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**SAINT PATRICK AND MONASTICISM. THE FIGURE OF THE
MONK-BISHOP**

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

Central European University

Budapest

May 2013

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by

Monika Belucz

(Hungary)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Monika Belucz**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, _15_ May 2013

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Marianne Sághy and Volker Menze for their invaluable support, encouragement, their constructive criticism and suggestions. Thanks to their guidance and help I feel that I have a better perception of Late Antique Church and I am at the beginning of a continuing journey to further discover this world. I am forever grateful to Judith Rasson for her tireless work and proofreading. I want to thank to Annabella Pál for her help in all matters concerning my studies at CEU.

I cannot express my gratitude to my family whose support and encouragement kept me going. Thank you for believing in me. Without them my work could not have been finished.

I want to thank to András and Renátó for being the spiritual support and consolation when I needed it. Special thanks to my friends and colleagues – Judit, Eszter, Zsuzsi, Marcsi, Andra, Dani and Pisti – for their never-ending encouragement and for their listening ears. Last but not least, I want to thank to Petter for giving me the strength and support that I needed to finish this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the possible connection between the “ascetic revolution” in late antique Christianity and the mission of Saint Patrick, “the apostle of Ireland.” I attempt to show through a close reading of Patrick’s *Confessio* and his *Epistola ad Milites Corotici* that Patrick knew, appreciated, and practiced an ascetic lifestyle as a bishop. My hypothesis is that Patrick met the newly emerging idea of the “monk-bishop” during his stay in Gaul and brought this knowledge with him to Ireland. I shall examine the kind of monastic and ascetic ideas that might have influenced Patrick in Gaul. On the basis of the Patrician documents, I try to show that Patrick contributed to the process that made monasticism the dominant feature of the Irish Church and spread ideas about strong ascetic leadership from the beginning. I focus on the ascetic and monastic trends at the end of the fourth and at the beginning of the fifth centuries in Latin Christendom: Italy, Gaul and Roman Britain. I found this crucial not only for a better understanding of Patrick’s spirituality, but also for appreciating his possible influence on early medieval Irish monasticism. How did the ascetic revolution reach Ireland? Who introduced the monastic movement in Ireland and how? What kind of monasticism and ecclesiastical leadership were presented to the Irish? I wish to suggest that Patrick, having encountered ascetic and monastic ideas and communities in Gaul, practiced and preached an ascetic lifestyle that prepared the soil for the rise of Irish monasticism in the early Middle Ages. Patrick’s ideal was that of a “monk-bishop” and his activity made asceticism and monastic communal ideas popular on the island.

This thesis contributes to the question of authority in the late antique Church as reflected in autobiographical and hagiographical sources. The comparisons between the Patrician texts and Gallic *Vitae* – the *Vita Martini* by Sulpicius Severus, the *Vita Germani* by Constantinus of Lyon, and the *Vita Honorati* by Hilary of Arles – provide arguments for

Patrick's asceticism and his self-representation as a "monk-bishop." In my view, this approach is essential to the understanding of Patrick's achievement. In previous research, Patrick has never been considered as a "monk-bishop," even though this type of ecclesiastical leadership was actively promoted by articulate Christian trendsetters before and during his lifetime. When searching for influences that might possibly have influenced Patrick, the question of ascetic authority and the model of "monk-bishop" comes up frequently. Due to the paucity of sources and the murky evidence, it seems to be a daring venture to identify the spiritual trends that had an impact on Patrick concerning monastic ideas and ecclesiastical leadership. This thesis offers a new approach to Patrick's activity, a fresh interpretation of the Patrician documents and an insight about the beginnings of Irish monasticism.

Saint Patrick: Life, Mission, Works, Monasticism

Sometime in the first half of the fifth century, a young man travelled across Gaul.¹ He got acquainted with monastic ideas and grew fond of ascetic practices. The young man was born in Roman Britain in a Christian family. His father was deacon and his grandfather was priest.² He was captured at the age of fifteen by Irish pirates. The raid, during which he was enslaved, was not unusual in Britain. He escaped from his Irish master after six years of slavery, and after a dangerous journey he arrived to the continent.

What his initial goals of travelling in Gaul were instead of going back to his homeland, we may never know. He may have wanted to finish his education which had been interrupted by years of slavery.³ He did not know that his most dangerous and adventurous years were still ahead of him, and that what he had learnt and experienced in Gaul would

¹ E. A. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?* 2nd ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 35.

² ... *patrem habui Calpornium diaconum filium quendam Potiti presbyteri...* Saint Patrick, *Confessio* in Saint Patrick, *Confession et Lettre à Coroticus* Sources Chrétiennes 249 Trans. and ed. by Richard P. C. Hanson (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978), 70.

³ Though Patrick was of Christian family he claims he was not a believer before his slavery. Even if we consider this as a sign of modesty or self-criticism, the fact that he was a young boy when he was captured makes it possible that he got introduced to monasticism only after his escape.

greatly affect the development of the medieval Church in Ireland. This young man, as mysterious as the land that he evangelized, was called Patricius, that is, Patrick.

The little we know of Patrick's life has been closely scrutinized and hotly debated in scholarship. From Patrick's extant writings – his *Confessio* and his *Epistola ad Milites Corotici* – we do not learn much about his life. Patrick was born in the Northern part of Roman Britain between 385 and 415 AD.⁴ At the age of fifteen, he was captured during an Irish raid and spent six or seven years in slavery. After he escaped from his master he was captured again for a short period of time. Following his second escape he spent some time in Gaul.⁵ He returned home to his family and received a divine call for missionary work in a dream. A man called Victorius appeared to him with letters from the Irish while Patrick heard the Irish calling him back to them.⁶ Shortly afterwards, following the death of his predecessor, Bishop Palladius – who was originally sent to the Irish but died shortly after beginning his mission around 431 – Patrick was appointed bishop to convert the Irish and establish churches for them.⁷ He died between 461 and 493 A.D.⁸

Two authentic works by Patrick survive: the *Confessio* and the *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*. These sources are the earliest Latin sources from Ireland, the *Epistola* being probably the earlier one of the two.⁹ Both sources – letters being structured over Scriptural quotations – are literary works.¹⁰

⁴ Liam De Paor, ed. *Saint Patrick's World* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 89.

⁵ On Patrick's missing years see: David N. Dumville, "St Patrick's Missing Years" in Ed. David N. Dumville, *Saint Patrick: A. D. 493-1993* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993), 25-28. On the cultural background of Patrick see: Ludwig Bieler, "The Place of Saint Patrick in Latin Language and Literature." *Vigiliae Christianae* 6 (1952): 65-98.

⁶ Patrick, *Confessio*, 96.

⁷ David N. Dumville, *The date 432*. in Dumville, *Saint Patrick*, 43.

⁸ It is not possible here to give an overview of the scholarly debate. Seventh-century hagiography makes the earlier date more likely, early medieval chronicles support the 490's. Hagiographical literature dates Patrick's death to 461, but Muirchu's *Vita Patrici* – the saint's earliest Life from the seventh century – puts it to the beginning of the 490's. David N. Dumville, "The Death-date of St Patrick." in Dumville, *Saint Patrick*, 32.

⁹ T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 216.

¹⁰ Bieler, "The Place of Saint Patrick", 97.

Patrick wrote the *Confessio* when he was an old man in order to defend himself against accusations. A sin that he committed as a young man was made public by one of his friends. It is problematic to identify the *Confessio* as a representative work of one single literary genre. Though it is the *Confessio* of Patrick, thus an autobiographic work, the source itself is an open letter addressed to Patrick's accusers and his friends. Nonetheless, defense is not the only function of the text. Patrick also summarizes his missionary work and expresses his beliefs and ideas as a testimony of his life achievements. The other problem with the *Confessio* is that it does not contain any precise data and date. Patrick's aim – despite writing a confession – was not to give an autobiography and even the description of the difficulties and achievements of his mission seem rather to be a credo than a report. However, his 'creed' is still an invaluable – and only – source for his personal beliefs and monastic ideas.

The *Epistola ad Milites Corotici* is in many ways similar to the *Confessio*. It was written to Coroticus – whom Patrick calls a tyrant – whose soldiers killed and captured members of a newly baptized group. In the letter Patrick excommunicates the criminals until they would set free the enslaved and repent their sins. Like in the *Confessio*, Patrick mentions here some details about his mission, his problems with the accusations of fellow bishops, and his strained relations with the churchmen of Britain. The letter has a tormented tone showing the pain of Patrick over the recent massacred.

The Rise of the Monk-Bishop

Parallel to the rise of the "holy man" from a monastic or eremitic background, a new type of sanctity emerged in the fourth century, that of the "monk- bishop."¹¹ By the time when Patrick was consecrated "bishop of the Irish", the new type of ideal leadership in the Church was widely promoted mainly by the monk-bishops of Lerinum and Sulpicius Severus, the hagiographer of Martin of Tours.

¹¹ Winrich Löhr, "Western Christianities" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36.

The charisma of the holy man is increasingly presented in fourth-century documents as overcoming institutional authority. Examples show that the institutional Church sought to integrate ascetics into its ranks. Not only did bishops recruit monks into the clergy, but bishops also adopted an ascetic lifestyle.¹² Having lived as monks or ascetics, they maintained the daily practices and routine of the monastic life even after their election to the bishopric. These “monk-bishops” are advertised in hagiography as the new ideal leaders of the Church.

Who were Patrick’s ‘role models’ in their quality of “monk-bishops”? I propose to compare Patrician texts and the lives of influential churchmen in Gaul: Saint Martin of Tours, Germanus of Auxerre, and Saint Honoratus.¹³ Saint Martin was one of the first well-known monk-bishops in the West advertised by Sulpicius Severus in his *Vita Martini*. Germanus of Auxerre was an influential bishop both in Gaul and in Britain with strict ascetic lifestyle, where he travelled twice the Pelagian heresy. Honoratus is important because of the influence of the monastery that he founded, Lerinum, which became a center for educating monk-bishops.

Hagiographical texts are a good source for ascetic and monastic ideas. The lives I intend to use for the comparison with Patrick were written in the fifth century. The *vitae* construct the image of the monk-bishop in the fifth century, an image that could have influenced Patrick. These lives mirror ascetic ideals and describe ascetic practices in an episcopal context.

Monks had similar ascetic practices as hermits, anchorites and holy men, who did not live in a community but on their own. Monastic literature cherishes the same traditions and

¹² Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (London: University of California Press, 2005), 137.

¹³ Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini* in Sulpicius Severus, *Vie de Saint Martin*. Sources Chrétiennes 133. Trans. and ed. by Jacques Fontaine (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967); Constance of Lyon, *Vita Sancti Germani* in Constance of Lyon, *Vie de Saint Germain d’Auxerre*. Sources Chrétiennes 112 Trans. and ed. by René Borius

spirituality that we find in ascetic literature: prayer, fasting, the abandonment of the secular world, and the excellence of ascetic charisma over ecclesiastical authority. In this thesis, I use the terms “ascetic” and “monastic” as interchangeable. One cannot always prove whether a bishop had monastic training or not and was simply fond of asceticism – as in the case of Patrick –, there are cases when monasticism is closely associated with traditional ascetic practices – as in the case of Martin of Tours or Lerinum.

Asceticism and Monasticism in late antique Gaul

Christian monasticism was widespread in Eastern parts of the Roman Empire but it only started to gain popularity in the fourth century in the Latin West. Ascetic groups did exist in the West in the second and third centuries, but monasticism started to spread more widely in the fourth and fifth century, when several monasteries were founded and soon became influential centers. John Cassian founded two monasteries in Marseilles, Honoratus founded Lerinum. Martin of Tours founded monasteries in Ligugé and in Marmoutier.

The *Vita Antonii* written by Athanasius of Alexandria in 356 made a vast impression on Latin audiences. The fourth century saw “the rise of the ascetic bishop,” that is, bishops practicing and promoting the ascetic lifestyle, from Ambrose of Milan, to Hilary of Poitiers, Eusebius of Vercelli, Martin of Tours, Augustine of Hippo and the ascetic community of Lerinum formed under the leadership of Honoratus.¹⁴

Saint Martin of Tours was presented by Sulpicius Severus in 397 as the first monk-bishop in Latin Christianity. It is useful to compare the Patrician documents to the *Vita Martini*. The example of Martin in the fifth century dominated and defined the image of the monk-bishop.

(Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965); Hilary of Arles, *Vita Sancti Honorati* in Hilary of Arles, *Vie de Saint Honorat*. Sources Chrétiennes 204. Trans. and ed. by Marie Denise Valentin (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1977)

¹⁴ Claudia Rapp, “Saints and Holy Men” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 551.

Saint Martin of Tours was born in Savaria in Pannonia, in 316/336 to a pagan military family.¹⁵ He served as a soldier in the Roman army just like his father, but he got into confrontation with his parents over his desire to become a Christian.¹⁶ While a soldier in Ambianum (Amiens), Martin saw a beggar freezing in the cold. Martin cut his cloak into two, covering the beggar with one half of it. At night, Christ appeared to him in his dream as the beggar. This vision of Christ strengthened his desire to become a monk, but he had to serve in the military for two more years.¹⁷ Upon leaving the army, Martin went to Gaul to become a pupil of Hilary of Poitiers, and was consecrated an exorcist. Martin returned to his parents in Italy and tried to convert them.¹⁸ Soon he had to leave because got into confrontation with Arians who had great influence in the region. Martin's spiritual father, Hilarius, was exiled from Gaul, so Martin returned to Italy. He lived as a hermit near Milan, then on the desert island of Gallinaria.¹⁹ When Hilary returned to his see around 360,²⁰ Martin followed him and established a monastery in Ligugé, near Poitiers. He was elected bishop of Tours in 371.²¹ A devoted ascetic, Martin did not neglect the practices of asceticism as a bishop, and combined his monastic lifestyle with the episcopal office, living in the monastery near to his see.

Representative of another type of a bishop, Germanus of Auxerre (418 - 448) was also a monk-bishop, whom Patrick probably knew personally. Germanus was of noble birth who acted not only as a spiritual but also as a political leader to his flock, and used his connections for the sake of them. Germanus was born in an upper-class family.²² He received an excellent education and became a master of law in Italy. He had settled to have a secular life and his career was on the rise. His life changed when he was elected bishop around 415, so he left his

¹⁵ The date of Martin's birth is debated. See: Clare Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 132-133.

¹⁶ Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 254.

¹⁷ Ibid 258.

¹⁸ Ibid 262.

¹⁹ Ibid 264., 266.

²⁰ Jean Honoré, Michel Laurencin and Guy-Marie Oury, *Saint Martin de Tours. XVIe Centenaire*. (Chambray-lès-Tours: C.L.D., 1996), 178.

²¹ Ibid., 71.

secular career and his wife behind to dedicate his life entirely to his official duties meanwhile leading a strict ascetic life.²³ He frequently traveled across Gaul to spread Christianity and to help his flock not only in a spiritual way but to serve them with his legal knowledge and use his connections to improve their life. He died in Ravenna around 448.²⁴ His life and miracles were presented in the *Vita Germani* by Constantius of Lyon around 480 A.D.²⁵

Germanus special importance among fifth-century Gallic bishops comes from the fact that he was well-known outside his own diocese. He was sent to a mission to Britain in 429 with Bishop Lupus of Troyes to fight the Pelagian heresy which still had followers in Britain despite its condemnation by the council of Carthage in 418.²⁶ He later travelled to the region one more time to deal with the Pelagian controversy. The ideal of ecclesiastical leadership and ascetic lifestyle for which he stood might have been introduced to the clergy in Britain as well. The Church in Britain was in close contact with the Gallic Church in the fifth and sixth centuries. Theological trends were transmitted from Italy via Gaul to Britain.²⁷ Germanus' visits might have triggered the Irish mission. Germanus and Martin represented a new type of spiritual authority that might have influenced Patrick.

Later hagiographical texts claim that Patrick lived for a while in the monastery of Lerinum.²⁸ Though we do not have incontestable evidence that he did so, I shall deal with the monasticism in Lerinum in comparison to Patrick. Similarities between the monk-bishops from Lerinum and Patrick's perception of bishopric would support my argument that Patrick was familiar with the ideal of the "monk-bishop". Lerinum's influence is well-represented in

²² Constantinus, *Vita Germani*, 122.

²³ Ibid., 124.

²⁴ Anthony A. Barrett, "Saint Germanus and the British Missions", *Britannia* 40 (2009): 209.

²⁵ Ibid., 197.

²⁶ Löhr, "*Western Christianities*", 41.

²⁷ Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), 31-32.

²⁸ Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, xiii.

the fact that Germanus of Auxerre also had connections with the monastery: he personally met Hilary of Arles, the disciple and hagiographer of Honoratus.²⁹

I wish to collect particular attributes, monastic practice, actions and anecdotes of monk-bishops from hagiographical accounts. If the same patterns could be found between Patrick's self-representation and fifth-century Gallic hagiography and monastic ideas, that might identify Patrick's ideological sources for both monastic ideas and for his perception of episcopacy. How did monk-bishops think about the relationship between bishops and monks, between episcopal office and monastic community? I focus on ideas, literary and religious *topoi* that are frequently present in the lives of the monk-bishops.

The state of the art: Patrician research

Patrick's writings have not yet been examined in the context of the rise of the "monk-bishop" in late antiquity. Scholars regard him a bishop who would have liked to be a monk, but his mission prevented him to become one.³⁰ It is unknown whether he had ever lived in a monastic community before being consecrated bishop and going to the mission.

Research on the connections between Patrick and the monastic movement, does exist. However, it is not unanimously accepted by scholars that Patrick was found of monasticism and monastic and ascetic ideas can be pointed out in his writings. Those who question whether Patrick was familiar with monastic traditions and terms underline that Patrick's stay in Gaul is uncertain. Nora Chadwick claimed that Patrician sources do not mention "monasticism" at all. When Patrick used the word "monk," he referred to a rare individual practice and this proves neither the popularity of monastic ideas nor Patrick's personal

²⁹ Constantinus, *Vita Germani*, 166; 168.

³⁰ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 224.

beliefs.³¹ Edward Thompson refused the idea that there is any kind of parallel between the Patrician texts and the *Vita Martini*.³²

On the other hand, John Ryan pointed out in the *Irish Monasticism: Origins and Early Development* in 1931, that Patrick might have been influenced by Western monastic and Eastern ascetic movements.³³ He suggested that Patrick's traveling on the continent should be compared to the travels of Egyptian hermits searching for holy men to learn from them. He assumes that in Lerinum Patrick learned ascetic practices and under the guidance of Saint Honoratus he experienced cenobite monasticism. Patrick learnt how to live in constant prayer and studied the lives of the saints, for example, the life of Saint Martin of Tours. In Ryan's understanding, Patrick studied as a monk in Lerinum and grew fond of the monastic life, but he could not perform his missionary work as a monk.³⁴

It is usually acknowledged by scholars as well that Patrick's writings show clear fondness for ascetic practices and monastic life. Richard Hanson suggested that Patrick was a monk, "perhaps in the tradition of Martin", and might have lived in a monastery in Britain, where he learnt the Latin Bible.³⁵

Recently Stephanie Hayes-Healy analyzed the chapters of the *Confessio* as if they show Patrick's knowledge of ascetic practices and traditions.³⁶ She tried to identify the written sources of Patrick – an investigation which is quite adventurous because of our lack

³¹ Nora K. Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 23.

³² Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 47. Thompson's *Who Was Saint Patrick* was first published in 1985. The book received mixed reviews. Richard Sharpe criticized that Thompson misunderstood and misinterpreted Patrick and diminishes Patrick's importance. On the other hand, in the preface of the second edition Colmán Etchingham defends Thompson's approach to Patrick and praises its contribution with his original perspective to Patriciologists. See: Richard Sharpe, „Who was Saint Patrick? By E. A. Thompson” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38/1 (1987) 114-115.; Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, xvii.

³³ John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism: Origins and Early Development*. 2nd ed. (Dublin: Colour Books Ltd., 1992), 62.

³⁴ Ibid. 67. For further discussion see: Dom Louis Gougaud, *Christianity in Celtic Lands: A History of the Churches of the Celts, Their Origin, Their Development, Influence, and Mutual Relations* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992), 62-63.

³⁵ Richard P. C. Hanson, *Saint Patrick: His Origins and Career* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 157-158.

of knowledge about Patrick's education and his readings. However, she did not compare Patrick as a bishop to personal role-models.

The emergence of the monk-bishop in the Late Antiquity has been in the focus of historiography in the last decades. Conrad Leyser, Philip Rousseau, Daniel Caner and Claudia Rapp greatly contributed to our knowledge about the appearance of the new type of bishop in the fourth and fifth centuries.³⁷ The Croatian Hagiotheca International Symposium recently also dedicated a conference to this problem.³⁸ Henry Chadwick and Philip Rousseau were among the first scholars who explored the connection between the role of monks and those of bishops.³⁹ Conrad Leyser explored the connection between interpretations of asceticism, the formation and structure of monastic communities and the leadership of these communities, while Claudia Rapp mainly focuses on the East.

Research showed how ascetic and monastic ideas influenced the perception of authority and personal holiness in the Eastern and the Latin Church. Based on the results of this research, I wish to take a further step and examine the appearance of the new ideas in the westernmost parts of Christianity.

³⁶ Stephanie Hayes-Healy, "Saint Patrick's Journey into the Desert: Confessio 16-28 as Ascetic Discourse" *Archivum Hibernicum* 59 (2005): 237-259.

³⁷ Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (London: University of California Press, 2005); Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Philip Rousseau, "The Spiritual Authority of the 'Monk-bishop'. Eastern Elements in Some Western Hagiography of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries" *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971): 380-419.

³⁸ Ott, John S. and Vedris, Trpimir, ed. *Saintly Bishops and Bishops' Saints* (Zagreb: Humaniora, 2012)

³⁹ Henry Chadwick, *The Role of the Christian Bishop in Ancient Society* (Berkeley: The Center, 1980); Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978)

CHAPTER ONE

I. Episcopal authority

The authority of the bishop is a multifaceted and ever-mutating construct that continued to change as individuals adapted, necessity dictated, and circumstances permitted. The office itself underwent a process of growth and change over time during which certain aspects and tasks gained in importance, while others receded into the shadows. The main components that define episcopal authority, however, remained the same. What changed was the relative weight of these components, or the way in which they were combined.⁴⁰

From the beginning, the relationship between personal holiness and ecclesiastical authority was ambiguous. This complexity was due to the fact that the bishop had to deal with administrative problems, with the secular business of the church, at the same time as he was the shepherd of his flock, performing the liturgy, preserving doctrinal unity, and dealing with religious issues. Bishops had to provide political leadership and social service in times of crisis and transition. However, by the end of the fourth century, besides being a political leader for the people, it became more important for bishops to possess spiritual gifts and to integrate an ascetic lifestyle into their ecclesiastical office.

Martin of Tours, Ambrose of Milan, and Honoratus were among the first monk-bishops in the West whose lives and activities were documented. Rather than withdrawing to the desert, they lived in cities in close interaction with their flock and adopted an ascetic lifestyle as they fulfilled their liturgical functions and administrative duties.⁴¹

Claudia Rapp distinguishes three sources of authority characterizing a bishop: spiritual, ascetic and pragmatic. Spiritual authority was received from the Holy Spirit. The source was outside of the individual; God gave it as a gift thus it could not be attained through personal efforts. It was not necessarily visible to outsiders. Ascetic authority, in contrast, required the personal efforts of the individual. It was achieved by self-control, virtue, and abstinence. Ascetic authority was accessible to all and it was visible to everyone.

Finally, pragmatic authority derived from actions for the benefit of others. It depended on the person's social position and wealth and was always public.⁴²

In the mid-fourth century, several monks were elected bishops. Afraid of losing their spiritual gifts or of being unable to maintain their ascetic practices if they tried to meet the responsibilities of ecclesiastical office, they hesitated to take over these offices. Monks sought to maintain contemplative, prayerful, and quiet lives away from the noise of the secular world. Their fears came from experience; former monks who had joined the clergy experienced difficulties in maintaining their ascetic habits.⁴³ Moreover, the clergy was mistrustful towards monks as well. Pope Siricius published a canon in 385 that monks could not receive episcopal sees based solely on their personal holiness, as it was not enough to qualify for a see.⁴⁴

In Gaul, the "ascetic revolution" – especially in Lerinum – contributed to the emergence of the figure of the "monk-bishop". Although married bishops were still the standard norm, it was difficult to praise them for their continence and represent them as models of Christian perfection. Thus, the most articulate proponents of asceticism set the figure of Martin of Tours as a model of episcopal sanctity.⁴⁵

Hagiographic literature often emphasizes the qualifications of a holy man or monk for the episcopate by stating that he was elected without his knowledge or volition – indicating that divine powers played a role in his election – or by stating that the candidate was reluctant to accept the position – which was supposed to show his humility. Being elected against his will indicated that the holy man or monk received episcopal authority based on his spiritual

⁴⁰ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 16.

⁴¹ Rapp, *Saints and Holy Men*, 551.

⁴² Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 16-17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 142-143.

⁴⁴ Marianne Sághy, "Should Monks become Bishops? A Debate on Asceticism and Episcopal Power in the Fourth-Century West," *Church, Society, Monasticism* (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 2008), 198.

⁴⁵ Brian Brennan, "Episcopae: Bishops' Wives Viewed in Sixth-Century Gaul," *Church History* 54, no. 3 (1985): 313.

and ascetic authority. Being elected like this had a price: these bishops could not resign to live a monastic life nor could they be removed.⁴⁶

Bishops realized that elected monks had spiritual power deriving from their personal holiness that could also support their ecclesiastical office. Embracing an ascetic lifestyle, several bishops, in their turn, tried to strengthen their authority and control the monastic movement at the same time.⁴⁷ A fusion of asceticism and episcopacy took place in the fourth century and led to the rise of the “monk-bishop.” Ascetic authority became a powerful element in the job description of a bishop. Ascetics and unmarried clergy often lived together at the bishop’s residence and formed a quasi-monastic community. Ambrose of Milan reports that it was already an existing practice in the West, citing Eusebius of Vercelli as the first example. The practice of clergy living an ascetic life seems to have been more common in the West than in the East.⁴⁸

Another source of enhanced episcopal prestige could come from prestigious family background. Many bishops came from senatorial families. Many had a secular career before being elected, while others withdrew from the world and society to practice asceticism before they were elected to a bishopric.⁴⁹ However, a humble social background was never an official obstacle to appointment in the clergy, and ecclesiastical officeholders of modest background are known.⁵⁰ The monastic ideal of episcopal leadership was attractive for many and diverse groups because it crossed “geographic, chronological and even theological boundaries.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 141.

⁴⁷ Rousseau, “The Spiritual Authority of the Monk-bishop”, 401.

⁴⁸ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 151.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵¹ Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church. The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.

I.1. Patrick and Martin of Tours: Spiritual and ascetic authority

Martin of Tours was one of the most well-known monk-bishops in fourth-century Gaul. Sulpicius Severus portrays him in his *Vita Martini* as the ideal bishop. Sulpicius, likewise an ascetic, was impressed by Martin the monk-bishop and promoted this ideal of leadership.⁵² By the fifth century, the image of the monk-bishop became widespread in Latin Christianity. Patrick might have been influenced by this image –which he could have learned of in Gaul.

The strategies of the *Vita Martini* and the *Confessio* use to construct the image of a monk-bishop can be compared to reveal whether Patrick portrayed himself as an ideal bishop or monk-bishop in the fifth-century. . Both Sulpicius and Patrick apologize for their lack of education; however, these excuses were obligatory clichés in hagiography. Hagiographers' mentions of their own lack of education and their inadequacy to write the lives of saints was already present at the first hagiographical writings. The *Vita Antonii* of Athanasius of Alexandria was a model for hagiographers in this respect, compared to Jerome's *Vita Pauli*, which praises his hero's culture and education.⁵³ Patrick's apology indicates that he was well aware of the literary requirements.

Patrick's defense of his lack of education had another purpose in the *Confessio* than simply following a literary model. Coming from an upper-class Christian family, Patrick was probably better educated than he liked to admit. Patrick did not simply compare himself to his accusers at home on how he had not received the same education as they did. He tried to prove his simplicity, not only to search for excuses. Ignorance made him similar to Martin; he had a spiritual and ascetic power which was more important and counted more than Classical *paideia* or even Christian learning.

⁵² Allan Scott McKinley, "The First Two Centuries of Saint Martin of Tours," *Early Medieval Europe* 14, no. 2 (2006): 175.

⁵³ Stancliffe, *Saint Martin*, 52.

The fact that Patrick was a slave also played a role in claiming spiritual and ascetic power. Being a slave in a mostly pagan region must have been a great disadvantage to him, hindering his education, but Patrick managed to use it in a positive way. In Martin's case, military service prevented him from getting a proper education and it also hindered his desire to lead an ascetic life, devoted to God. Patrick certainly had some education even before his capture as well as before being consecrated as bishop. For him, slavery plays the role that military service does in Martin's life.⁵⁴ Instead of claiming a good education, Patrick chose to claim a more important authority, spiritual authority, to justify himself as a bishop. Slavery thus becomes, in a sense, proof of spiritual authority. Patrick is clearly claiming to have the more important spiritual authority for his mission, given by the Holy Spirit: "... 'stuttering tongues will quickly learn how to speak peace' ... but it is established and strongly written in our hearts not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God."⁵⁵

Patrick's denial of erudition parallels the hesitance of ascetics to value secular knowledge and clearly states the idea that spiritual quality is superior to education.⁵⁶ Education was important in only one respect: to "speak the 'language' of the people."⁵⁷ Patrick's statement about the disadvantage of his not being unable to explain himself as learned persons do was not necessarily a disadvantage during his mission. Patrick did not need special language skills because in Ireland Latin was not the language of communication.⁵⁸ A "master in law and rhetoric"⁵⁹ was not the most essential skill; it was not even the most important in Britain.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 254.

⁵⁵ '*Linguae balbutientes uelociter discent loqui pacem.*' ... *sed ratum et fortissimum scripta in cordibus uestris non atramento sed spiritu Dei uiui.* Patrick, *Confessio*, 80, 82.

⁵⁶ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 179.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵⁸ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 176.

⁵⁹ Patrick, *Confessio*, 78, 82.

⁶⁰ "Britain, however, except for the aristocracy, was a Celtic- speaking country, and there is almost no trace of the Vulgar Latin which was the normal speech of the masses on the Continent. Conditions in Britain, therefore, were linguistically unsuitable for the propagation of Christianity... It is the same with Roman law... In late Roman Britain, however, Celtic law was still being applied and sometimes conflicted with Roman principles. In

Sulpicius praised Martin's charisma over secular education: "It is the duty of man rather to seek after eternal life than an eternal memorial and that, not by writing, or fighting, or philosophizing, but by living a pious, holy, and religious life".⁶¹ The same attitude is present in Patrick's *Confessio*. "Ignorance" for Patrick and for Martin meant that someone did not know God, not the absence of intellectual training.

Patrick mentions his ignorance at one point in a less apologetic tone. He recalls and condemns his ignorance as a young boy not knowing God and his former inability to differentiate between good and bad: "...he took pity on my adolescence, on my ignorance... before I knew him, yes, even before I was wise enough to tell good from evil...".⁶² Patrick remembers that during his missionary years the Spirit was within him and it was praying within him.⁶³ After receiving the Holy Spirit, he had the ability to distinguish between good and bad. Patrick presents the Spirit being within him as the ascetics' spiritual competence of discernment (*distinctio*). This gift came directly from someone's possession of the Holy Spirit as a result of intercessory prayer.⁶⁴ "Knowledge" was therefore knowledge of God, not secular learning.

Patrick's similarity to Martin in his lack of education puts him in the opposite position to aristocratic bishops in Gaul – Germanus of Auxerre or the monk-bishops from Lerinum who found education important. Germanus' higher education is exactly the kind of knowledge which Patrick claimed was not sufficient for missionary work:

And because I myself did not learn in the same way as others, who easily absorbed both their law and their sacred literature, the one as avidly as the

A.D. 410 the Britons, in ejecting the Roman administrators, ejected the 'Laws of the Romans' with them," see: K. S. Painter, "Villas and Christianity in Roman Britain" *The British Museum Quarterly* 35 (1971): 161.

⁶¹ ... *cum hominis officium sit perennem potius uitam quam perennem memoriam quaerere, non scribendo aut pugnando uel philosophando, sed pie sancte religioseque uiuendo*. Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 252.

⁶² ... *misertus est adolescentiae et ignorantiae meae ... antequam scirem eum et antequam saperem uel distinguerem inter bonum et malum...* Patrick, *Confessio*, 72.

⁶³ Patrick, *Confessio*, 98.

⁶⁴ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 56.

other, and who scarcely changed the way they talked since childhood. They seemed to polish their perfection without apparent effort.⁶⁵

While the idea of the monk-bishop as represented by Martin helped empower Patrick with spiritual authority, the model of the aristocratic bishop as represented by Germanus empowered him with pragmatic authority.

I.2. Germanus of Auxerre: Pragmatic authority

After his escape from Ireland, Patrick spent some time in Gaul.⁶⁶ At that time the monasticism in Lerinum and influential aristocratic bishops – among them Germanus of Auxerre – were the greatest influences in the Gallic Church. Thompson suggests that even though Patrick's personal relations cannot be traced back, he still spent three or four years in Gaul. It is inevitable to compare Patrick's self-portrayal to the Gallic standards of the fifth century.

In fifth-century Gaul, a powerful episcopate emerged with a monastic-aristocratic background.⁶⁷ Aristocrats redefined their authority in the face of declining Roman power by entering the episcopate. The ideal of episcopal sainthood offered a novel Christian way to preserve the ancient aristocracy's prestige. An important aspect of this new ideal was its adaptation of Christian ascetic values.⁶⁸ These new bishops were able and ambitious administrators; sometimes they assumed the responsibilities of civil authorities, for example, by organizing the distribution of donations. Roman aristocrats found a new role as ascetic contemplation replaced the life of cultured philosophical repose, and the pursuit of a military or civil career was transposed into the strenuous regime of an ascetic bishop.⁶⁹ The bishops received authority given to him by the institutional church by ordination and they could

⁶⁵ *quia non legi sicut et ceteri, qui optime itaque iura et sacras litteras utraque pari modo combiberunt et sermons illorum ex infantia numquam mutarunt, sed magis ad prfectum semper addiderunt.* Patrick, *Confessio*, 78.

⁶⁶ Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 35.

⁶⁷ Richard Bartlett, "Aristocracy and Asceticism: The Letters of Ennodius and the Gallic and Italian Churches" in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, ed. Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 202.

⁶⁸ Löhr, *Western Christianities*, 35.

receive another type of authority by personal action through asceticism. Hagiographic literature added further elements to the bishop's authority, such as the working of miracles.⁷⁰

Germanus of Auxerre was born in an aristocratic family.⁷¹ He received an excellent education and became a master of law in Italy – the exact opposite of the education Patrick was able to receive. His life changed when he was elected bishop of Auxerre around 415. He left the secular life to dedicate his life entirely to his office and adopted an ascetic lifestyle.⁷²

Germanus was educated, served in the local administration, and was a military leader. However, he chose to be a soldier of Christ instead of serving in the imperial army -- just like Martin. Martin was eager to escape from his city and was living a secluded life in the monastery next to his see. Germanus also founded a monastery near Auxerre and visited it often while he stayed in close daily connection with his flock and still used his “secular skills” to help them. Germanus was a mediator between the imperial authority and his flock. He not only used his legal knowledge and aristocratic relations, but even took up arms as the leader of the troops in Britain against the Picts and Saxons.⁷³ Germanus had a pragmatic authority deriving from his noble birth, his high education, and the way he used his connections and skills for the sake of others. Germanus also had ascetic authority thanks to his strict penance and ascetic practices.

Patrick portrays himself as a bishop who works hard for his people and mediates for their sakes with local authorities. Indeed, his letter displays his episcopal duty. It was his duty to demand the release of captives. This was not the only occasion when he interfered for Christians. In the *Epistola* he writes: “It is the custom of Roman and Gallic Christians to send holy and qualified men to the Franks and other gentiles with several thousand *solidi* to

⁶⁹ Ibid., 36-37.

⁷⁰ Simon Coates, “*Venantius Fortunatus* and the Image of Episcopal Authority in Late Antique and Early Merovingian Gaul,” *The English Historical Review* 115 (2000): 1115, 1120.

⁷¹ Constantinus, *Vita Germani*, 122.

⁷² Ibid., 124.

⁷³ Ibid., 154.

redeem the baptized captives”.⁷⁴ Bishops had to interfere for the sake of Christian captives and slaves in other parts of Europe and in Africa as well. Augustine of Hippo and his friends also tried to reduce the slave trade and the taxes imposed on their flocks.⁷⁵

Patrick suggests that he was born to a privileged family and gave it all up to live an ascetic life and go on to his missionary work. In the fourth and fifth centuries, aristocrats abandoned secular careers, and instead of serving the empire, established themselves in the church as bishops. These bishops helped shape the function and image of the episcopal office that defined the representation of the early medieval bishop.⁷⁶ Patrick states that he could have stayed at home as his parents wanted him to do, probably meaning he could have entered a career at home: “They asked my word that ... I would go nowhere from them”.⁷⁷ Giving up his possible career at home would have made him similar to aristocratic bishops, for example Germanus of Auxerre, who also left his career behind to serve others.

Moreover, Patrick seems similar to Germanus in one more way: he was able to use his wealth to serve others. Patrick may have financed his mission partially on his own, but that was probably not sufficient: “For by descent I was a freeman, born of a decurion father; yet I have sold this nobility of mine, I am not ashamed, nor do I regret that it might have meant some advantage to others”.⁷⁸ Decurions were the leading citizens of the 2000 or so cities of the Roman Empire.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ *Consuetudo Romanorum et Gallorum(que) Christianorum (est): mittunt viros sanctos idoneos ad Francos et caeteras gentes cum tot millibus solidorum ad redimendos captivos baptizatos.* Patrick, *Epistola ad Coroticum*, 144; 146.

⁷⁵ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 447.

⁷⁶ Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 144

⁷⁷ *ex fide rogauerunt me ut ... nusquam ab illis discederem* Patrick, *Confessio*, 94; 96.

⁷⁸ *Ingenuus fui secundum carnem; decorione patre nascor. Vendidi enim nobilitatem meam – non erubescio neque me paenitet – pro utilitate aliorum* Ibid., 142.

⁷⁹ Frank D. Gilliard, “Senatorial Bishops in the Fourth Century,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 77 (1984): 154.

This is not the only occasion Patrick refers to his birth; he mentions it in the *Confessio* as well.⁸⁰ According to Thompson, Patrick alludes to the property which granted him noble status in Britain. Patrick writes about his parents opposing his missionary work and also that he lost them by going on the mission.⁸¹ This loss might not only mean that he lost his parents by leaving them, but also that they opposed his giving up his status and wealth. There is no data about Patrick's inheritance. By giving up wealth and status for the sake of others he acted as his aristocratic monk-bishop colleagues. The mention of his parents and nobility only served this parallel.

I.3. Lerinum: other aristocratic monk-bishops

Patrick's confrontation with his parents made him parallel with the aristocratic bishops. Saint Honoratus, the founder of the influential Lerinum monastery (around AD 410), also resisted his family's will to stay a layman and not to become an ascetic. The monasticism at Lerinum was greatly influenced by Eastern traditions. Before creating the monastic community in Lerinum Honoratus went on a pilgrimage to the East.⁸² His own experiences were built into his community. His choice of a place was already a mirror of the desert communities: Lerinum is on an island near the coast of today's southern France, the Riviera. The ascetics at Lerinum lived on the island as hermits did in the desert: outside of society.⁸³ "Lerinum would thus influence dioceses and the development of monasticism on the Rhone-Saone axis as far north as the Jura and even, indirectly, Britain and Ireland."⁸⁴

In the fifth-century, Lerinum became a centre for those who wished to withdraw from the secular world and dedicate their life to God and achieve personal perfection by ascetic practices. Many monks came to Lerinum from the northern part of Europe – from Patrick's

⁸⁰ *darem ingenuitatem meam pro utilitate aliorum*, Patrick, *Confessio*, 110.

⁸¹ *Unde mihi postmodum donum tam magnum tam salubre Deum agnoscere nel diligere, ut patriam et parentes amitterem...*? Ibid., 110.

⁸² Hilary, *Vita Sancti Honorati*, 100.

⁸³ C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*. 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1989), 15.

homeland as well.⁸⁵ The nobility of some of the most important figures to join the community at Lerinum suggest that the religious life was attractive not only for pious reasons, but also because monastic life became a refuge from political perils in Gaul, where Roman rule was about to collapse.⁸⁶

Lerinum soon became famous for its spiritual training. As the request for monk-bishops grew, several Lerinum monks were elected bishops. The first monks of the monastery were promoted to the bishopric and became holders of prestigious episcopal sees in Provence and beyond.⁸⁷

The monastery became a “nursery” for monk-bishops. As spiritual authority became more incorporated into ecclesiastical office, more monks were elected to the episcopate. Honoratus left the monastery to become the bishop of Arles. His pupil, Hilary, became his successor in 429. The monks at Lerinum were influential in Gaul not only because of their spiritual power. They often came from aristocratic families; Honoratus was born to a senatorial family; and one of his ancestors had been a consul.⁸⁸ Hilary of Arles, Honoratus’ successor to the see of Arles and a friend of Germanus of Auxerre, was a relative of Honoratus. The two monk-bishops represent well the aristocratic episcopate in late antique Gaul.

As Martin’s and Patrick’s case shows, that it was not generally accepted in aristocratic circles that a bishop led an ascetic life or lived in a monastery. Hilary of Arles informs us that Honoratus’ family was against his ascetic lifestyle, and his narrative indicates that his

⁸⁴ Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 83.

⁸⁵ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 15.

⁸⁶ Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, 82.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸⁸ *Praetermitto itaque commemorare avita illius saecularium honorum insignia et, quod concupiscibile ac paene summum habet mundus, usque ad consulatus provectam familiae suae nobilitatem, maiore generositate pectoris fastiditam; nee placuisse ilium sibi de supervacuis suorum honoribus, qui pro amore veritatis iam suos non optabat.* Hilary, *Vita Sancti Honorati*, 76; 78.

conversion went against the will of his father.⁸⁹ After going to live first as a hermit in the East and then founding the monastery of Lerinum, Honoratus only visited his home once, during which convinced Hilary of Arles to take up the monastic life.⁹⁰

Lerinum's remarkable role as a training center for bishops in the fifth century underlines the elitist nature of the community. Western aristocracy had already replaced older aristocratic ideals of public service, for example, in the magistracy, by the ideal of public service through the episcopate; in the early years of Lerinum, monastic training became part of the *curriculum vitae* of a number of episcopal aristocrats. Lerinum soon became the most important cultural centre in Gaul, having influence in the farthest parts of Europe as well.⁹¹

The presence of the different authority models of Martin of Tours, Germanus of Auxerre, and the monks of Lerinum shows how monastic and religious ideas could have spread fast in the fifth-century, so that the British Patrick serving in Ireland may have been aware of them. The same concepts and ideas of the education and authority of bishops can be found throughout the Western Church in the fifth century: in Lerinum, in northern parts of Europe, and in Britain. Based on Patrick's *Confessio*, his letter, and the fact that the Christian communities in Ireland had connections with both Britain and Gaul from the beginning, it is likely that Patrick intentionally portrayed himself as bishop with both spiritual and pragmatic powers. To his critics he could introduce himself as an aristocratic monk-bishop, giving up his noble birth, receiving his vocation from God, being led by the Spirit. That he was of higher social class is shown in his introduction: "My father Calpornius was a deacon, son of Potitus, a priest. We lived in the town of Bannaventa Berniae, and outside there was a small

⁸⁹ M. A. Wes, "Crisis and Conversion in Fifth-century Gaul: Aristocrats and Ascetics between 'Horizontality' and 'Verticality,'" in John Drinkwater and Hugh Elton, ed. *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1992), 256.

⁹⁰ David Woods, "The Origin of Honoratus of Lérins", *Mnemosyne* 46 (1993): 82.

⁹¹ Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, 83.

holiday villa”.⁹² His birth and familiar background appears to be important to him despite his preference for poverty and simplicity.

It seems that the ideas of the monk-bishop and the aristocratic bishop were quite widely spread in Britain so that Patrick could adapt it. By introducing ascetic ideas – spiritual power and ascetic practices – to the Irish, he might have helped monasticism to become dominant on the island. According to Charles-Edwards, Patrick did not draw a sharp line between the world of the monastery and secular world. This approach to monasticism may explain some extraordinary features of the Irish Church, for example, due to the wide extension of monastic vocabulary, it is difficult to tell when a church was not a monastery.⁹³ Patrick founded episcopates in Ireland and the monasteries did not initially have the importance that they gained within the following decades.⁹⁴ However, his preference of ascetic values, his perception of authority, and the uncertainties surrounding the structure of the Irish Church might have given an advantage to monasteries over episcopates.

If the idea of the monk-bishop spread in Ireland, and bishops might have had monasteries right next to their sees – like in the fifth-century Gaul – it is not surprising that abbots took over the episcopal offices and became more influential. The phenomenon that in Ireland the abbots became more important than the bishops in the Middle Age, and in many cases the two positions were held by the same person, might not be an Irish innovation after all. These abbots may fit the image of the monk-bishop coming from fifth-century Gaul.

⁹² ... *patrem habui Calpornium diaconum filium quondam Potiti presbyteri, qui fuit uico bannauem taberniae uillulam enim prope habuit...* Patrick, *Confessio*, 70.

⁹³ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 225.

⁹⁴ Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints*, 20.

CHAPTER TWO

II. The Monk-Bishop and the Problem of Evangelization

... the fifth century still left a good many pagans in the territories of the former Roman Empire for the Church to cope with. Martin had toiled among rustic pagans in Gaul and Victricius in Belgium before the collapse began, and Germanus later campaigned against paganism in the country round Auxerre.⁹⁵

The Christianization of the Irish was a special event in the fifth century because it was missionary activity carried out outside of the Roman Empire. The conversion of the Irish preceded the missionary policy of Gregory the Great, who sent monks to convert the Anglo-Saxons in 596.⁹⁶ The Irish mission was such a success that by the sixth century the Irish monks became the greatest missionaries in Europe.

The conversion of the Irish was an urgent matter for the Church in Britain. Many Christians were captured and enslaved during Irish raids and it was difficult for them to keep their faith. With the conversion of the Irish, the enslaved Christians would be in a better situation. Missionaries arrived in Ireland in the fifth century from both Britain and Gaul.⁹⁷

Although Patrick's mission was special because he went abroad, his work was not the sole example of someone converting pagans in the fifth century. Hanson points out that the barbarian invasions required Christians to try to convert newcomers to the true faith.⁹⁸ The conversion of the barbarians was also important because in some cases they were Arian Christians. The communication between Christian communities and barbarians imposed new tasks on the bishops. During times of crisis the bishops became political leaders of their cities and mediated between pagan kings and Christian people. However, the missionary expansion of the Church in the West almost came to a stop in the fifth century. This is not surprising, because a period of social collapse and economic chaos did not favor missionary expansion.

⁹⁵ Richard P. C. Hanson, "The Reaction of the Church to the Collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the Fifth Century," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 26, no. 4 (1972): 286.

⁹⁶ Robert A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 178.

⁹⁷ David N. Dumville, "British Missionary Activity in Ireland" in Dumville, *Saint Patrick*, 139.

⁹⁸ Hanson, "The Reaction of the Church", 286.

Even the desire to evangelize seems to have been lacking.⁹⁹ Martin of Tours was a rare exception.

Besides the arrival of barbarians, Christian bishops had to deal with another threat to Christian communities. Hagiography often reports that the bishops and monks had to debate with heretics. These confrontations many times got to a point when the bishop or monk had to flee from the city – as in the case of Athanasius of Alexandria or Hilary of Poitiers, who were exiled because of the Arians. The fight against heretics was so important because it was not only the “orthodox” Christian communities that had to be protected, but pagans had to be persuaded to belief before heretics won them over.

In the debates with the heretics, the educated clergy of Gaul was on a solid basis. In Gaul and Britain, two heresies were wide-spread and caused unrest in the Church: Pelagianism and Arianism. When Patrick was consecrated bishop and active in Ireland, in both Gaul and his homeland, Britain, these heresies were present. Pelagianism was especially strong in Britain. Patrick’s possible role models had to fight heretics as well as to convert pagans. Martin of Tours not only converted pagans, but he was combated Arianism and Priscillianism; Germanus of Auxerre was sent to Britain to bring back the Pelagianists to orthodoxy, and his monastery near Auxerre became a centre for further missionary work. Lerinum, became a training centre for ascetics as well as Classical education, and its scholars participated in the fights against heresies.¹⁰⁰

As the fight against heretics became an essential part of the lives of fifth-century bishops, it is worth examining whether Patrick had to deal with heretics. To contextualize what Patrick says about himself, it is essential to take a look at Patrick’s mission, examining how he claims to have carried it out and how others reacted to it. Such apostolic work would

⁹⁹ Ibid., 282.

¹⁰⁰ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 16.

further add to the picture he seems to paint of himself: an ideal bishop who is the most suitable for the Irish mission.

II.1 Martin of Tours and missionary work

Martin of Tours is the greatest example of a bishop carrying out missionary work in late antique Gaul. The *Vita Martini* indicates that a great many pagans lived in Gaul at the time of Martin, who is introduced as an ascetic devoted to bringing as many to God as possible. He performed miracles, destroyed pagan temples, and zealously spread Christianity in rural Gaul. Meanwhile, God protected him because his faith was great enough and he earned ascetic authority through his prayers. His determination to terminate pagan cults is well-illustrated in the famous scene of cutting down a venerated tree. Martin was safe because God protected him, unlike those who trusted false gods:

... When in a certain village he had demolished a very ancient temple, and had set about cutting down a pine-tree, which stood close to the temple, the chief priest of that place, and a crowd of other heathens began to oppose him. ... Martin carefully instructed them that there was nothing sacred in the trunk of a tree, and urged them rather to honor God whom he himself served... Then one of them ... says, "If you have any trust in the God, whom you say you worship, we ourselves will cut down this tree, and be it your part to receive it when falling; for if, as you declare, your Lord is with you, you will escape all injury." ... he [Martin], trusting in the Lord, and waiting courageously, ... while it was now falling, ... simply holding up his hand against it, he put in its way the sign of salvation. Then ... it swept round to the opposite side, to such a degree that it almost crushed the rustics, who had taken their places there in what was deemed a safe spot.¹⁰¹

Martin and Patrick were both concerned with missionary work. Martin zealously tried to convert pagans and travelled around Gaul. For Patrick, missionary work was his life, more important than anything else: "Me the ignorant should...dare undertake this duty that is so

¹⁰¹ Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 280.

holy and so wonderful”¹⁰² His greatest fear was that he could not continue what he started: “I fear to lose the labor I have begun”.¹⁰³

Martin’s and Patrick’s zeal for missions was similar and neither of them was sent particularly to do this. Both spread Christianity out of personal conviction and relied on their ascetic authority.¹⁰⁴ The *dynamis* of Martin was meant to demonstrate that ascetic bishops could work miracles.¹⁰⁵ The extension of Patrick’s and Martin’s missionary work is significant even in comparison with other ascetics’ attempts to convert pagans in their own areas. As a missionary to foreign regions, Patrick incorporated yet another aspect into his episcopal office: it was a feature of the apostles to go on missions to spread Christianity. Patrick combined apostolic, ascetic, and episcopal authority.

In the *Vita Martini*, the conversion of pagans occupies a central position. The narratives about Martin meeting, confronting, and converting pagans take up a great part in the narratives. Martin’s episcopal see was central in the election of Martin, but afterwards Martin’s travels seem more important.¹⁰⁶ By not tying the bishop strictly to Tours, Sulpicius underlines the importance of Martin’s missionary work while travelling through Gaul and his ascetic lifestyle withdrawing to the monastery of Marmoutier. Patrick never mentions a see or an ecclesiastical center; he speaks of himself as someone who is sent to the Irish, who knew him as bishop.¹⁰⁷ The lack of mentioning the episcopal see suggests that the ascetic authority to carry out the mission was more important in the image of the monk-bishops than performing jurisdiction and administrative work in his episcopal see.

Patrick was aware of the dangers and importance of his mission. He emphasizes that no one had yet gone to the Irish, and that it was an unknown and wild land. He undertook the

¹⁰² *ego inscius... hoc opus tam pium et tam mirificum auderem adgrederi*, Patrick, *Confessio*, 108.

¹⁰³ *timeo perdere laborem quem inchoavi*, Ibid., 116.

¹⁰⁴ John Marcus Beard, “Public Displays of Asceticism: Holy Bishops and the Conversion of Gaul in the *Vita Sancti Martini*,” in Ott and Vedriš, *Saintly Bishops and Bishops’ Saints*, 43.

¹⁰⁵ McKinley, “The First Two Centuries”, 178.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 181.

mission for the glory of God despite threats from the pagans: “I have to talk about briefly how often the caring God saved me from captivity and from the twelve dangers threatening my life and many other traps as well.”¹⁰⁸

Patrick’s evaluation of his mission mirrors how the Apostle Paul viewed his own duty. The young, non-believer Patrick can be compared to Paul before he converted and Patrick’s mission can be compared to Paul’s ministry among the gentiles. Talking about his youth, Patrick quotes the letters of Paul. This imitation of Paul’s life shows Patrick’s conversion in a new light: like the conversion of Paul. The parallel would justify his position as well, as Paul was unquestionably the apostle of the gentiles. Patrick was the apostle of the Irish – in a sense the “new gentiles”.

Although Martin was the most devoted to converting the pagan population of Gaul, others made efforts as well, even if not to such an extent. According to Constantius, Germanus not only maintained the ascetic lifestyle, but founded a monastery near Auxerre. He stayed there frequently and the monastery became a centre for missionary activity. This story of the *Vita Germani* is clearly one of the main points on which the *Vita Martini* influenced Constantius.¹⁰⁹ According to Sulpicius, Martin “wherever [he] destroyed heathen temples, there he used immediately to build either churches or monasteries.”¹¹⁰ Constantius even compares Germanus’s life to the ascetics in the desert:

Thus this man of blessings achieved something very difficult: amid all the coming and going he lived the life of the solitary, and inhabited the desert while dwelling in the world. Furthermore, for the advancement of religion he provided two roads to Christ, by founding a monastery within sight of the town, across the river Yonne, so that the surrounding population might be brought to the Catholic faith by contact with the monastery and by the ministrations of the church.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ ... *Hiberione constitutus episcopum me esse fateor*, Patrick, *Epistola ad Coroticum*, 134.

¹⁰⁸ *Breuius dicam qualiter piissimus Deus de seruitute saepe liberauit et de periculis duodecim qua periclitata est anima mea, praeter insidias multas...* Patrick, *Confessio*, 108.

¹⁰⁹ Barrett, “Saint Germanus and the British Missions”, 197.

¹¹⁰ *Nam ubi fana destruxerat, statim ibi aut ecclesias aut monasteria construebat*, Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 282.

¹¹¹ *Itaque uir beatissimus, quod est difficillimum, inter frequentias populorum solitudinis uitam et heremum in saeculi conuersatione seruauit. Qui duplicem uiam Christo ad profectum religionis instituens, in conspectus*

This quote from the *Vita Germani* is important because it shows that the few existing monasteries were considered as centers for missions in the fifth century – just as Martin founded monasteries at previously pagan sites. In some dioceses on the edge of Western Christendom, such as Noricum in the east and Dumio (Portugal) in the west, monasteries became episcopal and missionary centers.¹¹² If Patrick was influenced by Gallic monastic and missionary traditions and knew that monasteries could function as centers for missionary activity, that would explain the special importance of monasticism to him. It might not have been only personal devotion, but he might have been aware that if he introduced monasticism into Ireland that would help further missionary work as well.

II.2 Opposition to missions

Both Patrick and Martin had to deal with people who disapproved of their missionary work before they could embark on it. Martin had to overcome the resentment of his parents, especially his father, who did not wish him to become a Christian. Patrick's Christian parents – his father and grandfather were clergymen – did not oppose Patrick becoming a Christian. However, Patrick parents, as recorded in the *Confessio*, tried to hold him back from his mission!¹¹³

According to Raymond Van Dam, the most important question about Martin's career is not the extent of the spread of Christianity in Gaul, but the greater issue is that he was an 'outsider' integrated to a certain level to a different society. Martin was not from Gaul and he was a Christian ascetic.¹¹⁴ He tried to convert a society which had a completely different perception of leadership and community. His ascetic perception was not wide-spread in Gaul

oppidi, interposito Icauna flumine, monasterium conlocavit, ut ad fidem catholicam populi et congregationibus monachorum et ecclesiastica gratia raperentur, praesertim cum tali pontifice uel magistro, Constantius, Vita Germani, 130.

¹¹² Marilyn Dunn, *Asceticism and Monasticism, II: Western* in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, 676.

and even the Gallic bishops had difficulty accepting someone so different than themselves. Patrick's position among the Irish and his mission were similar to Martin's in many aspects. He was not from Ireland, but a Christian bishop from Britain with a fondness for asceticism. His strangeness could have been even more striking; he preached new religious views and lived by ascetic ideas and practices, completely different standards. Even though he spent years among the Irish he was still an outsider, a former slave.

In Patrick's understanding, his authority and responsibility for the mission was justified because it derived from God and because the Irish called him back:

During the night it seemed that a man from Hibernia had come to me. His name was Victoricus and he brought many letters with him of which he handed me one... As I was reading out the letter it seemed as in my mind I heard the voice of the same ones who live next to the forest of Foclut... And they were exclaiming: 'We ask you holy boy to come and walk once again among us!'¹¹⁵

Patrick claimed to have been chosen and asked by the Irish – which would have made him similar to other monk-bishops chosen by their flock, for example Martin of Tours who was elected by the citizens of his see. The idea that the ordination of monks and holy men was an act of divine approval expressed through human agency appeared as a trend in hagiography which Sulpicius could have conveyed to Patrick. Claudia Rapp has pointed out that ordination could take place in a vision or in a dream,¹¹⁶ which is exactly the same circumstance that Patrick tells about his ordination. The candidates for the episcopal see show

¹¹³ ... *et ex fide rogauerunt me ut uel modo ego post tantas tribulationes quas ego pertuli nusquam ab illis discederem*, Patrick, *Confessio*, 96.

¹¹⁴ Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, 122.

¹¹⁵ ... *ibi scilicet in sinu noctis uirum uenientem quasi de Hiberione, cui nomen Victoricus, cum aepistolis innumerabilibus uidi; et dedit mihi unam ex his... Et dum recitabam principium aepistolae putabam enim ipse in mente audire uocem ipsorum qui erant iuxta siluam Focluti...* *Et sic exclamauerunt: 'Rogamus te, sancte puer, ut uenias et adhuc ambules inter nos.'* Patrick, *Confessio*, 96.

¹¹⁶ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 141.

further qualifications by being humbly reluctant to accept the position -- which again Patrick claimed: "...who saw in me that I was ready, but for me I did not know what to do."¹¹⁷

The similarities between Patrick's *Confessio* and the *Vita Martini* suggest that Patrick had heard about the bishop of Tours.¹¹⁸ Martin would have been the most inspiring missionary for Patrick. Martin's struggles with pagans and his commitment to his job might have served as an example for Patrick in his missionary vocation. Although confidence in God was a hagiographic topos, it gains special importance in the *Vita Martini* and in Patrick's *Confessio* concerning their missionary work. Patrick's faith that God was with him in his struggles and missions corresponds to the *Vita Martini*. Martin took issue with paganism – destroying ancient pagan altars and temples – in the confidence that God was with him.¹¹⁹ Patrick trusted God that he would protect him against every danger, and even against his accusers. He credited God for already having saved him many times.¹²⁰

Patrick's accusers were similar to those who attacked Martin. Both saints were busy converting pagans; both were criticized by fellow bishops. Sulpicius underlined that only the bishops maltreated Martin: "although a few, but no others than those who were said to be bishops were his prosecutors."¹²¹ The bishops were envious of Martin's spiritual achievements: "And truly we have had experience of some who were envious of his virtues and his life – who really hated in him what they did not see in themselves, and what they had not power to imitate."¹²² Patrick writes about jealousy not only in his *Confessio*, but also in a letter about his relationship with other bishops: "And if my own do not want to know me, well and good, 'a prophet is not honored in his own country.' Indeed, perhaps we are not

¹¹⁷ ... quia uidit in me quod paratus eram, sed quod mihi pro nesciebam de statu meo quid facerem, Patrick, *Confessio*, 120.

¹¹⁸ On Patrick's possible knowledge of Martin see: Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 224; Bieler, "The Place of Saint Patrick", 70; Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*, 68.

¹¹⁹ Stancliffe, *Saint Martin*, 248.

¹²⁰ Patrick, *Confessio*, 108.

¹²¹ Licet pauci admodum, non alii tamen quam episcopo ferebantur Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 314.

¹²² Et uere nonnullos experti sumus inuidos uirtutis uitaeque eius, qui in illo oderant quod in se non uidebant et quod imitari non ualebant. Ibid., 314.

‘from the same sheepfold’... They are jealous of me. What am I to do, lord? How bitterly they despise me!’¹²³

The disapproval of the two saints by other bishops connects them with yet another line. It is not only the education that they lacked compared to other bishops, but their preference for poverty and simplicity could have been seen by others as unworthy for the episcopal order. Claudia Rapp pointed out that bishops in Late Antiquity became powerful and prestigious figures in society.¹²⁴ Martin was an unpleasant rival: an ex-soldier and an ascetic – none of these qualified for the episcopal office.¹²⁵ Patrick realized that one possible reason behind the “jealousy” of others was maybe that he, the former slave and less sophisticated than the other was chosen for the mission by God: “Now be amazed those great and petty who fear the Lord; and you who are masters of rhetoric ... pay attention and take note that he lifted me up, the ignorant from those who seem to be wise, know the laws and in their speech and everything else are learned”.¹²⁶

II.3 Pelagianism in Britain and Ireland

In Patrick’s case there was more behind others’ opposition than his ascetic non-episcopal figure. The main reason why Patrick wrote the *Confessio* was that a sin that he committed as a young man was made public and he had to explain himself. However, the way he refers to God’s mercy and the forgiveness of sins suggest that he is trying to defend himself before Pelagian bishops. If Patrick encounter with heresy, it might have been Pelagianism, which was so wide-spread in Britain that Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes were sent to rally the Britons to orthodoxy in 429.

¹²³ *Et si mei non cognoscunt, propheta in patria sua honorem non habet. Forte non sumus ex uno ovili... invidetur mihi. Quid faciam, Domine? Valde despicio*, Patrick, *Epistola ad Coroticum*, 144.

¹²⁴ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 172-173.

¹²⁵ Beard, *Public Displays of Asceticism*, 40.

¹²⁶ *Unde autem ammiramini, magni et pussilli, qui timetis Deum, et vos Domini ignari rethorici,... audite et scrutamini, quis me stultum excitavit de medio eorum qui videntur esse sapientes et legis periti et potentes in sermone et in omni re*, Patrick, *Confessio*, 82; 84.

According to Constantius' *Vita Germani*, the weapon used by the bishop of Auxerre when he won over the Britons and thus cornered the Pelagian party was exile. However, there was fear that the penalty would only displace the problem and not solve it. Germanus' first visit to Britain did not turn out to be a complete success. Around 444, he was called again to the island because of Pelagianism.¹²⁷ "Meanwhile it was reported from Britain that again a few supporters started to spread the Pelagian heresy... so...he embarked on the sea under the leadership of Christ."¹²⁸

Germanus' first visit became a landmark not only in the fight against Pelagianism, but it marked the first mission to the Irish that was not on the behalf of the British clergy; Gallic missionaries and bishops turned their attention to the neighboring-yet-still-pagan land of Britain. In 431, Palladius, Patrick's predecessor, was sent to convert the Irish.

Prosper of Aquitaine suggests a connection between Palladius' interest in the Pelagian controversy and his interest in the Irish Christians. According to him, one of the reasons why Palladius was sent as bishop to the Irish who believed in Christ may have been a precaution. Germanus' success in securing the exile of the leading Pelagians might have led them to take refuge in Ireland. Thus, Palladius' task was partly to protect the orthodoxy of existing Irish Christians besides making the barbarian island Christian.¹²⁹ Perhaps there was some Gallic missionary activity in the northern parts of Leinster and Connaught, although of less significance than the missionary activity of the Britons.¹³⁰ Palladius, then Patrick, could have been the leaders of these communities founded by Gallic missionaries.

The spread of Pelagianism in Britain is indicated by the fact that Rome frequently tried to hinder the further spread of the heresy in the fifth century. Not only the *Vita Germani* reports that Pelagianism was a recurring problem. Based solely on the *Confessio* and the

¹²⁷ Barrett, "Saint Germanus and the British Missions", 214.

¹²⁸ *Interea ex Brittaniis nuntiatur Pelagianam peruersitatem iterate paucis auctoribus dilatari rursusque... itaque... mare Christo auctore conscenditur*, Constantinus, *Vita Germani*, 170.

¹²⁹ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 204-205.

letter it may not be possible to declare Patrick anti-Pelagian. His frequent reference to God's grace and the fact that he was sent as Palladius' successor – who was from the circle of Germanus – suggests that he was not a Pelagian. Since the *Confessio* was written many years later than Patrick started his mission, his accusers might have been of those Pelagians to whom Constantinus referred as new supporters of the heresy. It cannot be proved based on the Patrician documents, but perhaps what Patrick feared – that he would have to give up his missionary duty – did not happen because his Pelagian accusers were silenced by Germanus' second visit to Britain.

Although Patrick does not mention Martin by name in his writings, the similarities between the *Vita Martini* and Patrick's *Confessio* are quite striking. Sulpicius could not have wished for a more devoted promotion of the idea of the monk-bishop. Likewise, Patrick could have not wished for a better ideological background to defend his position as bishop and Martin could have been the best model for him on how to evangelize in foreign territory. Patrick probably did not mention Martin by name because Martin's veneration was limited to certain regions in Gaul at that time and it is unlikely that the Patrick's readers in Ireland or in Britain had heard of him. The other reason why he might not mention Martin, if he knew about him, could have been because both of them were attacked by other bishops and it would have given additional excuse to his critics to disapprove of him. Patrick may have based his mission and his perception of ascetic authority on Martin's model, but he did not necessarily want to give his accusers another chance to criticize him.

Germanus' visit to Britain seems to be the indicator of why the Christianization of the Irish started in the fifth century. Lack of sources makes it difficult to connect Patrick to

¹³⁰ Harold Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland* (London: Butler and Tanner, 1992), 40.

Germanus' visit in any way, but the links among Germanus, Palladius, the Irish missions, and the fight against Pelagianism suggest that Patrick was aware of the Pelagian controversy.¹³¹

¹³¹ For a different view: "Patrick, for all that we can tell, never heard of the controversy which gripped educated Christians throughout the outside world, or, if he had heard of it, he wisely decided to put it to one side. His adult life coincided with the period of the Pelagians' greatest activity in Britain, and that is why some scholars have thought that it is 'antecedently likely' that he had heard of it. But he never hints that he had. There is not a phrase in his writings which suggests that he knew anything about it. Whatever else we may say of him, it is certain that he did not see his task in Ireland as aimed at fighting Pelagianism," see: Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 54.

CHAPTER THREE

III. Asceticism in the *Confessio*

In order to get a full picture of Patrick's self-representation, whether he had the attributes of a monk-bishop, some further features of the ascetic life has to be put under the microscope. So far the comparison between Patrick and the "monk-bishops" supports the idea that Patrick was aware of the model. Besides the question of authority, the attitude to secular education, the missionary work and the problem of heresies, there are two more elements that should be examined in Patrick's writings. The first is the constant prayer as a way to achieve spiritual power and get closer to God. Prayer was the core of the ascetic life, and later Irish monasticism retained a strongly contemplative element based on the prayerful ascent to God.¹³² Unceasing prayer is the main weapon of ascetics to fight Satan, demons, and temptations.¹³³ Satan and demons tried to tempt away the ascetic from God. Often the ascetic had to bear physical sufferings caused by demons who tried to drive him to despair.¹³⁴ The only weapon against demons was prayer; the men of God influenced earthly and heavenly powers with their prayers.¹³⁵ The second element is the desert as the place for spiritual growth. The desert was the setting of ascetic life from the beginning: it was the space where Satan attacked the ascetic, thus an ideal place to practice asceticism. Mountains, forests and the sea were also conceived of as "desert", as a desolate landscape.¹³⁶

It is important to examine these hallmarks of asceticism in Patrick's writings. If he was trained as a monk before he was consecrated bishop, he knew the ascetic practices of the Gallic aristocracy, he imitated this lifestyle. If we find traces of ascetic habits in Patrick's writings, we can deduce that he strove to live as a monk-bishop.

¹³² Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, 145.

¹³³ Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 169.

¹³⁴ Stancliffe, *Saint Martin*, 234.

¹³⁵ Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of Saint Anthony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 116.

¹³⁶ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 109.

III.1. Unceasing Prayer

The precondition for a holy man's spiritual authority, including his ability to approach God in prayer, was thus spiritual perfection, achieved with the help of ascetic efforts that turned his soul into the fertile ground where *parrhesia* could take root and grow.¹³⁷

Intercessory and contemplative prayer had several purposes in the life of the ascetic. Those who were able to control the flesh by abstinence and prayer had the power to distinguish between good and bad as well as to work miracles. The ascetics prayed not only for themselves and the forgiveness of their sins, but also mediated between God and others.¹³⁸

The ultimate achievement of the ascetic was an ecstatic state reached through prayer.¹³⁹ With the help of the Spirit and through his own efforts, the ascetic purified his soul and controlled his body. As a reward for his efforts, he received the gift of spiritual sensibility which allowed him to recognize demons, reject temptation and discover and unite with God within his soul.

Martin and Germanus both performed miracles after deep intercessory prayer. Their power came from the Spirit present in them. Martin resurrected a catechumen to life with the help of the Holy Spirit through prayer: "Having given himself for some time to earnest prayer and perceiving by means of the Spirit of God that power was present... beheld the man alive whom they had formerly left dead".¹⁴⁰ Before healing a blind child Germanus offered a short prayer, then "filled with the Holy Spirit", he gave back the sight of the child.¹⁴¹

Patrick records that he discovered the Spirit within his soul during his twenty-eight days spent in the desert. Patrick was praying so intensely that the Spirit "took over his soul" and prayed instead of him. This was not the first time that he discovered the Spirit in himself. Patrick's description of his spiritual experience mirrors other ascetics' experience. This

¹³⁷ Ibid., 84.

¹³⁸ Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 106.

¹³⁹ Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 182.

implies that Patrick wanted to show his accusers that the Spirit was with him because of his ascetic efforts:

“Who gave his own soul for you speaks in your soul... And I saw him again, praying in my soul and it seemed like as if I were in my body and I heard him from above, over my inner man. And he was there praying with sights, meanwhile I was stunned and kept marveling and wondering who it might be who prays within me. But when the prayer ended, he declared that it was the Spirit...I recalled the words of the apostle: ‘The Spirit comes to support the failings in our prayer. Because we do not know how we should pray as we supposed to, but the Spirit himself would ask for us with words that cannot be expressed.’¹⁴²

Patrick describes his habit of praying throughout the day which seems to resemble monastic habit. He claims that he was already practicing unceasing prayer the time when he was enslaved, which gives the illusion that he lived as a monk before escaping, before being chosen for the mission:

... I was praying continuously, throughout the day... I would tell a hundred prayers on a day, and hardly less during the night. Whether I was in a forest or on a mountain, before the sunrise, I would have already started praying, in snow, freeze as well as in rain.¹⁴³

Patrick’s statement corresponds to Sulpicius’ description of Martin’s habits of prayer:

No hour passed, no minute which he had not dedicated to pray or had filled with reading, but even if he was occupied with something else his soul did not stop praying... Martin was praying all the time.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ *Et cum aliquandiu orationi incubisset sensissetque per spiritum Domini adesse uirtutem... quod uidebant uiuere quem mortuum reliquissent.* Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 268.

¹⁴¹ Constantinus, *Vita Germani*, 152.

¹⁴² *Qui dedit animam suam pro te, ipse est qui loquitur in te...Et iterum uidi in me ipsum orantem et eram quasi intra corpus meum et audiui super me, hos est super interioirem hominem, et ibi foriter orabat gemitibus, et inter haec stupebam et ammirabam et cogitabam quis esset qui in me orabat, sed ad postremum orationis sic effitatus est ut sit Spiritus, ... et recordatus sum apostolo dicente: Spiritus adiuuat infirmitates orationis nostrae: nam quod oremus sicut oportet nescimus. sed ipse pruitus postulat pro nobis gemitibus inenarrabilibus, quae uerbis exprimi non possunt...* Patrick, *Confessio*, 24-25.

¹⁴³ ... et frequens in die orabam... ut in die una usque ad centum orationes et in nocte prope similiter, ut etiam in siluis et monte manebam, et ante lucem excitabar ad orationem per niuem per gelu per pluuiam... Ibid., 86.

¹⁴⁴ *Numquam hora ulaa momentumque praeteriit quo non aut orationi incumberet aut insisteret lectioni, quamquam etiam inter legendum aut si quid aliud forte agebat, numquam animum ab oratione laxabat. ... Martinus, etiam dum aliud agere uidereur, semper orabat.* Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 312, 314.

Martin and Patrick both appear as “monk-bishops” in prayer: occupied with ecclesiastical matters but still maintaining the contemplative momentum that they acquired during monastic training.

Sulpicius does not tell much more about Martin’s other ascetic practices. He mentions Martin’s prayers, vigils and fasting – general ascetic habits that Patrick also mentions. It would be hard to identify the source where Patrick learnt about these manners.¹⁴⁵ However, it seems doubtless that Patrick was aware of these customs. The preservation of his ascetic inner life makes him similar to Martin.

Those who managed to reach a spiritual sensibility through prayer and fasting could decide when and what to say to others. This ability is *parrhesia*, “the freedom of speech.”¹⁴⁶ Patrick defends himself and even though “it may seem to some of my critics that I appear bold to talk like this”,¹⁴⁷ he justifies his bold speech and why he can speak to defend himself by stating that he cannot hold his truth back because God would “abandon those who tell lies”.¹⁴⁸ Patrick felt that it was his duty to say the truth and his close connection to God gave him the right to speak “boldly”.

Patrick’s teaching resembles the spiritual guidance of the ascetics: “Now after all, I am speaking plainly to my brothers and fellow servants, who have trusted me on account of what ‘I have already said and what I now say’”.¹⁴⁹ Ascetics instructed their disciples by giving them words to contemplate and live by and served as personal example to them. This spiritual guidance was the foundation of monastic spirituality.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Stephanie Hayes-Healy tried to connect Patrick’s *Confessio* to various hagiographical texts, wisdom literature, travelogues, and prescriptive texts of the late antique period. However, because of the uncertainties of Patrick’s life and education it would be risky to name specific authors or texts as his source, see: Stephanie Hayes-Healy, “Saint Patrick’s Journey into the Desert”, 244.

¹⁴⁶ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 67.

¹⁴⁷ Patrick, *Confessio*, 80.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁴⁹ *Nunc ergo simpliciter insinuaui fratribus et conseruis meis qui mihi crediderunt propter quod praedixi et praedici* Ibid., 120.

¹⁵⁰ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 67.

Ascetic groups were wide-spread phenomenon in fifth-century Gaul. The *Vita Martini* shows that a group of disciples around Martin passed on the stories about the miracles of the saint.¹⁵¹ In Lerinum, Honoratus' disciples maintained the ascetic practices introduced by him at his monastery and followed his example by becoming monk-bishops. Similarly, the *Vita Germani* presents Germanus as a teacher to his deacon, teaching him to trust in God, and that he should not be afraid to give everything away as alms to the poor because God will repay everything.¹⁵²

Through intercessory prayer one could reach another level of spirituality, when one became able to mediate for others.¹⁵³ This ability is a recurring theme in monastic literature. It stressed that the holy man or monk cared about others and emphasized their holiness.¹⁵⁴ Patrick dedicated his life to serving others by evangelization and he interfered for others in his prayers. While travelling home with the pagan sailors, they run out of food. The captain asked Patrick to pray to his God to save them. Patrick told him to trust God who would take care of his people: the same day, they found pigs that they could eat. The story that an ascetic miraculously receives food in the desert is a literary *topos*.¹⁵⁵ However, Patrick did not eat from the meat not only because they were sacrilegious offerings, but because he kept his fast.¹⁵⁶ Refusing the miraculous food shows that he did not want the food for himself but he interfered for the sake of others, for the pagan sailors.

Sulpicius Severus emphasizes that Martin maintained a balance between ascetic spirituality and episcopal office. He remained an ascetic even when playing an active role in society.¹⁵⁷ Germanus was also involved in secular matters, but he too kept his ascetic practices that allowed him to perform miracles. He was a mediator for his flock when he

¹⁵¹ Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church*, 145.

¹⁵² Constantinus, *Vita Germani*, 184.

¹⁵³ Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 106.

¹⁵⁴ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 82.

¹⁵⁵ Hayes-Healy, "Saint Patrick's Journey into the Desert", 250.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 251.

communicated with the authorities. He was the spiritual leader of the people and used his ascetic skills to solve their problems by asking God in prayer. Apart from his pragmatic authority, he received ascetic authority as well by maintaining his ascetic lifestyle. His biographer, Constantinus of Lyons linked Germanus to the monastic movement. Constantinus represents Germanus as a bishop concerned with secular and ecclesiastical matters, who supports monasticism and lives an ascetic life, despite not having received monastic training previously.

Instead of calling himself as “monk”, Patrick called himself a “bishop”. He never mentions in his writings that he founded monasteries in Ireland. He implies, however, that he was living an ascetic, contemplative life which gave him special strength and right to carry out his mission. He performed the mission with the help of the Holy Spirit and his ascetic powers helped him through the toughest ordeals. It was important to him that not only he lived an ascetic life, but on several occasions he reports how “I cannot count how many of the sons of the Scotti and the daughters of the kings have become monks and virgins of Christ”.¹⁵⁸ In the *Confessio* Patrick narrates the story of a noblewoman who became a virgin of Christ after receiving her vocation in a dream.¹⁵⁹

“The unceasing prayer and pre-dawn devotions” were part of monastic practices, which characterized the Egyptian monks. This monastic tradition became popular in the late Antique West as well.¹⁶⁰ The importance of intercessory prayer in Patrick’s writings shows that he practiced the ascetic – and monastic – practice of daily prayer as a bishop. He

¹⁵⁷ Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church*, 150.

¹⁵⁸ *et filii Scottorum et filiae regulorum monachi et uirgines Christi enumerare nequeo*. Patrick, *Confessio*, 144.

¹⁵⁹ *Et etiam una Scotta benedicta, Scotta genitiva, nobilis, pulcherrima, adulta erat, quam ego baptizavi: et post paucos dies una causa venit ad nos: insinuavit namque nobi responsum accepisse a nutu Dei, et monuit eam ut esset virgo Christi, et ipsa Deo proximaret*. Ibid., 116.

¹⁶⁰ Hayes-Healy, “Saint Patrick’s Journey into the Desert”, 244.

expressed his desire to visit monasteries in Gaul to meet with the holy men.¹⁶¹ Patrick once more comes across as a monk-bishop with ascetic life.

III.2. Fasting

Considering the reasons why Patrick was supposed to compose his *Confessio*, intercessory prayer gains particular importance. Fasting and prayer were also necessary in order to do penance for one's or others' sins. Patrick was criticized – and almost deposed from his office – because of a sin he committed as a young boy. Emphasizing spiritual, ascetic habits he sought to suggest that his sin do not make him unsuitable for the episcopacy because he did his penitence. Mentioning his fasting seems intentional when he is talking about his time in slavery. His narration of his slavery is a story about sinning, doing penance and returning to society. He looked at his captivity as a punishment for his former life without Christ:

At that time I did not recognize the True God that was why I was taken as a captive to Ireland, along with many thousands of others with me. We fully deserved to suffer like this for we had all “turned our back upon God”; we “did not keep his commands”.¹⁶²

After this report on his capture, Patrick goes into detail how he spent his days in constant prayer. At the end of his captivity he received a vision in which he got divine approval for his fasting. This can be regarded as the “peak” of his penitence: “And there on a certain night I had a dream. I heard a voice saying to me: ‘You are right to fast, soon you will be returning to your own country’”.¹⁶³ After this he escapes from his master, and cleared from his sin returns home – to Christian society. To make the penance complete he confessed the crime to a friend – who later made it public – and received forgiveness: “to dishonor me

¹⁶¹ Patrick, *Confessio*, 116.

¹⁶² *et Dominus induxit super nos iram animationis suae et dispersit nos in gentibus multis etiam usque ad ultimum terrae, ubi nunc paruitas mea esse uidetur inter alienigenas.* Ibid., 72.

¹⁶³ *Et ibi scilicet quadam nocte in somno audiui uocem dicentem mihi: ‘Bene ieiunas cito iturus ad patriam tuam’* Ibid., 86.

so publicly over a matter which before he had been so glad to pardon, as had the Lord who is great than all”.¹⁶⁴

Patrick’s fast serves a double role. It was not only part of his penitence and his conversion, but is tightly linked to ascetic life. He receives the prophecy concerning his return as a result of his fasting: “fasting was believed to purify the mind to the extent that it could receive visions from God”.¹⁶⁵ Fasting was part of his penitence and part of his ascetic conversion indicating that he depicted his experiences after the example of ascetic monks.¹⁶⁶

Ascetics often received divine guidance or even tasks through dreams or visions. If Patrick was aware of this, then the dream in which he supposedly received his vocation must be seen into a different light. His vocation gets a divine approval after he was able to achieve spiritual sensibility through praying and fasting. His missionary work rises above the others’ not only because he has ascetic authority, but because of the divine approval of his spiritual achievements.

Ascetic practices were widespread not only among monks, but also among bishops. Germanus of Auxerre kept a strict fast, according to Constantinus, to do penitence for his sins:

“No words can describe the fierceness with which he did violence to himself and the crucifixions and penances with which he persecuted his own body... he persisted in nourishing his soul by starving his body”.¹⁶⁷

The habit of rigorous fasting further supports the argument that Patrick received some monastic training.¹⁶⁸ Although our sources are silent about this, the patterns in the Patrician

¹⁶⁴ *Et me publice dehonestaret quod ante sponte et laetus indulserat, et Dominus, qui maior omnibus est?* Ibid., 106.

¹⁶⁵ Hayes-Healy, “Saint Patrick’s Journey into the Desert”, 248.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 249.

¹⁶⁷ *Uero enarrari non potest qua hostilitate uim sibi ipse consciuerit, quas cruces quaeue supplicia corporis sui persecutor induerit... tanta obstinatione tabe corporis animam suam pauit* Constantinus, *Vita Germani*, 124; 126.

¹⁶⁸ Hayes-Healy, “Saint Patrick’s Journey into the Desert”, 248; 259.

documents indicate that Patrick was well-versed in ascetic techniques and knew hagiographic texts.

III.3. The Importance of the Desert

... the desert—a symbol of total withdrawal and rejection of the world—... a training ground for those who aspire to ascetic authority. The insistence on the physical desert setting as most beneficial for spiritual progress, it is argued, was soon augmented by the notion that the soul could achieve complete inner detachment regardless of its surroundings. This expanded understanding of the significance of the desert as an internalized state of mind made the monastic ideal accessible to those who, like bishops, lived in cities and were active in the public life.¹⁶⁹

The “desert” had a special place in ascetic life. It was a spiritual concept and a physical space at the same time.¹⁷⁰ To imitate the desert fathers, ascetics sought out secluded and abandoned spaces where to live, but the notion of the desert meant a spiritual state as well.¹⁷¹ The desert was the image of a place to encounter with God.¹⁷² The desert could be a state of mind and was not necessarily tied to a specific kind of landscape or location.¹⁷³ “Desert” also symbolized the state of mind that one could achieve by purifying his own soul. The desert was the emblem of an inner space where the dangers of temptations and the attack of demons were the greatest.¹⁷⁴

Those bishops to whom Patrick was compared so far were also found of deserted landscapes and the ideal of the desert as a spiritual state. Honoratus founded his monastery on an island. Germanus lived in the world “as if he lived in the desert”. Martin of Tours founded his monastery out of the town below a rocky precipice:

“For, on one side, it was surrounded by a precipitous rock of a lofty mountain, while the river Loire had shut in the rest of the plain by a bay extending back for a little distance; and the place could be approached only by one, and that a very narrow passage... Many also of the brethren had, in the same way,

¹⁶⁹ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 20.

¹⁷⁰ James E. Goehring, “The Dark Side of Landscape: Ideology and Power in the Christian Myth of the Desert” *Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 3 (2003), 448.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 444.

¹⁷² Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 109.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁷⁴ James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 75.

fashioned retreats for themselves, but most of them had formed these out of the rock of the overhanging mountain, dug into caves.”¹⁷⁵

In Patrick’s *Confessio*, two descriptions allude to the desert. The first describes the landscape where Patrick was kept as a slave. While taking care of the sheep, he turned to God and devoted himself to constant prayer. He spent his days praying “in the woods and on the mountains”.¹⁷⁶ In western monastic tradition the desert was symbolized by forests.

When Patrick fled from slavery, he travelled through unknown territories of Ireland, and arrived to a harbor where he managed to get on a ship:

Once again ... I was told: ‘Come and see where your ship is waiting for you.’... It was two hundred miles away, in a place I had never seen before... I ran away... we set sail... Three days later we reached land. Then for twenty-eight days we journeyed through a land that was completely barren. Their food ran out... the leader started to complain to me... ‘Why can’t you pray for us?’ ... But I told them with confidence, ‘Turn trustingly to the Lord who is my God and put your faith in him with all your heart... On this same day he will send us food sufficient for our journey...’ And with the help of God that is how things turned out.¹⁷⁷

Patrick’s journey has been widely discussed in scholarship. Thompson suggested that Patrick has arrived to Gaul but admits that there was no such desert that would have required a twenty-eight-day long journey.¹⁷⁸ According to Charles-Edwards, this “is probably best interpreted as Patrick making his desire to return home for good abundantly clear by comparing his escape from captivity in Ireland to the escape of Israel from captivity in

¹⁷⁵ *Ex uno enim latere praecisa montis excelsi rupe ambiebatur, reliquam planitiem Liger fluuius reducto paululum sinu clauerat; una tantum eademque arcta admodum uia adiri poterat. multique ex fratribus in eundem modum; plerique saxo superiecti montis cauato receptacula sibi fecerant.* Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 274.

¹⁷⁶ *etiam in siluis et monte manebam* Patrick, *Confessio*, 16.

¹⁷⁷ *et iterum ... ‘Ecce nauis tua parata est’... forte habebat ducenta milia passus et ibi numquam fueram... conuersus sum in fugam... nauigauimus. Et post triduum terram cepimus et uiginti octo dies per desertum iter fecimus et cibus defuit gubernator mihi dicere: ‘... quare ergo non potes pro nobis orare?’... Ego enim confidenter dixi illis: ‘Conuertimini ex fide ex toto corde ad Dominum Deum meum... hodie cibum mittat uobis in uiam uestram usque dum satiamini quia...’ et adiuuante Deo ita factum est* Ibid., 86; 90.

¹⁷⁸ “The blunt truth is that the story of the march through the vast desert, whether it took place in Gaul or in Britain, is impossible as Patrick tells it. It could not have happened. There was no such desert, whether caused by nature or by warfare, in any province of the Western Roman Empire, whether in Britain, Gaul, or anywhere else, whether needing fourteen or twenty-eight days to cross.” See: Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 31-32.

Egypt.”¹⁷⁹ Patrick’s voyage as a journey of the soul makes a better explanation: “it (is) more plausible to consider his desert journey as the withdrawal of an ascetic, in the tradition of St. Anthony or Saint Martin, or the many desert fathers introduced to the Christian West by the travelogues of Cassian, Rufinus, Palladius and others”.¹⁸⁰

III.4. Fight against Satan

The ascetics living in the desert were tempted by demons and even by Satan so that they would fall into despair or break their fasting and loose self-control. In their fight, they relied on the help of the Holy Spirit and on their spiritual power that they achieved by praying and fasting. In order to introduce himself as a true ascetic who possesses spiritual power, Patrick had to report on his fight against Satan and demons.

The fight against Satan started with the capability to recognize him. Martin of Tours’ spiritual powers allowed him to recognize Satan even when it visited him disguised as Christ:

Once when Martin was praying in his cell, [the Satan] appeared to in front of him surrounded with light... the Satan said first: ‘Admit it Martin, you see Christ in front of you!’... ‘Martin, why are you in doubt? Believe because you see! I’m Christ; I wanted to appear to you first...’ But the Spirit revealed to him and made him understand that it was the Satan, not the Lord.¹⁸¹

The recognition was mutual. The demons feared the ascetics because they had the power to control them, thus they often revealed the holiness of the ascetic to others. Germanus was revealed as a bishop in spite of his poor looks for the people of Milan by the demons.¹⁸² Patrick learnt how to discern the good and the bad. The highest level of this power is that he could distinguish his visions, whether they came from God or it was the Satan trying to fool him. He had a dream about Christ and another one about the Holy Spirit, and he

¹⁷⁹ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 217.

¹⁸⁰ Hayes-Healy, “Saint Patrick’s Journey into the Desert”, 250.

¹⁸¹ *Quodam enim die, praemissa prae se et circumiectus ipse luce purpurea, ... prior diabolus: agnosce inquit, Martine, quem cernis: Christus ego sum...Martine quid dubitas? Crede, cum uideas! Christus ego sum. Tum ille, reuelante sibi spiritu ut intellexeret diabolum esse* Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 306; 308.

¹⁸² Constantinus, *Vita Germani*, 182.

was sure that it was God who appeared to him. This clairvoyance was rare even among ascetics.¹⁸³

Martin's only weapon in his fights with demons was prayer.¹⁸⁴ The *topos* of ascetic's physical fights against demons was lifted from ascetic literature. The impact of the *Vita Antonii* shows in the *Vita Martini* as well.¹⁸⁵

Like Martin, Patrick also confronted Satan:

The same night during my dream Satan tempted me strongly. The memory will stay with me as long as I live in this body. Like a heavy stone he fell upon me that there was no strength in my bones. From where should have known my ignorant soul to shout out the name of Elijah? And while this was happening to me I saw the sun rising to the sky and I was shouting: Elijah, Elijah! Suddenly the shining of the sun flooded over me and all my weakness disappeared.¹⁸⁶

Sulpicius tells that Martin was near Milan when Satan appeared before him and asked him to where he was going. Martin answered that he was going to wherever God was sending him. Satan claimed that wherever Martin would go he would be against him. Martin pitied this threat stating that with God's assistance he did not have anything to fear from men.¹⁸⁷ Likewise, Patrick claims in the *Confessio* that many tried to hold him back from his mission, but he went anyway because God sent him to the unknown lands and took care of him in all dangers.¹⁸⁸ Martin's answer was one of his recurring declarations of his trust in God. A similar attitude shines through the *Confessio* as well, especially in the descriptions of Patrick's struggles.

¹⁸³ Hayes-Healy, "Saint Patrick's Journey into the Desert", 254.

¹⁸⁴ Stancliffe, *Saint Martin*, 229.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 238.

¹⁸⁶ *Eadem uero nocte eram dormiens et fortiter temptauit me Satanas, quod memor ero quamdiu fuero in hoc corpore, et cecidit super me ueluti saxum ingens et nihil membrorum meorum praeualens. Sed und eme uenit ignarum in spiritu ut Heliam uocarem? Et inter haec uidi in caelum solem oriri et dum clamarem „Heliam, Heliam” uiribus meis, ecce splendor solis illius decedit super me et statim discussit a me omnem grauitudinem* Patrick, *Confessio*, 92-94.

¹⁸⁷ Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, 264.

¹⁸⁸ Patrick, *Confessio*, 120.

The topos of fighting Satan was not only present in the *Vita Martini*. Germanus of Auxerre fought demons and healed people through his ascetic powers. The power with which he interceded with his prayers is due to his ascetic, pure life: “they [the demons] had been put to flight by the holy man’s prayer”¹⁸⁹ The example of Martin and Germanus shows that ascetic achievement was a reality for all, thus a possibility for Patrick as well.

The presence of the most important ascetic features in Patrick’s writings implies that he valued ascetic virtues and tried to incorporate them into his life becoming the newly emerged ideal bishop, the monk-bishop. According to his statement monasticism was present among the Irish from the beginning even if not in an institutionally organized form. Even if we cannot trace the beginnings of the monastic movement in Ireland, Patrick’s report is proof that the ascetic – monastic ideals were important for him.

Prayer, fasting and the fights against demons are common elements in the ascetic discourse. These ascetic practices were the sources of Patrick’s ascetic authority and played a crucial role in his self-defense against the accusations.

Patrick’s spiritual power not only helped him in his struggles with temptation and demons but also gave him the trust in God and the strength to carry out his mission. The dangerous, pagan regions became a “desert” for him; the hostile pagans were his “demons”. It was his ascetic accomplishment to baptize so many in the Lord.¹⁹⁰ In this journey he could only rely on God:

I expect sudden death or deception or being taken back as a slave or some such other misfortune. ‘But fear none of these’ since I look to the promises of heaven and have flung myself into the hands of the all-powerful God, who rules as Lord everywhere.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ *que in fugam uersos eius oration confessus est* Constantius, *Vita Germani*, 136.

¹⁹⁰ Patrick, *Confessio*, 84.

¹⁹¹ *quia cotidie spero aut internicionem aut circumueniri aut redigi in seruitutem siue occasio cuiuslibet, sed nihil horum uereor propter promissa caelorum, quia iactaui meipsum in manus Dei omnipotentis, qui ubique dominatur...* Ibid., 128.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the thesis was to offer a new approach to the beginning of the Irish monasticism. I tried to show that Patrick, one of the most influential bishops of early Christian Ireland, was aware of new ideologies and trends in ecclesiastical and monastic matters. Based on his own account I aimed to find Patrick's place among other fifth-century bishops. My focus was on questions of authority, education, ascetic practices, missionary work, and heretics.

I intended to compare the Patrician texts and the lives of influential churchmen in Gaul in order to see whether his perception of episcopacy, monastic life and his opinion about his mission and office fits the picture of the fifth-century ideas about these matters.

In the first chapter I tried to show that Patrick's apologies for his supposed "lack of education" can be interpreted not only as a defense but as a way of claiming ascetic authority. By introducing himself as an ascetic and someone who possesses more than pragmatically authority, he builds up a defense speech against his critics. It seems that the idea of the monk-bishop was spread widely enough so that Patrick to rely on it. He might have had Martin of Tours in mind when he wrote about the divine approval of his mission.

However, the Patrician documents reveal another type of influence on Patrick's perception of episcopacy. Germanus of Auxerre and the monks at Lerinum represented a different type of leadership. Germanus was a "prototype" of fifth-century aristocratic bishops who used their pragmatic authority to be not only spiritual but political leaders to their flocks. Although in education bishops with aristocratic background were in an opposite position than Patrick and Martin, in other manners Patrick seems to cast himself after them. With referring to his parentage – calling his father a decurion – and emphasizing his service for others – especially his efforts to free Christian slaves from the Irish – he might have been claiming pragmatically authority. Mixing the two type of episcopal models together he could introduce

himself as the most suitable for the Irish mission as well as could make up for his insufficiencies by borrowing what he needed from both models.

In the second chapter I examined where Patrick's missionary activity fits in other evangelizations in late antiquity. I found that for converting pagans he could have had Martin and Germanus as role models again. The similarities between his commitment for mission and Martin's zeal for mission are convincing. Both bishops spread Christianity out of personal conviction and both were criticized by fellow clergymen. The disapproval of the two saints by other bishops connects them. For late antique bishops who were powerful and respected figures in society, the two saints could have been seen unworthy for the episcopal because of their preference for poverty and simplicity besides their inadequate secular education. Martin was an ex-soldier and an ascetic – none of these was enough to qualify for the episcopal office. Patrick was a former slave and even less sophisticated than the others. He turns these disadvantages around and argues that his mission is further justified because in spite of all his failures and weaknesses he was chosen by God for the mission.

Germanus of Auxerre also travelled around Gaul and while dealing with everyday problems with his flock, he still tried to do evangelization. It seems that the monasteries founded by these saints played an important role in the evangelization, which might have increased the importance of monasticism in Patrick's eye as well. In addition, Patrick's life – as represented in the *Confessio* – was modeled on Apostle Paul's. They were both young and non-believers; they converted, and then went on a mission.

In this chapter despite the lack of evidence I attempted to show that Patrick's mission might have been connected to Germanus' visit to Britain concerning the Pelagian controversy. The links among Germanus, Palladius, the Irish missions, and the fight against Pelagianism suggest that Patrick was aware of the Pelagian controversy. It is a much debated question whether Patrick's critics were Pelagians, and whether Patrick had to deal with

heretics. However, if we suppose that Patrick had to deal with heretics, it would strengthen his position among other fifth-century bishops who had to do as well.

Finally, in the third chapter I pointed out the ascetic practices and traditions that are present in the Patrician works. The unceasing prayer, the strict fasting and the dangerous of the desert are all present in Patrick's *Confessio*. Although, these elements of asceticism are general hallmarks, I find it important to examine their role in Patrick's memoir. The knowledge of the *topoi* of ascetic literature and hagiography indicates that Patrick was introduced to these ideas; he might have even received a proper monastic training. Nevertheless, the presence of these anecdotes in his writings show that he suggested that even as a bishop, he lived by ascetic ideas to which he was introduced previously. As a result of his proper way of living, he received ascetic authority. Patrick appears as a true monk-bishop with his ascetic practices and his ascetic authority incorporated to his ecclesiastical office.

I tried to show that if Patrick carried out his mission as a monk-bishop that might have greater impact on Irish Christianity than it seems at first sight. If the idea of the monk-bishop spread in Ireland, it is not surprising that abbots soon took over the episcopal offices and became more influential. The phenomenon that in Ireland the abbots became more important than the bishops, and in many cases the two positions were held by the same person, might not be an Irish innovative after all. It can be traced back to the image of the monk-bishop from the fifth-century Gaul. In this respect I tried to give an additional explanation to the importance of Irish monasticism. If Patrick was influenced by Gallic monastic and missionary traditions, that would explain the special importance of asceticism to him as well. It might not have been only personal devotion, but he might have been aware that if he introduced monasticism into Ireland that would help further missionary work as well. In this regard, monasticism was vital for the Irish Church from the beginning.

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