Cardinal Pelagius Galvani, whom Pope Honorius III had put in charge of the Crusade, that he should make peace with the sultan, who despite far greater force on his side, was all ready to do so. But the cardinal had dreams of military glory and would not listen. His eventual failure, amid terrible loss of life, brought the age of the crusades to its inglorious end.

Donald Spoto, one of Francis of Assisi's most recent biographers, rightly calls Francis "the first person from the West to travel to another continent with the revolutionary idea of peacemaking...."

As depicted in the drama, Lafracoth's efforts are insular instead of international, but had she lived two centuries later she would have much admired Francis' peace-keeping work and his religious tolerance. Indeed, she would have taken to heart the Franciscan motto *Pax et Bonum*. According to the timeline, (Ibid. p. 12) to which the reader has already been referred, the Franciscan order was established in 1209.

⁹ A Gwynn, SJ (1980/1992): *Saint Malachy and the See of Armagh*. In **The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th Centuries**, edited by G. O'Brien, p. 205.

Cf: W Jones (1969): **A History of Western Philosophy II: The Medieval Mind, second edition**. p. 200 footnote 50:

"Peter Abelard is a persecutor of the Catholic faith and an enemy of the cross of Christ. Outwardly he is a monk but inwardly a heretic....His inexperienced auditors who ... are scarcely able to bear the first elements of the faith, he introduces to the mystery of the Trinity, to the holy of holies, to the chamber of the King.... With Arius [he] distinguishes grades and steps in the Trinity; with Pelagius he prefers free will to grace; with Nestorius he divides Christ....Thus traversing almost

all sacred subjects he boldly attacks them from end to end and disposes each in a damnable manner” – Letter 331, quoted in McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. II. p. 224.

¹⁰ A Gwynn, SJ (1980/1992): *Lanfranc and the Irish Church*, In: **The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th Centuries**, edited by G. O’Brien, pp. 68-83.

¹¹ A Gwynn, SJ (1980/1992): *The First Synod of Cashel*, In: **The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th Centuries**, edited by G. O’Brien, pp. 156-168.

Cf: J Lydon (1998): **The Making of Ireland From Ancient Times To The Present**. Routledge, London and New York., p. 46:

The decrees of the council of Cashel show that the reformers were mainly concerned with the same sort of problems which preoccupied the church elsewhere—simony, the freedom of the church from secular taxation and the civil courts, the right of sanctuary, the celibacy of the clergy. But the terminology employed showed the peculiar character of the Irish church, with authority still vested in abbots (laymen and usually married) and no territorial dioceses. Nor did the council make any real attempt to reform marriage law in any meaningful way. While promulgating the forbidden degrees of kinship within which marriage could not be contracted, the council still allowed for easy divorce, retained some traces of polygamy, and left the Irish marriage laws gravely in conflict with the orthodox Christian ethic. Secular rulers, however, refused to be confined to strict monogamy and indissoluble marriage and no reformer was ever able to implement fully the canon law in this respect.

For all its shortcomings, the council of Cashel was an important event. It demonstrated the will to reform, brought influential churchmen into the movement, and showed Muiredach O’Brien with the capacity to provide the necessary secular leadership. Perhaps most important of all, it showed in the presence of a papal legate that reform was now an organized, purposeful movement in the European tradition. Máel Muire Ua Dúnáin, the legate, must be seen as exemplifying a new breed of bishops who were now to drag the Irish church into the twelfth century, under the auspices of Rome and, more immediately, Canterbury, and with the support of O’Brien and lesser rulers in the south.

Nota bene: A Gwynn, SJ (1980/1992): *Six Irish Papal Legates* in the same collection , p. 119:

... Maol Muire Ua Dunain exercised legantine jurisdiction in Ireland, and that it was delegated to him by Pascal II ten years before the date of the synod of Rath Breasail.

All that we know of Maol Muire Ua Dunain makes it plain that the pope has chosen the most prominent Irish bishop of his day for the responsible charge. The bishop’s name first appears in a charter which has been copied into the Book of Kells.... His name appears as a signatory to the letter which Muirchertach Ua Briain and others sent to St. Anselm on behalf of the church of Waterford in 1096.... Once Domnall Ua hÉnna died (1098) Ua Dunain took his place by general consent as the acknowledged leader of the Irish reformers.

...He died in his seventy –seventh year in 1117.

p.120:

... We know nothing, it may be remarked, of Ua Dúnáin’s own movements from the date of the joint letter to St. Anselm in 1096 to the synod of Cashel in 1101. He may well have made the long journey to Rome in those dramatic years when the crusaders were slowly making their way across Europe and Asia Minor to Jerusalem. Urban II who had preached the first crusade in 1095, died at Rome in July 1099. Pascal II was elected in the following month, and he must have commissioned Ua Dúnáin to act as his legate in Ireland within a year or so of his own

consecration. Anselm who had been in touch with the Irish reformers since his own consecration in 1093, was at the court of Urban II for most of the year 1098, but had left Rome early in 1099 and was back in England by the autumn of 1100. It is thus not probable that he had any part to play in the choice of the first Irish legate: indeed the appointment must have been felt in Canterbury as a challenge to the claims Lanfranc and Anselm had been urging so persistently for the past quarter of a century.

It will be obvious at once to the reader that Historian Gwynn champions Ua Dunáin as the first among the papal legates, a distinction often given, as in Historian Moore's account of the synod that follows shortly, to Gilbert of Limerick.

Nota bene: This same Ua Dunain, as 'chief bishop of Ireland, over the bishops and clergy of Munster' according to **MacCarthaig's Book** (MCB, 1117) was closely involved with Muirchertach in his waning years 1114-19 and championed his cause against the usurpation by Muirchertach's brother, Diarmaid. For a coherent interpretation of these annals, see Gwynn, SJ (1980/1992): *Six Irish Papal Legates*, pp. 122-23:

The text [i.e. **MCB**] begins abruptly in the middle of the year 1114, when Muirchertach's brother Diarmaid 'came to Limerick and drove Muirchertach, king of Ireland, from his sick-bed and from his own encampment, from Limerick to Killaloe, under guard'. Muirchertach rallied his forces that year, and 'took possession of his kingdom again'. He then marched against Leinster, and left his son Domnall as king of Dublin. In 1115 Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair king of Connaught, having been installed there originally by Muirchertach Ua Briain] marched his army into Thomond, and the men of Leinster turned against Muirchertach who sent his son Domnall to take vengeance on them. Toirdelbach ua Conchobair brought a great fleet down the Shannon, where he did great damage both in Thomond and in Conmaicne, 'bur he came to Clonmacnoise, where he fasted and gave a drinking-horn ornamented with gold and a silver goblet ornamented with gold to God and Ciarán. Domnall, son of Muirchertach Ua Briain, set out from Midhe into Ormond 'to avenge the deposition of his father by Diarmaid, Muirchertach's brother. But Domnall was defeated and captured by Diarmaid, who threatened to blind his nephew unless Muirchertach submitted to his terms. To save his son from blinding, Muirchertach (now an old man, in failing health) submitted to Diarmaid's terms and renounced his kingship.

It is at this juncture that Maol Muire Ua Dunain comes into the story. The annalist for 1117...tells us that the bishop 'left Munster to wreak vengeance on Diarmaid Ua Briain for the violation (of his security) by taking the kingship of Munster from his brother...."

¹² T Moore (1843): **The History of Ireland; Commencing with Its earliest Period to the Great Expedition against Scotland in 1545**, pp.231-32

¹³A Gwynn, SJ (1980/1992): *The Synod of Breasail, 1111*. In: **The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th Centuries**, edited by G. O'Brien, pp.180-192.

Cf. Citing **AU 1097§6, 1099§7, 1102§8, 1105§, 1107§8, 1109§5 and 1113§7**, Irish historical scholar Griffin writes in *The Mac Lochlainn High Kingship in Late Pre-Norman Ireland* (p.11):

...On at least seven separate occasions, the *comarb* of Patrick, who at this period was generally the lay abbot of Armagh, intervened in what would have been major (possibly even decisive) battles between the two forces [i.e. South and North], and it is this, if nothing else, which forces one to question the totality of either man's [i.e. Muirchertach Ua Briain and Domnall Mac Lochlainn, respectively] to the high-kingship of Ireland.

These annals (and one other, **AU 1113§8**) identify by name the two successors of Patrick each of whom treated four times with Muirchertach Ua Briain and Domnall Mac Lochlainn. Sharing the same first name as the king of Ulster, Domnall was the successor of Patrick to first enter into the annals for his work in

making peace between the two inveterate foes. In fact he died while on his last peace mission, in 1105. Cellach, son of Aed son of Mael Ísa was appointed in his place and took up the cause of peace as well. What they usually brokered was 'a semblance of peace' between the adversaries, which however did not prohibit either king from making predatory excursions into territories outside of the other's direct sphere of influence. Both peacemakers were from Armagh, the primatial see of Ireland. Cashel would be, after the Synod of Breasail, of nearly equal stature; the two sees were intended to divide prestige and power much as Canterbury and York had in England.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 182-83.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp 188-89.

¹⁶ *Square of opposition*: see **Dictionary of Philosophy**, ed. T Mautner, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, 1996, pp. 407-408. The adaptation made here substitutes a union, alliance, or accommodation for an opposition at the top. *The therapeutic frame* is a heuristic device, perhaps modeled after the *square of opposition*, which I have learned and used in psychotherapy supervision but the origins of which I am unable to ascertain. Proceeding from the upper left corner, clockwise around the square, the points of engagement are: therapist, patient, unconscious derivatives of the patient, and unconscious derivatives of the therapist. The vectorial representations are as depicted in the adaptation but represent the terms of engagement: therapeutic alliance [c], patient's work conducted on unconscious his /her conflicts [b], therapist's work conducted on his/her unconscious conflicts [a], with distorting forces represented by the bottom line being unconscious communications [d] and the crossed diagonals being transference [t] and countertransference [(~t)]. Then, it is proposed, therapeutic progress occurs if and only if $a + b + c > d + t + (~t)$.

¹⁷ Gwynn, SJ: *Six Irish Papal Legates*, p. 126.

Anselm sent encouragement to Gilbert, as reported by Historian Gwynn (p. 112-13), in the form of these words:

'I now learn that by God's grace you have been advanced to episcopal dignity, and I venture to give you advice according to what I have understood to be needful. God has raised you to this great dignity in Ireland, and has appointed you that you may be zealous for the welfare of religion and the good of souls. Be careful and earnest in the correction of abuses among the people, and in planting the seed of good morals. As far as in you lies, with the king and the other bishops and all others you can influence for this good cause, showing them the joys which are prepared for the good and the punishment prepared for the wicked. May you deserve to receive from God the reward of your labours and the good works [f]or others. I thank you for the gift you sent me.'

In his commentary that follows (pp. 113-114), Historian Gwynn writes:

The final stage of reaching a full Irish hierarchy was not reached for another forty-five years. The Irish reformers of Anselm's day were planning a division of Ireland into two ecclesiastical provinces, Armagh and Cashel, each with twelve suffragan bishoprics as had once been planned for the two English provinces of Canterbury and York. That plan was put into effect at the national synod which met at Rath Breasail in 1111. Anselm had died two years before that date, but he could fairly claim to have done much to make the synod's work possible. Gilbert the papal legate who presided over its sessions, was the bishop of Limerick whom Anselm had met at Rouen, probably in 1106, and to whom he had sent his letter of instruction and encouragement in 1107. Malchu, whom Anselm had consecrated as bishop of Waterford in 1096, was chosen in 1111 to be the first archbishop of Cashel. Muirchertach Ua Briain, with whom Anselm had maintained a fatherly correspondence for many years, was present as king of Ireland at the synod of Rath Breasail. His powerful support must have done much to assist the great change from monastic to diocesan government. His death in 1119 was to prove a sore blow to the work of the

reformers. Bishop Gilbert, though he remained as papal legate in Ireland for the next thirty years, was unable to make any notable advance during those years. The lack of a powerful support from a friendly king of Munster was no doubt one reason for his failure.

Cf Lydon, p. 47:

...The most remarkable [among the new breed of bishops of the Hiberno-Norse sees] was Gilbert, bishop of Limerick, who became a friend of Anselm's following their meeting at Rouen in Normandy, probably 1087. The friendship was probably responsible for Gilbert's nomination as papal legate in succession to Ua Dúnáin and it was he who thus presided over the revolutionary synod of Rath Bresail in 1111, which gave a wholly new structure to the Irish church. Probably by way of preparation for that momentous event, Bishop Gilbert composed an extraordinary tract, *De statu ecclesiae* (On the state of the church), which fitted the new canon law into the traditional structure which divided society into those who pray, those who fight and those who work. Not until the advent of Aquinas in the next century was this piece of ecclesiology to be surpassed. In the twelfth century its impact was shattering. He wrote it at the request of many clergy, with all the authority of a legate. And addressed it 'to the bishops and presbyters of the whole of Ireland'.

¹⁸ Moore , p.231

For some of the text of Lanfranc's correspondence with Muirchertach's father, Toirdelbach Ua Briain, see Gwynn, SJ: *The First Synod of Cashel*, p. 175:

Among many things that please us, some things have been reported to us that displease us; namely that in your kingdom every man abandons his lawfully wedded wife at his own will, without the occasion of any canonical cause; and, with a boldness that must be punished, takes to himself some other wife who may be his own kin or of the kindred of his wife whom he has abandoned, or whom another has abandoned with like wickedness, according to a law of marriage that is rather a law of fornication (*maritali seu fornicaria lege*).

For some of the text of Anselm's correspondence with Muirchertach Ua Briain, see A Gwynn, SJ (1980/1992): *Anselm and the Irish Church*. In: **The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th Centuries**, edited by G. O'Brien, p 108:

One thing is said to be common among the people whom you have undertaken to rule, Which is urgently in need of correction as being altogether contrary to Christian religion. It has been said to us that men exchange their wives for the wives of others as freely and publicly as a man might exchange his horse for a horse or any other property; and that they abandon their wives at will and without any cause. How evil this is, any man who knows the law of Christ will understand. If Your Excellency is unable himself to read the passages in Holy Writ which condemn this wicked traffic, give an order to the bishops and religious clerks in your kingdom to expound them to you: so that, having known their teaching, you may know with what zeal you must be vigilant to correct this abuse.

Nota bene. This particular letter has a postscript, reported by Historian Gwynn (p.108):

...concerning a monk Cornelius... whom Anselm wishes to retain in his own company as being necessary for his health in old age. The Irish king had asked that Cornelius be sent to him, perhaps as an advisor on ecclesiastical affairs. Anselm pleads that his own life would be endangered, should he be separated from so faithful a companion....

As depicted in the drama, Conor enjoys this kind of relationship with Anselm, which both protects him from Muirchertach, and enables him to carry out his personal mission to gain intelligence for himself and his lover, Lafracoith, regarding Alice and Philip and later to conduct Philip to Almenèches in

Normandy. However, the letter to which this is added as postscript probably antedates the imagined union of Conor and Lafracoith in 1099.

¹⁹ Gwynn, SJ: *The First Synod of Cashel*, pp. 170-72.

²⁰ B Jaski (2003): *Early Irish marriage*. **The Encyclopedia of Ireland**, p. 697.

²¹ Gwynn, SJ: *The First Synod of Cashel*, p.173.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 171-2

²³ Markale, pp. 145-6.

²⁴ Tremayne, p. xiv.

²⁵ B Jaski (2003): *Status of women, 800-1200*. **The Encyclopedia of Ireland**, p.1145.

²⁶ M O'Dowd (2003): *Status of women 1200-1700*. **The Encyclopedia of Ireland**, p.1145-6.

²⁷ T Rolleston (1917/1990): **Celtic Myths and Legends**, Dover Publications Inc, New York, pp. 178-80.

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 279-80.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 332-35:

At any rate, “Barddas” is a work of considerable philosophic interest, and even if it represents nothing but a certain current of Cymric thought in the sixteenth century it is not unworthy of attention by the student of things Celtic.... We have come upon a strain of thought which whatever else it may be, is certainly not Christian, and speaks of an independent philosophic system.

In this system two primary existences are contemplated, God and Cythrawl, who stand respectively for the principle of energy tending towards life, and the principle of destruction tending towards nothingness. Cythrawl is realized in Annwn [pronounced “Annoon”], which may be rendered, the Abyss, or Chaos. In the beginning there was nothing but God and Annwn. Organized life began by the Word—God pronounced His ineffable Name and the “Manred” was formed. The Manred was the primal substance of the universe. It was conceived as a multitude of minute indivisible particles – atoms in fact—

Each being a microcosm, for God is complete in each of them, while at the same time each is a part of God the Whole. The totality of being as it now exists is represented by three concentric circles. The innermost of them, where life sprang from Annwn, is called “Abred”, and is a stage of struggle and evolution—

the contest of life with Cythrawl, The next is the circle of “Gwynfyd” or Purity, in which life is manifested as a pure, rejoicing force, having attained triumph over evil. The last and outermost circle is called “Ceugant” or Infinity. Here all predicates fail us, and this circle, represented graphically not by a bounding line, but by divergent rays, is inhabited by God alone....

Cf: I Leask (2003): *John Scotus Eriugena*, **Encyclopedia of Ireland**, p.361:

Stressing that all of being is the manifestation of God, the *Periphyseon* attempts a dialectical comprehension of theophany. For Eriugena, all creation ‘is’ God: Natura, as genus, has four species, which show the Deity as beginning, middle and end of the universe. The first of these species is God as uncreated creator; the second is the group of primary created causes, which

themselves create a non-creating third species; lastly there is God as the goal of the previous stages. Eriugena's schema is thus circular and yet hierarchical. Despite the description of God becoming more 'visible' through his effects, Eriugena also maintains an emphasis on God's hiddenness. Strongly influenced by Greek Fathers, this negative theology stresses that, while God is immanent in creation, he is also utterly transcendent: beyond definition, conception, and being, God is the no-thing from which all emerges; the deity is both within and beyond all that is. Accordingly, any over-hasty charge of pantheism is undermined—as is any suggestion that human understanding is somehow 'total' or absolute.

Cf: F. Copleston, SJ (1950): *John Scotus Eriugena I and II. A History of Philosophy Volume II: Medieval Philosophy*, Doubleday, New York, 1993, pp. 112-135.

Nota bene: God's immanence, God's transcendence and an *apophatic* approach to the divine are all ideas immediately recognizable and agreeable to Lafracoth, whose abiding concerns include the determination to eradicate mystery. She would, however, surely have raised an objection to the idea of 'a dialectical comprehension of theophany.' Throughout her life she is ill at ease with any effort to treat faith as a placeholder for comprehension by reason. Lafracoth would have preferred what Søren Kierkegaard termed apprehension (in the sense of 'grasping' or, even better put, 'holding on for dear life').

³⁰ Cf: Jones, pp. 187-196:

It was characteristic of the medieval attitude toward knowledge that men of the Middle Ages were content to restrict themselves to choosing among Porphyry's alternative solutions to the problem of universals.... The first of Porphyry's alternatives ... was the notion that universals are real entities, separate from particulars and subsisting incorporeally. John Scotus Eri[u]gena's position was typical of this "realistic" (so called because universals were held to be real in their own right) solution.... That the individuals ... are less real than the universal... follows from his conception of nature as a progression through eternal exemplars to physical objects: "God has constituted all men simultaneously in that first and one man, whom he made to his image, but did not produce them at once in this visible world, rather at certain times and in certain places bringing the nature, which he had founded simultaneously, into visible being."

In contrast, *nominalism*, Historian of Philosophy Jones continues, in its most extreme form,

...denied any sort of objective status to universals....

The compromise finally worked out by the medieval philosophers was strikingly similar to Aristotle's theory, though because the Middle Ages was largely ignorant of Aristotle's views, it was virtually an independent achievement. The medieval version of the compromise is sometimes called "conceptualism" because it is based on the notion that what the universal word names is not a Platonic form but a concept formed by the mind.

Abelard's contribution is to characterize *abstraction* as the process whereby conceptions of universals are formed:

"...In relation to abstraction it must be known that matter and form always subsist together, but the reason of the mind has this power, that it may consider matter by itself; it may now turn its attention to form alone..."

³¹ F. Copleston, SJ (1950): *St Anselm of Canterbury. A History of Philosophy Volume II: Medieval Philosophy*, Doubleday, New York, 1993, pp. 156-165.

Nota bene: pp. 158-9:

In the *Monologium*, St Anselm develops the proof of God's Existence from the degrees of perfection which are found in creatures. In the first chapter he applies the argument to goodness, and in the second chapter to 'greatness'.... Such qualities are found in varying degrees in the objects of experience, so that the argument proceeds from the empirical observation of degrees of, for example goodness, and is therefore an *a posteriori* argument. But judgment about different degrees of perfection... implies a reference to a standard of perfection, while the fact that things participate objectively in goodness in different degrees shows that the standard is itself objective, that there is for example an absolute goodness in which all good things participate, to which they approximate more or less nearly, as the case may be.

Anselm's more renowned Ontological Argument which proceeds from the idea of God to God as reality is contained in his *Proslogium*. For an appreciation of modern day renderings and critiques of the Ontological Argument see:

Plantinga A (1974/1977): **God, Freedom and Evil**. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.

Plantinga A (1974): **The Nature of Necessity**. Oxford, Clarendon.

Mears T (2006): *Sympathy for the Fool*. **Aporia** 16 (1):74-91.

For a rigorously constructed inductive argument for the existence of God utilizing Bayes theorem, see:

Swinburne, R. **The Existence of God**, second edition. Clarendon press, Oxford, 2004.

For a discussion of apophatic theology with specific reference to Kierkegaard, see:

Kangas D (1998): *Kierkegaard, the Apophatic Theologian*. **Enrahonar**, 29:119-123.

³² Jones, pp. 66-7.

³³ Markale, pp. 138-40

Nota bene: p. 141: [Pelagianism] was even as Dom Louis Gougaud says "in some sense the national heresy of the Britons."

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp.149-50