



NUI MAYNOOTH  
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

# **THE EVOLUTION OF PILGRIMAGE PRACTICE IN EARLY MODERN IRELAND**

by

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## Introduction

In the religious history of Ireland the existence of the pilgrimages to Lough Derg, or St. Patrick's Purgatory, in County Donegal, and Our Lady's Island in County Wexford, pose significant questions about their popular appeal and the religious experience of the pilgrim in the early modern period. Of the two, Lough Derg was the only one internationally documented and consequently the only one known outside of Ireland, during the Middle Ages. Peter Harbison writes in his history of Irish pilgrimage, 'For Ireland pilgrimage is a pious exercise that has helped to fulfil religious needs and yearnings for more than 1,400 years'.<sup>1</sup> Several forms of pilgrimage have flourished there. One type of pilgrimage which the Irish came almost to monopolise, though they were by no means the first to practice it, was the ascetic pilgrimage. This involved leaving behind one's land forever to embark on a life-until-death pilgrimage. Not far removed from this ascetic spirit was the penitential pilgrimage undertaken to expiate sin. Jonathan Sumption has noted that pilgrimage was much favoured by the Irish as a spiritual exercise. As a penance for the more enormous transgressions it was thought especially appropriate.<sup>2</sup> One of the best definitions of the idea of pilgrimage is given in James Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics*, which strongly emphasises the significance of the sacred place:

Most people understand pilgrimage as a journey to a holy place or shrine, either in the pilgrim's native land or abroad. The object of pilgrimage is to obtain some benefit - material, symbolic, moral or spiritual - which the sanctity of the chosen spot is believed to confer. A pilgrimage may be undertaken because such a journey is considered meritorious. The idea of the acquisition of divine favour, either directly or through a saint, is generally associated with such a journey.<sup>3</sup>

The idea that the remote lake-island in West Ulster known as St. Patrick's Purgatory provided a private glimpse of the afterlife had largely captured the medieval mind.<sup>4</sup> Yet if we examine the medieval descriptions of visits to Lough Derg, we see little that is characteristically Irish in either their otherworld topography or their way of characterizing pilgrimage. It has been suggested by Harbison that harsh penances of barefoot pilgrimage were presumably to be endured and not written about. Or, if the Irish wrote about them in the mediaeval period, their stories have been lost.<sup>5</sup> We do, on the other hand, have evidence of Irish experience at the site

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland: the monuments and the people* (London, 1991), p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sumption, *The age of pilgrimage: the medieval journey to God* (Totowa, 2003), p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> James Hastings and John A. Selbie, *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics Part 19* (New York, 2003), p.12.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Gillespie and Bernadette Cunningham, 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage in the age of the Counter-Reformation' in *Eire-Ireland*, xxxix, no. 3:4 (2004), p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*, p. 63-64.

from the seventeenth century in the form of several examples of bardic poetry that refute the miraculous strain of European narratives of the pilgrimage. Tadhg Ó Dúshláine, in an essay on Lough Derg poetry in Irish, begins with this critical premise:

Native Irish Literature in general, and bardic poetry (c.1250-1650) in particular, is usually regarded as being traditional, insular and untouched by the main literary currents of Europe until comparatively recent times. The exception to this rule is the religious poetry of the bards and many of the religious conceits and apocryphal legends in the works of Donnacha Mór Ó Dálaigh (1175-1244), Philip Bocht Ó hUiginn (+ 1487) and Aonghus Ó Dálaigh (1520-1570) come directly from continental sources.<sup>6</sup>

This remains true in the seventeenth century when Lough Derg comes sharply into focus as a place of pilgrimage and repentance. Ó Dúshláine makes the crucial point, however, that these poems are valuable records then, of the religious feeling and practice of the time, and like the bulk of the European religious poetry of the period would appear to be strongly influenced by the contemporary devotional prose.<sup>7</sup> Most of this prose was written in the Irish Colleges on the Continent, in Rome and Louvain and concerned with controversial Catholic practice at the time, largely the sacrament of penance. But equally important in this study on pilgrimage are the myths and legends which surround the origins of Lough Derg and have their own attraction and fascination. Tradition states that St. Patrick spent Lent in a cave on an island in Lough Derg and was there granted a vision of Purgatory and the torments of Hell. This vision had been prayed for by St. Patrick because of his difficulty in convincing the Irish that there was both temporal and eternal punishment waiting for those who failed to live a proper Christian life.<sup>8</sup> Traditional associations of St. Patrick with Lough Derg appeared in place-lore. In several accounts written in the Middle Ages, the origin of the name Lough Derg, derived from the Irish *Loch Dearg* (the red lake), is ascribed to the slaying by St. Patrick of a monster, whose blood turned the waters of the lake red. One account in particular tells of St. Patrick fighting with the devil's mother, who then escaped to Lough Derg only to be pursued by the saint and eventually killed.<sup>9</sup> Such place-lore gave a literary expression to the power of the saint, while other vital elements including folklore and hagiography (the writings of the

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<sup>6</sup> Tadhg Ó Dúshláine, 'Lough Derg in native Irish poetry' in *Clogher Record*, xiii, no. 1 (1988), pp 76-84.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-84.

<sup>8</sup> John B. Cunningham, *Lough Derg, legendary pilgrimage* (Monaghan, 1984), pp 11-13.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph McGuinness, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg* (Dublin, 2000), p. 11.

lives of the saints) reinforced each other in delineating the sanctified nature of the pilgrimage site in Lough Derg.<sup>10</sup>

Although a full history of Lough Derg has yet to be written, there are some excellent studies by St. John D. Seymour, Ludwig Bieler, J. M. Picard and Y. de Pontfarcy, and Alice Curtayne, among others. Canon Daniel O'Connor and Shane Leslie also endeavoured to collect its lore. The first real effort to provide a comprehensive history for Lough Derg is Canon Daniel O'Connor's book, which has remained the standard account of Lough Derg since its first publication in 1879.<sup>11</sup> The history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography, and scenic surroundings of the place are fully dealt with; in addition O'Connor provides a lucid description of its more notable pilgrims, and a detailed description of the authorised devotions performed at the shrine. The most compelling aspect of O'Connor's narrative, however, is his preference for a penitential rather than a legendary, purgatorial Lough Derg. The second most useful source to the student of Lough Derg is Shane Leslie's *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, published in 1932, which contains most of the evidence relating to history of Lough Derg from its development as a pilgrimage site in the twelfth century until its destruction in the late fifteenth, and subsequent revival and transformation in the sixteenth and later centuries.<sup>12</sup> I have used this compilation extensively in my analysis. It should be noted that most, if not all of the primary documents consulted in this thesis come from published works which have been filtered through interpretation and evaluated by the author.

The writings listed above primarily represent the Catholic perspective on Lough Derg, but there are some useful Protestant writings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which epitomized their 'clashing world views'.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most famous is the work of the Protestant minister Rev. John Richardson who adds a valuable, though sometimes prejudiced account of the Lough Derg pilgrimage in his volume called *The great folly of superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, printed in 1727.<sup>14</sup> As one might expect, his focus was almost exclusively on ridiculing the site and all the devotional practices carried out there. But if one disregards the misrepresentation in these writings, they give some incidental

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<sup>10</sup> Gillespie and Cunningham, 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage in the age of the Counter-Reformation', p. 171.

<sup>11</sup> Rev. D. O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography, and scenic surroundings* (Dublin, 1903).

<sup>12</sup> Shane Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory: a record from history and literature* (London, 1932).

<sup>13</sup> J. S. Donnelly, Jr., 'Lough Derg: the making of the modern pilgrimage' in William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairead Dunleavy (eds), *Donegal: History and Society* (Dublin, 1995), p. 492.

<sup>14</sup> John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland* (Dublin, 1727).

information that is valuable.<sup>15</sup> The most intriguing part of Richardson's account of the pilgrimage is the way he interprets the spiritual symbolism of the stational exercises. This task was also undertaken by the Dominican priest, Dominick Brullaughan, in his little Latin guide to Lough Derg, printed in 1726, in which he also pointed out the biblical significance attached to the devotional exercises. Works from the nineteenth century include William Carleton's *The Lough Derg pilgrim*, which contains an abundance of realistic descriptions of what it meant to 'do' Lough Derg in his time. There is a strong emphasis on how one's body felt whilst performing the penitential acts, and what the people around one looked like.<sup>16</sup> Another useful nineteenth-century work is Philip Dixon Hardy's *The holy wells of Ireland*.<sup>17</sup>

Of the secondary literature J. M. Picard and Y. De Pontfarcy's *Medieval pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Purgatory* makes an extremely important contribution to the medieval history of the site.<sup>18</sup> In this book the extent of the fame of St. Patrick's Purgatory throughout Europe is clearly laid out and supported, country by country, with detailed documentary evidence. The chapter entitled 'The later pilgrimage—Irish poetry on Lough Derg' was particularly useful for its critical evaluation of the sources. The most recent effort to write a history for Lough Derg is that conducted by Alice Curtayne, who published her book *Lough Derg* in 1944.<sup>19</sup> Her book received in fact the official imprimatur of the Church. Curtayne argues that the purity of the devotion at Lough Derg has always been safeguarded by the scrupulous attention to it and interventions performed by the hierarchy. This is an important aspect that will be addressed in the present study, especially in chapter three where the process by which the Church began to oppose the holy well pilgrimages, most particularly for their 'excesses', is examined.<sup>20</sup>

Much of the recent literature on Lough Derg is found in academic journals, and highlights specific themes relating to the pilgrimage. Historians Bernadette Cunningham and Raymond Gillespie in their essays on 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage in the age of the Counter-Reformation', and "The most adaptable of saints": the cult of St Patrick in the seventeenth

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<sup>15</sup> Curtayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> William Carleton, *The works of William Carleton* (3 vols, New York, 1881).

<sup>17</sup> P. D. Hardy, *The holy wells of Ireland, containing an authentic account of those various places of pilgrimage and penance which are still annually visited by thousands of the Roman Catholic peasantry, with a minute description of the patterns and stations periodically held in various districts of Ireland* (Dublin, 1840), p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Haren and Yolande de Pontfarcy, *The medieval pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg and the European tradition* (Enniskillen, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> Alice Curtayne, *Lough Derg, St. Patrick's Purgatory* (Dublin, 1944).

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence J. Taylor, *Occasions of faith: an anthropology of Irish Catholics* (Dublin, 1995), p. 53



century' have explored two such themes.<sup>21</sup> While the first article offers much insight into the spiritual dimensions of the Franciscan leadership at Lough Derg during the Counter-Reformation, the second focuses on a particular aspect of the Franciscan mission in promoting the lives of the saints of Ireland, in particular St. Patrick, as part of their attempt to promote the values of the Counter-Reformation. Complementing these works is a remarkable collection of essays contained in the book, *The Irish Franciscans, 1534-1990*, edited by Edel Bhreathnach, Joseph MacMahon, and John McCafferty.<sup>22</sup> Gillespie's chapter on 'The Irish Franciscans, 1600-1700' is especially pertinent to this study. J.S. Donnelly's 'Lough Derg: the making of the modern pilgrimage' in *Donegal: history and society* which traces major changes in the character and dimensions of the ritual activities is also relevant.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, the historiography on Our Lady's Island is relatively thin. There has yet to be a comprehensive study carried out on this pilgrimage, the only proper account of its history having appeared in an early twentieth-century pamphlet entitled *Our Lady's Island in History and Legend*.<sup>24</sup> The author, Patrick Murphy, outlines the history of the site from ancient times and refers to some of the available evidence. As a guide, the book is useful but it is short and does not focus on any particular time frame. The rest of the literature on Our Lady's Island comes from essays in books and local journals. One such essay entitled 'Two centuries of Catholicism in County Wexford' by the historian, Patrick J. Corish, is an invaluable study for anyone attempting to comment on the evolution of Catholic culture in Wexford during this period.<sup>25</sup> A number of essays by Herbert F. Hore are published in *The Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, which contain documents relating to the religious aspects of the pilgrimage in the seventeenth century. W. H. Grattan Flood's *History of the diocese of Ferns*, gives a list of all the parish priests who ministered on Our Lady's Island from 1615.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Raymond Gillespie and Bernadette Cunningham, 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage in the age of the Counter-Reformation' in *Eire-Ireland*, xxxix, no. 3:4 (2004). See also Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The most adaptable of saints: the cult of St. Patrick in the seventeenth century' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xlix (1995).

<sup>22</sup> Edel Bhreathnach, Joseph MacMahon, and John McCafferty (eds), *The Irish Franciscans, 1534-1990* (Dublin, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> J. S. Donnelly, Jr., 'Lough Derg: the making of the modern pilgrimage' in William Nolan, Liam Ronayne, and Mairead Dunleavy (eds), *Donegal: History and Society* (Dublin, 1995), pp 491-507.

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Murphy, 'Our Lady's Island in history and legend' in *Recusant History*, xx, no. 4 (1991).

<sup>25</sup> P. J. Corish 'Two centuries of Catholicism in County Wexford' in Kevin Whelan and William Nolan (eds), *Wexford: history and society-interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*, (Dublin, 1987).

<sup>26</sup> W. H. Grattan Flood, *History of the diocese of Ferns* (Waterford, 1916).

The most recent literature available on Our Lady's Island is Hilary Murphy's book *Our Lady's Island: millennium memories*.<sup>27</sup> A short article entitled, 'Centre of pagan worship and Christian heritage' focuses on the earlier history of the site. Niamh Kielty's thesis, 'The origins, decline and eventual modernisation in 1850-1897 of the pilgrimage in Our Lady's Island' was extremely helpful and a major starting point. Also, many accounts from travellers and local residents survive which describe the area through different eyes and from varying viewpoints. For the topic of missions, the *memoirs* of a Redemptorist Missionary who worked in the area are a useful source. The Ordnance Survey records are also invaluable and have helped to preserve a picture of the region as it appeared before the famine.

Much literature has concentrated on the development of the Irish Church in the nineteenth century. The most obvious example is Emmet's Larkin's 'devotional revolution' thesis in which he explained the apparently dramatic resurgence of public piety in the post-Famine period.<sup>28</sup> The response to Larkin's thesis was strong and is sufficiently well-known not to require further comment here.<sup>29</sup> However, this study hopes to illustrate that many of the significant changes in religious practice which Larkin located in the post-Famine period were already well established at Lough Derg and Our Lady's Island.

Finally, this thesis also endeavours to examine some of the broader historiography of pilgrimage including the anthropological work of Victor Turner on St. Patrick's Purgatory. His article 'St Patrick's Purgatory: religion and nationalism in an archaic pilgrimage' focuses on the institutional structures of pilgrimage behaviour. His work offers a way of understanding the use of symbols, their meanings and developments which is crucial for an understanding of cultural processes. Another study consulted whilst researching this subject is Dorothy French's 'Ritual, gender and power strategies: male pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory'. French is one of the first historians to venture into this area of gender and pilgrimage in relation to Lough Derg: thus her claim that Saint Patrick's Purgatory was a male pilgrimage site for a select group of men in the medieval period is clearly laid out.

This study looks at the evolution of pilgrimage practice at Lough Derg and Our Lady's Island in the early modern period. It will demonstrate that what occurred at Lough Derg can be seen

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<sup>27</sup> Hilary Murphy, *Our Lady's Island: millennium memories* (Wexford, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Emmet Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75' in *American Historical Review*, lxxvii, no. 3(1972), pp 625-52.

<sup>29</sup> See Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth Ireland* (Dundalk, 1994); Thomas McGrath, 'The Tridentine evolution of modern Irish Catholicism, 1563-1962: a re-examination of the 'devotional revolution' in *Recusant History*, xx (1991), pp 512-23.

as a small, but significant, part of the much larger process of the changing role of the institutional church after the Council of Trent. At Lough Derg change manifested itself in the character of the devotional exercises. This study will strive to address the significant changes in religious practice that made up the Tridentine agenda, which set out to refashion the practice of religion by ordinary believers. In place of such traditional features as communal feasts celebrating local saints, the reformers inspired by the Council of Trent aimed to bring worship within the confines of the parish church, to focus on the mass and the sacraments – a change that was deemed relevant and necessary in the eyes of the Catholic Church. This thesis will examine more closely what this new religious regime meant for Lough Derg and its clientele. More importantly, it will look at the changes in religious practice taking place at Our Lady’s Island many of which took place in the town of Wexford where the economic climate was conducive to improvements in church fabric and liturgical practice.

When research for this project commenced the intention was to focus on two pilgrimage sites in two culturally rather different parts of Ireland. This was to make the study manageable, given the long period of time it intended to cover. However, it emerged that a greater degree of comparison would be necessary to assist in fleshing out the conclusions. Therefore, the pilgrimages of Croagh Patrick and Struell Wells are also discussed, and there is some reference to the Ardmore Pattern in chapter three.

The period 1400-1900 was chosen for a number of reasons. The first reason was to establish the authentic elements of the traditional pilgrimage in the sixteenth century. This was necessary to allow for a careful interrogation of this concept of tradition, in order to explain more thoroughly how new practices became accepted and embedded over the course of time. The second reason for choosing the period was because efforts to realise the goals that made up the Tridentine agenda represented a very protracted process. The process of change was slow and a lot of time and effort was needed to see it through to completion. Certainly, the baggage of the penal laws, for example, weighed heavily on the Catholic Church by the middle of the eighteenth century, and particularly affected its capability to provide pastoral care. The final reason for taking the study as far as the twentieth century was to show the strong connection between religion and nationalism. As this study will reveal, in the late 1890s and the first decades of the twentieth century, the traditional pilgrimage at Croagh Patrick and indeed Lough Derg enjoyed a dramatic revival.



Fig. 1: The prior giving instructions to Knight Owein before entering the cave in Shane Leslie's *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*.

CHAPTER ONE  
THE TRADITIONAL PILGRIMAGE, 1400-1600

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries one of the most unusual pilgrimage sites in Ireland was not Croagh Patrick in County Mayo, or even Our Lady's Island in County Wexford, but a small island cave on desolate, windswept Lough Derg, in the northwest corner of Ireland called Saint Patrick's Purgatory. This site gained renown in the twelfth century as a place where it was possible to physically descend to the otherworld. It also could be said that Lough Derg throughout the Middle Ages had twin identities. In England and throughout continental Europe for example, it was mainly the visions and fantasies of the otherworld experience that largely captured the European mind, while among the Irish it continued to be a retreat for intensive prayer and less spectacular forms of penance. It is with the coming of the Augustinians to Lough Derg in 1135 that we first find hard evidence of a pilgrimage dedicated to St. Patrick, and reputedly founded by him. The Latin prose work, *Tractatus de Purgatorio Insulae Sanctorum*, written in 1180 by a Cistercian Anglo-Norman monk called Henry, relates the tale of how Knight Owein came to Lough Derg and there experienced a journey into the next world. The motive for the penance undertaken by Owein was his own participation in a life of plunder and violence while in the service of the English king, Stephen (1135-54). Owein told his confessors, 'since I have so greatly offended my creator I will take on a penance more arduous than any penance, I will with your encroachment enter Saint Patrick's Purgatory'.<sup>30</sup> His story won acceptance throughout England and the Continent during the thirteenth century, the period in which Jacques Le Goff credited with forging 'the vision of the genuine Purgatory'.<sup>31</sup> Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, fifteen different Latin versions appeared, as well as numerous vernacular prose and verse renditions in most of the major European languages is testimony to their popularity.<sup>32</sup> In a fragmentary sermon-note without indication of date or place of preaching at the commencement of the sermon diary of Richard FitzRalph, archbishop of Armagh and *primas Hiberniae*, 1346-60, the preacher made use of an *exemplum* concerning St. Patrick's Purgatory and referred to the knight who *solum post Patricii tempus eius purgatorium pro Dei amore intravit*.<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> Haren and Pontfarcy, *medieval pilgrimage*, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (London, 1984), p. 108.

<sup>32</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> K. Walsh, *A fourteenth-century scholar and primate: Richard FitzRalph in Oxford, Avignon and Armagh* (Oxford, 1981), p. 306. See also K. Walsh, 'Richard FitzRalph of Armagh (1360) - professor-prelate-saint' in *County Louth Archaeological and Historical Journal*, xxii (1990), pp 111-24. 'After the time of Patrick, he entered his Purgatory, for love of God'.

number of visitors who flocked to St. Patrick's Purgatory increased especially after the middle of the fourteenth century, and they did not come merely from nearby countries such as France and England, but from the Italian and Iberian peninsulas, from Hungary and the Low Countries as well. The pilgrims were mainly members of the patrician and knightly families and many were able to combine diplomatic and economic or military-strategic interests with motives of piety and penance.<sup>34</sup>

The first part of this chapter aims to explain the various elements that constituted the Lough Derg pilgrimage as it was experienced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The introduction of the Augustinians to the Island who played no small role in revitalizing the pilgrimage gave it 'a fresh impetus' as Canon Daniel O'Connor put it in 1903. Of the religious orders who spread to Ireland in the twelfth century, Peter Harbison, the noted historian and archaeologist, points out that the Augustinians were responsible for taking over many of the earlier Irish monastic establishments, a common practice that we also see in the case of Our Lady's Island. There is also evidence to suggest that they took control of Croagh Patrick during the later medieval period and ministered to the pilgrims there. The second part of this chapter examines the fundamental elements of the pilgrimage experience at Croagh Patrick and Our Lady's Island. We know that the pilgrimages to Lough Derg, Croagh Patrick, and Our Lady's Island had a long tradition before the arrival of Christianity. In pre-Christian times both Croagh Patrick and Our Lady's Island had their origins in the Celtic festival of Lughnasa. The beginning of August marked the festival of Lughnasa which was a celebration of the arrival of the harvest. Generally the celebrations were marked by large assemblies:

Its most distinctive manifestation was an assembly at a traditional site, always a remarkable natural feature, either a height (often the top of a mountain) or a water side: a lake, river or well.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, the Christianisation of the Lughnasa celebrations is a prime example of the compromise between the two worlds. Obvious connections can be drawn in all three pilgrimage sites. We begin with Lough Derg.

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<sup>34</sup> French, 'Ritual, gender and power strategies: male pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory' in *Religion*, xxiv (1994), p. 109.

<sup>35</sup> Máire MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, (Oxford, 1962), p. ix.



Fig. 2: St. John of Bridlington in St. Patrick's Purgatory in Shane Leslie's *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*.



## I

The authentic elements of the traditional pilgrimage at Lough Derg as it was experienced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were based on hagiography and associated visions and wonders. When the Augustinians took over the monastery on Saints Island in 1135 by the authority of the cathedral in Armagh under Saint Malachy, it automatically became a place where pilgrims in the spirit of prayer and penance would prepare themselves for visiting the purgatory. The ritual activity took place on two separate islands (Saints Island and Station Island) approximately a mile from the shore. Saints Island was where the Canons resided and where pilgrims performed their penitential exercises before they were taken to Station Island for their twenty-four hour vigil in the cave called ‘purgatory’. A small boat ‘which was made like a kind of hollow tree trunk, roughly dug out where four people would hardly have fitted’ was the only transportation across the lough.<sup>36</sup> Admission to the sacred site was carefully regulated. To enter Saint Patrick’s Purgatory pilgrims had to obtain the permission of the Archbishop of Armagh and the Bishop of Clogher as well as the prior of Saints Island before they could undertake the journey to the sacred site. Once on the island, pilgrims underwent rituals that fell into two distinct parts. Initially pilgrims underwent fifteen days of intense prayer and fasting to spiritually strengthen them for the real challenge of the pilgrimage, a twenty-four hour vigil in the cave during which they experienced the worst tortures the medieval mind could conceive. Their only source of nourishment during the first phase was bread and water.<sup>37</sup> When George Grissaphan, a Hungarian knight, undertook the pilgrimage in 1353 his fifteen-day ordeal included a five-day ritual death. During that time he lay on a bier which was covered with a black cloth. Every morning priests in funeral vestments, carrying a ‘cross, thurible and holy water’ said the office for the dead followed by requiem mass. After this the pilgrim was absolved ‘as though before burial and bells were rung as for the dead’.<sup>38</sup>

These rituals were necessary physical and spiritual preparations for the second phase, the vigil in the cave. A procession of priests singing the *Dies Irae* accompanied the pilgrim Ramon de Perellós, a Spanish Count, in 1397 to the door of the purgatory where they sprinkled him with holy water. It was customary for all pilgrims entering the cave to hear the

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<sup>36</sup> Haren and Pontfarcy, *Medieval pilgrimage*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.



dire warning that ‘many have gone in there never to return’.<sup>39</sup> The terrors and tortures of purgatory became increasingly ingenious and graphic in the fifteenth century. Grissaphan, for example, found himself tempted by the devil who disguised himself as a ravishingly beautiful woman, while de Perellós in the course of his visionary sojourn in the cave was shown many of his friends and relatives being cruelly tortured for their sins. William Staunton, a native of Durham in 1406, was shown ‘a man in white dressed as a canon and a woman dressed in a similar habit with a nun’s veil on her head’.<sup>40</sup> They welcomed William and later disclosed themselves to be St. John of Bridlington and St. Ives his sister. Whatever induced their visions, there is very little doubt that they underwent a deeply felt religious experience. Certainly the combination of fast and solitude in the darkness of the cave would have ensured that these pilgrims experienced visions. It is also important to see these accounts as being part of a genre of painting and literature which surrounded speculation on the theme of Purgatory.<sup>41</sup> As no one had direct contradictory experience, accounts of Purgatory owed much to the authors’ ‘flights of fancy and imagination’ as suggested by the historian John Cunningham.<sup>42</sup>

This is not to say that there were not plenty of doubters concerning the visions of Purgatory. Cynicism recedes, however, on reading the records left by pilgrims from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As James Yonge, a notary and man of letters, wrote in his memorial, ‘we know that in our time many persons have visited the place in question, but few have entered there for motives of holiness’.<sup>43</sup> During the extraordinary cold winter of 1411 the Hungarian Knight, Laurence Rathold of Pasztho who had his fast reduced, confessed to Yonge that he was not certain whether his journey to the Otherworld had been in body or spirit. He thought, however, that it must have been in the body since he had taken a candle into the Purgatory and had ‘lit and burned the nine pieces of his candle one after the other’ until he exited the cave.<sup>44</sup> Others were honest enough to admit that not much at all happened to them in the dreaded cave. One such account was given to the historian Froissart by the English knight Sir William de Lisle:

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<sup>39</sup> Cunningham, *Lough Derg*, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> Cunningham, *Lough Derg*, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xxviii.

<sup>44</sup> Haren and Pontfarcy, *medieval pilgrimage*, p. 168.

In the morning we were awakened, they opened the bolt, for so we had ordered and we issued out and within a short season clean forgot our dreams and visions; wherefore we thought and think all that matter was but a phantasy.<sup>45</sup>

In the *Mirror of the world*, published by Caxton in 1481, the author speaking of Lough Derg, reported that he knew of a 'high canon of Waterford' who had been to Purgatory five or six times and had seen or suffered nothing, and of a Knight of Bruges, Sir John de Banste, who 'had been therein in likewise and seen none other thing but as afore is said'.<sup>46</sup> Several other writers from the same period contradicted the legends. Ponticus Virunnius, the author of *Britannica Historia* quotes a four-times pilgrim to the Island, Clausius Biraguas:

In a lake in Ireland is St. Patrick's pit, an island in which there is a cave, having a descent of six stones steps, but in no respect according to the fables commonly told of it. For I entered and saw it all for myself.<sup>47</sup>

However, considering all the evidence available from the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it seems clear that the pilgrimage ran uninterruptedly until the end of the fifteenth century. In 1497 the pilgrimage was suppressed temporarily by Pope Alexander VI because of a certain pilgrim-monk from Eymstadt in Holland who accused the clergy of simoniacal practices. According to the monk, at almost every stage of his pilgrimage money was demanded of him. This was one of the chief charges of corruption against the church generally at that time and on the little island of Lough Derg, it appears that both the bishop of Clogher and the Augustinian community began to exploit the financial possibilities of the sanctuary by demanding a fee from those wishing to descend into the cave. There was also the added religious dissatisfaction of the pious monk, who experienced nothing of the visions which many before him had claimed to have seen. He concluded that the whole pilgrimage was a fraud and as a matter of fact 'it was on account of quest of money that local inhabitants asserted to strangers that their sins could be purged therein'.<sup>48</sup> In the end the reason given by Pope Alexander VI for closing the cave was that the purgatory was not the 'Purgatory Patrick got from God although they were, everyone, visiting it'.<sup>49</sup> However, the pilgrimage was not

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<sup>45</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

easily suppressed. In 1503, only six years after its closure, it was re-opened by order of Pope Pius III at the request of the archbishop of Armagh.<sup>50</sup>

From the various surviving accounts it would appear that the conduct of the pilgrimage in the fifteenth century varied but the following seems to have been typical. The pilgrim spent fifteen days in prayer and fasting on Saints Island where the canons who administered the pilgrimage lived. This preparation concluded with confession of sins and Holy Communion. At the heart of the pilgrimage was a twenty-four hour vigil in the ‘purgatory’ often described as a cave or a pit, where pilgrims reported seeing visions and experienced the tortures of the other-world. For all the rich pattern of experience or alleged experience in the cave there are, however, marked differences in the descriptions of the cave given by different pilgrims in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Perellós, for example, described the cave as fifteen feet long and spacious. Grissaphan entered the door of the Purgatory ‘which entrance is a pit, exceedingly deep, of dept two miles and more, with turning, twisting steps in the manner of a spiral staircase, which one finds in bell-towers and in the ascent and descent thereof’.<sup>51</sup> Sir William Leslie and another English knight who visited the cave in 1395, descended three or four steps. The Florentine merchant Antonio Mannini in 1411, gave his measurements of the cave as ‘three feet wide, nine feet long and high enough for a man to kneel in but not to stand upright’.<sup>52</sup> Guillebert De Lannoy of Wallonia who came on pilgrimage in 1430 gave nearly the same measurements, ‘the hole is nine feet long from East to West and then turns five feet towards the South-West and as a whole is fourteen to fifteenth feet long’.<sup>53</sup> And then, finally, there was the Dutch monk who was lowered down by a rope into a deep pit. From these descriptions it is quite obvious that the pilgrims could not have all been in the same cave and as a number of historians have pointed out including Shane Leslie, Daniel O’Connor and John D. Seymour, there had to be another cave on Saint’s Island. Understandably, Canon Daniel O’Connor conjectures that motives of convenience influenced the Augustinians to build another cave on their own island ‘in face of the difficulty of crossing and re-crossing the wide expanse of water separating Saint’s Island from Station Island’.<sup>54</sup> There is also the possibility that a second cave was needed to accommodate the growing flow of pilgrims coming from Europe throughout the fifteenth century.

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<sup>50</sup> Henry A. Jefferies, *History of the diocese of Clogher* (Dublin, 2005), p. 65.

<sup>51</sup> Haren and Pontfarcy, *medieval pilgrimage*, p. 133.

<sup>52</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p.38.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>54</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 114.

Although the main flow of pilgrims to the Island throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries largely came from Europe, it is conceivable that the Irish were visiting as well. The fact that the fourteenth and fifteenth-century descriptions of visits to Lough Derg are entirely dominated by foreigners need not mean that the Irish did not go on pilgrimage to the lake during the same period. On the contrary, we are fortunate to have the testimony of many poets who made the pilgrimage during this time, when visions and impressions of the other-world were being written down by the twenty-nine pilgrims who recorded visited the cave between 1140 and the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>55</sup> However, unlike the colourful, event-filled dreams reported by the Europeans, the mood of Irish writers on Lough Derg was very different. They produced heart-rending verse filled with petitions for mercy to Christ, Saint Patrick and their favourite saints, and laments for their own sinfulness. Often they chastised themselves for the difficulty they experienced in reaching suitably emotional state of penance. The thirteenth-century bard, Donnchadh Mór O Dálaigh in the poem *Truagh mo thuras ar Loch Dearg* lamented:

*Truagh mo thuras ar Loch Dearg,  
a Rí na gceall is na gclog,  
do chaoineadh do chneadh's do chréacht,  
's nach faghaim déar thar mo rosg.*<sup>56</sup>

The late fifteenth-century Franciscan poet Philip Bocht Ó Huiginn also describes the power of Lough Derg as a place and means of penance. However, the idea that the ordeal in the cave was any more than that was obviously unacceptable in the educated circles in which he moved. A verse from his poem denotes a rather painful experience:

*Fa cuid do Phurgadóir Phádraig,  
Pian na Treibhe atá ar an loch  
Do budh mhó an phian fuair ga fulang.  
Gér phian dó an uaimh chumhang chloch.*<sup>57</sup>

The early sixteenth-century poem *Loch Dearg aon Róimh na hEireann* [Lough Derg Is Ireland's premier shrine], by Tuileagna Mac Torna is another typical example of a penitential poem. He asserts that penance such as one can do at Lough Derg is the only remedy for a

<sup>55</sup> Patrick J. Corish, 'The marvels of Lough Derg' in *The Furrow*, xl (1989), p. 414.

<sup>56</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 167. 'Alas for my visit to Loch Dearg to weep Thy wounds and stripes, O Lord of its cells and bells, seeing I can press no tear from my eye'. See also Ó Dúshláine, 'Lough Derg in native Irish poetry', pp 76-84.

<sup>57</sup> Lambert McKenna, *Philip Bocht Ó Huiginn* (Dublin, 1931), p. 44. 'The suffering from the hut on the Lake was only part of Patrick's Purgatory. Painful as was the strait stone cave, worse was the penance he bore'.

stony heart, a hard eye, and a deceitful mouth.<sup>58</sup> The focus of his attention was ‘this cell where Patrick fasted’ and ‘the lake-wave that will cure my wound’.<sup>59</sup> He was there to repent for his sins and would do this through a visit to the cave. However, dissatisfied with his measure of sorrow, wondering why he could weep ‘over any loss in worldly goods’ and then find himself without a tear for the ‘pierced side and feet’ of Christ, he must lie again in the Saint’s cave.<sup>60</sup> He asks Our Lady to watch over his vigil in the cave and make it profitable for him. He acclaims Lough Derg as the road on which ‘to follow the Creator’, calling it ‘the guiding star of the East and West’.<sup>61</sup> The evidence of these poems suggests that within the native Irish tradition stories of struggles with demons of the other-world or wonderful visions that marked the continental experience may have been less dominant. While European pilgrims went in search of spiritual adventure, the Irish went to do penance in the manner established by the ascetical monks of the Irish church. Repetition of prayers combined with physical hardship was their idea of penance. Nothing could contrast more strongly with the way that Lough Derg was treated in the continental tradition.

At the start of the sixteenth century the Purgatory appears to have continued to attract visitors. The *Annals of Ulster* reported in 1516 that a French knight visited the place and in gratitude for friendly hospitality and safe-conduct on part of the O’Donnell sent his host ‘a ship filled with ordnance and containing a large castle-breaking gun’.<sup>62</sup> However, by the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, the experience of otherworldly visions in the cave had faded. This is evident from the account of the Italian Papal Nuncio Chiericati who visited the island in 1517. Although Chiericati mentions that two of his companions had such experiences in the cave, he was unconcerned with the details. Chiericati recorded the order of the pilgrimage as it was conducted in the early sixteenth century:

On the day of your arrival you make your will if you have anything to leave. Then you confess and fast on bread and water for nine days and visit the three cabins every hour, saying any number of prayers. And you have to stand in the Lake, some up to the knees, others half way up their bodies and some up to their necks. At the end of nine days you hear Mass, communicate, and are blessed and signed with holy water, and go with the cross before you to the gate of St. Patrick’s well. Then you go inside

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<sup>58</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 171.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

and the door is closed, and not opened until the next day, as you have to stay there twenty four hours.<sup>63</sup>

What he found is unexpected in view of the accounts of the previous century. To begin with, what he describes seems to give a new importance to the penitential disciplines before entering the cave. Besides fasting and visiting the cabins dedicated respectively to St. Bridget, St. Patrick, and St. Columba, pilgrims are said to stand immersed in the lake as far as the neck for some hours reciting prayers. There seems to be an indication of an established round also in the prior Donatus MacGrath's letter, certifying that an Irish priest named Nylanus O'Ledan in 1507, had 'performed all the pilgrimages on the Island of the said Purgatory and has stayed in the ditch of the same St. Patrick'.<sup>64</sup> The most important element in this letter is the prior's reference to 'the pilgrimages of the island'. This is the first documentary source which indicates that 'pilgrimages' were being performed on the island at the start of the sixteenth century. To return to Chiericati's account, it is also revealed that the number of days given over to fasting and intense prayer had been greatly reduced from fifteen to nine. Furthermore, while Chiericati's account may be the first and only European account to detect any real changes brought about at Lough Derg at the start of the sixteenth century, there are some useful native accounts that are able to do much the same. One late sixteenth-century poem by Aonghus son of Aodh Ruadh Ó hUiginn is particularly interesting because he is the first of the bards to invoke also the other saints commemorated in the penitential 'Beds' on station Island: Columcille, Brendan, Brigid, Molaise, Dabheoc and Catherine, 'that humble maid, to help me on the Day of Judgement'.<sup>65</sup> Harbison suggests that these beds dedicated as they were to the six early Irish saints, might seem to provide proof and indicate a survival, of pre-Augustinian pilgrimage to the lake going back to the early years of Christianity. However, the dedication of one of the beds to a non-Irish saint, Catherine, must make us cautious for, as the late John Hennig pointed out, the earliest evidence for her cult in Ireland is found in the *Martyrology of Gorman*, which dates from no earlier than 1166.<sup>66</sup> According to Harbison, this points, therefore, to the dedications of the beds being finalised after the arrival of the Augustinians and that the dedication of a bed to St. Catherine may have been an Augustinian idea.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>64</sup> L. Bieler, 'Letters of credence by Donatus Magrahe, prior of Lough Derg, for Nylanus O'Ledan, priest and pilgrim' in *Clogher Record*, ii (1958), pp 257-59.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>66</sup> Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*, p. 64.



Fig 3: Betelius' map of Ireland, 1560. St. Patrick's Purgatory shown as the cave in Shane Leslie's *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*.

The prominence given to St. Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg in Betelius' map of Ireland in 1590 is indicative of the importance that the shrine had on the continent at that time. Betelius shows the Purgatory as a large cave in the south-east (as opposed to north-west) corner of the country, and it gives it the same prominence as the two other places in the country he deemed important: the city of Armagh and Lough Foyle. Incidentally, Betelius makes the following comment on Hibernia, which gives some idea of what, even in the late sixteenth century, a pilgrim to that county would expect: '50 Bishoprics – nothing born poisonous – the race uncouth of customs, rejoicing in war, pillage and music'.<sup>67</sup>

Considering all the evidence from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it should be noted that St. Patrick's Purgatory attracted a particular type of pilgrim in the fifteenth century. Those in search of solitary atonement and sanctification with a preference for extreme ascetic practices were more likely to be found on this small island. The typical fifteenth-century experiences at the site were fasting, enclosure in the cave, and visions. By the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century the situation changed whereby this older pattern was being undermined and replaced with penitential exercises that were conducted on Station Island.

## II

Climbing Croagh Patrick was another form of pilgrimage to a sacred place because of its penitential nature and its association with St. Patrick. However, unlike Lough Derg where the pilgrim spent some time shut-up solitarily inside a cave, the journey over sacred ground formed the most important devotional exercise here. Long before St. Patrick's visit, the name given to this ancient mountain was Cruachán Aigle, in early Hiberno-Latin documents latinised Mons Egli. The origin of the name is set down in the *Dindshenchas*, a tenth-century collection of place-lore, translated by the author Edward Gwynn. It relates that Crom Derg murdered his nephew Aigle in revenge for having slain a lady named Cliara who was under his protection, 'thenceforth its name is Cruachan Aigle, till the day of judgement'.<sup>68</sup> Máire MacNeill has pointed to the great probability that the pilgrimage's roots go back to pagan times. In her book, *The festival of Lughnasa*, she argues in favour of seeing Croagh Patrick as one of many places in Ireland where the festival of the Celtic god Lug was celebrated, though the evidence for this lies primarily in the strong local tradition of performing the pilgrimage on *Aoine Chrom Dubh*, the Friday of Crom Dubh. Tradition represents Crom Dubh as the

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<sup>67</sup> Alannah Hopkin, *The Living Legend of St. Patrick* (New York, 1989), pp 84-91.

<sup>68</sup> Harry Hughes, *Croagh Patrick* (Westport, 1991), p.18.



pagan potentate, dominant in the land until the coming of a Christian missionary, most often St. Patrick. He is overcome by the superior power of the saint, and it is the victory of Christianity over paganism which tradition claims to commemorate ever since on Domhnach Chrom Dubh.<sup>69</sup> According to MacNeill, it may be accepted that Crom Dubh is, in fact, a name of a pagan deity. While the religious importance of Croagh Patrick had its origins in the Celtic festival of Lughnasa, we are reminded that those of Lough Derg did not.

Once again the importance of hagiography and folklore constituted the authentic elements of this pilgrimage as it was experienced in the medieval times. The earliest reference to Saint Patrick's prayer and fast on Croagh Patrick is to be found in the *Book of Armagh* from the seventh century writings of Tírechán, a native of Connacht who wrote a memoir in Latin of St. Patrick's travels and foundations in Connacht and Meath, some two hundred years after Patrick's death. He tells us that 'Patrick proceeded to the summit of the mountain, climbing Cruachán Aigli and stayed there forty days and forty nights and the birds were troublesome to him and he could not see the face of the sky and land and sea.'<sup>70</sup> This vision of the holy birds about the saint on the mountain is the earliest recorded tradition of Croagh Patrick. It is echoed in the Dindshenchas poem on *Find-Loch Cera*, 'a flock of birds of the Land of Promise came there to welcome St. Patrick when he was on Cruach Aigle. They struck the lake (with their wings) 'till it was white as new milk, and they sang music there so long as Patrick remained on the Cruach'.<sup>71</sup> Other references to this particular legend are enlarged and extended in the *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick* written in the tenth century. According to this version, Patrick spent the forty days of Lent on Croagh Patrick or the Reek, the name referred to in the *Tripartite*. During his pilgrimage the mountain was encircled by demon-birds who blacked out the sky above him. He rang a bell, given him by St. Brigid, unavailingly. Finally he threw it at them and a piece broke off it. The legend has almost the same form in the Leabar Brecc homily on St. Patrick. There are explicit comparisons between Patrick on the Reek and Moses on Mount Sinai, which illustrate, the coming together of Irish and conventional biblical traditions.<sup>72</sup>

In the writings of two Anglo-Norman clerics who came to Ireland in the wake of the Norman Invasion, Giraldus Cambrensis, whose *Topographia Hibernica* was written in 1188, and Jocelin, the Cistercian monk, whose *Life of St. Patrick* is dated 1185-6, there are references

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<sup>69</sup> MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, p. 28.

<sup>70</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 12.

<sup>71</sup> MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, p. 72.

<sup>72</sup> Mary Low, *Celtic Christianity, and nature, early Irish and Hebridean traditions* (Belfast, 1996), pp 48-50.

made to another tradition that it was from the Reek that St. Patrick drove all the poisonous reptiles and serpents into the sea. While Giraldus disregarded this belief as superstition, Jocelin states that the Saint blessed the Reek, ‘and from the Reek and all the land of Ireland, with all the men of Erin, no poisonous thing has appeared in Ireland’.<sup>73</sup> Mac Neill, in her detailed examination of ‘Mountain Pilgrimages’ verifies that the earliest extant authorities for the legend of the expulsion of the snakes from Ireland are not Irish. Indeed it seems always to have been more acceptable to non-Gaelic than to Gaelic tradition. Although she admits that the legend of St. Patrick driving out the snakes of Ireland sometimes turns up in the Gaelic environment it never really acclimatised itself. This is reinforced by the fact that it appears again and again in the travel books of English and Anglo-Norman writers and is rarely mentioned in the traditional accounts of the Gaelic people. In the life of St. Colmcille, compiled by Manus Ó Domhnaill in 1532, one sees the genuine native tradition that Patrick banished and drove away the evils spirits from Cruachan Aigle.<sup>74</sup> And so it seems according to Mac Neill that the seventh-century tradition of the birds comforting the saint on Croagh Patrick developed, on the one hand, into a legend of victory over demons, and, on the other, into a foreign story of the expulsion of snakes from Ireland.<sup>75</sup>

Haren and de Pontfarcy have pointed out that a link between Croagh Patrick and Lough Derg is provided by none other than the devil’s mother, commonly known as the Caora or the Caorthanach. St. Patrick finally managed to kill her off in Lough Derg, but that was only at the second attempt. His first attempt was on Croagh Patrick, where he confined her for a while in the lake, from which she escaped only to meet final defeat at Lough Derg which suggests the transference of a St. Patrick myth from Croagh Patrick to Lough Derg. Once again according to tradition the devil’s mother was another type of adversary which beset the saint on the mountain. However, it is not wise, as directed by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, to place too much reliance on the early references to the mountain, as they were probably influenced by an undercurrent of early medieval ecclesiastical politics, which initiated what was recently termed the ‘all-devouring Patrick legend’.<sup>76</sup> It may be no coincidence that the earliest references associating St. Patrick with the mountain were made by Tírechán who we already know was a native of Connacht, and who used these legends of Patrick to illustrate the

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<sup>73</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, p. 74.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>76</sup> Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland 400-1200* (London and New York, 1995), p. 22.

primacy of Armagh among the churches of Ireland.<sup>77</sup> There are also many parallels between the local folklore and place names of Croagh Patrick, and the early historic references to the mountain.<sup>78</sup> The events of Patrick's legendary visit to the mountain, for example, are reflected by place-names attached by folklore to natural features at the mountain, such as Lough Nacorra 'Lake of the Serpent' to the south of Croagh Patrick, and Lug na nDeamhan 'Hollow of the Demons', a steep hollow on the northern slopes of the mountain.<sup>79</sup>

Following on from the various Patrician legends associated with the mountain, there are numerous references to the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick over four centuries. By the twelfth century the annals confirm the existence of an established pilgrimage route to Croagh Patrick by giving mention to important occurrences and military action along the way. The *Annals of the Four Masters* recount how in 1079 Toirdhealbhac Ua Briain, with a great army, invaded Connacht and plundered the 'Cruach'.<sup>80</sup> The *Chronicum Scotorum* (1141-1150) states that in 1109 'Ua Longain, Airchinnech of Ard-Patrick was burned by lightening on Cruach-Padraig'.<sup>81</sup> A single sentence found buried in the entry of the *Annals of Loch Cé* for the year 1113, records that 'a thunderbolt fell on Cruachán Aigle [Croagh Patrick], on the night of the festival of Patrick, which destroyed thirty of the fasting people'.<sup>82</sup> As brief as it is, this statement is evidence that by the early twelfth century, Croagh Patrick was an established pilgrimage site and that fasting and a night vigil were the main devotional practices for the pilgrims who came there. Obviously the medieval pilgrims who went to Croagh Patrick were there to pray and fast like St. Patrick himself had done in the fifth century. As the Cistercian hagiographer Jocelin described it: 'many are accustomed to spend the night awake and fasting on the mount'.<sup>83</sup>

In the thirteenth century, the *Annals of Connacht*, in praising the reign and order established by Hugh O'Connor, son of the High King of Connacht, Felim O'Connor, state that the only crime committed in Connacht was a robbery which occurred on the way to the Cruach. The fact that the offender was severely punished 'by having both his hands and feet cut off' served as a powerful warning for anyone who dared to molest a pilgrim on his way to Croagh

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 22

<sup>78</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, pp 86-88.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 86-88.

<sup>80</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> W. M. Hennessy, *Chronicon Scotorum* (London, 1866), p. 315.

<sup>82</sup> MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, p. 74.

<sup>83</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 16

Patrick.<sup>84</sup> Other acts of violence committed against pilgrims were reported in the annals for 1351. On this occasion the incident involved important people and was of some significance in the feuds of the dynastic families. The annals recorded that Aodh Ó Ruairc was taken prisoner by Mac Philpin MacWilliam Burke, whilst coming from Croagh Patrick. Ferghal MacDiarmada rebelled in consequence of this capture, and a general war broke out in all Connacht. Similar incidents were reported in the annals concerning Lough Derg in the fourteenth century. According to John Cunningham the practice of sanctuary was a very old feature of Christianity whereby a fugitive could not be pursued into or removed from sacred ground.<sup>85</sup> There were decrees of sacredness with the most sacred area being the interior of the church itself. Just as the route to Croagh Patrick was regarded as most sacred ground, the monastic lands of Lough Derg were considered its Termon or sanctuary area. While the surrounding chiefs and clans in Ireland were supposed to honour the principle of the sanctuary, the Irish annals are full of breaches of the practice. These breaches also occurred in the Termon of Lough Derg. The *Annals of the Four Masters* report that anyone who trespassed on its sanctuary swiftly came to an untimely end. Furthermore, the *Annals of Ulster* relate that in 1395 O'Muldoon, chief of Lurg, was captured at the Termon by Art Maguire's sons and murdered. In 1471:

Colla, son of Hugh Maguire, and his sons slew Rory, son of Donncha, son of Hugh Maguire at the house of the Mac Crait (McGrath) in Altruaidhin, in the Termon, and Donncha Og (Rory's brother) followed Colla and slew him, and Colla's son was killed the next day, through the vengeance of God and St. Davog, for the profanation of the Termon.<sup>86</sup>

What can be inferred from the annalistic records is the existence for several centuries of a well-known pilgrim-road and of stopping-places and shrines. During this period it seems reasonable to assume that the pilgrimage was protected and patronised by the O'Connor lords of Connacht.<sup>87</sup> It was a source of revenue to several religious communities. A reflection of the popularity of the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick and its importance to monasteries situated along the route is seen in many papal documents. The *Calendar of Papal Registers*, 1198-1304, discloses information on a litigation between the archbishops of Armagh and Tuam concerning the proprietorship of certain churches in Connacht over which Armagh had

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>85</sup> Cunningham, *Lough Derg*, p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>87</sup> MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, p. 76.

asserted traditional control.<sup>88</sup> In 1216, archbishop of Tuam, Felix Ó Ruane, appealed to Rome against the claim of Armagh for a tax on the church on Croagh Patrick. Armagh's claim was based on the traditions that these churches were founded by St. Patrick. Pope Innocent III decided that as the chapel had been erected by the archbishop of Tuam, no tribute from it could be claimed by the archbishop of Armagh. Other churches in question also included Aghagower which owed its importance to its proximity to Croagh Patrick and the fact that St. Patrick stayed there before ascending the mountain. Tírechán gave a brief account of St. Patrick's visit to Aghagower where he went to the well of 'Stringell' and stayed there for two Sundays.<sup>89</sup> According to MacNeill, it may be assumed that the services of the oratory on the Reek and the ceremonies of the pilgrimage were in the charge of the monks of Aghagower. Author, Jack Mulveen, conjectures that something occurred which caused concern regarding the legal ownership of these two churches, and probably the Papal suit reflects rivalry for financial gain because of a new, or revived, pilgrimage route in the area.<sup>90</sup> One of the main sources of revenue for monasteries throughout the medieval period were pilgrims. MacNeill notes that at Kilmaine and Kilbannon, both sites of abbeys, may have served as hostels for pilgrims travelling to Croagh Patrick. Furthermore, Mulveen indicates that it was also during this time that Ballintubber Abbey, the recognised starting point of the pilgrimage was founded in 1216 by the King of Connaught, Cathal Crovdearg, who also built an abbey for the Augustinian Canons Regular. This most likely was the stimulus for the renewal and promotion of the pilgrimage.

Further evidence of the prestige of Croagh Patrick may be found in a papal document of 1432, whereby Pope Eugenius IV granted penance to penitents who visited and gave alms for the repair of the church of Saint Patrick on the hill. MacNeill noted that there were extensive ruins at Aghagower, but that people returning from the mountain completed their devotional exercises here. The papal document of 1432 noted:

Relaxation of two years and two quarantines of enjoined penance to penitents who visit and give alms for the repair or fabric of the below-mentioned chapel on the Sunday before the feast of St. Peters Chains, on which day St. Patrick is specially venerated in the chapel of St. Patrick on the hill which is called Croagh Patrick (capella S.P. in Monte qui Tumulus S.P. nuncupatur sita), whither resorts a great

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>89</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 82.

<sup>90</sup> Jack Mulveen, 'Mayo's penitential and sculptured highway' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, li (1999), p. 171.

multitude by whose alms the parish church of Aghagour in the diocese of Tuam is adorned with chalices and other ornaments.<sup>91</sup>

From this indulgence it can be assumed that the pilgrimage was in the charge of the monks of Aghagower. A letter dated 12 February 1456 by Pope Callistus III gave permission to Hugh O'Malley, an Augustinian friar of the House of Corpus Christi to establish a church and friary in Murrisk because 'the inhabitants of those parts have not hitherto been instructed in their faith'.<sup>92</sup> This marked a new pilgrimage route to Croagh Patrick. Before this pilgrims had approached the mountain from AnTóchar Phádraig (Patrick's causeway), which originally started in Aghagower. By the middle of the fifteenth century the Augustinians friars in Murrisk seem to have taken over the organising of the pilgrimage from the Aghagower monastery.<sup>93</sup> At the end of the fifteenth century the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick continued to attract pilgrims. This time a letter written in 1485 by the archbishop of Armagh, Octavian, testifies that two priests from Lyons in France had visited the Holy Mountain, on which St. Patrick had fasted forty days and nights.<sup>94</sup> This is the first piece of evidence of pilgrims coming from outside of Ireland to the mountain. Another was by the Elizabethan Governor of Connacht, Sir Richard Bingham, who reported seeing Scots about to enter Mayo to attend a 'superstitious' ceremony on Croagh Patrick. These Scots were initially believed to be Galloglaigh, mercenary soldiers of Hebridean origin who hired themselves to Irish Lords, however, it was later accepted that the Scots were in fact genuine pilgrims.<sup>95</sup>

What is easy to overlook in considering the different accounts of the pilgrimages to Croagh Patrick and Lough Derg is what is missing. There is no mention of any women making the pilgrimage during this time. The area of gender and pilgrimage in medieval studies is relatively unexamined, except for Dorothea French's 'Ritual, Gender and Power Strategies', in which she provides an explanation as to why Saint Patrick's Purgatory was carefully circumscribed and prospective pilgrims had to pass through a painstaking screening process. The screening policy at Lough Derg appears to have excluded women in general. According to French this practice contributed to the extraordinary nature of the Lough Derg pilgrimage. Peter Brown noted in his book *The cult of the saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity*, that shrines were public places accessible to all regardless of social class or

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<sup>91</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 58.

<sup>92</sup> [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie), Mar. 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 16.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>95</sup> MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, p. 76.

gender.<sup>96</sup> Author Lisa Bitel indicated that prior to the late twelfth century, Saints Island was a place of retreat for ascetics of both sexes whose lives were models of life-long, inner pilgrimage.<sup>97</sup> It seems that the early Cistercians (who first recorded, copied and circulated the *Tractatus*) and the Augustinians (who were in charge of the site) efforts to promote St. Patrick's Purgatory as a pilgrimage site were part of their campaign throughout Europe on behalf of 'Purgatory'.<sup>98</sup> This is why the Augustinians at Lough Derg were especially concerned with attracting elite males from various societies as pilgrims.<sup>99</sup> C.M. van der Zanden suggested that the *Tractatus* was in part a Cistercian manifesto, intended to depict the white monks as the best qualified to inherit St. Patrick's role in taming Ireland.<sup>100</sup> The twelve men in white, whom others scholars compared to the twelve apostles, looked very much like the Cistercians.<sup>101</sup> This suggests that the Cistercians were exploiting their audience's fear of death and punishment as an antidote for their own declining reputation.<sup>102</sup> According to the Cistercian, Caesarius of Heisterbach, the *Tractatus* offered the most convincing proof that purgatory was a place. He writes, 'let him who doubts the existence of Purgatory go to Ireland and let him enter into Saint Patrick's Purgatory. He will then have no more doubts about the reality of Purgatorial punishments'.<sup>103</sup>

### III

Pilgrims that went to Lough Derg and Croagh Patrick in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries claimed the special protection of St. Patrick. At Our Lady's Island, however, special devotion to the Mother of God and her maternal protection was sought by pilgrims who went to this sacred place. Historian, Peter O'Dwyer revealed that there was strong devotion to Mary in early Christian Ireland. Writers and preachers generally consider that devotion to Mary must have found its way to Ireland in St. Patrick's time since her divine maternity was defined in the Council of Ephesus in 431.<sup>104</sup> Writing on the subject 'Our Lady in Old Irish Folklore', Fr. James Cassidy highlighted the importance of folklore and hymns in providing ample evidence that early Christian Ireland was in a very marked way devoted to the Mother of

<sup>96</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981), p. 34.

<sup>97</sup> Lisa Bitel, *Isle of the saints: monastic settlement and Christian Community in early Ireland* (New York, 1990), pp 222-34.

<sup>98</sup> French, 'Ritual, gender and power strategies', p. 109.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>100</sup> Carol G. Zaleski, 'St. Patrick's Purgatory: pilgrimage motifs in a medieval otherworld vision' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xlvi, no. 4 (1985), p. 478.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>104</sup> Peter O'Dwyer, 'Mary in early Irish tradition' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, lxxii (1986), p.72.

God.<sup>105</sup> The name of Mary was so treasured by the ancient Irish that they referred to her in their everyday speech and actions. Commonplace greetings such as: ‘May God and Mary bless you’ and ‘May the Cross of Christ’s Body and Mary guard us on the road’ were often invoked when people were about to undertake an important journey.<sup>106</sup> The nineteenth-century scholar Eugene O’Curry, first drew attention to the existence of an old Irish Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the *Leabhar Breac*, and believed it to be as old as the middle of the eighth century. It consisted of sixty invocations, beginning: ‘O great Mary! O Mary, greatest of all Marys! O greatest of women! O Queen of angels, etc’.<sup>107</sup> Another nineteenth-century scholar Brian O’Looney indicated that the litany was a good example of the forms of prayer peculiar to the early Irish Church and a strong proof of the veneration to the Blessed Mother.<sup>108</sup> Further reference to Our Lady was found in hymns. The name of Mary, which was invoked with fascinating simplicity and a profound confidence in her maternal protection was emphasised in the hymn: ‘I offer myself under thy protection, O loving Mother of the only Son, And under thy protecting shield I place my body, My heart, my will and my understanding’.<sup>109</sup>

While the references above gave a strong sense of devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God, there was no record of Our Lady’s Island pilgrimage until the coming of the Normans. Tradition states that the Barony of Forth was a place of worship since pagan times. Before Christian times, there were two famous pagan shrines or temples of sun-worship in this locality. Fr. Robert Fitzhenry noted that one was at Ballytrent and the other stood at Carnsore Point.<sup>110</sup> Considering this locality was the centre of druidical worship, it would not be far-fetched to suggest that Our Lady’s Island was in pre-Christian times inhabited by druidesses. Such place-lore would indicate that the Irish name for Our Lady’s Island was Cluain-namBan, [the meadow of the women].<sup>111</sup> Other traditions state that the island founded by St. Abban, nephew of St. Ibar in the sixth century. One of the famous monasteries founded by St. Abban was that of Fion-Magh, on the bright plain. Scholars were divided as to where

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<sup>105</sup> James F. Cassidy, ‘Our Lady in old Irish folklore’ in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, cxlii (1960), p. 14.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>107</sup> Rev. John Greene, S. J. ed., *Ancient Irish Litany of the ever blessed Mother of God in the original Irish with translations in English and Latin* (New York, 1880), p. 11.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>109</sup> Eugene O’Curry, ‘The Protecting Corselet of Mary’ in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vi (1869), pp 320-22.

<sup>110</sup> Murphy, *Our Lady’s Island*, p. 11.

<sup>111</sup> Murphy, ‘Our Lady’s Island’, p. 9.



Fion-Magh was, but local historians, Edmund Hore, John B. Cullen and Father John L. Furlong, late P.P., Gorey, hold that Fion-Magh was Lady's Island.<sup>112</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that Our Lady's Island functioned as an ecclesiastical site in the early medieval period, nor is there any evidence or suggestion of early medieval pilgrimage to the site. Before the coming of the Normans the Christian faith and fervour was strong in South Wexford. This is evident from the large number of parishes, each having at least one place of worship and burial in Forth and Bargy bearing Irish names.<sup>113</sup> Fr. Murphy noted that 'if these parishes owed their origin to the Anglo-Normans, it is not likely that they would have received Anglo-Norman, or English names'.<sup>114</sup> In the Forth, extending over 38,849 acres, there were thirty-two parishes, of which twenty-four had Irish names. In Bargy, occupying 40,002 acres, there were thirteen parishes, of which twelve had Irish names. According to Murphy, the pilgrimage to Our Lady's Island had been well established, for it seems unlikely that the Irish would flock in such vast numbers from the most distant parts of Ireland, to a shrine or pilgrimage founded by a hostile race.<sup>115</sup>

The medieval landscape of the Lady's Island region was unique in that it was characterised by a pattern of fortified residences and parish churches, and dominated by castles constructed from the mid-thirteenth century. To the south-east of Lady's Island was the parish church of Carn close to the mid-thirteenth Codd family castle of Carn, the mid-thirteenth castle of the French family of Ballytory, the remains of the late-thirteenth castle of the Hay family of Tacumshin and the Renaissance fortified house of the French family at Rathshillane.<sup>116</sup> This pattern of Anglo Norman settlement was also reflected in the local dialect of Forth. Kathleen Browne noted that the local dialect of Forth and Bargy was 'the language of the Saxon and Welsh-Flemish followers and retainers of the Anglo-Norman knights and gentlemen who accompanied FitzStephen, Strongbow and the Earl Marshall to Ireland'.<sup>117</sup>

According to Niamh Kielthy the coming of the Normans should have ended the practice as they were a foreign group who brought their own culture and practices to their new home.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>115</sup> Murphy, 'Our Lady's Island', p. 13.

<sup>116</sup> Murphy, *Our Lady's Island*, pp 11-19.

<sup>117</sup> K. A. Browne, 'The ancient dialect of the baronies of Forth and Bargy, county Wexford' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 6th series, xvii, no.2 (1927), pp 127-37.

<sup>118</sup> Niamh Kielthy, 'The origins, decline and eventual modernisation in 1850-1897 of the pilgrimage in Our Lady's Island, Co. Wexford' (M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2000), p. 24.

After the arrival of the Normans, Strongbow gave the barony of Forth to Robert Fitzstephen who in turn granted Our Lady's Island to Rudolphe de Lamporte. De Lamporte built his castle on the island but the pilgrims continued to come and walk the circuit.<sup>119</sup> De Lamporte reputedly made the lands over to the church on his departure to the Third Crusade in 1184, and after he fell at the Battle of Hattin in Gallilee in 1185, Lady's Island passed into the ownership of the church.<sup>120</sup> There is no clear evidence as to how Lady's Island was used in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, though by the fourteenth century the site was said to have held a community of Augustinian Canons. It seems that at some point after the arrival of the Augustinians the area was dedicated to Our Lady who replaced the original sponsor, St. Abban. According to W.H. Grattan Flood, the move towards Our Lady seems to have been well advised: 'Lady's Island belonged to the Augustinians Canons of St. Mary's, Ferns, and, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, became famous for a shrine of the Blessed Virgin, which attracted pilgrims from all parts of Ireland'.<sup>121</sup> This habit was common to the Augustinian policy at the time. Despite the uncertainty over St. Patrick's connection with Lough Derg, it is believed that St. Dabheoc, an alleged disciple of St. Patrick was the earliest saint associated with the lake until he was overtaken and overshadowed by the association of Lough Derg with St. Patrick. Moreover, Harbison suggests that it was the Augustinians who first popularised St. Patrick's connection with the lake, and linked him to the cave in order to increase the pilgrimage traffic. St. Patrick, being well-known throughout Ireland, was perhaps considered a more likely draw for pilgrims than the local St. Dabheoc.<sup>122</sup> It is instructive to recall in the quotation above from the *Annals of Ulster* concerning the profanation of the Termon in 1471 that Colla's son was avenged upon through the 'vengeance of God and St. Davog' and not the vengeance of God and St. Patrick.<sup>123</sup>

Mac Leighim's 1920 examination of the 'Ancient things in Lady's Island district' reported that when the Normans (the Hay and Stafford families) settled at Tacumshane, one of the oldest religious foundations in the Parish of Our Lady's Island, they set aside St. Fintan, the old Irish patron and founder of the place, and erected St. Catherine in his place.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, it is possible that dedication of the beds to St. Catherine on Lough Derg may have been an

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<sup>119</sup> Murphy, 'Our Lady's Island', p. 13.

<sup>120</sup> Murphy, *Our Lady's Island*, pp 11-19.

<sup>121</sup> Flood, *History of the diocese of Ferns*, p. 166.

<sup>122</sup> Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*, pp 64-65.

<sup>123</sup> Cunningham, *Lough Derg*, p. 12.

<sup>124</sup> A. Mac Leighim, 'A survey of the ancient things in Lady's Island district' in *The Past: the Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, no. 1 (1920), pp 133-40.

Augustinian idea, and that the bed dedicated to her may originally have been dedicated to St. Adomnan.<sup>125</sup> Once again dedication to this non-Irish saint was quite possibly an Augustinian idea. Our Lady's Island continued to be a place of pilgrimage throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A papal *bull*a or seal was found in 1941 on the island by the Druhan family while ploughing, and was believed to have been attached to a document issued by Pope Martin V (1417-1431) granting indulgences to pilgrims to Lady's Island. Furthermore, the lands were owned by the diocese after the Suppression, and later leased to the Walter Browne of Mulrankin in 1536 for an annual rent of £3.6.8.<sup>126</sup> It is not known how Walter Browne made use of Lady's Island during the sixteenth century as pilgrimage to the site appears to have continued.

#### IV

Considering all the evidence from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the traditional elements of the pilgrimage as it was experienced at Lough Derg, Croagh Patrick and Our Lady's Island were largely based on hagiography and folklore. The penitential pilgrimages to Lough Derg and Croagh Patrick differed ever so slightly to Our Lady's Island, not only in their devotional orientation but mainly because Our Lady's Island was the only site attached to a holy well. In a Latin life of St. Abban, it is stated that he cured a deaf mute: 'O Jesus, who didst once give speech to a brute beast, the ass, give utterance to this man, said he. And it was done thereupon as he requested'.<sup>127</sup> It is possible that Our Lady's Well was credited with healing powers to which pilgrims came to seek healing through the power of St. Abban. The importance of folklore reinforced the sacredness of the pilgrimage site. The close political and mythological links between Lough Derg and Croagh Patrick as examined by Yolande de Pontfarcy, highlight the circumstances in which one grew out of the other, first in history and then in folk tradition.<sup>128</sup> In addition to hagiography and folklore, religious poetry also emphasised the importance of penance in the pilgrim experience and captured the various personal reactions to it. In an unpublished mid-sixteenth-century poem, the poet explained the meaning and purpose of St. Patrick's Purgatory 'where repentance is made and it is that which firmly destroys the sins committed by all and sundry'.<sup>129</sup> The poet also

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<sup>125</sup> Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*, p. 63.

<sup>126</sup> Murphy, 'Our Lady's Island', p. 114.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>128</sup> Haren and Pontfarcy, *Medieval pilgrimage*, pp 30-33, 35-42.

<sup>129</sup> Jefferies, *History of the diocese of Clogher*, p.129.

described the holy mountain of Croagh Patrick: 'I am fond of western Cruach'.<sup>130</sup> All three pilgrimage sites at one point were under the care of the same religious congregation, the Canons Regular of St. Augustine. However, while pilgrimages to Lough Derg, Croagh Patrick and Our Lady's Island flourished in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, they suffered a change in the seventeenth century. It is here that the Franciscans enter into the history of Lough Derg.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 129.

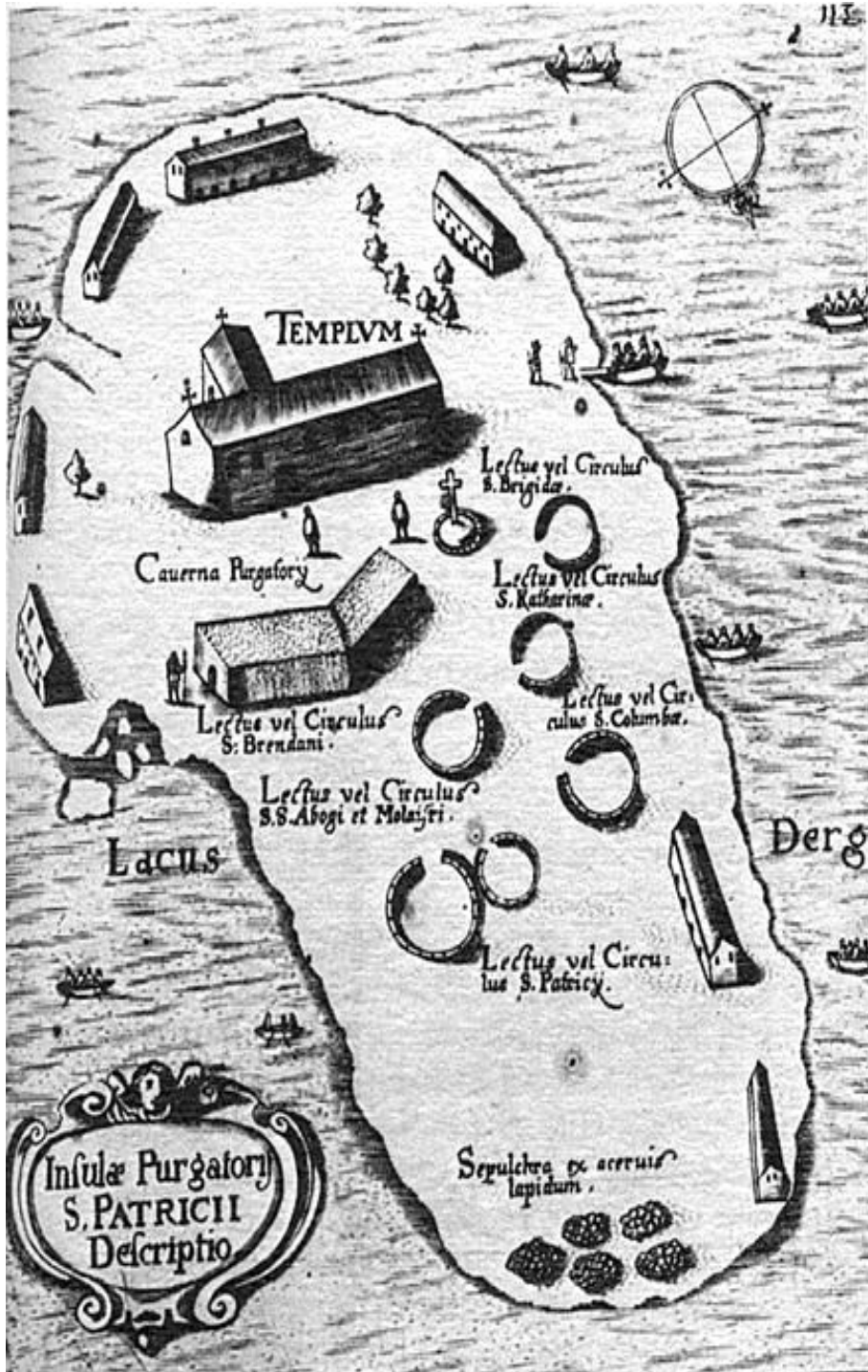


Fig. 4: Thomas Carve's Map of Station Island (1666) in Shane Leslie *St. Patrick's Purgatory*.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE RISE OF THE FRANCISCANS  
1600-1780

Following on from the main pilgrimage events of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the practice of the pilgrimage as experienced at Lough Derg in the seventeenth century underwent significant changes, most notably the arrival of the Franciscan friars and the penitential exercises that were conducted on Station Island. The first explicit reference to this type of devotional practice that characterized the Lough Derg pilgrimage at the start of the seventeenth-century comes from the Irish Franciscan Michael O'Clery's account of c. 1630.<sup>131</sup> In his account O'Clery makes reference to the stations which consisted of seven saint's beds dedicated to Saints Patrick, Bridget, Colmcille, Molaise, Brendan, Dabheoc, and Catherine.<sup>132</sup> At each bed, the pilgrim went 'three times sunwise' round the outside of the bed, reciting three *Paters*, three *Aves* and one *Credo*. After this the pilgrim moved to the inside and went 'three more times sunwise' round the bed saying the same number of prayers on their knees.<sup>133</sup> This aspect of doing stations at the penitential beds would seem to be a new form of penance, very distinct from the rituals that characterized the medieval pilgrimage.

In 1624, the contemporary writer and Rector of the Irish College in Paris, Fr. Messingham, detailed the course of penance as then performed on Lough Derg, with specific reference to the penitential beds.<sup>134</sup> During the nine days, he noted that pilgrims observed 'a rigorous fast on oaten bread and water from the lake'.<sup>135</sup> Pilgrims began barefoot with a visit to the church and walked around on their knees seven times inside and outside, repeating prayers. Afterwards they proceeded to the seven stations, known as *lecti poenosi*, which were formerly small churches, or sanctuaries dedicated to various saints.<sup>136</sup> Having completed all the stations it was customary to visit the lake, 'to which tradition pointed as the place in which St. Patrick had knelt in prayer'.<sup>137</sup> All this pilgrimage and prayer was repeated three times each day, morning, noon and evening, during the first seven days. On the eighth day it was repeated six times with confession and communion following on the morning of the

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<sup>131</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 69.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>134</sup> Thomas Messingham, *Florilegium Insulae Sanctorum* (Paris, 1624), pp 87-108. Also cited in Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 91.

<sup>135</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 127.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

ninth day as well as the twenty-four hour vigil inside the cave. By the year 1625, Archbishop Fleming of Dublin noted the vast numbers of pilgrims visiting Lough Derg: ‘from every corner of the kingdom so much in fact that many have been obliged to return without satisfying their pious desire, as a result of there being no room for landing on the island’.<sup>138</sup> In his report to the Internuncio at Brussels, he revealed the manner of performing the pilgrimage, with ‘each pilgrim from the day he arrives on the island till the tenth following day, is devoted to fasting, watching, and prayer’.<sup>139</sup> From the following accounts, it is obvious that Lough Derg attracted a considerable number of pilgrims in the early to mid-seventeenth century, who besides their fasting, watching, meditation and other bodily austerities, recited a numbers of prayers. However, according to O’Connor, ‘so great was the concourse of pilgrims that the place became an object of jealousy to the government’.<sup>140</sup>

During this time the English government consolidated its grip on the country and as a result, the pilgrimage itself came under direct attack. In the eyes of the reformers, Lough Derg represented a particularly repellent example of Catholic superstition, a view reinforced by the many legends and visions associated with the place. Given the religious climate of the time, it was hardly surprising that orders were given by the Lords Justice for the destruction of St. Patrick’s Purgatory in 1632. These orders were carried out under the direction of the Church of Ireland bishop of Clogher, James Spottiswoode. The cave, penitential beds and all other buildings were completely levelled. The reaction of the local people was apparent from the following extract taken from the report which the bishop wrote to Dr. Ussher, the Protestant archbishop of Armagh:

The country people expected that St Patrick would have wrought some miracles; but thanks be to God none of my company received any other harm than the bad waves, broken cawsies, and the dangers of going in a little boat: yet one comfort is, that we effected that for which we came hither, which was more than was expected could be done in so short a time, which hath wonderfully displeased them who were bewitched with their fooleries.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 95.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>140</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 129.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

While access to the Island was denied, pilgrims circumvented authority by praying as they walked around the shore of the lake.<sup>142</sup> While they prayed at the lake shore they often extended their hands towards the island.<sup>143</sup> However, by the mid-seventeenth century pilgrims had restarted the pilgrimage on Station Island. Throughout the rest of the seventeenth century the pattern of suppression continued. Papal Nuncio, Rinnucinni, in 1648 stated that the Calvinists in their rage filled up the Purgatory.<sup>144</sup> It is understood that the Franciscans were still labouring on the island between 1648 and 1651, as the Jesuits in Ireland sent a report of their mission to Rome which referred to an attack made on St. Patrick's Purgatory. Parliamentary cavalry and foot soldiers were sent against this island and in an infuriated attempt they expelled the Franciscan friars.<sup>145</sup> There is no evidence to prove the presence of the Franciscans on Lough Derg for almost seventy years after this, but, it can be assumed they continued to minister to the pilgrims going there. The pilgrimage was as popular as ever during those years. In 1704 pilgrims were once again resorting to Station Island in such great numbers that an Act of Queen Anne's government was passed to restrain them. This Act prohibited assembly at Lough Derg under penalty of a ten-shilling fine or, in default of payment, a public whipping.<sup>146</sup> According to Walsh, a bigoted Protestant who lived in the neighbourhood in 1710 did all in his power to put an end to it by imposing exorbitant fines on the pilgrims, and about the same time 'libellous pamphlets and calumnies were spread ridiculing the devotions on the island'.<sup>147</sup> By 1714 legislation made it difficult to hold Mass in public throughout the country, but, according to Hugh MacMahon, bishop of Clogher, the pilgrimage to Lough Derg continued to flourish. Various priests attended to the needs of the pilgrims but, in MacMahon's words 'the Franciscan Fathers beyond all other ecclesiastics who come there, labour the most strenuously'.<sup>148</sup> Despite persecution, eviction, dwindling numbers and general hardship, the Franciscans kept up their task of administering spiritual aid to the Lough Derg pilgrims until the latter part of the eighteenth century.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Mary Lee Nolan, 'Irish pilgrimage: the different tradition' in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, lxxiii, no. 3 (1983), pp 421-38.

<sup>143</sup> Curtaayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 80.

<sup>144</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 81.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>147</sup> R. Walsh, 'Glimpses of the Penal Times' in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, xxix (1911), p.138. See also Cathaldus Giblin, 'The Franciscan ministry in the diocese of Clogher' in *Clogher Record*, vii, no. 2 (1970), pp 149-203.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>149</sup> Giblin, 'The Franciscan ministry', pp 149-203.



It is difficult to get an adequate idea from the late medieval and early modern descriptions of the physical appearance of Station Island as it was before 1632, when Spottiswoode completely demolished all the buildings. The first detailed map of Station Island dated 1666, comes from the book *Lyra Hibernica* by Fr. Thomas Carve and features on the top left hand corner of this chapter. Oriented so that north is near the bottom–right corner of the map, it shows the ‘templum’ or St. Patrick’s chapel at the south, with the Purgatory northeast of it and the penitential beds northwest of that, even showing early evidence for the bed of St. Catherine. According to the mid-seventeenth-century Protestant bishop of Clogher, Henry Jones, there were other buildings on the island including a house for the hearing of confessions, as well as various Irish houses covered with thatch but recently built.<sup>150</sup> Between the church and the cave there was a heap of stones bearing a broken cross dedicated to Saint Patrick which was kissed by the pilgrims as they alighted on the island.<sup>151</sup> There was another cross made of interwoven twigs to the east of the church; on it were three pieces of bell said to have belonged to St. Patrick. Pilgrims kissed the black stone and some fragment of the bell.<sup>152</sup> Dedicated to the same saint was a well on the island which was likely blocked up in the demolition of 1632. O’Clery gave an account of this: ‘after they have all come out of the cave, they should all go three times under the water at the spot which is called Patrick’s pool’.<sup>153</sup> The penitential beds dedicated to the various Irish Saints including, Patrick, Brigid, Colmcille, Molaisse, Brendan and Dabheoc are clearly featured on the map and reinforce the special association they had with the traditional pilgrimage. Such references to non-local saints appealed to many pilgrims who came from as far as Cork.<sup>154</sup>

The first section of this chapter examines the influence of the Franciscans at Lough Derg throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. How did the Franciscans cater for the spiritual and devotional needs of the pilgrims going to Lough Derg at this time are also examined. However, in order to begin answering this question the impact of the Counter-Reformation must be considered. In the previous chapter in order to understand what the Cistercians and Augustinians were doing at the turn of the thirteenth century it was necessary to grasp firstly, the significance of the newly developing doctrine of Purgatory which was being heavily debated at this time, and secondly, how the *Tractatus* helped to advertise the cave as a legitimate place in the afterlife quite distinct from heaven and hell. Purgatory rose

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<sup>150</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, pp 99-102.

<sup>151</sup> J. M. Picard and Y. de Pontfarcy, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory* (Dublin, 1985), p.13.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>154</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland, 1600-01* (London, 1905), p. 297.

to an official status among the doctrines of Latin Church by the end of the thirteenth century. As Le Goff noted the doctrine of Purgatory was enthusiastically adopted by society as references to it appear in wills, sermons, and in vernacular literature.<sup>155</sup> The accounts of the otherworld journeys not only helped to confirm the relationship between this world and the next that was being developed by theologians, but it also helped to bolster Cistercian influence in the theological debates over purgatory.<sup>156</sup>

One key feature of the Counter-Reformation was to reform the existing institutional church by fostering a renewal of its spiritual life and mission. Counter-Reformation clergy were to catechize, administer the sacraments, and extirpate superstition. This raises important questions about the role of the Franciscans at Lough Derg in formulating a Catholic ideology, underpinned by Counter-Reformation devotional practices. The intellectual heritage of the Franciscan community encourages an even greater examination of their devotional and historical writings such as the catechism. In this there are references to St. Patrick and his purgatory along with images of the saint. Fundamentally, the most important shift in the character of the pilgrimage exercises has generally been overlooked. On the contrary, one study by the historian Raymond Gillespie describes the efforts which were made to transform the pilgrimage from a set of popular rituals into an inner spiritual experience. This had an impact on the conduct of the pilgrimage as the Franciscans adopted new roles as preachers and confessors. Preachers emphasized the spiritual dimension of the inner pilgrimage journey rather than its outward manifestations with their accompanying social elements.<sup>157</sup> This shift away from a religion of the exterior to a religion of the interior was exemplified in the manner in which the pilgrimage activities were carried out, for example, the dipping of one's feet in the lake as a reminder of one's baptism, and an example of the interior. Two accounts from the 1720s, one by the Protestant minister John Richardson, in an otherwise harshly critical account of the pilgrimage, and the other by the Dominican priest Dominick Brullaughan, interpret the spiritual symbolism of the stational prayers, which in general indicate that the process of providing Tridentine-style spiritual direction for pilgrims was well under way by the end of the seventeenth century. The second part of the chapter focuses on the remaining pilgrimage sites which are worth comparing with Lough Derg at this time.

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<sup>155</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 237.

<sup>156</sup> French, 'Ritual, gender and power strategies', p. 109.

<sup>157</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage', pp 167-79.

There is much evidence to indicate that the Franciscans in the seventeenth century were strong innovative reformers, who assumed many roles to spread the devotional message of Tridentine spirituality, which emphasised the role of the priest who acted as mediator between God and humanity especially in offering up the Mass.<sup>158</sup> It was a spirituality strongly rooted in the Church's tradition with the use of Latin and Gregorian chant. Moreover, Tridentine Spirituality was the concrete way in which the Council of Trent (1545-63) impacted upon belief among Catholics and the way the Church conducted its day to day ministries.<sup>159</sup> Catechetical literature that was produced on the Continent and formed an integral part of the Catholic faith and practice in the seventeenth century is one means of how the Franciscans spread their Tridentine message to a Catholic audience. Elements of the cult of St. Patrick and the Purgatory were put to use as a catechetical tool by the Franciscans. According to the teachings of Trent, the catechism was the heart of reform in the Irish Catholic Church. Historian, Salvador Ryan points out that the publication of *An Teagasg Críosaíde* in 1611 marked a water-shed in the history of Irish exiles in the seventeenth century.<sup>160</sup> It was not only a catechism in the Tridentine mould but also the work of an individual, 'Giolla Brighde Ó hEoghusa, native of Clogher diocese, intimate of Gaelic Ireland, distinguished poet and Irish Franciscan'.<sup>161</sup> The purpose of his catechism was to make the Christian doctrine, as communicated through the Tridentine catechisms, available to an Irish-speaking audience. In other words, as Ryan suggests, his catechism was to act as a bridge between popular religion in Gaelic Ireland and the international religion of the Catholic reform.<sup>162</sup>

The issue of the catechism here has more to do with the frontispiece illustration of Ireland's patron, St. Patrick. The picture of Patrick is not the most important feature, but rather the depiction of the open cave immediately behind the saint. This iconography emphasised traditional devotional themes, most notably pilgrimage and repentance. Bernadette Cunningham and Raymond Gillespie argue that this image was designed to communicate the

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<sup>158</sup> Adolphe Tanquerey, *The spiritual life: a treatise on ascetical and mystical theology* (Belgium, 1930), pp 257-267.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-267.

<sup>160</sup> Salvador Ryan, 'Bonaventura Ó hEoghusa's "An Teagasg Críosaíde" (1611/1614): a reassessment of its audience and use' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, lviii (2004), pp 259-67.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>162</sup> Salvador Ryan, 'Popular religion in Gaelic Ireland, 1445-1645' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 2 vols, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2002), ii, pp 31-58.

fundamental truths of the Catholic faith to the Irish people.<sup>163</sup> The image of St. Patrick and his purgatory demonstrated the catechetical significance which the Franciscans attached to the example of this holy man. Pilgrimages and relics, traditional devotional practices associated with saints, were harnessed as tools to promote devotion, thus, reinforcing the message of the Counter-Reformation catechists, and increasing the likelihood of their message having an impact. Other early seventeenth-century devotional texts also promoted the image of Patrick as a holy man, and an example, to be followed. Old English priest, Geoffrey Keating, when writing his *Trí bior-ghaoithe an Bháis*, described the penitential lifestyle of Patrick and other Irish saints: ‘their fasting, praying, almsgiving, in addition to their work of preaching and administering the sacraments’.<sup>164</sup> Writing in the second decade of the seventeenth century, the Franciscan Aodh Mac Aingil was keen to adopt symbols of traditional spirituality in his theological tract on the Sacrament of Penance, *Scáthán Shacramuinte na hAithridhe*.<sup>165</sup> Referring to Lough Derg, he reminded pilgrims of the tangible association of the place with St. Patrick, that ‘we have ourselves seen the wells where he prayed, the stones where he slept, the bed where he interceded with God to show grace and mercy to his people’.<sup>166</sup>

Those in Ireland who were introduced to Counter-Reformation literature and teaching were thus being exposed to a religion that was highly combative. Nicholas Canny suggests that a great deal of care was taken to explain where Protestants had deviated from the truth, and Irish Catholics were provided with ready-made answers to counter the challenges posed by Protestant theologians.<sup>167</sup> In the 1630s Keating denied Meredith Hanmer’s suggestion that it was not St. Patrick who established the pilgrimage.<sup>168</sup> It cannot be underestimated either that these devotional tracts created a sense of identity with Catholic Europe. In this context, it should be understood that the Franciscans’ work of gathering Gaelic sources for the presentation of the stories of Ireland’s past, including the lives of the saints was a way of asserting the continuity of the Catholic Church. Mac Aingil, for instance, was very thorough in his assertion that St. Patrick ordered the penitential pilgrimages to Croagh Patrick, Down,

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<sup>163</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, ‘The most adaptable of saints’, pp 82-104.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 97

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>166</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, ‘The most adaptable of saints’, p. 96.

<sup>167</sup> Nicholas Canny, ‘The formation of the Irish mind: religion, politics and Gaelic Irish literature 1580-1750’ in *Past & Present*, no. 95 (1982), pp 91-116.

<sup>168</sup> Geoffrey Keating, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (ed), David Comyn and P.S. Dinneen (4 vols, London, 1902-14), i, 46-49.

Saul and Lough Derg. Thus, the link between the penitential beds on Station Island dedicated to the six Irish saints and Franciscan culture becomes all the more apparent. Both Cunningham and Gillespie argue that Old English Counter-Reformation Catholics saw the need for revision of some of the traditional lives of Patrick when presenting his story to a Roman audience.<sup>169</sup> The concept of Patrick as patriarch was emphasised by Counter-Reformation writers, at the expense of the image of the miracle-working prophet. The existing iconographic evidence supports the suggestion that the image of a more patriarchal St. Patrick was being promoted. This was to make him more acceptable to Tridentine standards. Thomas Messingham's 1624 publication *Florilegium Insulae sanctorum* contained a frontispiece portraying a bearded St. Patrick dressed in vestments of the Tridentine bishop with his patriarchal staff.<sup>170</sup>



Fig. 5: St. Patrick and the Purgatory from Ó hEodhasa's *Teagasc Criostai* (Antwerp, 1611).

<sup>169</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The most adaptable of saints', p. 91.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.



Fig. 6: The patriarchal image published in Messingham's *Florilegium Insulae Sanctorum* (1624).

In an effort to reinforce the message of the Counter-Reformation, preaching was another means of reform adopted by the Franciscans at Lough Derg. One early eighteenth-century Ulster Franciscan preacher stressed that the grace and mercy of God were available not only in Rome, Lough Derg, or other lonely or saintly places, and that the pilgrimage to Lough Derg was no more effective than living an upright life.<sup>171</sup> The earliest references to preaching as part of the pilgrimage appear in the activities of the Rev. Francis Kirwan at the Purgatory in the 1630s. His later biographer John Lynch recorded that Kirwan visited the island, and ‘there did he apply himself to hearing confessions and preaching sermons’.<sup>172</sup> By 1701, Michael Hewson, the Church of Ireland rector of St. Andrew’s parish, Dublin, noted that mass was celebrated on the island several times a day and that there was a daily sermon in Irish.<sup>173</sup> According to Cunningham, the content of these sermons is unknown, but the interpretation of Scripture was a key element in the structure.<sup>174</sup> One early eighteenth-century Irish poem describes the outstanding ability of Father Philip Gartland, a Franciscan preacher at Lough Derg who ‘proved his worth as a preacher by explaining the writings of the Church Fathers and examining the Gospels’.<sup>175</sup>

Further evidence to preaching at the site was recorded by the bishop of Clogher, Hugh MacMahon, in his *Relatio* of the diocese sent to Rome in 1714. He observed that there was a sermon twice or three times a day, and that ‘such is the fervour of the pilgrims that the preacher is frequently interrupted by sobs and outbursts of weeping among the congregation’.<sup>176</sup> To achieve such effects, preachers needed to be skilled in the art of rhetoric.<sup>177</sup> Another preacher, Francis Magrath O.F.M, received faculties for confessing and preaching in 1736.<sup>178</sup> He also worked with the Franciscans attached to Lough Derg. Fr. Brullaughan also paid frequent visits to the island and often preached to the people there. He found that the faithful were not well informed regarding the holy place, and ‘of the method of performing the pilgrimage, which is the most arduous in the whole world’.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, ‘The Lough Derg pilgrimage’, p. 169.

<sup>172</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 108.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>174</sup> Bernadette Cunningham, ‘Zeal for God and Souls: Counter-Reformation preaching in early-seventeenth century Ireland’ in Alan J. Fletcher and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *Irish Preaching, 700-1700* (Dublin, 2001), pp 108-26.

<sup>175</sup> Séamus P. Moore, ‘Poems in Irish on 18<sup>th</sup> century priests’ in *Clogher Record*, i, no. 3 (1955), pp 53-65.

<sup>176</sup> P. J. Flanagan, ‘The diocese of Clogher in 1714’ in *Clogher Record*, i, no. 3 (1955), p. 129.

<sup>177</sup> Cunningham, ‘Zeal for God and Souls’, pp 108-26.

<sup>178</sup> Cathaldus Giblin, ‘The Franciscan ministry’, pp 175. Two inscribed stones on the wall of the Basilica there bear his name and were erected by him in 1753.

<sup>179</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, pp 169-70.

In addition to Counter-Reformation preaching at the site, there were other indications to Tridentine spirituality being provided to the pilgrims on Lough Derg, as noted by the Protestant rector, John Richardson in his book *The great folly of pilgrimage* published in 1727. As part of his concern to demonstrate ‘the great blindness and credulity of the Irish papists and the sway which their priests have over them’, Richardson visited the site for himself and made a copy of the written ‘instructions’ that the pilgrims observed. The earliest printed guide-book given to pilgrims on the island was first produced in 1726 by the Dominican priest Dominick Brullaughan.<sup>180</sup> This little handbook with the following title ‘The Pilgrimage of Lough Derg, by B.D’ was published in several places, including Belfast, Dublin and Strabane.<sup>181</sup> The author transposed the initials of his name, ‘B.D’ in order to escape the danger of detection during the Penal Laws.<sup>182</sup> Richardson described the ten-day pilgrimage from the removing of the pilgrim’s shoes and the uncovering of their heads before arrival on the island; their greeting by the prior; their reciting of *Paters, Aves, and Credos*; their kissing of stones; their walking around various altars, chapels, and penitential beds; and their walking into the water and performing further rituals there. He found that the pilgrims observed the instructions exactly as they were laid out in the handout which were being kept there both for the direction of the pilgrims, and for their satisfaction, ‘as to the reasonableness and efficacy of the many foolish things imposed upon them’.<sup>183</sup>

The significance of these written instructions along with the scriptural meaning of those instructions signalled a major turning point in the practice of the pilgrimage. It was these instructions, rather than custom, that now sanctioned the practice of the pilgrimage. Richardson noted ‘how impertinently the scriptures are quoted, and how miserably they are wrested and perverted to countenance the most ridiculous folly and superstition’. He contested ‘their placing religion and morality in numbers’. The rounds of the penitential beds associated with the saints were recorded, but the instructions made no mention of any particular devotions or prayers associated with the saints. Instead, the focus was on the triads of *Paters, Aves, and Credos* recited so ‘that we may obtain from God true contrition of heart, sincere confession of mouth, and a full satisfaction of deeds, and invoking the Trinity, ‘beseeching that by the power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and goodness of the Holy

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<sup>180</sup> McGuinness, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 55.

<sup>181</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 211.

<sup>182</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 169.

<sup>183</sup> Richardson, *The great folly*, pp 51-61.



Ghost we may obtain full remission of all our sins'.<sup>184</sup> Pilgrims also had the option of saying twelve *Paters* 'to obtain the twelve fruits of the Holy Ghost, Charity, Joy, Peace, Benignity, Goodness, Longanimity, Mildness, Modesty, and Contenance'.<sup>185</sup> The station was continued at the seven penal beds, where the pilgrim was 'to do penance for the seven capital sins', and to invoke God, and to obtain 'the seven moral virtues'. Stations in the water were continued in a similar manner but this time, Richardson indicated that instead of saying three *Paters*, pilgrims recited five *Paters*, *Aves*, and one *credo* so 'that we may draw from his five wounds a remedy for the sins occasioned by our fives senses'. The visit to the cave was again explained in biblical terms:

We enter the cave or sepulchre, where we remain 24 hours, to obey the command of the Lord, by Jof. 2. Ch. Enter thou into the rock, and be thou hidden in the earth from the face of the Lord and glory of his majesty: For our sins have placed us in the inferior lake, in dark places, and in the shadow of death, Psal. 87. My sin placed me in the obscure places as the dead of the world.<sup>186</sup>

Fr. Dominick Brullaughan described the cave as a 'sepulchre' where pilgrims would watch, pray and fast for twenty four hours.<sup>187</sup> He noted that often there was so great a crowd of pilgrims that another cave was built of stones in honour of Saint Patrick.<sup>188</sup> According to Brullaughan two groups, men first, women second, emerged 'before dawn and three times cast themselves in the lake in the name of the Holy Trinity in which we were first absolved by Baptism...'<sup>189</sup> So the cave was death and rebirth, penance and imprisonment, twenty-four hours fasting from food and then a new baptism.<sup>190</sup> According to Joseph McGuinness, native Irish poetry presented the cave and island as symbols of the spiritual journey of the pilgrimage.<sup>191</sup> The pilgrim in the cave was buried with Christ, contemplating his sins, so that he could emerge with the Risen Christ, freed from all sin.<sup>192</sup> Once more McGuinness notes how strong the symbolism of baptism was in this tradition. Some poems directly compare the lake with the River Jordan in which Jesus was baptised. A similar idea was expressed rather differently in the commentary of Dominick Brullaughan. He noted: 'Just as the Israelites

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 51-56.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 51-61.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 51-61.

<sup>187</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 118.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 118

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>190</sup> Terence Dewsnap, *Island of Daemons: the Lough Derg pilgrimage and the poet Patrick Kavanagh* (Delaware, 2008), pp 21-82.

<sup>191</sup> McGuinness, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 74.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 74.

crossed the Red Sea to freedom from slavery, so the pilgrim crosses the ‘Red Lake’ (Loch Dearg) to be freed from sin.<sup>193</sup>

The scriptural underpinning of these instructions was clearly demonstrated in the prayers and actions of the pilgrims. Pilgrims were given these instructions, printed in modern form, and encouraged to mediate on their actions, turning the ritual into an example of Tridentine spirituality.<sup>194</sup> In examining Richardson’s account, Gillespie emphasises that while the new prescriptions retained many of the physical elements of the traditional pilgrimage, as it had been known to the sixteenth-century poets—the cave, the stones in the lake, and the penitential beds—there was superimposed on them an elaborate matrix of Tridentine doctrine and devotion.<sup>195</sup> The use of numbers as mnemonics, whether for three persons of the Trinity, the seven moral virtues, or the twelve fruits of the Holy Ghost, was intended for pilgrims who were not literate. Gillespie points out that the numbering system aided the memorizing of important Christian doctrine in abbreviated format.<sup>196</sup> Richardson demonstrated his contempt for this numbering system, ‘having no manner of foundation either in the nature of the thing, or in the word of God’.<sup>197</sup> The printed word constituted the real success of the Franciscan mission at Lough Derg.

## II

It is with the same considerations that we approach the second case study that of Our Lady’s Island, as well as pointing out some of the key elements that characterised the pilgrimage at the start of seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. By the early seventeenth century pilgrimages were a major feature of the island. In 1607, Pope Paul V addressed a ‘brief to the clergy, nobility and faithful people of the kingdom of Ireland’ in which he exhorted them ‘to imitate the martyrs of their race and so prove themselves worthy sons of their forefathers who merited for Ireland the title of Island of Saints’.<sup>198</sup> He also granted indulgences to pilgrims to Lady’s Island on the Feast of Our Lady and on the Feast of the Assumption: *In festo Nativitatis et Assumptionis beatae Mariae Virginis ecclesiam in Insula eiusdem beatae*

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>194</sup> Raymond Gillespie, ‘The Irish Franciscans, 1600-1700’ in Edel Bhreathnach, Joseph MacMahon and John McCafferty (eds), *The Irish Franciscans, 1534-1990* (Dublin, 2009), p.69.

<sup>195</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, ‘The Lough Derg pilgrimage’, p. 175.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>197</sup> Richardson, *The great folly*, pp 52-61.

<sup>198</sup> [www.ourladysisland.ie](http://www.ourladysisland.ie). May. 2011.

*Mariae*.<sup>199</sup> Lough Derg was also signalled out for special indulgences at this time. In 1649, only twelve years after the complete demolition of St. Patrick's Purgatory, Cromwell and his army attacked Our Lady's Island 'where the holy men who long had ministered at the altar, and comforted the weary pilgrim, met the same fate as awaited the friars of the Order of St. Francis a few days later around the altars of their convent at Wexford'.<sup>200</sup> The church was unroofed and desecrated and the castle was burned. It might naturally be concluded that this ruin and desolation of Our Lady's Shrine would put an end to future pilgrimages to Our Lady's Island. This was not the case as a mere twenty years after Cromwell's massacre of 1649, pilgrims were flocking to Our Lady's Island once more. During the penal era, certain abuses arose which were reported to Rome and caused the Pope to take action. Benedict XIV deemed it necessary to suppress several Irish pilgrimages but he especially exempted those of Lough Derg and Our Lady's Island. The Irish bishops mitigated the prohibition somewhat and declared 'that if there were any virtue or power of healing naturally or through the intercession of a Saint, in the waters of the wells, the priests were not to prevent people from making the pilgrimage'.<sup>201</sup> The government of the day for their own reasons, tried to put a stop to pilgrimages. They particularly aimed at closing down Lough Derg and yet Bishop MacMahon was able to report to Rome in 1714:

It is regarded by all as little short of a prodigy how this pilgrimage, though prohibited by name, in the foremost place, and under the most severe penalties by Act of Parliament, suffered little or no interruption... Though everywhere else throughout the kingdom the ecclesiastical functions have ceased, on account of the prevailing persecution; in this Island, as if it were placed in another orb, the exercise of religion is free and public.<sup>202</sup>

Local tradition states that Our Lady's Island pilgrimage also continued exempt and undisturbed during this terrible period. Tomás O'Brion's 'Some interesting historical finds in Co. Wexford' noted that a penal cross from Lough Derg acted as a physical link between the two sites:

The writer has in his possession two other interesting things connected with Lady's Island. The one is a statue of Our Lady – evidently very old – and said to have been found many years ago in a niche in the ruins of the church on the island. The other is a 'penal cross' bearing the date 1756, and brought by a pilgrim from Lough Derg to a friend in Lady's Island, with whom he was accustomed to stay when attending the

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<sup>199</sup> Corish 'Two centuries of Catholicism' pp 222-45.

<sup>200</sup> Murphy, 'Our Lady's Island', p. 15.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>202</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 113.

pilgrimage in the latter place. This bears out the tradition that Lough Derg and Our Lady's Island were closely associated in olden times.<sup>203</sup>

Unlike Lough Derg which was well documented, it is difficult to measure the complete seventeenth-century experience of the pilgrimage to Our Lady's Island because only a few pilgrims recorded anything specific about the nature of the pilgrimage exercises. In any case, these reflections do not mean that the elements of this traditional pilgrimage cannot be traced, for there are some useful descriptions outlining key features of the pilgrimage routine. The first account is an anonymous topographical description of the Barony of Forth, entitled 'briefe description of the barony of forth, in the county of Wexford, together with a relation of the disposition and some peculiar customs' which was written in 1670.<sup>204</sup> The second account is by an officer in Cromwell's army, Colonel Solomon Richards written in 1682. Using these historical accounts, it is possible to evaluate the extent to which religious practice was similar to that on Lough Derg, given that Wexford was most committed to the Catholicism favoured by the official church.<sup>205</sup> A number of clergymen who had trained on the continent, and exposed to Tridentine ideals, assumed the role and responsibility of attending to the flocks of pilgrims going there. In the following accounts, the second especially, it is possible to detect some aspects where Tridentine spirituality was imposed on the pilgrimage.

### III

The first account, written in 1670, is considered to be by an anonymous priest, and is extremely valuable from a religious point of view. It is concerned solely with the Barony of Forth which included Our Lady's Island. The author's name is not given, but it is clear from the text that he was a native of Forth, a Catholic, and as suggested by Hore quite possibly a priest. The particular attention he gave to the Sinnott family suggests that it was his own. He also described the pilgrimage at Our Lady's Island, but gave no details of the devotions:

Within this Ismus (containing twelve acres) is a Church, builded and dedicated to the glorious and immaculate virgin Mother; by impotent and infirme pilgrims, and a Multitude of persons of all Qualities from all provinces and parts of Ireland, daily frequented, and with fervent devotion visited, who, praying and making some

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<sup>203</sup> Tomás O'Brion, 'Some interesting historical finds in Co. Wexford' in *The Past*, no. 3 (1925), pp 107-14.

<sup>204</sup> Herbert F. Hore, 'An account of the barony of Forth, in the county of Wexford: written at the close of the seventeenth century' in *The Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society, new series*, iv, no. 1 (1862), pp 53-84.

<sup>205</sup> Corish, 'Two centuries of Catholicism', pp 222-45.

oblacions, or extending charitable Benevolence to Indigents there residing, have been miraculously cured of grievous Maladyes, and helped to the perfect use of naturally defective Limmes, or accidentally enfeebled or impaired Sences.<sup>206</sup>

A particular kind of pilgrim ‘impotent and infirme’ visited this place and were miraculously cured of grievous maladies. Sinnott made some references to the ‘incomparablie cleare and whole some Springs and Fountains’ in the Barony of Forth which were dedicated to some other local saints.<sup>207</sup> Part of the ritual activity at Our Lady’s Island involved praying, drinking the healings waters as well as bathing. Some pilgrims made charitable donations to the Canons Regular of St. Francis, who were secretly hiding there, owing to the rigour of the penal laws.<sup>208</sup> Our Lady’s Island played a spiritual and indeed a curative role. The weak and disabled attended, as well as those suffering from serious ill health. William Shee of Kilkenny, noted in his prayerbook in 1694, ‘my daughter, Ellen, being very ill I promised to make a pilgrimage to Our Lady’s Island in honour of our Blessed Lady. This performed’.<sup>209</sup> From these descriptions it emerged that the ritual activities performed at Our Lady’s Island focused on healing rather than with any rigorous forms of penance associated with Lough Derg. Yet, at both places there was still a communal performance and sense of tangibility of the natural features of the pilgrimage. Pilgrims dipping their feet in the water and touching stones all involved a specific directionality of movement, but also a real physical contact with the very elements made holy by the saints.

The sincerity with which these devotional exercises were carried out is evident in Sinnott’s comments. The people, he said, keep patron days very devoutly, by penance and the Eucharist in honour of God and his Saints.<sup>210</sup> Those who did not on such days penitently (by confession to his spiritual pastor) purge his conscience from mortal sin, be reconciled to his neighbours, and reverently receive the sacred Eucharist was deemed profane.<sup>211</sup> It was also customary on such festivals to invite neighboring friends back to the house to cheerfully, piously and civilly entertain.<sup>212</sup> Furthermore, they were very precise and exact in keeping the Church’s fasts. At wakes and funerals there were no rude emulations or clamours, as in so

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<sup>206</sup> Hore, ‘An account of the barony of Forth’, pp 53-84.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>208</sup> Murphy, *Our Lady’s Island*, p. 11.

<sup>209</sup> J. F. Ainsworth, ‘Survey of records in private keeping’ *Analecta Hibernia*, xx (1958), p. 250. See also Raymond Gillespie, *Devoted people: belief and religion in early modern Ireland* (Manchester and New York, 1997), p. 91.

<sup>210</sup> Hore, ‘An account of the barony of Forth’, p. 70.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 70

many other parts of Ireland.<sup>213</sup> In the early seventeenth century it was claimed that the Irish fasted on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, since Saturday was Mary's day.<sup>214</sup> The Barony of Forth, however, suffered badly following the Cromwellian Plantation. Sinnott with his intimate knowledge of the churches in the area gave the following description:

There were very many crosses in publique Roads, and Crucifixes, in private houses and Churches in the said Barony kept, builded of Stone, Timber, or Metal, representing the dolorous passion of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which, wherever found, were totally defaced, broken, or burned by Cromwellian soldiers. Soe odious in our unfortunate age, became even the Memory of the first Christian Altar that ever was erected, whereon was offered the propitiatory Sacrifice of all Mankind's Redemption. The direption and demolition of the aforesaid Churches and Chapells were perpetrated, and their sacred ornaments profaned, since and during the late Usurper's Government.<sup>215</sup>

While this account is very detailed, it does demonstrate the fact that the pilgrim spirit was alive and well. A much more useful account of the pilgrimage was provided by Solomon Richards, a Cromwellian settler who had been rewarded lands in Wexford. He was quite interested in what he regarded as the superstitions of popery, gave a detailed description of what he saw and heard of Our Lady's Island in 1682. He noted that 'in former times of ignorance, this island was highly esteemed and accounted Holy, and to this day the natives, persons of honour, as well as others, in abundance, from remote parts of the kingdom with great devotion went there to do penance'.<sup>216</sup> The social composition of the crowds who participated in these popular devotions was very diverse. This is hardly surprising considering the dynamic nature of this society which freely borrowed from a variety of traditions including, Gaelic, Old English and Continental European.<sup>217</sup> In the case of Lough Derg, very few observers were explicit in calling attention to the social diversity evident at the site, and evidence of social heterogeneity was not always immediately obvious. Bishop MacMahon, who visited the site in 1714, went there disguised as a merchant from Dublin. It was necessary, he said for prelates and non-registered priests of this country to conceal themselves especially on account of the prevailing persecution that was sanctioned by the

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 71

<sup>214</sup> Gillespie, *Devoted people*, p. 87.

<sup>215</sup> Hore, 'An account of the barony of Forth', p. 69.

<sup>216</sup> Herbert F. Hore, 'Particulars relative to Wexford and the barony of Forth: By Colonel Solomon Richards, 1682' in *The Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society, New Series*, iv, no. 1 (1862), pp 84-92

<sup>217</sup> Billy Colfer, 'The Ethnic Mix in medieval Wexford' in *History Ireland*, x, no. 1 (2002), pp 19-23. See also Kevin Whelan, 'The regional impact of Irish Catholicism, 1700-1850' in W.J. Smyth and K. Whelan (eds), *Common ground: essays on the historical geography of Ireland* (Cork, 1988), p. 271.

Penal Laws.<sup>218</sup> This piece of evidence suggests that unless merchants were travelling to Lough Derg and engaging in the rituals there, adopting the disguise of a merchant would not have been so effective for MacMahon. On the contrary, he noted that the minister of that district received him kindly.<sup>219</sup> Although, there is nothing in Solomon Richard's account to indicate that merchants were among the crowds going to Our Lady's Island, a study on the 'Catholic community in Wexford town between 1630 and 1700' highlights the importance of this influential group in society.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, the position of the Catholic merchants improved enormously as illustrated by the fact that as early as 1662 Catholics were listed in the subsidy rolls which give the names of all the principal proprietors, householders and merchants in the town at that time.<sup>221</sup> Therefore, the possibility that merchants attended the site during this time cannot be dismissed. Historian, Kevin Whelan pointed out that this area was strongly linked to mercantile communities in Catholic Europe and that these same merchants were linked by ties of kingship and cultural affinity with large-scale Catholic farmers making their presence in Ireland all the more greater.<sup>222</sup> These dense social linkages meant that new ideas could and did move more easily from Europe to Catholic Ireland. According to Whelan the ties of kinship and cultural affinity between urban and rural Catholic elites produced a 'symbiosis of town and country' which ensured that 'urban consciousness [was attuned] to the rhythms and exigencies of rural life, perhaps to an extent unrivalled elsewhere in urban Europe'.<sup>223</sup>

In demonstrating the devotional exercises of this pilgrimage, Solomon Richards observed that pilgrims went 'barelegged and barefooted, dabbling in the water up to mid-leg around the island'.<sup>224</sup> Those who had committed grievous sins were required to perform the exercises on bended knee.<sup>225</sup> In addition to this, there are details given in Solomon's account of pilgrims leaving their stockings and shoes at home and beginning the journey barefooted to the island. Having done their penance, they proceeded 'to make their offering in the chapel' and at the end returned to Wexford. The most striking piece of information concerning the nature of the pilgrimage exercises, and one which contrasts favorably with that of the Lough Derg

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<sup>218</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 113.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>220</sup> Jarlath Glynn, 'The Catholic Church in Wexford Town 1800-1858' in *The Past: The Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, no. 15 (1984), pp 5-53.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>222</sup> Whelan, 'The regional impact of Irish Catholicism', p. 259.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 259-60.

<sup>224</sup> Hore, 'Particulars relative to Wexford', p. 87.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

pilgrimage is reference to ‘rounding’. Further evidence to rounding rituals being performed at a site near the town of Wexford are given by a French traveller in 1644, which again reinforces the notion that rounding was an established part of the pilgrimage routine and quite possibly may have been for some time:

At this site, are many ruins of old churches...towards which the women have great reverence, and come there in solemn procession. The oldest march first and the others follow, then take three turns round the ruins, make a reverence to the remains, kneel and recommence this ceremony many times. I have noticed them at this devotion three and four hours.<sup>226</sup>

M. P. Carroll’s *Irish pilgrimage: holy wells and popular Catholic devotion* emphasizes that the elaborate rounding that permeated popular Catholic practice at Lough Derg (and elsewhere) only emerged during the modern era. It has been pointed out, however, that such rounding rituals at Lough Derg, discussed at some length by Carroll, may be rather older than he suspects.<sup>227</sup> One of the sources which Carroll uses is cited as an Irish language poem from the seventeenth century. According to Gillespie, ‘the dating of the poem poses problems since it survives only in a late-seventeenth-century manuscript and the scribe was clear that it was old and probably from the now lost Psalter of Cashel and, if it was, it may be as old as the tenth century’.<sup>228</sup> The poem ‘a dhuine theid go Loch Derg’ as indicated by Gillespie is earlier than the seventeenth century. Therefore, the earliest evidence for the rounding tradition is in both the wrong period and the wrong place for Carroll’s argument.<sup>229</sup>

Much of the ritual at Our Lady’s Island consisted of reciting prayers while making rounds of the old church. Like Lough Derg, there was a sense of order in how the devotional exercises were performed. Pilgrims led a procession three times around the ruins of the church, where they stopped to make a form of reverence to the remains, and then repeated the same devotion for three and four hours. There are no details given in Solomon’s account that might suggest the type of prayers or devotions that were said here, but the practice itself was carried three times. The emphasis on the number three as applied to the stationary practice at Lough Derg was to symbolize the Trinity, ‘beseeching that by the power of the Father, the wisdom

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<sup>226</sup> Carroll, *Irish pilgrimage*, p. 79.

<sup>227</sup> Raymond Gillespie, ‘Book review, *Irish Pilgrimage: holy wells and popular Catholic devotion*’ in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, xxxii no. 1 (2001), pp 201-202.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 201

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 201



of the Son, and goodness of the Holy Ghost we may retain full remission of all our sins'.<sup>230</sup> Again, the dipping of one's feet in the water signified something spiritual, a reminder of one's baptism and more importantly a sense of order. At Lough Derg, Richardson observed that pilgrims on leaving the cave went into the water to be 'entirely cleansed from their sins'.<sup>231</sup> It would not be wrong to suggest that pilgrims to Our Lady's Island were provided with the same Tridentine-style spiritual direction that was given to pilgrims at Lough Derg. Evidence is too scanty to pin this assumption on the teachings of the Counter-Reformation, yet, it is difficult not to associate these devotions and rounds with some form of Tridentine spirituality.

Local historian for County Wexford, Kevin Whelan looks at a number of indicators that might be taken as measures of the degree to which Tridentine Catholicism was implanted in an area. One of the Penal Laws passed in the early 1700s required 'Popish clergy' to register with the government. As part of the registration process, priests were required to give the place of their ordination. Whelan suggests that the critical variable here is whether priests were educated in Ireland or on the Continent.<sup>232</sup> Continentally-trained priests were far more likely than their Irish-trained counterparts to be committed to Tridentine ideals.<sup>233</sup> Fr. James Prendergast was parish priest of Our Lady's Island from 1675 to 1715. In a list of names of all the parish priests who were registered for County Wexford in 1704, Fr. Prendergast is noted as having received his seminary training in Spain. As parish priest, he would have exercised a certain influence over the pilgrimage, and assumed all of the pastoral responsibilities that were assigned to him by the bishop. Based on Solomon Richards's account of the pilgrimage devotions performed at Our Lady's Island, it might be considered that Fr. Prendergast was trying to transform the pilgrimage into an example of Tridentine interiority. The act of dipping one's feet in the water and the number of times this practice was performed demonstrates that there was a sense of Tridentine spirituality about it and that pilgrims may have also been encouraged to meditate on their actions in the same way as those on Lough Derg. The evidence is limited but with these pieces of information; the dipping of one's feet in the water signifying an inner spirituality of Trent; the rounding three times in the lake invoking the Trinity; and Fr. Prendergast's commitment to Tridentine Catholicism, it may be concluded that the pilgrimage experience was not so different to the one on Lough Derg.

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<sup>230</sup> Richardson, *The great folly*, pp 52-61.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>232</sup> Carroll, *Irish pilgrimage*, pp 105-133.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-133.

During the Franciscan period of ministry on Lough Derg which encompassed most of the period of the Penal Laws, little information can be obtained about the friars who labored there. Fortunately, the names of six priors survive in the days of the Franciscans, some of whom held very distinguished positions and had postgraduate degrees. Dr. Tadhg O'Clery was appointed prior of Lough Derg in 1648 and 1661.<sup>234</sup> His father, Sean, was a third cousin of the famous Brother Mícheál Ó Cléirigh. This Tadhg (or Thady) was educated in Salamanca, and held the distinguished position of vicar-general of Raphoe until 1661, when he was also prior of Lough Derg.<sup>235</sup> In 1670 Felim O'Coineagain was prior and evidently appointed to the post by archbishop Oliver Plunkett.<sup>236</sup> Nothing is known about his studies, but he was considered a prominent priest and vicar-general of Armagh diocese.<sup>237</sup> In 1693, 1701, 1704 and 1714 Art McCullion was prior.<sup>238</sup> Like many of his Parish priest contemporaries, nothing of his early years or education was recorded, but he was ordained by Plunkett, in Dublin, in May 1670.<sup>239</sup> This priest's name was also mentioned in a document to support the claims of the Canons Regular to the old priory of Lough Derg. One Abbot Lynch of Cong, who was a Canon Regular, was alleged to have asserted the order's rights by appointing priests to various parishes in Ireland in the reign of James II:

A deed dated March 13th, 1732 and signed by F. Patrick Browne, O.S.F., Guardian of the Irish Convent of St. Anthony in Louvain, who deposed that he was present when Abbot Lynch of Cong collated a priest named Mac Cullin to St. Patrick's Purgatory.<sup>240</sup>

A report on Popery in Fermanagh dated 22 June 1714, confirmed that 'Edmund McGraw officiating in the Parish of Inish McShant (sic) and came from beyond the seas, not registered nor taken the oaths'.<sup>241</sup> The only other reference to this priest is from the Popery Report of 1731: 'Edmond McGragh, Prior of Loughderg and one Connely officiate in several 'parts of ye parish in woods near ye mountains'.<sup>242</sup> In 1753 Francis MacCavell was pastor of Carn and Coolmony as well as director and prior of St. Patrick's Purgatory. He also received a licentiate in both (civil and canon) law in the consultative Faculty of Paris'.<sup>243</sup> The last

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<sup>234</sup> Cunningham, *Lough Derg*, p. 66.

<sup>235</sup> Ó Gallachair, 'The parish of Carn' in *Clogher Record*, viii, no. 3 (1975), pp 301-80

<sup>236</sup> Cunningham, *Lough Derg*, p. 66

<sup>237</sup> Ó Gallachair, 'The parish of Carn', p. 346.

<sup>238</sup> Cunningham, *Lough Derg*, p. 66

<sup>239</sup> P. Ó Gallachair, 'Clogherici: a dictionary of the Catholic clergy of the diocese of Clogher (1535-1835)' in *Clogher Record*, viii, no. 1 (1973), pp 93-103.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>241</sup> William P. Burke, *The Irish priests in the penal times* (Shannon, 1969), p. 280.

<sup>242</sup> 'Report on the state of popery, Ireland, 1731' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, i (1912), p. 14.

<sup>243</sup> Ó Gallachair, 'Dictionary of the Catholic clergy', pp 514-28.

mentioned prior was Anthony O'Doherty, O.F.M, S.T.D (Doctorate in Sacred Theology), who was noted prior in the year 1763.<sup>244</sup> From the information, it is clear that Lough Derg had a strong line of Counter-Reformation priors, thus strengthening Whelan's argument that continentally-trained priests were far more likely than their Irish-trained counterparts to be committed to Tridentine ideals.

There were other priests, already noted in this chapter, who set out to implement Tridentine reforms. Fr. Kirwan, who ministered and preached on the island, was sent to Lisbon to be educated. He very aggressively set out to implement Tridentine reforms. This meant instructing the laity in Church doctrine by employing effective preachers. Young men were not allowed to be ordained until they had spent a year under Kirwan's guidance. Kirwan also instituted a program to educate older priests 'not sufficiently acquainted with the ceremonies of the church'.<sup>245</sup> For a short time after 1739 the Franciscan Philip Gartland, who studied in France and achieved fame as a preacher, ministered on the island.<sup>246</sup> The aforementioned, Fr. Dominick Brullaughan 'having completed his course of studies with great credit in the College of Holy Cross at Louvain, returned to Ulster, where during a long series of years, he zealously discharged missionary duty'.<sup>247</sup> Thomas de Burgo, who visited St. Patrick's Purgatory in the year 1748, wrote an account of the life of Dominick Brullaughan in his *Hibernia Dominicana*. De Burgo indicated that 'he was second to none as a preacher in that province, he reaped a large harvest of souls for Christ; and for that reason he was deservedly raised to the title of Master in Theology'.<sup>248</sup> Only the most skilled and competent of priests were given the role of prior at Lough Derg. They were all committed to the Tridentine reforms and saw nothing inappropriate in combining official activities like confession and preaching with the rituals and activities that lay at the core of popular pilgrimage tradition. Even De Burgo's impressions of Lough Derg were somewhat exceptional, yet again, they demonstrate how effective the Franciscans were at preserving the traditional elements of the pilgrimage along with implementing their program of reform, 'so great are the penitential deeds performed there, that they exceed in my opinion those of any other pilgrimage in the world'.<sup>249</sup> He noted:

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<sup>244</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 173.

<sup>245</sup> John Lynch, *The portrait of a pious bishop, or the life and death of the Most Reverend Francis Kirwan*, (Dublin, 1848), p. 49.

<sup>246</sup> Giblin, 'The Franciscan ministry', p. 174.

<sup>247</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 169.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

I do not relate mere matters of hearsay, but what I have witnessed with my own eyes: for, I had the great happiness to visit in the year 1748 that island, which was consecrated by the presence and the miracles of the most holy Patrick, and which still affords an illustrious example of the austere penances of the primitive ages of the Church.<sup>250</sup>

Furthermore, the Council of Trent laid heavy obligations on the diocesan bishop. All pastoral care was to emanate from him.<sup>251</sup> The diocese of Ferns had a strong line of Counter-Reformation bishops throughout the seventeenth century, so the commitment to Tridentine religion was beyond question. John Roche was an example of the new generation of clergy of the Catholic Reformation, who was nominated bishop of Ferns in 1624. After Roche, Bishop Nicholas French, who studied in Louvain, was appointed bishop in 1645. With his successor, the Franciscan Luke Wadding, born in Wexford and trained at Paris, it is possible for the first time to study the work of a Catholic bishop in Wexford. According to Patrick J. Corish, there are some useful details contained in Wadding's notebook which throw enormous light on Catholicism enriched with the fundamentals of Counter-Reformation. The introduction of the Catholic parish registers that Wadding authorized in 1671, was a record of Catholic parish life unique in Ireland.<sup>252</sup> Instruction and sacramental life were at the centre of what Bishop Wadding tried to do in Wexford. He distributed beads and medals by the gross and prayer-books and catechisms by the dozen.<sup>253</sup>

As already revealed in Ó'hEodhasa's *Teagasg Críosaíde*, the elements of the cult of St. Patrick were put to use as a catechetical tool by the Franciscans. In the early eighteenth century reprint of the same catechism, there are examples of Marian devotion, which can be found in an appendix relating to a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine 'Teampall Muire Loreto'.<sup>254</sup> It is hardly any surprise to find some reference to Marian devotion in a Franciscan catechism especially when the Franciscans were one of the champions of the cause of Marian devotion in Ireland. Fr. Luke Wadding had a firm foundation of Marian devotion from his own home and Florence Conry, among other Franciscans, wrote tracts in honour of Our Lady. In 1628 Franciscans founded a confraternity in honour of her immaculate conception in Waterford. Historian, Peter O'Dwyer noted that this pilgrimage was well known among the Irish in the seventeenth century. Nicholas French, exiled bishop of Ferns, Hugh O'Neill, and Ruairi

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>251</sup> Corish 'Two centuries of Catholicism', pp 222-45.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>254</sup> Mary O'Reilly, 'Seventeenth-Century Irish Catechisms: European or Not?' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, 1, (1996), pp 102-12.

O'Donnell all made the pilgrimage.<sup>255</sup> Perhaps then this tract in Ó hEoghasa's work also served as a promotion of this particular Marian devotion in Ireland. There is little doubt that Wadding, a keen supporter of Marian devotion and of the Counter-reformation, would have expressed a certain degree of interest in the pilgrimage to Our Lady's Island.

#### IV

There were other key elements of this pilgrimage that were viewed with much suspicion and contempt, most notably the time in which this particular devotion was to take place in the calendar year, 'The chiefest or more meritorious time is between the two Lady Days of August 15 and September 8'.<sup>256</sup> This also meant harvest time, which was a source of irritation for the English administration for two reasons. Firstly, it give the impression that people were trying to avoid important work of the harvest, and secondly, these celebrations had been grafted onto the Catholic practices. Measures were taken in 1707 by the lord lieutenant in Dublin who issued a definitive list of public holidays along with the following warning which read:

And whereas we have received Information, that many Persons refuse to Work on Several Other Days, besides those mentioned in the Aft, being thereto encouraged by Popish Priest, who publish the Same as Holy Days at Mass, in manifest Contempt of the aforesaid good and wholesome Law, and to the very great Prejudice of the Kingdom, especially in Harvest Time, when all Hands ought to be occupied.<sup>257</sup>

The issue of corruption and profiteering that went on at the site was another example of what Solomon Richards perceived as abuse. He noted that 'if any lady, through indisposition, be loath to wet her feet, there are women allowed to do it for them, they being present, and paying a fee for it. And this is effectual enough'.<sup>258</sup> At Lough Derg pilgrims were obliged to confess their sins before commencing their stations. Richardson indicated 'that some do it much oftener, paying six pence for every confession'.<sup>259</sup> Furthermore, there were social dimensions to the Lough Derg pilgrimage that that the clergy disapproved of. Having completed the pilgrimage, pilgrims reintegrated themselves into the secular world with suitable activities. One of the earliest reports emanated from a Roman Catholic writer

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 106-08.

<sup>256</sup> Hore, 'Particulars relative to Wexford', p. 88.

<sup>257</sup> *Dublin Gazette*, 5 Aug. 1707.

<sup>258</sup> Hore, 'Particulars relative to Wexford', p. 88.

<sup>259</sup> John Richardson, *The great folly*, pp 52-61.

mentioned by Hewson as ‘a Latin author, whose book, printed at Waterford, 1647, complains of the Irreligion, great abuses, and disorders of the pilgrims going to St. Patrick’s Purgatory’.<sup>260</sup> About 1710 the Church of Ireland vicar of the parish of Templecarn not only controlled the boats to the island but during the pilgrimage season monopolized the local market in ‘brandy, aqua vit[a]e, beer, and portions’, which were sold at inflated prices to pilgrims leaving the island and rejoining the everyday world.<sup>261</sup> There may have been a good deal of justification for this, for it is quite conceivable that many abuses and disorders did exist during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

There was nothing to indicate that such abuses occurred at Our Lady’s Island. Such abuses would not have escaped Solomon’s Richards attention considering his position as a staunch Royalist as well as being a fierce bigot and a scoffer of all Catholic practices. However, evidence is weak and with only two known accounts from the later seventeenth century, it is not certain if in fact such sacrilegious activities took place there. At the other end of the spectrum, there were holy places in Wexford which were effectively under lay control.<sup>262</sup> These were places associated with hagiographical lore but had little input from the official clergy. According to Gillespie, it was not the teachings of the clergy that was deemed important but the actions of the saint which had sanctified the place.<sup>263</sup> The medieval church of St. Margaret in Wexford was resorted to by pregnant women, ‘to whom women are much devoted, their patroness in Travaile with Childe, much visited’.<sup>264</sup> The chapel dedicated to St. Vake was frequented by people afflicted with Toothach.<sup>265</sup> At the more localized level pilgrims went to the chapel dedicated to St. Ibarius, on the smaller island of Beg-Erin, and performed a number of devotions to ease their maladies.<sup>266</sup> Inside the chapel was a ‘wooden Idol, in shape of an old man, called Saint Iberian, who was also (as he desired), buried in this island of Beg Erin.’<sup>267</sup> To him people went to worship and ‘in cases of controversyes about debt or otherwise, the partys goe into this island, where one swears before St. Iberian, and the other willinglie is concluded by his oath’.<sup>268</sup> One such case involved two men, one of whom had returned from sea and was envious that the other man, (his neighbour) in his absence

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 51-61.

<sup>261</sup> John Cunningham, ‘Lough Derg and its unusual ‘guardian’ in *Clogher Record*, x (1980-81), p. 421.

<sup>262</sup> Gillespie, *Devoted people*, p. 90.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>264</sup> Hore, ‘An account of the barony of Forth’, p. 68.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>267</sup> Hore, ‘Particulars relative to Wexford’, p. 90.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 90.

cheated with his wife. As a result, the man with suspicion ‘called on St. Iberian to witness’.<sup>269</sup> The man suspected went before St. Iberian to plead his case that he never cheated with the other man’s wife. The other man was left ‘full of belief and satisfaction, and ever after esteems that neighbour without jealousy’.<sup>270</sup> So while some of these places of local pilgrimage attracted specialised devotions, others in Wexford were attended by pilgrims for many different reasons. Furthermore, there were other reasons for visiting the sanctuary of Lough Derg as indicated in the following account of 1682, by Thomas Knox:

Near this Church of Carne is an old ruinous building which of old was used as a place so sacred that when the inhabitants used to go from their winter dwellings to the utmost mountains for grass to their cattle, which they did most commonly in the Summer, they left such goods as they could not leave safely at home in this place until they returned again or had occasion to use them. And it was accounted a kind of sacrilege to meddle with anything that was left there to be kept.<sup>271</sup>

## V

So while the pilgrimages to Lough Derg and Our Lady’s Island were both very popular in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the same cannot be said for the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick. With the dissolution of the monasteries and the persecution from the state imposed religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the pilgrimage suffered a change. As MacNeill noted, no longer did the ‘proud bearers’ of ancient names dismount to pass the night at wayside abbeys on their journey to St. Patrick’s mountain.<sup>272</sup> However, in the old traditional world the pilgrimage held its appeal. In 1652, provincial of the Irish Augustinians, Fr. James O’Mahony noted ‘on this mountain of Holy Patrick is held the most widely celebrated pilgrimage of the whole Kingdom, one begun and established by Saint Patrick himself’.<sup>273</sup> The banning of Catholic religion may have strengthened the appeal of Croagh Patrick. Mac Neill suspects that the ‘hard-pressed’ clergy must have recognised that these traditional devotions as carried out by pilgrims on the mountain would help maintain their attachment to the old religion and, probably, would have taken care to encourage them.<sup>274</sup> There is evidence of this encouragement in the instructions given to the procurator, William

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>271</sup> Ó Gallachair, ‘The parish of Carn’, pp. 301-80.

<sup>272</sup> MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, p. 78.

<sup>273</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 16.

<sup>274</sup> MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, p. 78.

Burgat, of the ecclesiastical province of Tuam in 1661.<sup>275</sup> One of these instructions directs that the plenary indulgence anciently granted to pilgrims to the holy places of Aran and Croagh Patrick should be continued and renewed, and extended to Doonpatrick in the diocese of Killala, and to Tobar Brighde in the diocese of Elphin.<sup>276</sup> The instruction read as follows:

*Ut indulgentia plenaria antiquitus concessa locis piis de Aran et Cruachpatrick, dioecesis Tuamensis, illa loca visitantibus quovis anni tempore, maxime dominica proxime ante calendas Augusti, continuetur et renovetur ; qualem indulgentia m obtineat pro loco de Doonpatrick dioecesis Aladensis, et pro Tobai Brighde dioecesis Elphinensis, maxime in die S. Brigidae.*<sup>277</sup>

In 1669, Fr. Francis Kirwan, who was deeply committed to implementing the Tridentine reforms in the diocese of Tuam, made a pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick and Lough Derg.<sup>278</sup> There are references to ‘creeping on bended knees over the rough rock fragments’ at Croagh Patrick and to going ‘on bended knees over paths beaten by the feet of saints’ at Lough Derg suggest that Kirwan engaged in the rituals that were being performed at these locations. In the travel book of De Latocnaye, *A Frenchman’s walk through Ireland*, there are references to the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage, all testifying to its popularity ‘the famous mountain on the summit’.<sup>279</sup> In his account there are no specific details of the pilgrimage exercises, but the legendary traditions associated with Croagh Patrick are clearly laid out: ‘on the summit of which Saint Patrick assembled all the devils and venomous beasts, in order that he might cast them into the hole which is still to be found on the mountain top’.<sup>280</sup> Such legendary traditions reinforced the power of the saint at the site but also verified the sacredness of the place. Folklore played an enormous part in shaping the popular imagination. He stated that ‘there is a little chapel at which mass is celebrated on this day, and in it is a black bell for which the inhabitants have a peculiar veneration’.<sup>281</sup> The bell was used as a thing to swear on in legal matters, and no one dared to perjure himself on it.<sup>282</sup> It was believed that the devil

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<sup>275</sup> Brendan Jennings, ‘Miscellaneous Documents III 1602-1715’ in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xv (1950), pp 39-40.

<sup>276</sup> MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa*, p. 78.

<sup>277</sup> Jennings, ‘Miscellaneous Documents’, p. 40. ‘In order that the plenary indulgences which were granted of old to the holy places of Aran and Croagh Patrick in the diocese of Tuam, to those who visited these places at whatever time of year, it was ordained and renewed that they would be observed on the Sunday nearest to the First Day of August; the same indulgence obtained for the place of Downpatrick in the diocese of Killala, and for the Well of Brigid in the Diocese of Elphin, especially on the day of St Brigid’.

<sup>278</sup> Lynch, *The portrait of a pious bishop*, pp 62-63.

<sup>279</sup> De Latocnaye, *A Frenchman’s walk through Ireland 1796-7*(Belfast, 1917), p. 174

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 174

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 174



would carry them off immediately if they told a lie.<sup>283</sup> De Latocnaye also made note of the surrounding country with ruins of abbeys and buildings round holy wells:

There has been specially pointed out to me a large stone on which there are two fairly deep holes, and the inhabitants venerate it as having been used by St. Patrick, the holes having been worn by his knees while he prayed.<sup>284</sup>

In some other cases, seventeenth-century commentators were keen to describe the ceremonies associated with the holy wells at Struell in County Down. Captain Josias Bodley, who came to Ireland in 1602 to visit his friend Sir John Morrison went to ‘the Well and Chair of St. Patrick’.<sup>285</sup> In 1643, Fr. Edmund MacCana, a Franciscan friar, gave a very detailed description of the various features of the pilgrimage at Struell wells and also of the features of the other sacred places in the area. His description of St. Patrick’s chair is most impressive:

The bed of St. Patrick on the hill opposite the above-mentioned stream, consisting of two large rocks, as it were the sides of a couch, and another large rock for the bolster. Upon this the most holy man used, towards the close of the night, in the open air, and under the cold sky, to seek a little rest for his wearied body.<sup>286</sup>

At this sacred place there was a ‘remarkable and unfailing stream’ called the ‘Sruthshil’, brought into existence by the prayers of our holy Apostle’.<sup>287</sup> This spring, ‘the piety of our forefathers’ was enclosed by a building, upon the floor of which, ‘the sanative water, the remedy for various maladies of the human frame descends in a rapid and unceasing stream’.<sup>288</sup> At Struell, MacCana noted the ruins of a chapel and another fountain which is commonly called ‘*the Tub*’ on account of the resemblance of its shape. According to MacCana this well was traditionally associated directly with St. Patrick, ‘the holy man, our Patrick, as an untiring athlete used to spend a great part of the night, stark naked, singing psalms and spiritual songs’.<sup>289</sup> This has always been regarded as the main well. It is referred to as the ‘mother of the well’ in Richard Dobbs’s mid seventeenth-century account of the site.<sup>290</sup> Dobbs noted that this well was only ankle deep and could hold half a dozen men.<sup>291</sup> His account of the rituals performed at Struell Wells was based on his childhood memories

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>285</sup> Josias Bodley, ‘Bodley’s visit to Lecale, county of Down, A.D. 1602-3’ in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 1st series, ii (1854), p. 89.

<sup>286</sup> William Reeves, ‘Irish Itinerary of Father Edmund MacCana’ in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 1st series, ii, (1854), p. 53.

<sup>287</sup> Reeves, ‘Irish Itinerary of Father Edmund MacCana’, p. 52.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>290</sup> George Hill, *An historical account of the Macdonnells of Antrim* (Belfast, 1873), p. 383.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 383.

when he lived near Downpatrick.<sup>292</sup> Dobbs wrote his memoir in 1683 when he was forty-nine years of age, so his description therefore, is likely to date to the 1640s. He describes the bathing in a well of some kind along with the station to St. Patrick's Chair thus:

A little house now without a roof, where about 4 feet [high] it spouts out, and there people hold their heads and naked bodies under it, when they wash; it is extremely cold, and a flat broad stone whereupon it perpetually falls is so slippery, that what with it, and the coldness of the water, people do often fall and hurt their bodies. The Irish use meny [many] ceremonies here, and there are seldom to this day, less than three or four hundred persons here upon Midsummer Eve, yearly to wash and drink, and say their Pater Nosters. There is on the face of the Hill above it the Rock they call St. Patrick's Chair; to this chair I have seen people creep up on their bare knees from the well (the way worn bare, and slaty, sharp, stony ground) that they have been Bloody.<sup>293</sup>

Dobbs also recalled from his childhood seeing a small Spring well at Saul, a place 'within a mile of Down-Patrick, near the East End of the Abbey'.<sup>294</sup> The inhabitants warned him that it would run dry or vanish 'if foul hands or Linen were washed in it'.<sup>295</sup> In his description, he's at pains to point out that this place too was directly associated with the saint:

In this Abbey Yard (I have seen, and perhaps is there yet) a little lodge built, walled, and roofed with Lime and stone fit to contain one person only, wherein tradition says, St. Patrick lodged, this being the first place he settled in when he first came to Ireland, and I have heard old people say they had seen a stone there (a hard pillow) wherein appeared a hollow, where the saint used to lay his head.<sup>296</sup>

Other eighteenth-century commentators were quite explicit in calling attention to the social heterogeneity of the penitents who flocked to holy wells. In 1744, Walter Harris produced a very detailed account of the wells of St. Patrick at Struell. He noted that 'vast throngs of rich and poor resort at Midsummer Eve, and the Friday before Lammas, some in hopes of obtaining health and others to perform penances enjoined them by the Popish priests'.<sup>297</sup> His description of the wells and what he saw at Struell is of great weight:

They are four in number, each covei-ed by a vault of stone, and the water is conveyed by subterranean aqueducts from one to the other ; but the largest of these vaults is the

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<sup>292</sup> J. S. Montgomery, 'Richard Dobbs 1634–1701: author of a brief description of Co. Antrim' in *The Glynnns*, xi (1983), p. 25.

<sup>293</sup> Hill, *Historical account*, p. 383.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>297</sup> James O'Laverty, *An historical account of the Diocese of Down and Connor, ancient and modern* (5 vols, Dublin, 1878–95), i, 248.

most celebrated, being in dimensions sixteen feet and a half by eleven, and is more particularly said to have received St. Patrick's benediction.<sup>298</sup>

The pilgrimage at Struell also attracted specialised devotions. Other wells were used by pilgrims for washing particular parts of the body such as the eyes, head, and limbs. The eye well was noted in the mid eighteenth century by Harris, but it is not mentioned in the two mid seventeenth-century descriptions of Dobbs and MacCana. Such cures were routinely associated with holy wells. During this time, Dr. O'Doran, bishop of Down and Connor, was anxious to have an indulgence conceded to the stations at Struell and writing in the year 1753 to Father Brullaughan, his agent in Rome, he said 'I have it to add that I would be glad if I could get those indulgences of Crum-dugh extended to Struel, for on that Fryday the Christians visit sd. Struel as well as Mount Donert'.<sup>299</sup> This was eventually granted in 1778.<sup>300</sup> Richard Pococke, writing in 1752, remarked that of the pilgrims that there 'are a great number of priests near who give them absolution'.<sup>301</sup>

## VI

What emerges from this detailed study is how the Franciscans in the course of their tenure as sole guardians of Lough Derg adapted the pilgrimage to suit Counter-Reformation standards. Gillespie argues that a large measure of their success was due to the vision of seeing themselves as distinctively Irish and distinctively Franciscan. This was held together by the strong links they made with their lay supporters. The ability of the order to move in and between many spheres, so as not to alienate their traditional supporters becomes clear in their efforts to transform the pilgrimage on Lough Derg from a set of popular rituals into an interior spiritual experience.<sup>302</sup> This may be true, but while there was a real appetite for reform, some of the changes that the reforming clergy wished to impose were not always supported by those who wished to maintain traditional practices.<sup>303</sup> As the bishop of Clogher noted in 1714,

there is one custom on the island of which I do not approve. On the ninth day of the pilgrimage the pilgrims about to enter the cave hear mass. The mass is always a requiem mass offered for the pilgrims now dead to the world and about to descend

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 250. See also Hugh Fenning, 'The 'Udienze' series in the Roman archives of Propaganda Fide' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xlviii (1994), p. 104.

<sup>301</sup> John McVeigh (ed.), *Richard Pococke's Irish tours* (Dublin, 1995), p. 33

<sup>302</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage', p. 178.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 178.

into burial. I have tried to alter this...to the mass conformable to the office, but I am told that the custom is an immemorial one coming down from St. Patrick' himself.<sup>304</sup>

Saint Patrick's cave was one aspect of the traditional pilgrimage which the Franciscans attached to the example of this holy man. It was believed to communicate the fundamental truths of the Catholic faith to the Irish people. So while there is much evidence to indicate that the pilgrimage had become an increasingly spiritual experience, the Franciscans had simply taken traditional elements and merged them with new continental ideas. The old practices persisted but had new meanings attached to them. It is possible therefore, that had it not been for the continuous attacks brought against the island and the disruptions caused, the Franciscans may have made a deeper impact. Owing to this, the Franciscans had little time on the island in which to make their mission at all effective.

It might well be said that Catholicism in Wexford had reached a degree of approximation to the Tridentine pattern that was not attained in some other dioceses until the best part of a century later. At the centre of Trent's plans for reform had been the conscientious bishop, overseeing the work of good priests. Good priests were to be provided by a new institution to train them, the seminary. The clergy who had trained in the seminary were able to instruct people and soften the older clergy who wished to resist the changes. The fact that Our Lady's Island was more in touch with the workings of the institutional Church meant that the people were very 'precise and exact' in keeping Church's fasts and other customs sanctioned by the church. It was claimed that the Irish fasted on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, since Saturday was Mary's day. The importance of trade with Catholic Europe meant that the flow of ideas could and did move easily from Europe to Catholic towns and from there to Catholic elites in the countryside.

The pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick collapsed in the seventeenth century and while there were some references to pilgrims at the site during this time, there was nobody in control of the site. It is interesting then, to find pilgrims visiting the holy wells at Struell in the seventeenth century. The form of ritual practised at Struell, for example, the communal naked bathing, was unique for an Irish holy well. The pilgrimage at Struell wells was unique in that pilgrims went there to do penance and to seek cures. Croagh Patrick was purely a penitential pilgrimage and had no tradition of miracle working. Perhaps this was a key attraction for pilgrims going to Struell wells; pilgrims not only climbed the hill to Saint Patrick's seat on their knees, mimicking the sort of penance at Croagh Patrick, but simultaneously could

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<sup>304</sup> Flanagan, 'The diocese of Clogher', p. 130.

benefit from the curative properties as well. It was no longer necessary for pilgrims to take the long journey to Croagh Patrick. Pilgrims could pray to Saint Patrick at the wells, bathe in the waters that were blessed by the saint to obtain complete expulsion of their infirmities and participate in the same penitential rituals that were performed at Croagh Patrick. In 1717, Dr. James O'Shiel, O.F.M, and bishop of Down and Connor described the wells at St. Patrick's, at St. John's, and at Our Lady's Well in Ireland 'you see by daily experience, many people to be cured from several infirmities at such wells'.<sup>305</sup> He compared such acts of washing oneself in the waters and being healed of certain infirmities to the story told by St. John's Gospel in the New Testament:

And you see likewise in Scripture that memorable passage of St. John, which says thus :— ' There is in Jerusalem, by the Sheep market, a pool having five porches, and in these were a great multitude of persons — blind, lame, withered — expecting the stirring of the water ; and an angel of our Lord descended at a certain time into the pond, and the water was stirred ; and he that had gone down first into the pond, after the stirring of the water, was made whole of what infirmity soever'.<sup>306</sup>

A lot was achieved to transform the nature of the pilgrimage from a set of popular rituals into an inner spiritual experience. However, it would take the rise of the secular clergy to stamp out the greater abuses and superstitions that were typically associated with the traditional pilgrimage experience.

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<sup>305</sup> O'Laverty, *Historical account*, i, 248.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.



Fig. 7: One of the seven beds in which penance is performed in Philip Hardy's *The Holy Wells of Ireland*.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE RISE OF THE SECULAR CLERGY

While the Franciscans did much to bring the pilgrimage at Lough Derg more closely into line with the demands of Tridentine Catholicism, a new religious regime was put into place in the years 1750-1850.<sup>307</sup> To begin with, the penitential severities for which Lough Derg had been famous in the medieval and early modern periods were greatly softened in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. According to James Donnelly's 'Lough Derg: the making of the modern pilgrimage', this softening of penitential discipline was part of a fairly systematic restructuring of the traditional rites of the pilgrimage.<sup>308</sup> Two of the most important modifications in the pilgrimage took place before 1800. In the first, the penitential exercises practised at Lough Derg were considerably modified. The period of a station, which formerly occupied nine days or at least six days, was now reduced to three days. The first commentator to make reference to shorter periods was the anonymous visitor of 1765 whose account appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* the following year. According to this account, the pilgrims' stay lasted three, six, or nine days, depending on the quality of his sins, his leisure, or judgement of his confessor.<sup>309</sup> Another visitor, the Rev. William Bruce, noted in his journal for 1783 that nine days was 'a full term', thus implying that not all pilgrims went the entire distance.<sup>310</sup> The situation was further clarified in a report of 1804 by the Catholic Bishop James Murphy, who observed that pilgrims made a '3,6 or 9 days' station according to the nature of their vow or obligation, and in the case of no vow or obligation, according to their devotion'.<sup>311</sup> Despite the shorter periods of penance at Lough Derg, the discipline for penance remained unchanged. According the bishop of Clogher, James Murphy, the great value of the pilgrimage was that many pilgrims came there who had not for many years 'complied with any Christian duty' and the pilgrimage gave them an opportunity of preparing for and of making a general confession of their sins.<sup>312</sup>

Just as important as the reduction in the length of the pilgrimage was the closure of the purgatorial caves. The old cave or caves were superseded about the year 1780 by a 'prison

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<sup>307</sup> Donnelly, Jr., 'The modern pilgrimage', p. 494.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 500.

<sup>309</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Feb. 1766.

<sup>310</sup> Journal of a tour by the Rev. W. Bruce in the North of Ireland, 21 July 1783 (N.L.I., Bruce Papers, MS 20884, p. 35). Also cited by J.S. Donnelly, 'Lough Derg: the making of the modern pilgrimage', p. 501.

<sup>311</sup> Rev. S. Ó Dufaigh, 'James Murphy, bishop of Clogher, 1801-24' in *Clogher Record*, vi, no. 3 (1968), p. 458.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

chapel', otherwise St. Patrick's Chapel, which was erected not only to serve the purpose of the former *Caverna*, but also for general worship.<sup>313</sup> Rev. Philip Dixon Hardy, a Protestant cleric of extreme views and the author of *Holy wells of Ireland*, indicated that the cave 'was closed up by an order of the prior, who considered it dangerous, on account of the number of persons who attempted to crowd into it at once'.<sup>314</sup> Philip Skelton, the Protestant rector of Templecarn, gave an account of Lough Derg in 1786:

Purgatory is nothing more than two parallel rows of pretty large stones, set upright at a distance of scarcely three feet, with others as large laid over, and altogether forming a kind of narrow vault of not more than four feet elevation, pervious here and there to the light, not of burning brimstone but of the sun, for Purgatory is rather above than under ground.<sup>315</sup>

By 1790 the cave was filled in and 'from then on the extraordinary chamber could only work as a spiritual metaphor'.<sup>316</sup> It was in the prison chapel that pilgrims would keep the sleepless and fasting twenty-four-hour vigil for over a century.<sup>317</sup> The new Church building was 'seventy-two feet long and twenty-four feet wide' a significant improvement that gave pilgrims sufficient shelter during their vigil.<sup>318</sup> The renowned Tyrone writer William Carleton in his book *The Lough Derg pilgrim*, described the interior of the prison chapel which was only a naked, unplastered chapel, with an altar against one of the side walls, and two galleries.<sup>319</sup> During the period of imprisonment, he noted that there were no prescribed prayers or ceremonies to be performed, which he found rather strange considering that every other stage of the station had its proper devotions.<sup>320</sup> Moreover, the closing of the caves and the erection of the prison chapel in their place appear to have coincided with a fundamental change in the administration of the pilgrimage.<sup>321</sup> Ever since the early seventeenth century, when they succeeded the Augustinian canons, Franciscans from the Donegal convent had supervised and staffed the pilgrimage, with one the friars serving as the prior. But in 1780, jurisdiction over the famous pilgrimage passed into the hands of the bishop of Clogher, Hugh O'Reilly, who appointed one of his diocesan priests, Father Patrick Murray, as prior. The new arrangement, which was attributed to the fact that the Franciscans 'reduced numbers rendered

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<sup>313</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 182.

<sup>314</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 4.

<sup>315</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 125.

<sup>316</sup> Michael Dames, *Ireland: a sacred journey* (Dorset, 2000), p. 29.

<sup>317</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 177.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>319</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 37.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>321</sup> Donnelly, 'The modern pilgrimage', p. 501.



them no longer equal to the work.<sup>322</sup> Their presence did not vanish immediately, the long-serving Franciscan prior, Father Anthony, who by 1873 had spent over thirty pilgrimage seasons at Lough Derg continued to minister on the island after Fr. Murray took over. The issue of closing the caves caused tension between the Franciscans and the secular clergy. They had protected the old world, and the cave with its association with St. Patrick was a vital part of that traditional world. It is no surprise then to find the caves still opened in 1783. Bruce noted that pilgrims keeping the twenty-four-hour vigil were still ‘sitting in purgatory or in the chapel’, and on the back cover of his journal he drew a sketch of the island site, with the mouth of the cave or purgatory clearly marked.<sup>323</sup> At some point before 1790 the cave or caves ceased to forever to be used. This strongly suggests that Bishop O’Reilly, and perhaps his successor James Murphy, were decidedly hostile to the traditional ritual which above all others had defined Lough Derg in the eyes of ordinary Catholics as well as its many Protestant critics.

The first section of this chapter attempts to chart some of the important changes that the secular clergy made to the pilgrimage at Lough Derg. How they went about adapting the pilgrimage to suit the goals of Tridentine Catholicism is the main subject in this study. The impact that the closing of the caves had on the pilgrimage tradition and on the pilgrims themselves must not be underestimated. The caves had always been the focal point of the pilgrimage and many were to feel betrayed by their closure. There were also social aspects of the pilgrimage including the consumption of alcohol, which invariably led to a range of indecent behaviour associated with violence or faction fighting. These were recorded at Ardmore in 1810 with the arch observation that the penitents had ‘bloody knees from devotion, and heads from fighting’.<sup>324</sup> Bishop Troy of Ossory was of the belief in 1782 that the pilgrims undertaking such pilgrimages, ‘profane the name of God and everything else that is sacred by the most execrable oaths and finish the day by the preparation of the grossest impurities, by shedding their neighbours blood, by murder and the transgression of every law’.<sup>325</sup> There was a strong belief that pilgrimages were merely occasions for drinking, carousing, dancing and the peddling of pre-tridentine material, which was opposed, to the message the newly structured Church was trying to deliver to its congregation. According to Patrick Corish, it is evident that the new and ordered religious practice had not displaced the

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<sup>322</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 182.

<sup>323</sup> Bruce Journal, 21 July 1783 (N.L.I., Bruce Papers, MS 20884, p. 34).

<sup>324</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 37.

<sup>325</sup> Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic community in the seventeenth and eighteenth century* (Dublin, 1981), p. 113.

old pattern of life.<sup>326</sup> Clearly, there were numerous problems associated with the pilgrimage traditions and feast days celebrated by the people. The fact that the old pilgrimage practices were based on pagan traditions had always been a source of discomfort for the Catholic Church. The second part of this chapter examines the situation at Our Lady's Island, Croagh Patrick, and Struell Wells in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and how the Catholic Church went about bringing them under its sphere of control. The Ardmore pattern will also feature in this study as a unique place of pilgrimage that continued long after patterns in other places had been discontinued.

## I

In 1802, Dr. James Murphy succeeded Hugh O'Reilly as bishop of Clogher. One of his first concerns was to look after the administration of the pilgrimage of Lough Derg and with that object he addressed a list of regulations to the prior, Father Bellew, and his principal assistant, the Rev. Peter McGinn.<sup>327</sup> The document was entitled 'A few of the many regulations necessary for the orderly administration of the station of Lough Derg, Tydavnet May 26, 1802'. This document noted:

I hereby prohibit, under pain of suspension ipso, any confessor, already approved, or who may be approved of this season of Lough Derg, not excepting even the prior himself, to receive the confession, give the absolution, or admit to the indulgence of the station of Lough Derg, any pilgrim or penitent who has not complied with his Easter duty this year in his own parish, or who cannot produce a certificate signed by his own parish priest or ordinary confessor, permitting him to be admitted to the benefit of said indulgence, though he has not complied with said Easter duty.<sup>328</sup>

This practice of examination before receiving the sacraments became quite widespread and much resented by the laity who wanted to avail themselves of these channels of grace without the continuous examination of their beliefs.<sup>329</sup> Other regulations regarding investing pilgrims with cords, scapulars, and other religious badges as well the selling or blessing of these badges were considered important.<sup>330</sup> There was also an injunction that the catechism be taught systematically to the pilgrims. For that purpose two catechists were specially employed, one for Irish speakers and the other for English speakers.<sup>331</sup> In addition to instructing the rude and illiterate, the two catechists also assisted the priests in preparing

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>327</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 186.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>329</sup> Oliver P. Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603-1983* (London, 1994), p. 103.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 188.

pilgrims for the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist.<sup>332</sup> In his 1814 *relatio status*, Dr. Murphy was pleased with progress in general religious instruction. He noted:

Our illiterate laity for nine tenths of our people owing to their great poverty are such, have made an astonishing progress in acquiring a competent knowledge of the Christian Doctrine within these few years back. This change has been effected by the zeal and exertions of the parish priests, many of whom have, besides the public catechism established on Sun day mornings and evenings in their chapels or places of worship, prevailed with a number of the well-disposed laity to teach in the more remote parts of their parishes on Sunday evenings, which has produced the most happy effects and is spreading rapidly over the diocese.<sup>333</sup>

Confession and Mass had long been established parts of the Lough Derg experience, but now a greater emphasis was placed on the sacraments and the preparation necessary for receiving penance and the Eucharist worthily. Dr. Murphy pointed out in his *relatio status* in 1814 that the parish priest, otherwise the ‘General Superior’ of the station was regularly employed in examining the pilgrims in the Catechism, and giving them tickets for admission to Confession. Without sufficient knowledge of the catechism pilgrims were not ‘admitted to the benefit of the Station’.<sup>334</sup> As for confessors for the station, Dr. Murphy appointed ‘the most learned and edifying in his diocese’.<sup>335</sup> Such men are very necessary there, he added, as they meet many difficult cases owing to the character of some pilgrims who have not for many years complied with any Christian duty.<sup>336</sup> According to Dr. Murphy penitents came from ‘every part of the Kingdom for the purpose of getting strange Confessors they would never see again’.<sup>337</sup> To accommodate the multiplicity of general Confessions ‘six or seven confessors sat in their confessionals for twelve hours or more every day for two months during the pilgrimage season.’<sup>338</sup> In the diocese of Clogher statutes were enforced between 1789 and 1824, which stipulated that if a priest ‘failed to preach on three Sundays in succession he would be *ipso facto* discharged from his duties’.<sup>339</sup> Clearly then the church was making strident efforts at self-reform.

For Murphy providing the laity with adequately educated clergy was vitally important. In 1714 Bishop MacMahon confessed to ordaining a number of men of inferior intellectual ability in order to ensure a sufficient number of priests for his diocese, during the Penal

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>333</sup> Ó Dufaigh, ‘James Murphy’, p. 461.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>339</sup> Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster*, p. 70.

era.<sup>340</sup> Higher education was an even greater problem at this period. Most of the continental seminaries had been closed down by the French Revolution and Maynooth was unable to facilitate enough students.<sup>341</sup> In 1806 Dr. Murphy decided to convert a classical school founded by his predecessor Dr. O'Reilly in the late 1790s into a 'temporary major seminary'.<sup>342</sup> As part of this four year training plan in which 'Logic, Metaphysics and Ethics were taught for the first year, and moral theology, a sketch of the Holy Scriptures and of Speculative Theology for the remaining three years'.<sup>343</sup> He also made a foundation of £1000 in Maynooth which raised his places there from seven to nine.<sup>344</sup> There were other issues that Dr. Murphy wished to address including the excessive use of alcohol, a prominent social problem at the time. According to Skelton one of the great vices of his parish, apart from the incessant faction fighting was the inordinate consumption of alcohol which in turn led to more fighting.<sup>345</sup> It was well known that the clergy mixed freely with the people on the social level.<sup>346</sup> Dr. Murphy considering the implications of drinking alcohol 'forbade under pain of a reserved mortal sin all drinking of wine, whiskey and other liquors on Sundays and holy days in public houses except for those taking a meal, travelling 10 miles on that day, or who were of necessity in public business on feast days'.<sup>347</sup>

A certain amount of resistance by the clergy followed. Rev. Michael Maginn, for example, contested the decree.<sup>348</sup> He argued that there were many non-Catholics in the diocese of Clogher to whom the law would not apply. While the Irish live in scattered huts, he stressed they love 'to come together to talk in public houses or taverns'. He questioned the bishop's power to make such a law bind under mortal sin and secondly, his power to reserve it.<sup>349</sup> Another priest, obviously speaking from experience, wrote the following rough draft of a letter to be sent to the bishop on the subject.<sup>350</sup>

I never knew any priest to question you in establishing the statute. Yet experience, the mistress of laws, seems to many to point out great inconvenience attending it. A prohibition under pain of mortal sin, of taking any quantity of liquor, extended to the multitude. The act itself is not peccant. Frequent occasions and temptations: frequent

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>341</sup> Ó Dufaigh, 'James Murphy', p. 425.

<sup>342</sup> J. Healy, *Maynooth College, its centenary history* (Dublin 1895), pp. 160-294.

<sup>343</sup> Ó Dufaigh, 'James Murphy', p. 426.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 425.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 425.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 451

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 451.

and proximate danger of violation. If this violation is not considered mortal sin; frequent sacrilege. Delinquents of every sex must travel many miles, sometimes often to expose their mortal sins in public . . . The expediency of continuing the statute in all its bearings or modifying it is much agitated in the diocese. Some light thrown on it by your Worship would gratify more than your Lordship's humble servant.<sup>351</sup>

While Dr. Murphy succeeded in nearly all aspects of instructing the laity according to the teachings of the Christian doctrine, other measures were taken by the Church to eradicate a number of practices beset with superstitions. As a result, the quality of the devotional practices had been substantially improved as part of the new religious regime. There was no longer any room for certain devotional practices that were now regarded as primitive and unseemly. With the closure of the caves, the customary practice of the requiem Mass was abandoned. Another target of the new regime was the purification ritual that had traditionally followed the release from purgatory. This purification ritual, with naked bathing to wash away sin, could also be found at other pilgrimage sites of the time.<sup>352</sup> But at Lough Derg men and women performed the ritual separately and out of each other's sight. Only after the male pilgrims had immersed themselves and dressed did the prior or his agent call the women from the cave and invite them to do likewise.<sup>353</sup> According to Donnelly, this practice was considered most inappropriate as far as Victorian standards were concerned and even if done separately by women and men, was hardly acceptable in that age.<sup>354</sup> One careful observer noted 'the practice of wading into the lake, which existed not long ago' had been forbidden.<sup>355</sup> In addition to this, pilgrims also carried away pebbles and water taken by the lake. The pebbles were treated as amulets with curative or protective powers and were given to the relatives and friends of the pilgrim on their return.<sup>356</sup> Clearly, the Church had also become hostile to such practices as that mentioned by Carleton of laying two Lough Derg pebbles on the breast of every corpse as it was placed in the coffin.<sup>357</sup> Not only was the ban restricted to pebbles but also embraced 'water from the lake, branches of tress, ferns, heath, or such like'.<sup>358</sup> O'Connor said 'there is just the danger that undue value might be attached to

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 451-52.

<sup>352</sup> Donnelly, 'The modern pilgrimage', p. 500.

<sup>353</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 118.

<sup>354</sup> Donnelly, 'The modern pilgrimage', p. 503.

<sup>355</sup> *Household Worlds*, 28 Oct. 1850.

<sup>356</sup> Donnelly, 'The modern pilgrimage', p. 503.

<sup>357</sup> Carleton, *The works of William Carleton*, iii, 818.

<sup>358</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 215.

those things; and, though this may seem a small matter, order and discipline even in small things should be observed'.<sup>359</sup>

The desire for order and discipline was manifested in other ways. In 1829 the Johnstons, who operated the boats at this time, were reported to have established 'patterns' at the shore of the lake. As a result, music, dancing, and drinking were introduced, thus bringing the place into disrepute and causing great annoyance and scandal.<sup>360</sup> The prior of the island, Fr. Bellew took counter measures to restore the reputation of the pilgrimage. The following letter confirms that Bishop Kernan fully supported his decision to suspend the station for this season:

The suspension of the station of Lough Derg, for this year, was a wise and necessary measure. We had no alternative. And it clearly proves, in my humble opinion, that irregularities and disorder shall never be permitted in that place where penance and devotion should hold the first prominence.<sup>361</sup>

Further measures were taken with regard to the admission of visitors, who now had to be 'furnished with written permission from the prior before the ferryman could take them on the island'.<sup>362</sup> The new religious regime also set out to abolish such practices as sobbing copiously during the religious sermons that were given to the pilgrims several times daily. As revealed in the previous chapter, Bishop MacMahon in 1714 noted that pilgrims frequently interrupted the preacher 'with copious tears, sobs, lamentations, and other marks of penance'.<sup>363</sup> Unsure about how long clerical tolerance lasted for such exuberant lay behaviour is not exactly known, but Donnelly claims that it had largely disappeared by the 1850s, if not earlier.<sup>364</sup> However, a visitor in 1850, heard the 'nightly warning' from the pulpit against such practices on the holy island. These were called exultations, 'expressions of religious praise or joy, as unfit for a time of penance'.<sup>365</sup> In addition to these new innovations 'there were the Priors Clerk and the Director of Devotion, whose special duty it was to maintain order during the vigil inside the chapel'.<sup>366</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, there was a rise in sectarianism and agrarian violence in Ulster with the foundation of the Orange Order. The Catholic Relief Acts of the 1780s and 1790s had added to Protestant grievances. This destabilised the working relations between Catholic

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>363</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 112.

<sup>364</sup> Donnelly, 'The modern pilgrimage', p. 503.

<sup>365</sup> *Household Worlds*, 28 Oct. 1850.

<sup>366</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 188.

and Protestants. As R. F. Foster has outlined in his book *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, Orangeism grew rapidly as did Defenderism, which was the Catholic response to the Orange Order with its anti-Protestant, anti-English and anti-state ideologies.<sup>367</sup> With the rise in sectarianism also linked to the repeal of the penal legislation and the foundation of secret societies, attitudes towards the pilgrimage to Lough Derg changed considerably over this period. During this time also, Lough Derg was resorted to by writers from the Protestant community, whose object seemed to be none other than to gratify the prejudices of this ‘time-honoured retreat’.<sup>368</sup> Philip Skelton, Caesar Otway, William Carleton, Philip Dixon Hardy were some of the principal writers among this class. Critical descriptions usually focused on the strangeness and barbarity of pilgrimage practices, either mocking or condemning the participants and their religious culture.

When Philip Skelton came to the parish of Templecarn, he found the whole Lough Derg area ‘a wild uncultivated place, whose inhabitants were rude and uncultivated in the utmost degree’.<sup>369</sup> He discovered that his congregation had ‘little more knowledge of the Gospels than American Indians’.<sup>370</sup> His account of the pilgrimage to Lough Derg in 1786 was anything but flattering. He recorded that pilgrims making the night vigil were armed with long pins which were ‘suddenly inserted into the elbow of his next neighbour at the first approach of a nod’.<sup>371</sup> As for great criminals they were given an additional penance:

They sometimes add an extraordinary exposure or two in cases uncommonly criminal, such as setting the delinquents to roost on the beams that go across the Chapels with their breasts sticking through the broken places in the thatch: and here the women are often placed as well as the men while the congregation is beneath employed in prayer.<sup>372</sup>

Many antagonistic accounts of the pilgrimage and its tradition also began to appear in the Protestant periodicals at this time. *The Christian Examiner*, for example, was a monthly journal founded by Rev. Otway and Rev. Dr. Singer in 1825 as the organ for the ‘New Reformation’ wing of the Established Church. The religious pamphleteers, a group known as the ‘Evangelicals’, whose literary contributions sustained the monthly, were notorious for

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<sup>367</sup> R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1989), p. 152.

<sup>368</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 102.

<sup>369</sup> Cunningham, *Lough Derg*, p. 67.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>371</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 125.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

their ‘frequent fanatic diatribes’ against the ‘abuses’ of Romanism.<sup>373</sup> In 1828, a lengthy piece, entitled ‘A pilgrimage to Patrick’s Purgatory’ featured in this journal. The writer, William Carleton, a convert to the Church of Ireland, had visited Lough Derg while still a Catholic and participated in the station there. According to Canon O’Connor, Carleton’s account was designed to ridicule ‘not only the foibles and peculiarities of an untutored peasantry, but even the religious customs and practices of Irish Catholics’.<sup>374</sup> He reported that there ‘is no specimen of Irish superstition equal to that which is to be seen at St. Patrick’s Purgatory, in Lough Derg.’<sup>375</sup>

Alice Curtayne cites Carleton for establishing his reputation on the ‘scurrilous attack on the Lough Derg pilgrimage’. She maintained that a great number of the writers who ridiculed the pilgrimage were incidentally entertaining, but not so Carleton. It is difficult to read him without irritation.<sup>376</sup> Dr. Patrick Murray, Professor of Theology at Maynooth in 1841 also highlighted the many inaccuracies in Carleton’s account of the Lough Derg pilgrimage, when he said, ‘his scenes and stories are utterly flat and spiritless from beginning to end’.<sup>377</sup>

Caesar Otway’s brief sojourn to Patrick’s Purgatory in 1826 is outlined in *Sketches in Ireland: description of interesting, and hitherto unnoticed districts, in the North and South*. Approximately half of ‘Letter IV’ is devoted to Lough Derg, which Otway visited after the pilgrimage season. During this time the island retreat had been deserted for a month, but the inventive clergyman conjured up his own vision of a station-in-progress. Before reaching the boat, he said, ‘the associations connected with it were of such a degrading character that really the whole prospect before me struck my mind with a sense of painfulness, and I said to myself, I am already in purgatory’.<sup>378</sup> He described the boatman as ‘a stupid country man’ and the clerk of the chapel, ‘a man whose wrinkled countenance was set in a sort of leering cunning that was extremely disagreeable.’<sup>379</sup> During his several hours at Lough Derg, Otway was absorbed in calculating the financial gains to clergy and ferrymen. He discovered ‘that

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<sup>373</sup> William Carleton, *The life of William Carleton: being his auto biography and letters; and an account of his life and writings from the point at which the autobiography breaks off*, by D. J. O’Donoghue (2 vols, London, 1896), ii, 1-2.

<sup>374</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 192.

<sup>375</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 20.

<sup>376</sup> Curtayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 92.

<sup>377</sup> Daniel J. Casey, ‘Lough Derg’s infamous pilgrim’ in *Clogher Record*, vii, no. 3 (1971/1972), p. 464.

<sup>378</sup> Caesar Otway, *Sketches in Ireland: description of interesting, and hitherto unnoticed districts, in the North and South* (Dublin, 1827), p. 149.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.



each pilgrim paid the priests from 1s. 8d. to 2s. 6d'.<sup>380</sup> While his visit was certainly brief and uneventful, the impression was unmistakable:

Altogether I may briefly sum up my view of this place, and say that it was filthy, dreary, and altogether detestable-it was a positive waste of time to visit it, and I hope I shall never behold it again; but as it is still and has been for a thousand years so famous in the annals of superstition, I shall, with your leave good reader, give an account of its modern state as recorded by an eye witness, who, more fortunate than I, was witness to the process of pilgrimage during the busy time of the station.<sup>381</sup>

Not all the notices of Lough Derg written by Protestants were negative. An anonymous letter in a book titled *Excursions in Ulster* offered a complimentary view of the island. Written in 1824 the author stated 'the station at Lough Derg is of a very different kind, and no person even of our religious persuasion can visit it without being struck by the appearance of piety and religious fervour which beams in every face'.<sup>382</sup> Scottish travel writer and social commentator, Henry Inglis, gave an account of Lough Derg, in which he described the famous Lough Derg wine, as it was known to many generations of pilgrims. It consisted of the reddish lake-water boiled in an enormous cauldron and 'given to the faint and greedy pilgrims as hot as they are able to swallow it'.<sup>383</sup> It is clear that the pilgrimage to Lough Derg had re-entered the literary world and gained much publicity.

The impact of the Second Reformation, which was a vigorous missionary movement by the Church of Ireland to convert Catholics to the Protestant faith in the early nineteenth century, was to play an even bigger role in encouraging many among the clergy and laity to adopt a more conscientiousness approach to religion and its duties.<sup>384</sup> Consequently, there was a determined Catholic counter-attack spearheaded by the Redemptorists and other missionary orders in response to the second reformation.<sup>385</sup> The mission proved to be a great era of public theological dispute and polemical sermons.<sup>386</sup> A rise of catechists within the Catholic communities meant that for the holy island of Lough Derg such catechists were to become an essential part of the administration there. There was an increasing emphasis placed on Catholic interpretation of dogma, transubstantiation and the veneration of the saints.<sup>387</sup> With

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>382</sup> Desmond J. Keenan, *The Catholic Church in nineteenth century Ireland: a sociological study* (Dublin, 1983), p. 173.

<sup>383</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 130.

<sup>384</sup> Brian McNamee, 'The Second Reformation in Ireland' in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, xxxiii (1996), pp. 39-64.

<sup>385</sup> Connolly, *Religion and society*, p. 26.

<sup>386</sup> Keenan, *The Catholic Church*, p. 148.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 164.

the rise in educational standards of the people in the basic tenets of their faith and the accompanying rise in devotional practices, there was a great increase in pilgrims to the island during the first half of nineteenth century. From the year 1800 down to 1824 the average number of pilgrims was about 10,000.<sup>388</sup> The experienced English traveller John Barrow, who toured Ireland in the autumn of 1835 ‘was assured that during the last year the number of persons who had taken what is called ‘their rounds’ at the purgatory was between nineteen and twenty thousand’.<sup>389</sup> The *Parliamentary gazetteer for Ireland* for 1844 noted that the seasonal intake varied from 10,000 to 15,000 pilgrims.<sup>390</sup> On the other hand, the antiquarian John O’Donovan, who visited Lough Derg in 1835 recorded that 7,000 pilgrims arrived ‘every year during the station season’.<sup>391</sup> Although the available evidence is conflicting, Donnelly suspected that a regular seasonal intake of 20,000 was dubious but, annual attendances of 10,000 to 15,000, at least in some years was probable.<sup>392</sup>

Upon reading the Ordnance Survey documents in 1835, the parish of Templecarn, which included St. Patrick’s Purgatory, appeared to be ‘wretchedly behind in the three great causes of national prosperity-agriculture, manufacture and commerce’.<sup>393</sup> Rev. William Ingram gave an account of the parish and its limited farming methods, when he was curate in 1814:

The farms in the parish are all small. Hence it may be concluded that improvements in agriculture are very tardy: the inhabitants are very tenacious of old habits of cultivation, old instruments of husbandry, and of old stocks of cattle. Owing also to the want of roads (which are very few) the slide cars are still here in common use. The usual mode of husbandry is to take first a crop of potatoes from the manured ground, the next a crop of flax or barley, and the third year a crop of oats; very little wheat is produced here.<sup>394</sup>

Besides the backward and unimproved farming practices, there was little industry in the area and the lack of roads, canals and other means of communication as well as the distance of regular markets only added to this backwardness. Farmers laboured more for subsistence than to accumulate capital. The usual food of labourers, servants and farmers consisted of potatoes, oaten meal, butter and milk. Animal food was only and very seldom consumed on

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<sup>388</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 195.

<sup>389</sup> John Barrow, *A tour round Ireland through the seacoast counties in the autumn of 1835* (London, 1836), p. 29.

<sup>390</sup> *Parliamentary gazetteer for Ireland*, 1844, ii, 10. Also cited in Donnelly, ‘The modern pilgrimage’, p. 493.

<sup>391</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 133.

<sup>392</sup> Donnelly, ‘The modern pilgrimage’, p. 493.

<sup>393</sup> Ó Gallachair, ‘The parish of Carn’, p. 326.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

festive occasions.<sup>395</sup> The fact that the inhabitants who heavily relied on agriculture and outdated methods of utilising the land, made them extremely vulnerable to effects of the crisis. It is not surprising that when the famine struck in 1845, Ireland was to suffer a hugely significant change in its social make-up and composition. On the contrary, it is significant that the pilgrimage tradition continued over the famine period. This was mainly the result of the local population who were responsible for the continuance of the pilgrimage during this time.



Fig. 8: St. Bridget's Chair in Philip Hardy's *The holy wells*. It was believed that whoever sat in St. Bridget's chair once would not meet an accidental or sudden death.

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 326.

The parish of Templecarn itself had a slightly unusual composition in the 1840s. In 1835 there was an unusually high number of Protestants in this parish. Lieutenant W. Lancey reported that there were 1,728 members of the Established Church and 2,568 Roman Catholics in the Parish in 1835.<sup>396</sup> When the famine struck, this parish did not suffer a depletion of its numbers to a great extent as other areas. Figures from the of 1841 put the number of residents of this parish at 4,272 and by 1851 this figure had decreased marginally to 4,077.<sup>397</sup> The help and support of the local community in these fearful times must not be underestimated. Owner of the estate, Mr. John Leslie, and his agent, Mr. John Cunningham, accomplished a great deal in alleviating the prevailing distress by giving a large amount of work to the poor. Mr. Cunningham employed a number of men, and ‘many a quiet act of genuine kindness was done by him that was never known by the public at large’.<sup>398</sup> Dr. John Smyth, a member of a very old respectable Pettigo family was prominent in relieving distress and sympathising with the poor. He organised a Relief Committee, composed of the leading shopkeepers in the town, the clergy, and some of the local gentry. While giving part of his time to this philanthropic work, he devoted himself almost unreservedly to attending the sick poor in his medical capacity, and at his own expense providing nurses and medical comforts, as tea, sugar, rice, lump sugar, etc., without stint, as far as his means afforded.<sup>399</sup>

In the same year, it was reported that 30,000 pilgrims made the pilgrimage.<sup>400</sup> Twelve to fifteen priests were daily engaged in hearing confessions and attending to the other Station duties.<sup>401</sup> Certainly, in times of hardship and unprecedented economic change, men and women of all social classes turned towards religion.<sup>402</sup> Many of those pilgrims may have undertaken the pilgrimage in order to pray for a better harvest. There was a general belief that God would hear their prayers if they attended sites with religious significance. However, with repeated crop failure, the subsequent years of distress and the consequent depopulation of the country by famine, pestilence and emigration, there was a gradual decline in the number of pilgrims to the island.

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<sup>396</sup> Ó Gallachair, ‘The parish of Carn’, p. 327.

<sup>397</sup> Laura Bridgid Shalvey, ‘Continuity through change: a study of the pilgrimage to Lough Derg in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ (M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2003), p. 43.

<sup>398</sup> Ó Gallachair, ‘The parish of Carn’, p. 327.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>400</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 195.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>402</sup> Connolly, *Religion and society*, p. 7.

## II

The pilgrimage to Our Lady's Island continued undisturbed during the period of the Penal laws. Artists John James Barralet and Gabriel Beranger visited the place in 1780, but unfortunately no sketches of their visit are known to survive.<sup>403</sup> Writing in 1764, Amyas Griffith pointed out that 'the pilgrimages and penances at Our Lady's Island continued from the (5–7 September)'.<sup>404</sup> A letter from a gentleman in Dublin to his friend in Wales describing a tour through the county of Wexford in 1790 noted that 'numbers professing the Roman Catholic religion assemble to pay respect to the saint and do penance for their past sins'.<sup>405</sup> It is evident that the pilgrimage was still being carried on in the late eighteenth century. Patrick Corish has indicated that the religious situation in County Wexford was somewhat different to other places, in that it had reached a degree of 'approximation to the Tridentine pattern' by the late 1780s.<sup>406</sup> Kielthy's 'The origins, decline and eventual modernisation in 1850-1897 of the pilgrimage in Our Lady's Island, Co. Wexford' indicates that the parish registers for Our Lady's Island which started in 1737 were quite complete. This was very early for a rural parish but it does demonstrate the high level of organisation that was in place.<sup>407</sup> The 1722 statutes drawn up by Bishop Verdon, set out strict guidelines to ensure that there was Mass on a Sunday at a fixed time and place and that priests of each parish were involved in teaching the catechism of Christian doctrine.<sup>408</sup> Certainly, the long episcopate of Nicholas Sweetman saw the stabilisation of the Catholic mission in the diocese of Ferns. Diocesan regulations of 1771 stipulated that 'no priest or friar must dare, under the same penalty, to administer any Sacrament whatsoever to any Roman Catholic person who eats meat on Fridays or Saturdays, in Lent'.<sup>409</sup> Therefore, the keeping of feast and fast was obviously a matter of great importance. There appears to have been no problem with providing Mass on a Sunday. Instruction was given that 'two Masses on Sundays and Holy Days are hereby recalled from all priests and friars in the diocese of Ferns'.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Peter Harbison, 'Barralet and Beranger's antiquarian sketching tour through Wicklow and Wexford in the Autumn of 1780' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, civ, no. 6 (2004), pp 131-90.

<sup>404</sup> P. H. Hore, 'The barony Forth: Part II' in *The Past: the Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, no. 2 (1921), p. 70

<sup>405</sup> Murphy, 'Our Lady's Island', p. 21.

<sup>406</sup> Corish 'Two centuries of Catholicism', p. 222.

<sup>407</sup> Kielthy, 'The origins, decline and eventual modernisation in 1850-1897', p. 24.

<sup>408</sup> Patrick J. Corish, 'Ferns diocesan statutes, 1722' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xxvii (1964), pp 76-84.

<sup>409</sup> W. H. Grattan Flood, 'The diocesan manuscripts of Ferns during the rule of Bishop Sweetman (1745-1786)' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, iii (1914), pp 113-23.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

When James Caulfield succeeded as bishop on the death of Nicholas Sweetman in 1786, there was a great deal of continuity. Diocesan regulations issued by the old bishop in 1771 could equally well have come from Bishop Caulfield. They reflect the later eighteenth century rather than its beginning. In particular, there was a relatively new sharpness in the command to priests ‘to put back and discourage as much as ye can, Patrons of pilgrimages or meetings of pretended devotion, or rather of real dissipation and dissoluteness’.<sup>411</sup> This new system of command can be applied too, in the denunciation of priests ‘who act the fairy doctor in any shape...who bless water to sprinkle sick persons, cattle and fields’.<sup>412</sup> A new age is clearly indicated in the concern with ‘profane impious Catholics that scoff at religion’.<sup>413</sup> The sacrament of confession and the Eucharist was frequently held in the church on Sundays. In 1796, Bishop Caulfield, speaking of the shortage of priests, indicated that they sometimes had to spend twelve hours or even more in the confessional.<sup>414</sup> It was known at this time, that the pastoral problem of confession and communion was met by the institution of ‘stations of confession’.<sup>415</sup> This sort of station had nothing to do with holy wells or rounding rituals but involved a priest visiting each of a series of private homes in an area, and hearing confessions and saying mass for those members of the community who attended.<sup>416</sup> Stations of confession were usually held sometimes around Christmas and Easter, and priests used the occasion to collect the dues they were owed by the members of their flock. In some parishes the numbers of stations held during a single year was quite large. Writing in 1800, the bishop of Kildare and Leighlin suggested ‘the stations, in large populous parishes, generally exceed, sometimes considerably, one hundred in the year’.<sup>417</sup> However, Corish indicates that this practice never became a feature of Catholic life in Wexford.

Superstitions lingered and it was hard to put ‘priests that act the fairy doctor’ out of business.<sup>418</sup> The civil law forbade them and the local authorities set themselves against the traditional pilgrimages. In 1777 the sheriff and grand jury of Wexford had ordered all

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<sup>411</sup> P. J. Corish, ‘James Caulfield, bishop of Ferns 1786-1814’, in *Journal of the Wexford Historical Society*, xvi, (1996-97), p. 121.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>414</sup> Corish, ‘Two centuries of Catholicism’, p. 244.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>416</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 77

<sup>417</sup> Charles Vane, *Memoirs and correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh* (12 vols, London, 1849), iv, 15.

<sup>418</sup> Corish, ‘Two centuries of Catholicism’, p. 245.

magistrates to be vigilant in suppressing them.<sup>419</sup> The archbishop of Dublin had the following letter read to the congregation at each Mass in the diocese in 1787:

Dear Christian, We think it incumbent on us to inform you that those of our communion who frequent the Well at the Royal Hospital, commonly called St. John of Jerusalem's well, on or about the 24<sup>th</sup> inst. The feast of St. John the Baptist, instead of gaining indulgence, or repairing any other spiritual benefit thereby, generally scandalise their holy religion and disturb public peace by many criminal excesses; it is therefore hopes that no Roman Catholic will encourage such lawless meeting, by erecting tents, by their presence or otherwise, under pain of disobedience of the Church. Such well-disposed Catholics as are inclined to glorify God by honouring His saints, in whom He is wonderful, may satisfy their devotions in the chapels or elsewhere in a becoming manner, without exposing themselves to the dangerous opportunities of intoxication, riot, and other manifold transgressions of every duty. We earnestly conjure you, dear brethren, as you regard your eternal salvation, the honour of religion, the good of society in general, and that of your own families in particular, to demean yourselves on this and every occasion in a manner becoming children of the Church, and peaceable members of the community.<sup>420</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, there was also the issue of alcohol that accompanied events such as dances, fairs, stations, and patterns. Kevin Whelan notes that out of a group of eighty-five priests who were heavily involved in the United Irishmen, eleven had drink problems. Whelan remarks that the unemployed or suspended priests may have been pressurized in a less subtle way. The suspended priest in Irish tradition was credited with supernatural potency, especially as a thaumaturgist, and the 'power' was particularly associated with those who had been silenced for a drink problem.<sup>421</sup> Priests who desired to participate fully in the life of the people were not always tolerated by the bishop in charge. The following letter from Bishop James Caulfield to Archbishop Troy of Dublin in 1798 indicated that a certain 'Thomas Dixon of Castle-bridge, had been curate at the Lady's Island for some years, but for drinking, dancing and disorderly conduct, was suspended about four years ago'.<sup>422</sup> Such priests were directly exposed to the good will of their host communities and may have felt the need to swim with the tide. As the Anglican bishop of Killala, Joseph Stock, accurately observed:

The almost total dependence of the Roman clergy in Ireland upon their people for the means of subsistence, upon every popular commotion, many priests of that communion have been ...in the ranks of sedition and opposition to the established

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>420</sup> *Dublin Chronicle*, 23 Jun. 1787.

<sup>421</sup> Kevin Whelan, 'The role of the Catholic Priest in the 1798 Rebellion in County Wexford' in Kevin Whelan and William Nolan (eds), *Wexford: history and society-interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1987), pp 305-08.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 315.

government... The peasant will love a revolution because he feels the weight of poverty and has not often the sense to perceive that a change of masters may render it heavier. The priest must follow the impulse of the popular wave or be left behind on the beach to perish.<sup>423</sup>

Moreover, it was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century that Our Lady's Island had its own stone church. Kielthy indicates that the church was not built until the prospects of the pilgrimage had improved.<sup>424</sup> At the start of the 1800s Our Lady's Island had only a temporary church of mud walls. P.H. Hore, the county historian, stated that the church was improved in 1791 and in 1803 another one was erected, but that pilgrims still frequented the island though in diminishing numbers'.<sup>425</sup> The pilgrimage practice at Our Lady's Island was effectively gone by the mid nineteenth century. By the 1830s the pilgrimage was being referred to in the past tense. An anonymous article in *The Dublin Penny Journal* entitled 'The Lady's Island in 1833' recorded that:

This place being dedicated to the Virgin Mary was then, and until lately, a celebrated place of pilgrimage, and even at this day (1838) persons resort to it from the counties of Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow, Wicklow &c.<sup>426</sup>

In 1840 John O'Donovan indicated that the pilgrimage had been discontinued, 'the holy well called after our Blessed Lady at which pilgrims were wont to say their prayers'.<sup>427</sup> There is also evidence that local priests prohibited 'patterns' in their parishes because of carousing and other inappropriate conduct. The wells involved were no longer deemed 'sacred', and in time became neglected and deserted as people became more philosophical. O'Donovan noted that the pilgrimages at the older parishes of St. Iberius and Carn had also been abolished.<sup>428</sup> In Carn parish there was a holy well dedicated to St. Vauk, at which 'patterns' were held annually on 20 January.<sup>429</sup> The old church of Ballymore that was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary held a 'pattern' annually on 15 August.<sup>430</sup> In the townland of Kerloge a 'pattern' was annually held on St. James' day, but it was abolished in the 1820s.<sup>431</sup> O'Donovan noted

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>424</sup> Kielthy, 'The origins, decline and eventual modernisation in 1850-1897', p. 26.

<sup>425</sup> P. H. Hore, 'The barony Forth: Part III' in *The Past: the Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, no. 3 (1925), pp 9-40.

<sup>426</sup> *The Dublin Penny Journal*, i, no. 30 (Jan. 1833), p. 23.

<sup>427</sup> Hore, 'The barony Forth: Part III', p. 21. See also John O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Wexford, collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1925).

<sup>428</sup> P. H. Hore, 'The barony of Forth: Part IV' in *The Past: the Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, no. 5 (1949), pp 13-59.

<sup>429</sup> Hore, 'The barony Forth: Part II', p. 80.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 94.



that it was about twenty-two years since a 'pattern' was held annually on 1 August at the holy well of St. Davin's in the townland of Kildavin. He indicated that people no longer resorted to this well for the cure of any disease.<sup>432</sup> Fundamentally, the civil authorities who had long been suspicious of pilgrimages had successfully prohibited them.

It should be mentioned that a number of factors conspired against the practice. The advent of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 had an impact on the political landscape. As a result, the position of the Catholic Church gained more authority and power. This in turn facilitated the process of institutionalising religious practice. The process was slow to begin with, but traditional practices, like pilgrimages and patterns, were targeted for reform. As Kielthy puts it 'the stage was set with a renowned religious site falling into decline'.<sup>433</sup> Articles, newspapers and the writings of the time all seem to speak in the past tense. Samuel Lewis's *Topographical dictionary* of the 1830s, noted the importance of August and September in the area in connection with fairs rather than the pilgrimage.<sup>434</sup> O'Donovan also lamented that local fairs superseded the pattern from 1840. By the mid 1840s the pilgrimage at Our Lady's Island had officially ended.

Unlike the parish of Templecarn in Donegal, for reasons geographical, economical and social, the Barony of Forth, not only escaped the worst ravages of the famine but actually prospered during this awful period. In 1841 the population of the Barony of Forth was 25,557 while a decade later it was recorded as 24,359.<sup>435</sup> This marks a marginal drop of 0.81 per cent of the population. It may be noted that the parish of Templecarn experienced a similar drop, but, it was the generosity of the Protestant community that saved so many of the Catholic inhabitants here from perishing. On the contrary, Richard Roche acknowledges that:

the survival of a small-farmer/peasant-farmer class in the Barony of Forth, a unitarian ethnic community in an isolated geographical situation, led to the perpetuation of a stable rural society, a mixed farming economy and a unique culture, all of which combined to form a bulwark against famine, poverty and rural decay.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>433</sup> Kielthy, 'The origins, decline and eventual modernisation in 1850-1897', p. 27.

<sup>434</sup> E. Browne and T. Wickham (ed.), *Lewis's Wexford* (Enniscorthy, 1983), p. 104.

<sup>435</sup> Kielthy, 'The origins, decline and eventual modernisation in 1850-1897', p. 27.

<sup>436</sup> Richard Roche, 'The famine years in Forth and Bargy' in *Journal of the Wexford Historical Society*, no. 15 (1994-95), p. 1.

By the time of the famine, south Wexford was a region of small medium farms, intensively cultivated, producing not just staple crops of potatoes, barley, oats, wheat, dairy products and pig products, but also beans and peas, eggs, fowl and honey. It was these additional foodstuffs that helped to sustain the community over this difficult period. In Our Lady's Island in 1847, 542 acres were under beans.<sup>437</sup> The entire area of Our Lady's Island only constituted 597 acres and as such over 90 per cent of the land was being used to grow a crop other than the potato. Moreover, the Barony of Forth was renowned for the industrious habits of the population. The people were more independent than others due to home industry flax. This was grown on the farm, dressed and spun in the farmhouse. Similarly wool was shorn by the farmer or his son, spun by the wife, daughters or maid servants.<sup>438</sup> It is not surprising therefore, to find that in the Barony of Forth there was only a minimal decrease in its population. After all, nearly everything which they needed to survive was produced at home.

### III

It has been noted already in this chapter that pilgrimages were often occasions for drinking, carousing, dancing and the peddling of pre-Tridentine material. In his book *Priests and people in pre-famine Ireland*, the historian, Sean Connolly pointed out that the Church was in danger of being overwhelmed and tainted by a characteristic combination of 'demonstrative religiosity and secular merriment'.<sup>439</sup> The clergy and church authorities had made genuine efforts to ensure the strict observance of church practice in the discipline of the sacraments. While Lough Derg and Our Lady's Island were free from the debaucheries of other sites, the boisterous patterns at Croagh Patrick, Struell Wells, and Ardmore were well documented in the writings of various representatives of the church, antiquarians and curious travellers in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There was no great class distinction to its clientele though the 'peasantry' were occasionally referred to by the more elitist commentators. Croagh Patrick may have lost its appeal in the seventeenth century, but it was noted that 30,000 pilgrims performed the stations in 1825.<sup>440</sup> A full account of the pattern at Croagh Patrick was given by the famous English novelist W.M. Thackeray during his tour of Ireland in 1842. He noted that it began on a Sunday and that the local priests going up the mountain forbade music and dancing, and that 'people should only content themselves with

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>438</sup> Thomas Walter Freeman, *Pre-famine Ireland: a study in historical geography* (Manchester, 1957), p. 192.

<sup>439</sup> Sean Connolly, *Priests and people in pre-famine Ireland* (Dublin, 1985), p. 215.

<sup>440</sup> Rev. James Page, *Ireland: its evils traced to their source* (London, 1836), p. 79.

the performance of what are called religious duties'.<sup>441</sup> From Thackeray's account, it is evident that attempts were made to prevent such sacrilegious activities from taking place on the holy site. A hermit from Glenconella who visited the site in 1820 reported that Father Anthony discouraged pilgrims against the 'clamour and indecency' committed after the pilgrimage. He acknowledged that it was not always in his power to remedy every evil and that sometimes the misconduct imputed to the pilgrims was not committed by them, but by others who had come to revile them.<sup>442</sup> It was difficult to turn back the tide of ignorance and priests were reluctant to take responsibility for the misdeeds of persons assembled near places where such degrading and unruly behaviour took place.<sup>443</sup>

Although Thackeray did not climb the mountain himself or participate in the stations, his informant noted that there were three stations. The first 'station' consisted of a cairn or heap of stones which pilgrims circled seven times, casting a stone and saying a prayer before and after each stone.<sup>444</sup> At the second station which was conducted on the top of the mountain and consisted of a great stone altar, pilgrims crawled on their knees while reciting fifteen prayers and making rounds of the mountain.<sup>445</sup> The third station was near the bottom of the mountain and consisted of three cairns. Pilgrims went seven times around these collectively, then seven times around each individually, saying a prayer before and after each circuit.<sup>446</sup> When the penitents had finished this 'frightful exhibition', they were in so much pain, that he could hear 'the women shrieking with the pain of their wounds'.<sup>447</sup>

Having completed the penitential rounding, pilgrims to Croagh Patrick visualised their separation from their sins and the associated punishment by leaving something behind. At St. Patrick's bed, pilgrims both men and women were observed cutting off their hair, taking horse-shoes, brogue-nails, pins and needles, and fastening them to the trees. They did the same with their clothes. Hardy described how 'awful to see the condition of these trees when the station is over'.<sup>448</sup> O'Donovan reported similar instances where pilgrims tore strips of cloth from their clothing and left them stuck in between the stones of the chapel.<sup>449</sup> At the

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<sup>441</sup> W.H. Thackeray, *The Irish sketch book, 1842* (London, 1887), p. 224.

<sup>442</sup> Eneas MacDonnell, *The hermit of Glenconella* (London, 1820), pp 204-05.

<sup>443</sup> Thackeray, *Irish sketch book*, p. 225.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-25.

<sup>448</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 54.

<sup>449</sup> Carroll, *Irish pilgrimage*, p. 39.

holy wells in Wexford, it was customary to leave ‘votive offerings’— a strip from the pilgrims garment, perhaps, or some religious token on the nearby tree or bush.<sup>450</sup> According to Gearoid O’Brien, this was reminiscent of ancient Greece or Rome, where flower garlands were brought in homage to the deities.<sup>451</sup> These were never to be removed and remained there for years. They were intended as tokens of gratitude to the saint for his help, and to remind the ‘Evil One’ that his influence could no longer endure.<sup>452</sup>

These excursions were often celebrations of drunkenness and debauchery ‘for after the business on the mountain came the dancing and love-making at its foot’.<sup>453</sup> Thackeray noted this was ‘woefully spoiled by the rain, which rendered dancing on the grass impossible, nor were the tents big enough for that exercise.’<sup>454</sup> About fifty tents were pitched at the foot of the mountain, where the people congregated, and food and drink were sold from booths and stalls erected by merchants from the neighbouring towns. Rev. James Page, in a polemic attacking the influence of Roman Catholicism in Ireland, referred to pilgrimage devotions as ‘debasement superstitions’.<sup>455</sup> He noted that the vast majority of the Irish, especially in the western parts ‘are as ignorant of the mind of God, as those who have been born where the light of Revelation hath never shined’.<sup>456</sup> There was another station on the north side, called Patrick’s bed and ‘none but those that are barren go there to commit the most abominable practices that would make human nature, in its most degraded state, blush’.<sup>457</sup> He noted that the station course was forty yards in circumference and that pilgrims circumvented it seven times. On entering the bed pilgrims removed small pebbles to bring home, in order to prevent barrenness, and to banish rats and mice.<sup>458</sup> The aforementioned Caesar Otway, described the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage as ‘a gross and barbarous superstition, a thing only fit for darkness and dreariness’.<sup>459</sup>

Yet, despite the profanity and harsh commentary, there were genuine cases of devotion at this place as O’Donovan observed in 1838, when he visited Aghagower, the half-way stop on the

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<sup>450</sup> Gearoid O’Brien, ‘The holy wells of Wexford’ in *Journal of the Wexford Historical Society*, no. 9, (1983-84), p. 28.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>453</sup> Thackeray, *Irish sketch book*, p. 225.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>455</sup> Page, *Ireland: its evils traced*, p. 62.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>459</sup> Caesar Otway, *Tour in Connaught* (Dublin, 1839), p. 317.

Tóchar Phádraig pilgrimage. At this place, he noticed an old women praying at the sacred spot and would ‘never forget the enthusiastic glow of devotion to which her eyes gave expression’.<sup>460</sup> Otway who visited the Reek in 1839 was told by a guide about a certain Robert Binn, affectionately known as ‘Bob of the Reek’. Bob performed the pilgrimage daily ‘for any poor sinner who either was unable, from want of health or other means, of coming themselves to the Reek’.<sup>461</sup> During the winter season, Bob was kindly received by the neighbours, who fulfilled his wish to be buried on the mountain.

#### IV

William Carleton in the 1830s stressed the love of fun as ‘the essential principle in the Irish character’, and that no event, ‘no matter how solemn or how sorrowful it may be’, was allowed to occur without it. He instanced the sincere and severe piety of the pilgrim to the holy well who shortly afterwards could be found in a tent, dancing ‘with an ecstatic vehemence’.<sup>462</sup> The most comprehensive description of the pilgrimage to Struell was provided by Hardy in 1836. The pilgrimage usually continued for a week with the climax at midnight on Midsummer’s Eve (23–4 June) and the Sunday nearest that date. He noted that

to this place about one thousand people resort every midsummer, for the purpose of doing penance. They come from all parts of Ireland, and even from Scotland and England. Besides these, there, there are always a large crowd of spectators, amounting probably to another thousand. For the comfort and accommodation of both, a number of tents are erected on the plain, where whiskey is sold, and entertainment of every kind is afforded.<sup>463</sup>

Another observer remarked that some fifty tents were present, which were occupied by ‘whiskey dealers and cooks of potatoes and herrings’.<sup>464</sup> The penitents first arrived in Downpatrick, and having ‘procured a portion of holy soil’ from St. Patrick’s grave they proceeded to ‘some house in town’ where Mass was said, and after a short delay set off for Struell.<sup>465</sup> Much of the ritual consisted of reciting prayers, completing rounds of the penitential cairns, a feature of most pilgrimages at holy wells, though some were more extreme than noted elsewhere: ‘A few, whose sins are of a milder cast may run up the path barefoot; but those who have been guilty of black and grievous offences, besides crawling

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<sup>460</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 82.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>462</sup> William Carleton, *Traits and stories of the Irish peasantry* (2 vols, New York, 1862), i, xxiv.

<sup>463</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 68.

<sup>464</sup> R. P., ‘St Patrick’s Wells at Struell’ in *The Catholic Layman*, v, no. 50 (1856), p. 22.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

upon their knees, must carry a large rough stone, with their hands placed upon the back of their necks'.<sup>466</sup> Pilgrims repeated this exercise three, seven, nine, or twelve times according to the nature of their transgressions. Part of the ritual necessitated the pilgrim to sit in St. Patrick's 'chair', and was turned in it three times by the superintendant who was rewarded with a penny.<sup>467</sup> J. B. Doyle noted that the person who was in charge of St Patrick's Chair 'is not a native of Down, but comes from the west, and claims it as a hereditary right'.<sup>468</sup> Pilgrims moved on to the cairns, crawling and running, while adding stones to the heap. These cairns were in groups of seven and twelve, which respectively signalled the days of the week, and the months of the year or, 'as some will have it the seven churches and the twelve apostles'.<sup>469</sup> Following this exercise they visited the four wells including 'the Body Well or the Well of Sins, the Limb Well, the Eye Well, and the Well of Life'.<sup>470</sup> The use of the Body Well was confined to those who could afford to pay for the privacy it provided:

If they can afford a few pence of admission money, they may enter the larger well, where they have room to undress if not, they must content themselves with the second or limb-well, into which they are admitted free of expense, being obliged, however, to strip themselves in the adjoining fields. All modesty is here thrown aside. As they approach the well, they throw off even their undergarments, and with more than Lacedemonian indifference, before the assembled multitudes, they go forward in a state of absolute nudity, plunge in, and bathe promiscuously. After such immersion, they go through the ceremony of washing- their eyes, and conclude the whole by drinking from the fourth well, called by some the well of forgetfulness, and by others the water of life.<sup>471</sup>

In the evenings those attending appear to have indulged in more secular activities, which no doubt contributed to the attractions of the pilgrimage: 'In the tents, and in the adjoining fields, under the canopy of a pure sky, they spend the whole night, quaffing the soul-inspiring beverage, and indulging in various gratifications to which the time and place are favourable; for it is understood, that while the jubilee continues, and as long as the happy multitudes remain on sacred ground, they cannot contract new guilt'.<sup>472</sup> 'R. P.' noted in 1856 that as a consequence of these activities 'many went away with more fresh wounds made than old sores healed'.<sup>473</sup> As always with the pattern the common participation of the lower clergy made it more difficult to suppress. Hardy was outraged by the practice of priests imposing

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>468</sup> J. B. Doyle, *Tours of Ulster: a hand book to the antiquities and scenery of the north of Ireland* (Dublin, 1854), p. 78.

<sup>469</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 69.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>473</sup> 'R. P.', 'St Patrick's Wells'.

rites of the pattern as a penance, and recommending them for indulgences and for the relief of souls in purgatory.<sup>474</sup> He also referred to a Catholic catechism to show that it too supported the pattern.<sup>475</sup> There were many instances of priests refusing absolution to penitents who did not know their catechism. One Mass-server named Andy Lawlor was appointed by the priest to assist in examining the catechism of all those who intended to confess during the station mass. If they passed the test 'he gave them a bit of twisted brown paper as a ticket, and they were received at the tribunal'.<sup>476</sup>

### THE STATION.



Fig. 9: Sketch of a station at a private house in William Carleton's *Traits and stories of Irish peasantry*.

<sup>474</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 73.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Official clerical disapproval for a long time had little impact but there is evidence of attempts at control. The ‘body well’ with its enclosure behind which the paying pilgrims could undress was evidence of the intrusion of bourgeois moral standards. In 1744 Walter Harris, the author of *The ancient and present state of the county of Down*, indicated that: ‘Precisely at twelve o’clock on each Midsummer Eve the water was accustomed to rise and overflow the large well, and all its miraculous powers, had then attained its maximum’.<sup>477</sup> This was achieved by ‘means of a sluice’, which retained or transmitted the water at pleasure.<sup>478</sup> In the 1830s, however, a respectable inhabitant of Belfast perforated a part of the embankment, and let the water escape in another direction, thus disappointing the expectants of the miracle. This was considered a significant sacred moment in the pilgrimage ‘when the expecting devotees saw the water rising in the wells, they attributed the phenomenon to Saint Patrick’.<sup>479</sup> A report in a local newspaper, the partisan *Downpatrick Protestant*, noted that ‘bottles, jars and portable pitchers were brought into requisition to carry away the “first shot” of the doubly distilled holy water’.<sup>480</sup> At times the crowds were so great that it was necessary to remove the covers of the culverts so that the pilgrims could have access to the miraculous waters.<sup>481</sup> After the banks had been perforated, the wells dried up and few visitors came that year ‘to this scene of mingled penitence and sensual enjoyment’.<sup>482</sup>

It was not uncommon for a person to travel long distances to a noted pattern. Historian Brigitte Caulier, in her book, *Water and the sacred: therapeutic cults around the fountains in France from the Middle Ages to the present*, pointed out that the necessity of exteriority is essential to all pilgrimages, for which it is necessary to touch or go beyond the symbolic limit of quotidian space.<sup>483</sup> Hardy mentioned people from as far away as Scotland and England going to Struell Wells. John Lalley had walked barefoot from County Galway to Struell to do penance for a man whose spirit had appeared to him. Lalley began the pattern ritual at six o’clock each morning and did not break his fast until seven in the evening. He could not leave the pattern, where he had already spent ten days, for sometime afterwards because his feet

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<sup>477</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 70.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>480</sup> *Downpatrick Protestant*, 28 Jun. 1861.

<sup>481</sup> Jonathan Binns, *The miseries and beauties of Ireland* (London, 1837), p. 141.

<sup>482</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 70

<sup>483</sup> Brigitte Caulier, *Water and the sacred: therapeutic cults around the fountains in France from the Middle Ages to the present* (Paris, 1990), p. 23.



were so bruised and his knees ulcerated from making the rounds.<sup>484</sup> Anthropologist Victor Turner used the term ‘liminality’ to refer to any condition which is outside of, or on the margins of, ordinary life, a condition which is potentially sacred.<sup>485</sup> Pilgrimage, as a journey to a place which is sacred was considered a liminal occasion.<sup>486</sup> As in the liminality of initiation rites, such an actor-pilgrim is confronted by sequences of sacred objects and participates in symbolic activities which he believes are efficacious in changing his inner and, sometimes, hopefully, outer condition from sin to grace, or sickness to health. He hopes for miracles and transformations, either of soul or body.<sup>487</sup> Moreover, liminality offered an escape from the current structures of society, or at least from ones place in them.<sup>488</sup> Turner’s notion of *communitas* was ‘a liminal phenomenon, consisting of a blend of humility and comradeship’.<sup>489</sup> This sense of *communitas* produced by the festival made the individual feel a part of a community in which class and gender were of no significance.<sup>490</sup> There were other forms of *communitas* noted by Tuner in *The ritual process*.<sup>491</sup> Religious systems and pilgrimage systems were all examples of normative *communitas*, each originating in a nonutilitarian experience of brotherhood and fellowship.<sup>492</sup> The pilgrimage to Lough Derg, its social organisation, and its rituals were all expressions of normative *communitas*. Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin points out that people enjoyed the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance and became more aware of their bodily unit. They enjoyed all the festivities with a degree of moral and social freedom.<sup>493</sup> All are participants he noted, ‘carnival...does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators’.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, pp 71-76.

<sup>485</sup> Victor Turner, *Dramas, fields, and metaphors* (Ithaca and London, 1974), pp 46-47.

<sup>486</sup> Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture: anthropological perspectives* (Oxford, 1978), pp 1-39.

<sup>487</sup> Victor Turner, ‘The Center out There: Pilgrim's Goal’ in *History of Religions*, xii, no. 3 (1973), pp 213-214.

<sup>488</sup> Kathleen M. Ashley (ed.), *Turner and the construction of cultural criticism: between literature and anthropology* (Indiana, 1990), p. 71.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>490</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world* (Indiana, 1984), p. 225.

<sup>491</sup> Victor Turner, *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure* (London, 1969), p. 132.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>493</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, p. 225.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century the pattern held at Ardmore was one the best known and well attended patterns with 12-15,000 pilgrims taking part in the devotions.<sup>495</sup> Those who attended the ‘pattern’ mainly came from communities in county Waterford and Cork, as well as further afield. One visitor to the pattern held in 1832 reported that ‘multitudes...there assembled were from all the neighbouring districts, even from the counties of Kerry, Cork, Limerick and Waterford’.<sup>496</sup> As always the religious devotions were undertaken first and then followed by the usual secular amusements found at other patterns. Hardy indicated that there were four stations at Ardmore, but the one that attracted the most attention was St. Declan’s Rock, (St. Declan being the patron of the festival). This was a large rock on the seashore and when the tide was low pilgrims went under the stone and performed their devotions. It was a tight squeeze that sometimes required the removal of one’s clothes to get through it. Hardy’s description was most insightful:

In order to begin here, the men take off hats, coats, shoes, and stockings, and if very large, waistcoats - they turn up their breeches, above the knee, then lying flat on the ground, put in hands, arms, and head, one shoulder more forward than the other in order to work their way through the more easily, and coming out from under the stone at the other end, (from front to rear perhaps is four feet,) they rise on their knees and strike their backs three times against the stone, remove beads, repeat aves, &c. They then proceed on bare knees over a number of little rocks to the place where they enter again under the stone, and thus proceed three times, which done, they wash their knees, &c. &c. dress, and proceed to the well. The women take off bonnets, shoes, stockings, and turn their petticoats up above the knee, so that they may go on their bare knees.<sup>497</sup>

After completing the devotions at St. Declan’s Rock, pilgrims then proceeded to the holy well a short distance away. The well was next to a ruined chapel, and here pilgrims circumvented both chapel and well three times. Other stations at Ardmore were conducted at the round tower, and a ruined structure called the Saint’s House. Priests were greatly angered by certain aspects of the pattern particularly the devotions at St. Declan’s stone. It was reported that pilgrims at St. Declan’s Stone were horse-whipped in an attempt to drive them away.<sup>498</sup> A story was told of how the parish priest at Ardmore asked people to stop all devotions at the

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<sup>495</sup> Samuel Carter and Anna Maria Hall, *Ireland: its scenery, character, &c* (3 vols, London, 1843), i, 284.

<sup>496</sup> William Hackett, ‘The Irish bacach, or professional beggar, viewed archaeologically’ in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, ix (1861), p. 266.

<sup>497</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, pp 61-62

<sup>498</sup> Eugene Broderick, ‘Devotions at holy wells: an aspect of popular religion in the diocese of Waterford and Lismore before the famine’, in *Decies*, liv (1998), pp 53-74.

stone. When this fell on deaf ears he gathered a group of men with sledgehammers to break it up. There is evidence to suggest that some of the devotions at Ardmore in the 1830s were overhauled and reshaped by the ecclesiastical authorities so as to bring them much more closely into line with the demands of Tridentine Catholicism. Hardy reported seeing ‘more than a thousand people being on their knees in the vicinity of the chapel where the priest was celebrating Mass, for on that day they have three Masses’.<sup>499</sup> It has been suggested already that priests were forbidden from attending patterns, in 1780. Bishop Nicholas Foran suppressed the Ardmore pattern in 1838 much to the satisfaction of the gentry, clergy and farmers of the area.<sup>500</sup> In 1840 the pattern continued and three hundred tierces of porter were consumed at it. *Waterford Mail* in 1846 reported that the pattern had gone ahead as usual despite warnings from the local priests.<sup>501</sup>

The strength of the people’s devotion to the stations at Ardmore was often mentioned in the writings of novelists and travel writers from the period. When the poet Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin made the pilgrimage to Ardmore for the pattern, he described the thousands of pilgrims winding their way up the cliff to ‘hold dialogue with the Saint and meditate on his virtues’.<sup>502</sup> These poor people in Tadhg’s eyes, were ‘God’s lovely people’.<sup>503</sup> Equally important was the enormous level of respect that people had for the traditions and legends of the holy wells and sacred stones. It was noted that water from holy wells should never be boiled or used for domestic or household purposes. Numerous tales bear testimony of the dire consequences of abusing holy wells.<sup>504</sup> At St. Declan’s Rock, one of the local landlords, Bagge, was said to have put his dog beneath the stone because he suffered from back pain, but the dog became stuck and was drowned when the tide came in again.<sup>505</sup> A similar sacrilegious act was committed at the holy well in Wexford, when a blind horse was led three times around a well by its owner, and was fortunate in having its sight restored. Unfortunately its master soon realised the folly of his deed, when he himself was suddenly struck blind for the remainder of his life.<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Hardy, *Holy wells*, p. 62

<sup>500</sup> Maurice B. Kiely and William Nolan, ‘Politics, land and rural conflict in county Waterford, c.1830-1845’ in William Nolan and Thomas P. Power (eds), *Waterford, history and society* (Dublin, 1992), p. 485.

<sup>501</sup> Broderick, ‘Devotions at holy wells’, p. 73.

<sup>502</sup> Dónal O’Connor, *The pilgrim’s Ardmore: a walk (1 hour) exploring some of the Christian antiquities of Ardmore Declain* (Waterford, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>503</sup> Stiofán Ó Cadhla, *The holy well tradition* (Dublin, 2002), p. 18.

<sup>504</sup> O’Brien, ‘The holy wells of wexford’, p. 28-29.

<sup>505</sup> Ó Cadhla, *Holy well tradition*, p. 18.

<sup>506</sup> O’Brien, ‘The holy wells of Wexford’, p. 29.

Degeneration of patterns into violence and ‘faction-fighting’ was also a common feature. The Antiquarian, Thomas Crofton Croker, noted the common loss of life at patterns owing to faction-fighting. As a result, the pattern of Gougane Barra in Co. Cork was banned by the bishop of Cork, Dr. John Murphy in 1818. The description ended with reference to ‘the disgraceful riot of the patron, a meeting that seems established only to profane all that is impressive, simple, and pious’.<sup>507</sup> At Ardmore this ‘want of piety’ and in particular the combination, as described in Croker’s 1810 account of the Ardmore pattern, of ‘bloody knees from devotions and bloody heads from fighting’, represented the juxtaposition of the sacred and profane:

Nevertheless, the sanctity of a day, marked even by the most humiliating exercises of devotion, did not prevent its night being passed in riot and debauchery. The tents which, throughout the day, the duties owing to the patron saint had caused to be empty, at evening became thronged with the devotionalists of the morning, and resounded till day-break with the oaths of the blasphemer, and the shouts of the drunkard.<sup>508</sup>

## VI

The Catholic Church in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a general reorganisation and a tightening of ecclesiastical discipline curbing if not eliminating the most serious abuses. The most visible agents of change were a new generation of bishops who set about the task of imposing higher standards of behaviour and performance among the clergy. Reforms introduced in different dioceses were broadly similar, but with the extent and pace of change varying from place to place. At Lough Derg, the introduction of a new religious regime was made easier, by the general disappearance of those profane or secular elements that the clergy struggled against. In 1780, when the prelates of the ecclesiastical province of Armagh banned patterns, Lough Derg was exempted ‘owing to its great utility’.<sup>509</sup> The drinking, feasting, singing, dancing, and fighting that characterised the profane side of patterns never established themselves at Lough Derg. One occasion when there was a serious danger of this happening, the ecclesiastical authorities suspended the station for that entire year. As for Our Lady’s Island, the eighteenth-century bishops set themselves against the traditional pilgrimages. Bishop Sweetman had denounced them even more strongly as

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<sup>507</sup> Thomas Crofton Croker, *Researches in the south of Ireland* (London, 1824), p. 283.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 59–60.

<sup>509</sup> Ó Dufaigh, ‘James Murphy’, p. 462.

‘meetings of pretended devotion’.<sup>510</sup> The diocesan statutes for 1771 were quite firm in their prohibitions of certain behaviours. When it came to dealing with the matter of the patterns, the tone was a lot less severe, with only a recommendation to be implanted if possible, than an absolute prohibition:

I earnestly recommend to ye to put back and. discourage as much as ye can Patrons or Pilgrimages, or Meetings of pretended Devotion, or rather of real Dissipation and Dissoluteness; wh. Bring nothing but reflection and ridicule on our Holy Religion, from those that are without, according to St. Paul's Phrase I Cor. v. 12 &c. At least ye must not say Mass at the Places of Patrons or Pilgrimages, but in ye Chapels or near them.<sup>511</sup>

The primary concern was more to do with the rowdiness associated with the pattern. Priests were asked to ‘do as much as ye can’ in discouraging these rowdy activities. Moreover the regulation did not restrict priests from saying Mass in connection with the pattern, but stipulated that if such masses are said they must be said in or around chapels. The common participation of the local clergy made these activities legitimately ‘Catholic’ and so ensured their popularity. Priests imposed the rites of the pattern as a penance or recommended them for indulgences or to help souls in Purgatory, thus, making them all the more difficult to suppress. Furthermore, pilgrims held such respect for the traditions of the holy well and the legends associated with them. While Struell flourished as a resort of piety at this time, the ecclesiastical authorities were necessitated to interdict devotional exercises at it, after it had become more than once the scene of bloodshed. The *Commercial Chronicle* on 25 February 1805 reported that ‘Wm. Ferguson was acquitted of murdering two men at Struell Well, near Downpatrick, in June, 1802’.<sup>512</sup>

Decades preceding the Famine saw a mounting attack on the culture of the Catholic poor. This development can in part be attributed to the changes which had taken place within the Irish Church. Clergy became more disciplined, better organised and more zealous. Other factors including growing literacy, rising standards of living, and exposure to outside influences had begun to undermine attachment to traditional attitudes and customs.<sup>513</sup> The continued increase in population, from around 4.5 million in 1791 to 8.1 million by 1841, swelled the ranks of the rural poor, the group which was the least capable of contributing to the church and weakest in official Catholicism. What changed all this was the impact of the

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<sup>510</sup> Corish ‘Two centuries of Catholicism’, p. 245.

<sup>511</sup> Flood, ‘The diocesan manuscripts’, p. 118.

<sup>512</sup> *Commercial Chronicle*, 25 Feb. 1805.

<sup>513</sup> Connolly, *Religion and society*, p. 52.

Famine. Deaths from fever and starvation, and migration during and after the Famine, drastically reduced the numbers of the rural poor, while leaving the farming class intact and even slightly strengthened. As a result, the Catholic Church, was left with a smaller but more prosperous population, which was both better able to support an ecclesiastical establishment adequate to the needs and more orthodox in its religious outlook.<sup>514</sup> It was these developments which made possible the major reshaping of popular religious practice which Emmet Larkin has called 'the devotional revolution'.

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 54.

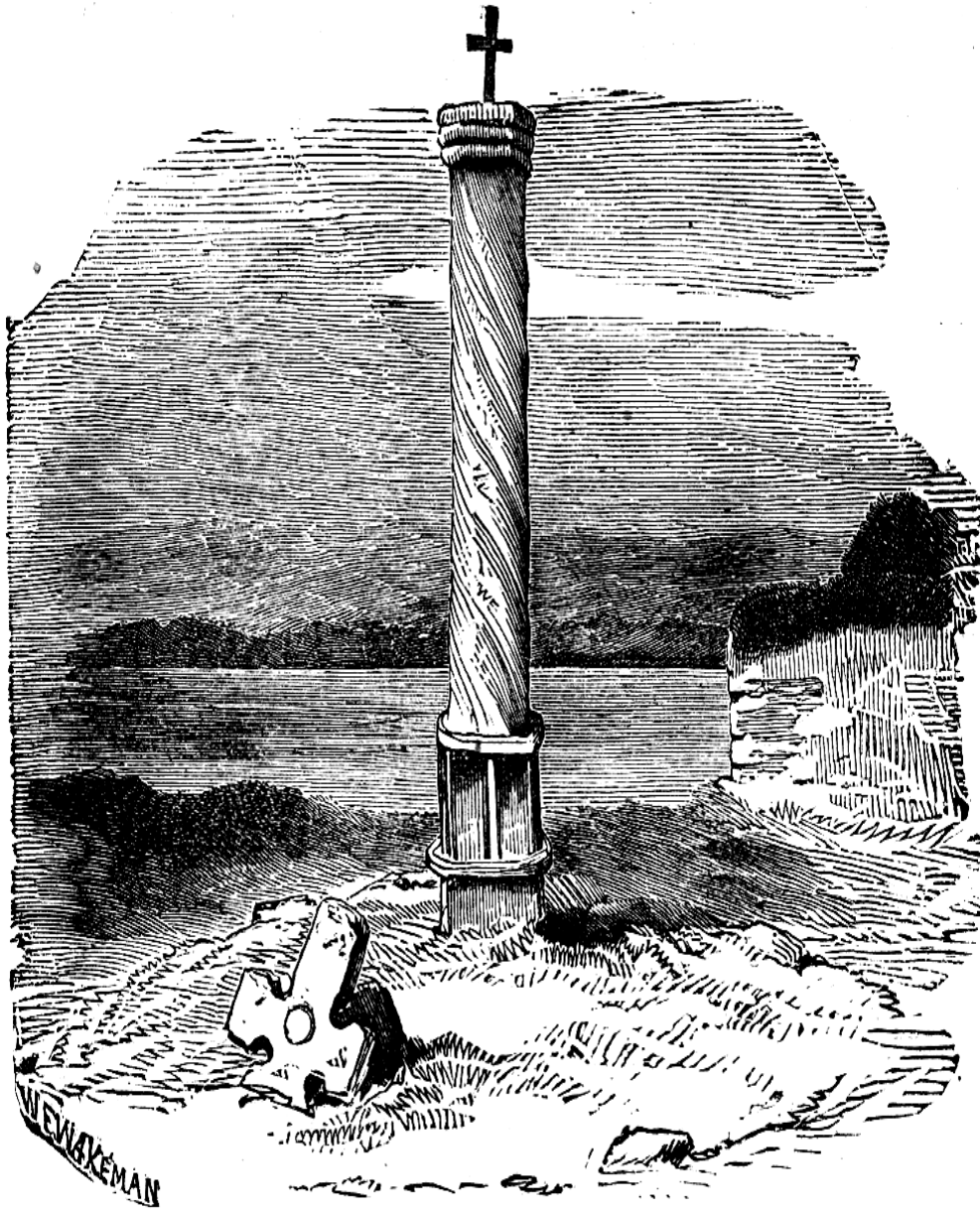


Fig. 10: William Wakeman's water colour sketch of St. Patrick's Cross, taken in 1876

THE IMPACT OF  
THE DEVOTIONAL REVOLUTION

There can be no doubt that the nineteenth century profoundly changed the appearance of Irish Catholicism. In the early nineteenth century, the Catholic Church had made strenuous efforts to reform its administration and practices, and to develop the knowledge of its adherents. In his controversial article, Professor Emmet Larkin put forward the thesis that Archbishop Paul Cullen championed the consolidation of a ‘devotional revolution’ in post-Famine Ireland. He claimed that before the famine any effective service on the part of the clergy was severely limited by the sheer weight of lay numbers, and that up to the 1840s, at least, the situation had been getting progressively worse.<sup>515</sup> The effects of the Famine were seen by him as key to this ‘devotional revolution’, bringing about a dramatic improvement in the ratio of priests to people through death or emigration of the disadvantaged who were the weakest in official Catholicism. Indeed what improvement there was before the famine . . . was largely confined to that “respectable” class of Catholics typified by the Cullens and Mahers in Carlow who were economically better off.<sup>516</sup> He noted that the clergy serving these urban communities were better educated than those serving in rural areas.<sup>517</sup> The advent of the reforming Paul Cullen as papal legate to the Synod of Thurles in 1850, and subsequently as archbishop of Dublin, coupled with the consequences of the Famine had a decisive effect in shaping Irish Catholicism and accomplishing a post-Famine ‘devotional revolution’.<sup>518</sup> Larkin’s thesis can be summed up as follows:

In the nearly thirty years that he faithfully served Rome in Ireland, Paul Cardinal Cullen, not only reformed the Irish Church, but, what was perhaps even more important, in the process of reforming that church he spearheaded the consolidation of a devotional revolution. The great mass of the Irish people became practising Catholics, which they have uniquely and essentially remained both at home and abroad to the present day.<sup>519</sup>

In re-examining the ‘devotional revolution’ thesis, Thomas McGrath indicates that whatever the great mass of the Irish people were before the Famine, they were not practicing Catholics.<sup>520</sup> Indeed, Larkin suggested the ‘bulk’ of the Irish people in the 1840s never had

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<sup>515</sup> Larkin, ‘The Devotional Revolution in Ireland’, p. 639.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 639.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 639.

<sup>518</sup> McGrath, ‘The Tridentine evolution’, p. 512.

<sup>519</sup> Larkin, ‘The Devotional Revolution in Ireland’, p. 625.

<sup>520</sup> McGrath, ‘The Tridentine evolution’, p. 512.



the opportunity to approach the sacraments.<sup>521</sup> Clearly, he got it wrong, because great efforts had been made in the devotional life of Catholics before the Famine, at least insofar as the main pilgrimage sites were involved. According to McGrath, the main weakness of Larkin's argument is that he failed to recognise that religion as expressed in the lives of the people was not markedly church-centred.<sup>522</sup> There were other venerable religious customs that were maintained such as pilgrimages, patterns, holy well penitentials, the observance of holy days, rigorous fasts and abstinences, pious exercises and private-prayer.<sup>523</sup> The extensive practice of the Stations, where the priest moved around the parish at set days hearing confessions, saying Mass and distributing Holy Communion was another form of popular religion that thrived in pre-Famine Ireland. So when Larkin stated in his thesis that only forty per cent of the Catholic population went to Mass in pre-famine Ireland, he had given no consideration whatsoever to the long held traditional practices and customs that were central to the religious experience at this time.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of Larkin's thesis is his failure to situate the religious changes of the nineteenth century in a longer temporal perspective. Donnelly suggested that although Larkin's view is that the 'devotional revolution' in Ireland essentially took place in the period 1850-75, coinciding with and spurred on by the ecclesiastical primacy of Archbishop Paul Cullen, other historians have seen it as a trend which began in the late eighteenth century and had already made deep inroads before the great Famine.<sup>524</sup> The timing of devotional change at Lough Derg and Our Lady's Island lends support to this latter revisionist view. McGrath who offers the most sweeping critique of Larkin's interpretation argues that what Larkin thought was a 'devotional revolution' was actually the final stage of a 'tridentine evolution'.<sup>525</sup> This institutional renewal and reform within a Tridentine framework took place in the period c. 1775 to c. 1875.<sup>526</sup> He added that lack of compliance during much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was blamed on the restrictions placed upon Catholic clergy, who longed to implement the Tridentine standards but were only able to do so effectively as the penal laws were gradually relaxed. Corish suggested that the same Tridentine fabric was fairly well in place in Ferns diocese by 1775.<sup>527</sup> Nevertheless, despite

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<sup>521</sup> Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland', p. 638.

<sup>522</sup> McGrath, 'The Tridentine evolution', p. 520.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

<sup>524</sup> Donnelly, 'The modern pilgrimage', p. 495.

<sup>525</sup> McGrath, 'The Tridentine evolution', p. 521

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 521.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, 521.

obvious and legitimate criticism, there is sufficient veracity in Emmet's Larkin's analysis to see in Cullen the pivotal figure that helped change the religious face of Ireland.<sup>528</sup>

Cullen came to Ireland not only as archbishop of Armagh but also as legate of the Holy See to the Irish Church. Having spent nearly thirty years in Rome, he was heavily influenced by the Tridentine Ultramontanism, which placed a strong emphasis on the prerogatives and powers of the pope. Sean Connolly claims that Cullen had a strong commitment to this new ideology that was 'distinguished by its political conservatism, its exaltation of papal authority, and its acceptance of a dogmatic, combative theology'.<sup>529</sup> Cullen's loyalty and commitment to the Holy See was so profound that Larkin described him as first and foremost a Roman whose 'allegiance to Rome in the person of the pope and his authority, temporal and spiritual, was uncompromising'.<sup>530</sup> It is worth pointing out that until the arrival of Paul Cullen, there was little acknowledgment of this system in Ireland. Instead there was a system of Gallicanism which minimised the authority of the Papacy over the national churches, the local bishops, and the practices of local churches. Cullen's aim was to re-organise the Irish Catholic Church from the top down and bring it into total conformity with Rome in organisation, liturgy, cult and devotions. Cullen was convinced that clerical discipline was generally lax and the spiritual condition of the people unhealthy.<sup>531</sup> He believed that the seminaries, particularly Maynooth, needed to be brought under tighter episcopal control, as with the theology of papal authority.<sup>532</sup> The most notable symbol of Ultramontane triumphalism was the diocesan seminary of Holy Cross at Clonliffe, which was opened in 1859 and slowly enlarged year by year.<sup>533</sup> He also established the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in 1864, an official journal for the clergy to communicate papal encyclicals, decisions, and instructions to priests and religious, and to inform them on history, literature, and the Catholic position on current intellectual problems. This was part of his efforts to bring the Catholic Church in Ireland into line with Roman practice.<sup>534</sup>

With the influence of Paul Cullen, religious practices continued to become more formalised. In 1850 he arranged the Synod of Thurles, the first such national synod in Ireland for almost

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<sup>528</sup> S. J. Brown and D.W. Miller (eds), *Piety and Power in Ireland, 1760-1960: essays in honour of Emmet Larkin* (Belfast, 2000), pp 4-9. See also Dáire Keogh, *Cardinal Paul Cullen and his word* (Dublin, 2011), p. 64.

<sup>529</sup> Connolly, *Religion and society*, p. 13

<sup>530</sup> [http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Paul\\_Cullen](http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Paul_Cullen), Dec. 2011.

<sup>531</sup> Rafferty, *Catholicism in Ulster*, p. 136.

<sup>532</sup> Connolly, *Religion and society*, pp 13-14.

<sup>533</sup> Desmond Bowen, *Paul Cardinal Cullen and the shaping of modern Irish Catholicism* (Dublin 1983), p. 146.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

700 years. Cullen's main intention at Thurles was to impose order in many areas of church practice. He was disgusted that the sacraments were not being carried out regularly and that the home played such a great part in the spiritual life of individuals. Baptisms, marriages, the sacrament of penance, and the mass were frequently celebrated in private houses. Cullen objected to such practices especially the excesses which sometimes accompanied them.<sup>535</sup> The church building became the centre of prayer, worship and devotions. The ratio of priests to people also improved in the post-Famine period. About 1840, it was estimated that there was one priest to every 3,000 people and one nun for every 6,500.<sup>536</sup> By 1850 the balance had altered to one priest to every 2,100 people and one nun to every 3,400, and by 1871 it was one priest to every 1,560 and one nun to every 1,100.<sup>537</sup> Not only was the population decreasing, but the number of priests increased by twenty per cent and the number of nuns by fifty per cent.<sup>538</sup> The population decline caused by the Famine left the country more disposed to the full effects of Ultramontane Catholicism.<sup>539</sup> Cullen also gained support at Thurles, in his attempt to cleanse the Church of popular religion and the organisational abuses of former times.<sup>540</sup> In this instance:

Patterns now stood condemned as potentially immoral, wakes were to be sanitized and all other rites of passage, funerals, baptisms and weddings were to be brought under clerical auspices alone.<sup>541</sup>

Cullen introduced a structured sacramental and devotional theology.<sup>542</sup> He promoted new methods of prayer as well as dynamic and energising parish missions. Para-liturgical devotions such as benediction became popular at this time. From the 1850s new devotions became the norm: the rosary, forty hours prayer and perpetual adoration, novenas, blessed altars, Via Crucis, benedictions, vespers, devotion to the sacred heart and to the Immaculate conception, jubilees and tridiums, pilgrimages, shrines, processions and retreats.<sup>543</sup> These tended to replace holy wells, bonfires, patterns, wakes, charms, effigies and celebrations of high points in the agricultural calendar.<sup>544</sup> Many traditional places of popular pilgrimage were simply abandoned while others were sanitized and made safe for Ultramontane orthodoxy

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<sup>535</sup> Rafferty, *Catholicism in Ulster*, p. 139.

<sup>536</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 338.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>539</sup> Rafferty, *Catholicism in Ulster*, p. 105.

<sup>540</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (London, 1989), p. 157.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>542</sup> Ciarán O'Carroll, 'The pastoral vision of Paul Cullen' in Dáire Keogh, *Cardinal Paul Cullen and his word* (Dublin, 2011), p. 115.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

such as at Lough Derg.<sup>545</sup> The first part of this chapter examines some of the key changes that took place at Lough Derg in the post-Famine period marked by a growth in spirituality termed the ‘devotional revolution’. What impact the ‘devolution revolution’ had on the nature of the pilgrimage exercises at Lough Derg, and how the pilgrims responded to the changes are important questions in this study. In the previous century, a break in traditional practice such as the closure of the caves in 1780 caused many pilgrims to feel betrayed. They were content with the old traditional ways and did not want any of the essentials changed. The importance of tradition has featured strongly in this thesis and therefore St. Patrick’s connection with the place cannot be set aside. The second part of this chapter examines the extent of religious change at the other pilgrimage sites such as Our Lady’s Island, Croagh Patrick and Struell Wells, as a consequence of the ‘devotional revolution’.

## I

The post-Famine era provided a great opportunity for the Irish Church to reform its structures. Lough Derg seized this opportunity to examine its pilgrimage and to implement some changes in its administration. The religious piety of the people developed and deepened greatly at this time. In 1852 the Protestant poet William Allingham made the pilgrimage and produced an account of it in *Household Words*. He praised the prior’s lecturers as being both ‘learned and practical’ and commented on the deep devotion of the pilgrims.<sup>546</sup> During this time many distinguished prelates and clergy members visited the island, some even choosing it as a place of their annual ecclesiastical retreat. Members from different religious orders expressed their great admiration, not only at the earnest piety and penitential spirit evinced by the pilgrims, but also at the order, regularity and efficiency with which the devotional exercises of the station were conducted.<sup>547</sup> The bright example of penance and humility, as demonstrated by the pious ecclesiastics who performed the penitential exercises, added to the popularity of this venerable shrine and gave great edification to the lay pilgrims. In the post-Famine period the number of pilgrims visiting Lough Derg continued to thrive and flourish. Accurate records of the numbers of pilgrims to Lough Derg are only available from the 1860s. These figures were extracted from the notes of the late James Canon Mc Kenna and are printed in Joseph McGuinness’ book *St Patrick’s Purgatory*. Since 1846 there had been a

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>546</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p.193.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 194.

gradual decline in the arrivals each year down to 1870. It was estimated that 30,000 pilgrims made the pilgrimage in 1846, but by 1856 the numbers has been reduced to 10,000 and by 1860 they had dropped further to a mere 3,000.<sup>548</sup> Canon Mc Kenna estimated that from 1861-1900, the average number of pilgrims annually was 2,880.<sup>549</sup> For this drop in numbers various reasons can be assigned; foremost amongst these being the Famine, the subsequent years of distress, and the consequent depopulation of the country caused by emigration. Another major cause may be attributed to the multiplication of facilities for missions and retreats throughout Ireland.<sup>550</sup> Now that missionaries travelled around the country from parish to parish conducting retreats and missions for the congregations, the need to travel to Lough Derg seemed less pressing. The traditions associated with the pilgrimage itself were maintained although with some new forms of worship been introduced by the ‘devotional revolution’.

In this period of study, 1850-1900, it was customary for the pilgrims to arrive fasting, and to perform at least one station before their first meal. The once daily meal of bread and tea remained. Pilgrims who arrived not having fasted were to remain an additional night on the island. The pilgrimage fast according to ‘immemorial custom’ was to be strictly observed by the pilgrims but ‘wherever any just cause exists for relaxation in this, or in any other of the penitential austerities’ the prior granted a reasonable dispensation, according to every particular case.<sup>551</sup> During the pilgrimage three stations had to be performed each day. Each station began with a visit to St. Patrick’s Church, which was then proceeded by a visit to St. Patrick’s cross. In addition to the stational exercises, pilgrims assisted each day at Morning Prayer, Mass, Meditation, Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, Evening Prayer, Sermon and Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>552</sup> In response to the ‘devotional revolution’ a great emphasis was placed on preaching, confession, the Eucharist and the way of the cross. Although the sacrament of confession had always been celebrated, this part of the pilgrimage continued with the aid of special thought-provoking sermons. At twelve o’clock, pilgrims gathered in St. Patrick’s Church for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament followed by a spiritual lecture.<sup>553</sup> These devotions and sacraments fell in line with the ‘devotional

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<sup>548</sup> Laurence Flynn, ‘St. Patrick’s Purgatory Lough Derg, county Donegal’ in *The Irish Heritage Studies*, liv (Dublin, 1984), p. 14.

<sup>549</sup> McGuinness, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, pp 889-90.

<sup>550</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 195.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

revolution' and the teachings of Paul Cullen. Furthermore, the influence of Ultramontanism and the 'devotional revolution' was greatly reflected in the sermons preached at Lough Derg in the post-Famine period. O'Connor noted that:

The religious discourses here delivered are of the most practical kind; are well calculated to awaken in the hearts of the pilgrims a lively sense of the external truths, and of their religious obligations; and, being so abundantly aided by divine grace, afford the pilgrims great help in preparing for Confession and Holy Communion.<sup>554</sup>

The Way of the Cross which was conducted by one of the officiating priests and accompanied by the choir was so 'prized and popular' that no one, not even the cabin-keepers would dream of being absent from it.<sup>555</sup> Pilgrims responded to the devotional exercises of the pilgrimage with loyalty and devotion. According to O'Connor the great majority of pilgrims 'cheerfully undergo all the austerities of the pilgrimage, wisely considering a three days mortification and penance as but light and easy in comparison to the temporal punishment due to sin'.<sup>556</sup>

There was a great improvement in the manner in which the pilgrimage exercises were conducted in the post-Famine period. Many pilgrims who had already experienced the pilgrimage returned to Lough Derg and were able to lead those for the first time through the various exercises by example. To assist and guide them a number of copies of the devotional exercises were printed in 1876 giving the instructions of the routine of the station exercises.<sup>557</sup> The station was to be performed exactly as laid out in the handbook. By the end of the nineteenth century there was a slight deviation in the pilgrimage exercises. O'Connor noted that at two o'clock each afternoon, a boat left for Saints Island, about two miles distant from Station Island'.<sup>558</sup> During this excursion pilgrims spent their time singing litanies and hymns and occasionally the sound of instrumental music could be heard.<sup>559</sup> This excursion served two purposes. While pilgrims were absent on their excursion to Saints Island, visitors having received a special permit from the prior were admitted to Station Island to look around.<sup>560</sup> This arrangement did not interfere with the station duties. For those who were undertaking the pilgrimage, the trip to Saints Island was an opportunity to see the site where St. Patrick was reputed to have visited and where the original purgatorial cave was located.

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 212-13.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 214-15.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 242.

There was a particular desire to convey to pilgrims the traditions that were associated with the pilgrimage in spite of the influences of the ‘devotional revolution’. Nearly at every stage of the pilgrimage journey, making the rounds of the saints ‘beds’, the pilgrim was being reminded of the mortified and penitential lives led by the saints who ‘within those little cells passed the day in rigid penance’.<sup>561</sup> O’Connor referred to ‘*nonne cor nostrum ardens erat in nobis*’, which one felt at Lough Derg, when ‘he walks upon holy ground and his prayer is certain of being heard’.<sup>562</sup> At the very outset of his station the pilgrim removed his shoes, out of respect for the sanctity of the place through a spirit of penance and in conformity with the admonition given by God to Moses: ‘Come not nigh hither; put off the shoes from thy feet, for the place wheron thou standest is holy ground’.<sup>563</sup>

The nineteenth century proved to be a period of extremely bad building, which always proves the most expensive kind, as Alice Curtayne put it.<sup>564</sup> St. Mary’s chapel was the worst example of this. The chapel was erected in 1789 by the Franciscan Father Anthony O’Doherty, and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Angels.<sup>565</sup> It was found unsuitable by the year 1813 and demolished with a new church built in its place. The church was again enlarged in 1835. In the post-Famine period, the church was extensively repaired in 1860 and in 1870 it was found necessary to have it entirely taken down.<sup>566</sup> It was replaced by a very substantial and ‘handsome Gothic edifice’ erected solely with the aid of voluntary contributions of the pilgrims.<sup>567</sup> The rebuilding of this chapel was a significant step forward and paved the way for further improvements of the facilities and amenities of the island for the benefit of the pilgrims. The church was built with a number of confessionals, which were to provide the pilgrim with some privacy for the sacrament of confession. The presbytery which was built in 1816 under the supervision of Prior Bellew was also vastly improved in 1864, at a cost of £164.<sup>568</sup> A bell was also erected at the same time all at a cost of little over £500.<sup>569</sup> St. Patrick’s Church was also intended for repair and improvement in 1860 when it too was remodelled by Rev. Mc Kenna. He removed its galleries, which were approached by

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid., 238. ‘Were not our hearts burning within us’.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>564</sup> Curtayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 110.

<sup>565</sup> McGuinness, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 25.

<sup>566</sup> Curtayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 110.

<sup>567</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 190.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 191.

stone steps from the outside of the gables.<sup>570</sup> Further extensive work was done to it during the summer of 1878 at a cost of £200.<sup>571</sup> A new house for the clergy which was built in 1816 was also rebuilt in 1864. The reason behind the poor building developments of the nineteenth century was not so much poverty as insecurity of tenure which had a paralysing effect on Lough Derg's building plans in the 1870s.<sup>572</sup>

During a visit to Lough Derg in 1879 by his Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Lynch, archbishop of Toronto, a building project long in contemplation took definite form. For many years previously the need of better provision for the accomodation of pilgrims was keenly felt. The six cabins then on Station Island did not afford sufficient accomodation for the large number of pilgrims who performed the pilgrimage every year. In the 1870s, it was estimated that 3,000 pilgrims arrived annually.<sup>573</sup> To meet this urgent need it was decided by the bishop of Clogher, who accompanied the archbishop of Toronto to the island, to erect a large hospice designed according to the building plans of some of the hospices in the more prominent places of pilgrimage in England and on the Continent, particularly Holywell, Lourdes, and Paray-Le-Monial.<sup>574</sup> The contributions discussed towards the building project at the preliminary meeting, included £100 from the bishop of Clogher, Archbishop Lynch £20, Fr. Collier, P.P, St. Agatha's, Dublin, £5, and several smaller sums.<sup>575</sup> Owing to the limited space on Station Island, one corner of the foundations of this building had necessarily to rest on a ledge of rock, in the water.<sup>576</sup> This part of the building was termed an encroachment on the bed of the lake and an infringement of the landlord's proprietary rights. Sir John Leslie, of Glasslough, Co. Monaghan, the owner of the lands surrounding Lough Derg, put forward a claim to the ownership not only of the lake, but also of the soil of Station Island.<sup>577</sup> The work of the hospice continued and was finished in the summer of 1881, despite the protest of Sir John Leslie. A lengthy correspondence on the subject followed, but no satisfactory result was achieved. The bishop of Clogher at this time Most Rev. James Donnelly hired Mr. James Riordan of Omagh to defend the rights of the Catholics of Ireland to their cherished pilgrimage.<sup>578</sup> The case never reached the courts as Sir John's counsel approached the

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<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>572</sup> Curtayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 111.

<sup>573</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 196.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>576</sup> Curtayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 115.

<sup>577</sup> Margaret Gibbons, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg* (Monaghan, 1920), p. 15.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 226.



defendant's solicitor with a proposal of settlement, the terms being that Sir John withdrew all claim to the island, and secondly that he was prepared to give a lease for 999 years of that portion of the water upon which the hospice intruded, at one shilling per year.<sup>579</sup> In spite of this offer, which the bishop duly accepted, the relationship between the Lough Derg authorities and the landlord were irreparably damaged. In the early stages of the development many of the Protestant farmers of Templecarn parish assisted their Catholic neighbours in carting the materials for the Hospice from the railway station to Pettigo.<sup>580</sup> While at times relationships between Catholics and Protestants were pleasant and harmonious, a changeover in the ownership of the ferry rights caused further disintegration between them. Towards the close of the last century, the ferry rights had been in the hands of the Protestant family, Johnston who rented the ferry at £250 each year.<sup>581</sup> In the post-Famine period, a Catholic ferryman named Daniel Campbell came into office for the first time. He was then succeeded by his son, John Campbell. It next reverted to his brother, Peter Campbell; then his brother, William, who held it down to the year 1862-3, when Thomas Flood of Pettigo took charge of it. He held it until 1876, when his brother Patrick secured his right in the ferry.<sup>582</sup> This clearly shows that the pilgrimage authorities at Lough Derg wished to employ Catholics over their Protestant counterparts. It was also noted that the rent of ferry was reduced for the Campbell's to £150 and again was further reduced to £50.<sup>583</sup>

The season of 1879 proved to be the most significant year of this decade for St. Patrick's Purgatory. It was reported that 'the attention of the public became riveted on Lough Derg, as it had not been before, as all eyes turned to admire in wonderment the austere penances performed at its sanctuary'.<sup>584</sup> Among the most noteworthy pilgrims who attended the island in this year were the Most Rev. Dr. Gillooly, bishop of Elphin, and the Most Rev. Dr. Mc Cormack then bishop of Achonry accompanied by Rev. Fr. Strickland S.J. They made a close examination of the pilgrimage, and expressed delight at the edifying spectacle of the pilgrimage which the pilgrims, engaged in their station duties, presented.<sup>585</sup> Other distinguished prelates were equally generous in their descriptions of what they saw. His Most Rev. Dr. Croke 'bestowed a meed of praise upon what he had seen, upon the churches, which

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>580</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 227.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid., 220.

he pronounced very suitable, not omitting to remark upon the good order and neatness apparent throughout'.<sup>586</sup> The aforementioned Most Rev. Dr. Lynch produced two letters that were published in the Dublin *Freeman's Journal* of the 20 and 21 August in 1879 detailing the exercises of the pilgrimage.<sup>587</sup> These letters not only afforded those who had not yet been to the island a vivid insight into the efficacy of the pilgrimage exercises and the extraordinary graces and favours obtained there, but it further increased the profile of the pilgrimage abroad. Many pilgrims came from America, England and Scotland, as well as Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>588</sup> Pilgrims from every class, age and condition in life were found performing 'with the greatest humility' the devotional exercises. Dignities, honours, wealth, education, and social position find no special distinction or acknowledgment.<sup>589</sup> Many of the pilgrims came annually, some even for fifty years as demonstrated by a worthy Belfast man, Mr. Henry, who came with an organised band of pilgrims. The late Edward Nicholson of Beechhill, Derry, had made the pilgrimage fifty-six times.<sup>590</sup>

The importance of prayer and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary gained popular approval among both laity and clergy at Lough Derg. In 1882 a statue of 'Our Blessed Lady of Lough Derg' executed in white marble by Mr. O'Neill, Dublin, and presented by two pious votaries of the pilgrimage, Mr. and Mrs. William McCaffrey of Kilmarnock, Scotland was erected 'on a pedestal of finely-dressed stone' in front of the Hospice.<sup>591</sup> On the 9 July at two o'clock, the clergy formed in processional order to St. Patrick's Church and proceeded round the lake side of the church, preceded by the banner of St. Patrick (presented by his Grace to the sanctuary as a votive offering).<sup>592</sup> The recitation of the litany promoted by Cullen was chanted by all who attended. Archbishop Lynch who returned to attend this special ceremony preached a sermon, in the course of which he declared:

a statue of the Blessed Virgin to have been a necessity of the place, to serve as a continual lesson to have confidence in her intercession with our Redeemer. Other statutes in time would be erected; they wanted one for St. Joseph and one for St. Patrick. Ireland he regarded as rich beyond all other countries in place of holy pilgrimage. She had her holy wells, and especially her holy Island of Lough Derg.<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 233.

## II

The pilgrimage in Our Lady's Island was a mere memory by the end of the Famine. In terms of religious devotion the people of Wexford had switched to focusing their energies on the institutional church. The orthodox religious practices fitted in well with the emerging Catholic middle class population. Chapter three successfully demonstrated that what Larkin described as being proper to the latter half of the nineteenth century was fairly well established in Wexford by 1775. The following letter written in 1822 by Bartholomew Keegan, a schoolmaster at Rathangan in the 'English baronies' of Co. Wexford noted many different types of devotions such as Benediction and the Blessed Sacrament, devotions which Larkin claimed to be significant in the post-Famine period, but are clearly mentioned:

We do have great work here on festivals. On Corpus Christi we have a procession of the Blessed Sacrament, on Palm Sunday a grand procession of palm, on 15th of August, our patron day, a grand solemn Mass and procession of candles. Every Sunday in Lent we sing round the Stations, and on other festivals we have a Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, all which serve very much to excite devotion in our people.<sup>594</sup>

The 'devotional revolution' as led in the diocese of Ferns by Bishop Thomas Furlong, saw the re-emergence and revival of the old pilgrimage. As with all rediscovered traditions a variety of factors combined to set the stage for the renewed custom. Central to the change was the reforming influence in the diocese of Thomas Furlong. The pastoral vision of Paul Cullen can be seen in Furlong's plan for the reorganisation of the Church in the diocese. The introduction of teaching institutions such as the Loreto Sisters in 1866, the Convent of Perpetual Adoration in 1870, and the Infirmarian Sisters of St. John of God, all helped in facilitating the reform of the church by improving the level of education, thus, allowing new ideas and teachings to reach an even wider audience. Cullen's programme for the provision of better churches, not only benefited Lough Derg, but Wexford also achieved much success with the opening of two twin churches, the Church of the Immaculate Conception and the Church of the Assumption, by Bishop Furlong in 1858. Our Lady's Island also had its very own stone church built in 1864. While the foundation of religious teaching institutions and the building of churches were important, the teachings of the Redemptorist missionaries were to provide a very powerful and effective pastoral presence in Wexford. Missions had begun

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<sup>594</sup> Pádraig ó Súilleabháin, 'Sidelights on the Irish Church, 1811-38' in *Collectanea Hibernica*, no. 9 (1966), p. 75.

in the 1840s as a response to proselytism.<sup>595</sup> Cullen gave them every encouragement, and though priests qualified to conduct missions remained scarce they made a very powerful impact.<sup>596</sup> The role of the Redemptorists as well as the actions of Fr. William Whitty at the end of the century, were vitally important in paving the way for the revival of the pilgrimage to Our Lady's Island.

One of the most important groups in the missionary worlds of the mid-nineteenth century was the Redemptorists. As a group they lived by a philosophy of holiness. According to *Two hundred years with the Redemptorists 1732-1932*, one explanation of their ethos was as follows:

They live neither for themselves, nor for the people alone, but they should devote themselves first to their own sanctification by the practice of prayer and of all the virtues, and then to the sanctification of other.<sup>597</sup>

John Sharp in his book *Reapers of the harvest: the Redemptorists in Great Britain and Ireland, 1843- 1898*, pointed out that 'their obvious zeal, their evident vitality and their fierce loyalty to the papacy' commended them to bishops such as Manning and Cullen.<sup>598</sup> Manning considered them to be 'the most evangelical men I know'.<sup>599</sup> In founding the Redemptorist Congregation, St. Alphonsus had in view a body of men who, while carefully attending to their own personal sanctification, would devote themselves to the work of giving missions and retreats. In the words of their rule, they are 'to strive to imitate the virtues and example of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, consecrating themselves especially to the preaching of the word of God to the poor'.<sup>600</sup> But what was a mission and what did it involve? According to T.A. Murphy, it was the installation of several priests in a particular parish for a given length of time to preach and teach the people in order to enliven their religious convictions as James Murphy put it in 1984.<sup>601</sup> But the mission not only dealt with things spiritual, it dealt with things spiritual towards a clearly perceived object. Murphy noted that it was a purposeful instrument. It worked most powerfully at times of change when it could effectively exploit the community's anxiety 'at the imminent break-up of the *status quo* to reshape it in the

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<sup>595</sup> James H. Murphy, 'The role of Vincentian parish missions in the 'Irish counter-reformation' of the mid-nineteenth century' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxiv, no. 94 (1984), pp 152-171.

<sup>596</sup> Patrick J. Corish, 'The Catholic community in the nineteenth century' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xxxviii (1983), p. 31.

<sup>597</sup> H. Kerr, *Two hundred years with the Redemptorists 1732-1932* (Dublin, 1934), p. 36.

<sup>598</sup> John Sharp, *Reapers of the harvest: the Redemptorists in Great Britain and Ireland, 1843- 1898* (Dublin, 1989), p. 20

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>600</sup> T. A. Murphy, 'St. Alphonsus in Ireland' in *The Irish Monthly*, lii, no. 613 (1924), p. 369.

<sup>601</sup> Murphy, 'The role of Vincentian parish missions', p. 154.

Tridentine mould'.<sup>602</sup> For the duration of the mission the principal tool of evangelisation was the preaching of doctrine. Great emphasis was also laid on the making of a general confession. Central, too, was the position of the parochial clergy and the establishment of confraternities. Their function was to enliven the faith of their members, usually drawn from the wealthier and more literate sectors of society, and through their members the faith of the community.<sup>603</sup>

The Redemptorists were highly trained in prayer and meditation, both for themselves and for others. The chief Redemptorist in Ireland was Joseph Prost an Austrian Redemptorist father who had worked in America before coming to Ireland. Prost early became aware that there were a number of serious abuses connected with giving parish missions in Ireland. Most of these abuses had mainly to do with the problem of how to provide for the expenses of the mission. He recognised the dangers of charging people for the right to attend the mission, so to remedy the situation he introduced a number of rules which stated that an admission fee should not be charged and that collections should not be made during the mission. By eliminating the financial burden he was making the mission more accessible for the poor. Prost remarked that 'our willingness to sacrifice and our unselfishness became known all over the country. We were even more admired because we rejected all invitations'.<sup>604</sup> Prost also insisted that 'we can accept no mission, he informed Fr. Roche, except under the following conditions'.<sup>605</sup> These conditions indicated that there was to be no collectors at the church gate and no collections during the mission. The final condition stipulated that his Lordship the bishop must sanction the mission, and grant to the missionaries all faculties, ordinary and extraordinary in addition to giving lease for Expositions.<sup>606</sup> The region which benefitted most from their religious instruction was Wexford. A number of missions and retreats were undertaken in the county during 1853-1854 under the direction of Prost.<sup>607</sup> In the introduction to the memoirs of Joseph Prost it states that:

This Wexford mission, in which seven Redemptorists laboured for six weeks, from the 14<sup>th</sup> August to 25 September 1853, was Prost's crowning achievement in Ireland. Indeed the parish mission movement was the single most important factor in the

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<sup>602</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>604</sup> Emmet Larkin and Herman Freudenberger (ed.), *A Redemptorist missionary in Ireland, 1851-1854: memoirs by Joseph Prost*, C.Ss.R (Cork, 1998), p. 68.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid., 16-17

making and consolidating of the Devotional Revolution that took place in Ireland between 1850 and 1880.<sup>608</sup>

The small village of Gorey in the north of Wexford was the first place the Redemptorists visited and they remained there for ‘three or four weeks’.<sup>609</sup> They were warmly received by the parishioners who gave them bread and meat as they had requested. From Prost’s memoirs we learn that they organised their mission exactly as St. Alphonsus de Liguori prescribed. The fact that the Redemptorists were able to pay for their own mission without any outside help, gave them enormous respect. While planning the mission in Gorey, the Redemptorists were very cautious not to exclude anyone from the main ceremonies especially the sermon. So to make it possible for all to attend these services, a sermon was preached in the morning before work and in the evenings after work.<sup>610</sup> Nobody missed any work except on days of confession, and because confession was heard late into the night and communion distributed early in the morning, parishioners did not lose any work time even on that day. Since the missions were longer and because the Redemptorists did not discriminate according to class in hearing confessions, the priests were always free in relation to granting absolution. According to Prost the advantage of this was that one could take care of the penitents even before absolution and ‘do the appropriate thing’.<sup>611</sup> This arrangement was terribly important to the mission and one that St. Alphonsus insisted on. Prost indicated that without this ‘arrangement’ the disorder in our missions would have been impossible to resolve.<sup>612</sup> The Jesuits used the same methods in their missions in Tyrol before they were suppressed by Clement XIV.<sup>613</sup> With this ‘arrangement’ the bishop was willing to tolerate the mission as the priest had to turn over the church and sacristy only for the duration of the mission. The Redemptorists had no power to force a priest to accept the mission, the bishop was fully obliged to perform that duty.<sup>614</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>610</sup> Larkin and Freudenberger (ed.), *A Redemptorist missionary*, p. 68.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid., 69.



Fig. 11: On Mission in Ireland; Rev. Fr Thomas Doyle, C.S.S.R., (1821-1882), Rev. Fr Jan Van der Aa, C.S.S.R. (1882-1872), Rev. Fr Johannes Niklaus Schneider, C.S.S.R., (1821-1873), Rev. Fr Fransiscus Theunis, C.S.S.R. (1821-1882) and Rev. Fr John Connolly, C.S.S.R. (1824-1871).

Soon after their mission in Gorey, they conducted another one in Wexford and already a number of distinctions can be made between the two types of communities. The town had 12,000 Catholics and a few Protestants. It was here that King Henry landed when the English began the conquest of Ireland.<sup>615</sup> Secondly, while Gorey had only one simple gothic chapel, Wexford had not only one Catholic Church which belonged to the Franciscan Fathers, but another two parish churches under construction. There was a great deal of wealth in the community and a prosperous merchant class. Corish claims that this class had deep personal religious convictions. Richard Devereux of Wexford was a wealthy ship-owner and merchant, whose benefactions went a long way towards equipping his native town and diocese with schools and charitable institutions.<sup>616</sup> Prost was also given the home of a wealthy bachelor named Devereux for the duration of the mission. Not only had the house its very own fine chapel but Devereux also agreed to pay for his upkeep. Prost rejected all invitations with the statement that it would be unseemly for us as preachers to the poor to be eating in the homes of the rich:

Firstly, we have to work hard, and therefore we eat and drink only what is necessary in order to keep up our energy. But we eat and drink only what is necessary, nothing superfluous or costly, avoiding any luxury and eating and drinking what is normal for the middle class. If we accepted your offer, you would, because of your love, treat us like upper-class 'gentlemen', a position that would not well suit us as missionaries to the poor.<sup>617</sup>

In Cardinal Cullen's pastoral vision of a devotional revolution, the role of the clergy and religious was crucial.<sup>618</sup> Priests became increasingly important in the community. They became the centre of the community becoming filters of information for the parishioners. The mission did not just focus on the people but also the clergy. By including the clergy the potential affect of the mission was much more widespread. The fact that the mission lasted for six weeks, increased the likelihood that the local clergy would be fully prepared to continue the church's missionary activity once the missionaries had moved on. Our Lady's Island did not receive a Redemptorist mission during this time, but that is not to say that the missions held in Wexford would not have had an affect on the surrounding areas. Firstly, the clergy attended so their influence would have been greatly felt. Also through normal social interaction and the dispersal of ideas the areas in the vicinity of Wexford town would not

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>616</sup> Corish, 'The Catholic community', p. 28.

<sup>617</sup> Larkin and Freudenberger (ed.), *A Redemptorist missionary*, p. 75.

<sup>618</sup> Fr. Ciaran O'Carroll, 'The Pastoral Vision of Cardinal Cullen' in *The Irish Catholic*, 12 Nov. 2009. See also Keogh, *Cardinal Paul Cullen and his word*, p. 117.



have been immune to the changing ideas. Certainly, the Redemptorists had a strong impact on Our Lady's Island and were in no small part responsible for the eventual re-emergence of the pilgrimage in a new, acceptable, and more spiritualised form. The tradition of a procession around the island appears to date from the mid-nineteenth century. *The People* describe the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament which was the culmination of a mission to the island by the Redemptorist Fathers in June 1867:

The great event of the day was the procession round the Island, in the evening, preliminary to the dedication of the parish to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This was, truly, a sight that will live in the memory of all who were present. At 5 o'clock the procession started from the church in the following order: First, a body of men, four deep, young men and old, the wealthy farmer and the struggling cottager, walked on shoulder to shoulder. A long line of females followed with fair young ladies clothed in white as their standard bearers. They carried banners, bouquets of sweet scented flowers and waxen tapers. Long files of little boys dressed in surplice and bearing banners, tapers and flowers came next in order while the procession was closed by His Lordship, the Right Rev. Dr. Furlong, bearing the Most Blessed Sacrament beneath a beautiful canopy, attended by a body of clergymen and preceded by the choir ...

It was a most grand and imposing sight, that procession as it wound its way, chanting hymns and reciting prayers round the ancient and historic Island, whose soil is sanctified by the blood of martyrs....

The numerous visitors from distant parishes then began to repair homewards. They had come there, filled with the same spirit as the pilgrims, who up to about thirty years ago, travelled long distances to pay their tribute of respect and love at the shrine of Our Lady.<sup>619</sup>

This was obviously a very idealised and probably heavily influenced piece of writing at this time. The use of imagery is both detailed and moving. In the article, reference is made to all the distinguished church men who were present including the Most Rev. Dr. Furlong, Rev. Thomas Grace, who later became Archbishop of Sacramento, Rev. Thomas Hore, Rev. Mr. Wall, Rev. John Doyle, Rev. Mr. Druhan, and Rev. Thomas Murphy.<sup>620</sup> After the priest's sermon, Benediction was given, and then the procession moved along the New Church, where it had started, and the devotions of the day ended.<sup>621</sup> The young ladies dressed in white carrying banners, bouquets of flowers and candles all added to the spiritual experience. Even the island's history and tragic tales from the past were utilised to increase the atmospheric effect: 'for which those holy men shed their blood'.<sup>622</sup> Father Johnson, who was responsible for some of the missions which were held in the area, preached for over an hour and a half in

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<sup>619</sup> Murphy, 'Our Lady's Island', p. 23.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 23.

‘language of such earnest and winning eloquence, that few of ten thousand present, thrilled by its sacred fire, could think he had been speaking for half that time’.<sup>623</sup>

Like Lough Derg the sermons preached here by the Redemptorists were practical, well constructed and thought provoking. The purpose of preaching was to heighten the penitent’s consciousness of sin and ‘bring him to a realisation of the consequences for his immortal sin if he should die in a state of sin’.<sup>624</sup> On each day of the mission the penitent was made more aware of all the various ways in which he might have forsaken God, and reminded that if he did not confess ‘his sincere repentance for his transgressions, he would lose the reward of heaven and win the torments of hell for all eternity’.<sup>625</sup> The multitudes that flocked to the confessionals at the mission in Wexford town in 1853 were a true witness to the effectiveness of the Redemptorist preaching. Fr. Vladimir Petcherine, a Redemptorist, was one of the most remarkable missionaries to preach in Ireland in the post-famine period. The fact that he worked as a missionary priest in the diocese of Ferns more than in any other diocese in Ireland, makes him an object of special interest here. Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman, archbishop of Westminster in 1850, considered him one of the foremost pulpit orators in Europe.<sup>626</sup> He had a remarkable facility for language and was able to preach in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, German, French, Italian, Spanish and finally English.<sup>627</sup> Petcherine’s first experience of mission preaching was in St. John’s Cathedral in Limerick which held the first Redemptorist mission in 1851. From that moment on his preaching career took off at a remarkable rate.<sup>628</sup> His introduction to the diocese of Ferns was in 1853 when he joined Prost and the other missionaries for their first mission in Wexford town. Petcherine made a considerable impression on the bishop, priests and people of Ferns. After the Wexford missions, Petcherine went back to preach a mission in Barntown and Glynn.<sup>629</sup> Following this he preached his first retreat to the clergy of the diocese in St. Peter’s College and two years later, in 1856, he was invited to preach a retreat to the clergy of the New Ross where he fell ill.<sup>630</sup> *The Tablet* of London published the following account asking their readers both lay and clerical to prayer for his recovery:

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., Larkin and Freudenberger (ed.), *A Redemptorist missionary*, p. 12.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>626</sup> Frederick M. Jones, ‘A Russian missionary in Ferns: Father Vladimir Petcherine, C.S.S.R., 1807-1885’ in *The Past: the Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, no. 19 (1995), p. 69.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid., 69.

The readers of *The Tablet*, lay and clerical, will not grudge a prayer for his recovery and the latter will feel a pleasure in recommending him to the prayers of the poor, whom he loved so much and laboured for so unselfishly, day and night, for the last twelve years.<sup>631</sup>

The Redemptorists' contribution to the 'devotional revolution' was very impressive but so too was the content of their catechesis. A rather extensive and detailed report on the fundamentals of the Redemptorist catechism was given in the *Catholic Layman* in 1856. The little book entitled 'The Short Catechism' or 'what every Christian must know' accompanied the Redemptorists on their mission throughout the country. The catechism was written by the Rev. J. Furniss, priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer' and approved by Paul Cullen with the official approval mark printed on the last page 'Imprimatur Paulus Cullen Archiepiscopus Dublinensis'.<sup>632</sup> The author, Enoch Heli stated that the catechism was exactly what the Church commanded everyone to know. It was useful for children and especially for grown-ups that went to confession without the knowledge necessary for the sacraments. It was also useful for the laity and to instruct the ignorant.<sup>633</sup> This book 'ought to interest every Irishman; for it is used to instruct the ignorant of our native land, whether children or grown-up persons'.<sup>634</sup> Every Christian, by the *command of the church*, must know at least:

1. The four great truths of Faith. 2. The Sacraments; at least baptism, confession, and the blessed sacrament. 3. The commandments of God and the Church. 4. The prayers; Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Creed, or I Believe.<sup>635</sup>

The commandments deserve special attention as they were most often addressed in their sermons. Fr. Van Antwerpen, who excelled with his popular catechism, gave three sermons on the seventh commandment at the mission in Wexford town.<sup>636</sup> In his introduction to the third sermon he demonstrated how the common people transgressed against this commandment and given that there were also rich distinguished people in this category, he had to refer to them as well. In doing this he gave a number of examples and spelled out exactly how precisely and substantively these cases differed in detail and how these obligations were ignored.<sup>637</sup> According to Prost, Antwerpen was a very important and highly skilled confessor-priest and his sermons never failed to heighten the penitent's

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<sup>631</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>632</sup> Enoch Heli, 'The Redemptorists catechism' in *The Catholic Layman*, v, no.51 (1856), pp 33-34

<sup>633</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>636</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., 76.

consciousness.<sup>638</sup> During the last week of the mission held in Wexford town the Redemptorists had to alter the number of sermons for the week so they could concentrate on hearing confessions.

Within a few years of their arrival in Ireland, the Redemptorists also set about popularizing the cult of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Anne Eriksen suggested ‘this picture was among the most cherished and widely spread religious images in the Catholic world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’.<sup>639</sup> It followed the Redemptorist order on their world-wide mission, but also acquired a life of its own as a mass-produced devotional object, found in private homes, on prayer cards, as book marks in prayer books, as amulets bringing luck, and so on.<sup>640</sup> The first copy of the icon is said to have been sent to Limerick in 1867 and from there, the image spread throughout Ireland.<sup>641</sup> In all the places where devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was practiced, the Redemptorists are said to have brought with them ‘authentic copies’ of the original icon.<sup>642</sup> Further evidence of devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour is found in the *Freeman’s Journal* of 1886. A notice written by the Very Rev. Canon Daniel, a parish priest in Dublin, described the deceased Fr. Johnston’s fervent devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. He noted the following:

Father Johnson was a model of humility, piety, and charity to all his brothers in religion during the twenty-nine years which he spent in the Congregation. He was, above all, a model in his devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and to Our Mother of Perpetual Succour. At home and on Mission he would spend his free time before the Tabernacle, or at an Altar of Our Blessed Lady. In Jesus and Mary he placed all his hopes for his own salvation, and from them he sought that grace with which he touched the most hardened sinners.<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>638</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>639</sup> Anne Eriksen, ‘Our Lady of Perpetual Help: invented tradition and devotional success’ in *Journal of Folklore Research*, xlii, no. 3 (2005), p. 295.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>643</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 9 Feb. 1886.



Fig. 12: Image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Pope Pius IX entrusted the icon to the Redemptorists in December 1865.

Moreover, his mind and his heart were frequently turned towards the Tabernacle and that he had the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Succour near his bed.<sup>644</sup> We can also be certain that Fr. Johnson, a native of the diocese of Ferns and editor of the local Wexford newspaper, *The People*, left an indelible mark on the community. Throughout the mid to late nineteenth century *The People* newspaper reported the activities of the Redemptorists with enthusiasm and frequency. The following description of a retreat was published in 1872:

The retreat given by the Redemptorists Fathers Johnson and Stevens which will close tomorrow evening, had been most successful in turning souls to God, and in kindling the Divine fire of religious fervour in the hearts of the thousands.<sup>645</sup>

It was not until Fr. William Whitty became parish priest in 1897 that the procession was revived. Fr. Whitty reinstated the procession as an annual event, building on the tradition of pilgrimage to the island from the medieval period and the relationship with Lough Derg. The *Wexford People* reported the first of the new processions on the 21 August 1897:

The number of those who took part in the ceremonial far exceeded all anticipations... Although heavy rain fell in Wexford and the neighbourhood, the day in Lady's Island was beautifully fine, and as the procession left the church grounds at 5.30 in the evening, the sun shone out in all its glory. The village was decorated with flags, and from the old castle and monastery, banners and mottoes were displayed. Every point of vantage in the ground was seized on for placing a flag or banner ... the procession was a magnificent success in every detail, no less that 1,500 taking part in it. It is the intention of Father Whitty to continue it, and for the future there will probably be Solemn High Mass in the morning, with the procession in the evening, with a sermon preached on some portion of the Island, and then Solemn Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament.<sup>646</sup>

Just like Fr. Johnston and other Redemptorists, Fr. Whitty also had a great personal devotion to Our lady. Amongst the banners and inscriptions which were brought from Enniscorthy by Fr. Whitty for the special occasion were the following—'Heavenly Mother, Protect Us', 'Jesus Mary and Joseph, Bless Us', 'Sacred Heart of Jesus, Save Us;' banner of the Sacred Heart, St. Patrick, The Pope, with motto, 'God Save Our Pope'.<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> Ibid., 9 Feb. 1886.

<sup>645</sup> *The People*, 3 Feb. 1872.

<sup>646</sup> Murphy, 'Our Lady's Island', p. 24.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid., 24.

### III

As seen in the previous chapter, the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage declined in popularity. The impact of the famine had reduced the population in Mayo at least by a half.<sup>648</sup> In 1865, an English traveller, William Whittaker Barry, noted the great fall in attendance at Croagh Patrick:

This mountain was formerly much resorted to by pilgrims from all parts of Ireland, but the custom I believe is now nearly abandoned. One of the commercials at Ballyshannon told me he had recently ascended the mountain in company with an English gentleman, and they saw one woman on her hands and knees performing the devotions.<sup>649</sup>

From the 1850s onwards that the character of Catholicism in the diocese of Tuam began to change, and it was not until the 1870s that the diocese moved more decisively into the mainstream of a new Irish Catholicism. Before the famine some attempts by the clergy to dismantle and destroy abuses associated with pilgrimages had been confined almost entirely to the dioceses in the eastern and southern parts of the country, with the result that the west became, for a time, even more clearly peripheral as regards the state of its Catholicism than before.<sup>650</sup> But the Catholic Church was not as uniform as it might appear to have been. Behind this official unity was the voice of John MacHale, the archbishop of Tuam. As a fervent nationalist and a strong advocate of Gallicanism, he had long held out against Cullen's new reforms. The biography of John MacHale encapsulates the development of the Catholic Church in Ireland during the nineteenth century. There are several interesting letters contained in this biography which throw enormous light on the state of Catholicism in the diocese of Tuam in the post-Famine period. The following letter by MacHale to Cardinal Fransoni in 1852, highlights the lack of missionaries in the parishes and the number of disadvantaged children without a proper education:

As to retreats and missions, there is no question but they are of the greatest benefit both for keeping faith alive and for correcting immorality. Wherefore, in my address to the parochial clergy, I have often exhorted them to make use of this most salutary help of missions in fulfilling their own duties as pastors. One parish priest had solicited the help of the missionaries; but these were so exhausted by previous labors that they had to refuse for the time being his invitation....

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<sup>648</sup> James Harpur, *Sacred Tracks* (London, 2002), p. 156.

<sup>649</sup> William. W. Barry, *A walking round Ireland in 1865, by an Englishman [W.W. Barry]* (London, 1867), p. 109.

<sup>650</sup> D. J. Keenan, *The Catholic Church in nineteenth-century Ireland: a sociological study* (Dublin, 1983), p. 140.

It is still to be regretted that the National Schools, as they are described in the Statutes of the Council of Thurles, do not contribute much toward the instruction of our poor children, because no child is allowed to frequent them who cannot pay two pence a week; and very many are too poor to afford even that sum.<sup>651</sup>

While Cullen managed successfully to impose his will on most Irish bishops, MacHale was the least cooperative and challenged the position of the church on many areas, particularly education. When Pius IX realised that little had been done to implement the reforms of the 'devotional revolution' in the diocese of Tuam, he sent the archbishop a letter of warning indicating that progress was needed. Pius IX urged him to be 'mindful of his duty as a bishop and to 'endeavour to discharge all the duties of a good shepherd'.<sup>652</sup> He emphasised the need for parish missions and retreats in fostering religious fervour:

We, therefore, most earnestly exhort you to undertake all that you can in your episcopal solicitude, so as to have missions given from time to time among your people. Make it your care also to have your priests perform, yearly, the exercises of a spiritual retreat; this, as you know, is a great help toward preserving and restoring ecclesiastical discipline.<sup>653</sup>

He instructed MacHale to provide schools in his diocese 'in which the young maybe carefully instructed and trained without any peril to their faith or to sound doctrine'.<sup>654</sup> From the Pope's letter it was noted that the west of Ireland had been a key target of the evangelicals' campaign. Many Catholics were being 'led into error' and detached from the Catholic faith by 'wicked and fraudulent manoeuvres of their enemies'.<sup>655</sup> He encouraged MacHale to 'spare no pains, no plans, no labors to defend his beloved flock from the attacks of the ravenous wolves'.<sup>656</sup> Evangelical Protestants had launched a zealous campaign to convert Catholics in the west of Ireland during the famine. Their efforts became more organized when, in 1849, Alexander Dallas founded the Society for Irish Church Missions to Roman Catholics. By 1854 it had set up 125 mission stations in Ireland, an indication of the zeal of the missionaries and the generosity of their supporters.<sup>657</sup> The famine years brought charges of 'souperism', or giving food in order to obtain conversions.<sup>658</sup> This term may also be

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<sup>651</sup> Bernard O'Reilly, *John MacHale, archbishop of Tuam: his life, times and correspondence* (2 vols, New York, 1890), ii, 432.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>656</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>657</sup> Donal A. Kerr, *The Catholic Church and the famine* (Dublin, 1996), p. 84.

<sup>658</sup> Helen Elizabeth Hatton, *The largest amount of good: Quaker relief in Ireland, 1654-1921* (Canada, 1993), p. 146. See also Miriam Moffitt, *Soupers and Jumpers: The Protestant Missions in Connemara, 1848-1937* (Dublin, 2008), p.30.



defined as the ‘exchange of spiritual allegiance for material benefits of one kind or another: employment, education, food, and clothing’.<sup>659</sup> MacHale charged in the *Freemans Journal* on 24 February 1847 that the Protestants were ‘purchasing souls’ and in the same paper on 11 April 1847, a priest in County Roscommon stated that forty-one of his parishioners had attended the Protestant Church to receive clothing.<sup>660</sup>

To counteract the efforts of proselytizing institutions in his diocese, MacHale, set up a number of schools in areas already occupied by Protestant missionaries. Edward Nangle, a young Church of Ireland minister, established a Protestant Mission on Achill Island with the purpose of converting the Catholic population to Protestantism. Father Michael Gallagher of Achill claimed that the extent of poverty had compelled most of the population to send their children to ‘Nangle’s proselytising villainous schools’.<sup>661</sup> He added that 1,000 Catholic children had attended the Protestant Mission for ‘they are dying of hunger, and rather than die, they have submitted’.<sup>662</sup> In response to this he dispatched two monks of the Order of St. Francis to establish the first National School on the island in 1852. This illustrates how Catholic interest in education was sometimes stirred by Protestant missionaries; MacHale had previously opposed the National schools as he believed they would be non-denominational, have schoolbooks with a decidedly British content and the Irish language would not be compulsory.<sup>663</sup> MacHale may not have been the most zealous in promoting pastoral reform, but there is evidence to suggest that much progress had been made in the Tuam diocese to hold missions and retreats. In a letter to Pius XI in 1853, he stated:

It will be most grateful to Your Holiness to learn that already we have gathered abundant fruits from these missions, and that the missionaries can themselves bear most convincing testimony to the utter absence of truth in all that has been shamelessly reported about the perversion of my diocesans.<sup>664</sup>

A letter of farewell which the missionaries addressed to the parishioners before leaving, is of interest; not only does it indicate how well the mission was received by the people, but the genuine sincerity with which the devotional activities were carried out:

During all the time that we labored among you, they say, the consolation and edification which you gave us are such as we cannot find words to express: the zeal and fervor shown by you to attend all the exercises, amid storm and rain, morning,

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<sup>659</sup> Raymond Gillespie, *A various country: essays in Mayo history 1500-1900* (Westport, 1987), p. 127.

<sup>660</sup> *Freemans Journal*, 24 Feb. 1847.

<sup>661</sup> Kerr, *The Catholic Church*, p. 86.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>663</sup> Terence Brown, *The literature of Ireland: culture and criticism* (Cambridge, 2010), pp 28-29.

<sup>664</sup> O’Reilly, *John MacHale*, p. 458.

noon, and evening, through a whole fortnight, kept the church full to overflowing with a dense throng, who listened with absorbed attention to the instructions, and who awaited around the confessionals three and four days in succession, with a most wonderful patience, their turn to get to confession; the zealous clergy of the neighboring parishes giving unwearied help to the missionaries.<sup>665</sup>

In addition to parish missions, MacHale also provided the laity with catechisms which were written in the Irish language. He indicated that these were to provide the people in the west of Ireland with ‘solid religious instruction in that tongue’.<sup>666</sup> Shortly afterwards he issued a little manual of prayer. In the preface to the second edition of this manual, published in 1857, he gave some interesting details about the catechism and how it still appealed to the minds and hearts of Catholic readers, not just in Galway and Mayo, but also in England, America and Australia. One of MacHale’s former Maynooth pupils, R. P. Crosbie, who had been on the mission in England for fifty years, sent him a letter acknowledging that his catechism ‘was doing good service in England’.<sup>667</sup> In the catechism there was special devotion to the ‘Litanies of Our Lord and of Our Lady of Loreto’ which formed a portion of the morning and evening prayers.<sup>668</sup> The ‘Litany of the Saints’ and the ‘Penitential Psalms’ also featured in the catechism. Moreover, he made translations into Irish of portions of the Holy Scriptures as well as the magnificent Latin hymns, *Dies Irae* and *Stabat Mater*.<sup>669</sup> Added to the second edition were other popular devotions including the ‘Way of the Cross’ and ‘Rosary of the Blessed Virgin’. Clearly MacHale had an intense respect for sacred theology and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. A letter by Fr. John Roche, indicated that MacHale was the main speaker at the consecration of the Church of the Assumption in Wexford town in 1860.<sup>670</sup> When archbishop MacHale died in 1881, his funeral was conducted amidst all the manifestations of respectable ultramontanism: gorgeous ceremonial and long processions of Convent children, boys from the Christian Brothers Schools, members of the Female Solidarity of the Sacred Heart, Children of Mary, the Brotherhood of the Sacred Heart, members of the Third Order of St. Francis and many more.<sup>671</sup> Clearly such displays were confirmation that the west of Ireland was less peripheral than before and its practices made safe for Ultramontane Orthodoxy.

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., 630.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid., 555.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid., 630.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., 631.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid., 554.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid., 690-91.

#### IV

The success of the ‘devotional Revolution’ owed as much to the advance of Irish nationalism, with its religious and cultural identity associations, as it did with Cullen’s leadership.<sup>672</sup> In 1900, summarizing his views on Irish nationality, Dr. John Healy, the Archbishop of Tuam, wrote;

In the future development of this country we must proceed on national lines. We have a national spirit and a national life of our own, and that national spirit and that national life are fed by the history and language and tradition of the past, the language of our sires.... Cultivate these memories? feed them, and if you do, you may be sure the national spirit will not die.<sup>673</sup>

This passage suggests what the revival of the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage may have meant to Healy. In his view, to proceed on national lines implies a rejection of Anglicization. In order to proceed on these national lines, Healy advocated the cultivation of the traditions of the past.<sup>674</sup> Thus the revival of one of these traditions, the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage, ‘must be seen as the deliberate nurturing of a national spirit, a national life, a national distinctiveness from Britain’.<sup>675</sup> Undoubtedly, MacHale was a pivotal vehicle in this development. After he died, his views and activity became a model for priests and prelates in their work for an Irish nation. The effect of his influence can be seen in the work of Rev. John Stephens and Rev. Michael Clarke as they set about restoring the ancient pilgrimage of Croagh Patrick.<sup>676</sup> They proceeded to rebuild the old church, with the necessary materials of sheet iron and metal pillars, as indicated in *The Irish Builder Magazine* of February 1883.<sup>677</sup> On the last Friday of July 1883, Fr. Stephens, Fr. Clarke and Fr. Laurence O’Brien celebrated Mass for 600 people.<sup>678</sup> However, it was not until the arrival of the new archbishop, Dr. Healy in 1903, that the revival actually happened.<sup>679</sup> Healy was an antiquarian and an historian; his interests centered on the early Christian church in Ireland, and in particular on the life of Saint Patrick. In 1905, he published a massive work on the life and writings of the saint. In his book, Healy

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<sup>672</sup> Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish experience since 1800: a concise history* (3rd ed., New York, 2010), p. 70.

<sup>673</sup> Patrick J. Joyce, *John Healy, Archbishop of Tuam* (Dublin, 1931), p. 129.

<sup>674</sup> John Shovlin, ‘Pilgrimage and construction of Irish national identity’ in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, xi (1999), p. 68.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>676</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 22.

<sup>677</sup> *The Irish Builder*, 15 Feb. 1883.

<sup>678</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 22.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

referred to the various places of pilgrimage associated with Patrick, and particularly to Croagh Patrick. Healy perceived Croagh Patrick as a symbol of Ireland's nationality and religion:

Think of this mountain as the symbol of Ireland's enduring faith and of the constancy and success with which the Irish people faced the storms of persecution during many woeful centuries. It is therefore the fitting type of Irish faith and Ireland's nationhood which nothing has ever shaken and with God's blessing nothing can ever destroy.<sup>680</sup>

The Croagh Patrick revival proved very successful. 3,000 pilgrims joined Archbishop Healy and the bishop of Achonry, Dr. Lyster, in celebrating Mass on the mountain in the summer of 1904.<sup>681</sup> By 1906, the numbers of devotees had expanded with 15,000 pilgrims ascending the holy mountain in that year. This number was exceeded in 1908 when 20,000 pilgrims attended.<sup>682</sup> Middle-class urban elements, especially Dubliners, were strongly represented among the pilgrims.<sup>683</sup> The rhetoric of the sermons made on the summit of Croagh Patrick during these years was nationalistic and culturally separatist. In 1905, Archbishop Healy stressed the recurrent theme of enduring Catholic faith despite British persecution. Dean Phelan, a visiting priest from Melbourne, Australia, elaborated on this point, arguing that England had robbed Ireland of her churches and temples but not of her faith. He also expressed a belief that his audience could 'look forward to the day when the last link in the chain which England had forged around the Irish people would be broken and when the Irish flag would float over a free Irish nation'.<sup>684</sup> Perhaps the surest credential of the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage's Irish-Ireland connections and inspiration is the fact that, every year from 1906 on, one of the two sermons preached on the mount was in Irish.<sup>685</sup> Fr. O'Fagan who gave the 1909 English sermon touched upon themes inspired by cultural nationalism. According to the reporter, 'He thanked God they were coming back to their own again; their language would soon be restored to them, and he asked them all to pray...that they might always preserve the faith, and that they would not always be under the rule of the foreigner.'<sup>686</sup> Archbishop Healy returned to Croagh Patrick for the tenth anniversary of the revived pilgrimage. In his address he returned to the familiar theme of the perseverance of nationhood in spite of English oppression. 'The ancient language of St. Patrick...', he wrote,

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<sup>680</sup> John Healy, *The Life and Writings of Saint Patrick* (Dublin, 1905), p. 654.

<sup>681</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 20 Aug. 1904.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 Aug. 1906 and 1 Aug. 1908.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 Jul. 1909.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 Aug. 1905.

<sup>685</sup> Shovlin, 'Pilgrimage and construction of Irish national identity', p. 69.

<sup>686</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 31 Jul. 1909.

‘at least to some extent is with us still, and we have that ancient Celtic race which has survived in spite of all’.<sup>687</sup>

Lough Derg was also dramatically revived during the first two decades of the twentieth-century. In the early 1880s the annual attendance at the pilgrimage fluctuated between two and three thousand.<sup>688</sup> However, in 1916, 10,584 pilgrims visited the lake island and this trend continued upward. O’Connor noticed a definite shift in the social class of pilgrims visiting Lough Derg in the late nineteenth century. Lough Derg had been the haunt of the ‘humbler’ classes during the late nineteenth century. In the years before 1910, wealthier individuals began to predominate at the annual pilgrimage.<sup>689</sup> In an article for the *Irish Monthly* in 1910, the Reverend James J. McNamee, a Catholic priest, argued that the Lough Derg pilgrimage ‘has come down to us as a living link with our National Apostle, a remnant of the once world-famed Island of Saints and Scholars, and a proud memorial of that undying faith, which three centuries of fire and sword could not destroy’.<sup>690</sup> The same sentiments were expressed by another observer who wrote two years previously. M. C. Keogh described the feelings Lough Derg stirred in him,

a strange feeling of spiritual contact with olden times came upon us as we tried to realize that we were, in this busy twentieth century, in this prosaic, work-a-day world, about to join in the almost identical penitential exercises that had been performed by the early Irish Christians and Saints, and that have been performed year after year with almost unbroken continuity since our National Apostle first set the example.<sup>691</sup>

According to Victor and Edith Turner, both Croagh Patrick and St. Patrick’s Purgatory belong to the category of pilgrimages labelled ‘archaic’. Archaic pilgrimage traditions have come down from very ancient times, and little or nothing is known of their foundation, however, they bear quite evident traces of syncretism with older religious beliefs and symbols’.<sup>692</sup> Turner indicates that archaism is the cement which keeps the Lough Derg pilgrimage together and makes of it a symbol of Irish nationalism.<sup>693</sup> This extends to the overseas Irish, many of whom made the pilgrimage. O’Connor noted that the great majority of pilgrims to Lough Derg are Irish or of Irish extraction. A great many come from America, England and Scotland, as well as Australia and New Zealand, and other distant colonies, in a

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<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Aug. 1913.

<sup>688</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 195.

<sup>689</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984), p. 219.

<sup>690</sup> James J. McNamee, ‘Our national pilgrimage’ in *Irish Monthly*, xxxvi (1908), p. 348.

<sup>691</sup> M. C. Keogh, ‘A pilgrimage to Lough Derg’ in *Irish Monthly*, xxxvi (1908), pp 682-83.

<sup>692</sup> Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and pilgrimage*, p. 104

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, 123

word from wherever the exiled Celt has found a foothold.<sup>694</sup> The Turners quote Curtayne who said, ‘That which speaks to them at Lough Derg is race. In going there they are answering the call of blood’.<sup>695</sup> In the second edition of O’Connor’s Lough Derg book, it is not surprising to find that many of the critical endorsements from the various Irish Catholic presses and testimonies from several bishops, all ‘play into the self-sufficiency of the nation, its singular, spotlighted role as the epitome of Catholic piety’.<sup>696</sup> The *Glasgow Observer* noted that ‘every Catholic should read’ O’Connor’s book ‘if only for the object of realising more forcibly that it is not necessary to go to the Continent in order to visit sacred shrines, where spiritual favours are bestowed in a special manner on the children of the Church’.<sup>697</sup> A reviewer from Melbourne, picked up on one of O’Connor’s key points about Lough Derg, a political more than a religious perspective, that the history of Lough Derg encapsulates the essence of the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The reviewer observes, ‘the fortunes of this little islet bear a curious resemblance in miniature to the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland at large’.<sup>698</sup> A letter from Charles Gavan Duffy dated 17 October 1895 makes a similar point, but includes a suggestion of the way in which Lough Derg also stimulates a personal and unforced ancestral connection. Duffy writes, ‘When I was ten years of age—about 1826 I think—I visited the island with my mother and made a station there. Whenever Ireland shall possess a perfect history, the author will owe you valuable suggestions on the customs and manners of a pious race intensely conservative of old habits and traditions.’<sup>699</sup> O’Brien suggests the phrase ‘perfect history’ to denote the redress of a tragic history is telling for the way such restoration of the nation is equated with a total elimination of imperfection.<sup>700</sup> Duffy also identifies the means by which this will be achieved, namely through the emulation of a piety and conservatism modelled by a Catholic past epitomized by Lough Derg. According to O’Brien, this is nationalism with a penitential cast.<sup>701</sup> O’Connor’s impassioned prose displays cultural nationalism at its best:

Seeing the peculiar efficacy of the exercises of this pilgrimage towards renewing and increasing the spiritual life, the sanctity of the place, and the graces and indulgences there received, what wonder is it that the eye of the pilgrim is charmed, his heart elevated, his faith enlivened, nay, even his love for holy Ireland increased, when first

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<sup>694</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 197.

<sup>695</sup> Curtayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 143.

<sup>696</sup> Peggy O’Brien, *Writing Lough Derg* (New York, 2006), p. 71.

<sup>697</sup> O’Connor, *St Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. xi.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>700</sup> O’Brien, *Writing Lough Derg*, p. 71.

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

the island of Lough Derg meets his view? And what wonder is it that the Irish people should so love this sanctuary? We love it on account of its association with the name of our National Apostle; on account of the number of saints, who here practiced the Gospel counsels of perfection, and whose manes are in benediction in the Irish Church; we love it because of the traditions, which enshrine it in the Irish heart; because of the numberless sinners here reconciled to God, and who here 'chose the better part'; and finally, we love it for the numberless graces here received, and the blessings it is the means of obtaining for its numerous votaries, and because it invites in us lofty desires of becoming more holy.<sup>702</sup>

## V

The Catholic Church in the later nineteenth century was a church that had been the subject of significant spiritual renewal and notable institutional reorganisation. There were thus two aspects to Cullen's 'devotional revolution' during the nineteenth century. The first was a dramatic alternation in the physical setting for Catholic devotions, and a vast change in religious behaviour and decorum. Congregational involvement in the Mass was essential for the revitalisation of parochial worship. Attendance at Sunday Mass became more regular and reception of the Sacraments more frequent. The devotional repertoire of the laity was also expanded and enriched. The performance of short devotions, paraliturgical rituals such as the rosary, the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and the Stations of the Cross, became the mark of a practicing Catholic. However, this was not a sudden transformation as Larkin described. Prior to the famine, the performance of canonical obligations such as Mass and the Sacraments was a vital part of the devotional activities at Lough Derg and Our Lady's Island. Most of the devotions recently authorised by the papacy were not new; indeed, many had their origins in the Counter-Reformation, but despite their Tridentine roots these devotions now took on a distinctly ultramontane cast.<sup>703</sup>

The relationship of para-liturgical devotion to the Mass illustrates how the church structured and informed the laity's worship. Many devotions emphasised the sufferings of Jesus and the real presence in the consecrated host, and because of this close connection with the Mass they vividly imparted to the laity the distinctive doctrines of the church.<sup>704</sup> The 'unbloody sacrifice' of the Mass was nothing less than a re-presentation of Christ's death and the miracle of the atonement. Through his real presence in the Eucharist, 'Christ's Himself

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<sup>702</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 241.

<sup>703</sup> Brian P. Clarke, *Piety and nationalism: lay voluntary associations and the creation of an Irish-Catholic community in Toronto, 1850-1895* (Canada, 1993), pp 45-62.

<sup>704</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

thanks His Eternal Father for the mercies bestowed upon the entire world'. Such devotions were designed to prepare the faithful for the Mass so that they would approach 'the Lord with a firm belief of his real presence...joined with a firm confidence in the mercies of the Redeemer'. Devotions, then, provided the ritualistic and symbolic context for religious practice and so shaped the laity's understanding of the Mass.<sup>705</sup> These new forms of piety placed the parish church at the heart of religious life. Parish missions were also designed to transform Catholics into practicing ones by communicating forcefully the claims of the Catholic Church and the consequences of sin. The sermons were intended to impart the principal teachings of the Catholic Church and to instruct the faithful in the nature of the sacraments as well as how they were to be received. The sermons which were instructional and catechetical in nature, encouraged personal conversions in the reception of the sacrament of confession.<sup>706</sup>

Thus, the revitalisation of the Catholic Church had a direct impact on all four pilgrimages sites with the intensity of change varying from place to place. Lough Derg was unique in that financial assistance came from outside. Among the special benefactors of Lough Derg was John Donegan, a jeweller from Dublin, who presented the sanctuary with certain church requisites to the value of £170.<sup>707</sup> Pilgrims made voluntary contributions towards repairs and building projects as well as the generous contributions by the archbishop of Toronto. Unlike Lough Derg which remained heavily dependent on outside help, the real success story behind the 'devotional revolution' in Wexford owed much to the prosperous farming class living within the community itself. It was this class that experienced the in-roads of English-speaking culture and agrarian capitalism. Only after the famine, with the collapse of the Irish language and culture that supported the unofficial religious practices of the lower classes, did devotional Catholicism and an extraordinary high level of religious observance become the norm.<sup>708</sup> The rival of the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage, as already noted, symbolised the success of the Irish in maintaining their Catholicism despite British attempts to protestantize them.<sup>709</sup> Finally, the 'devotional revolution' also managed to stamp out widespread popular superstition permanently. Reports indicate that the rituals at Struell Wells scandalised the Catholic Church before 'Protestant eyes'.<sup>710</sup> Clearly, communal bathing was too much for

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<sup>705</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>707</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 234.

<sup>708</sup> Clarke, *Piety and nationalism*, pp 45-62.

<sup>709</sup> Shovlin, 'Pilgrimage and construction of Irish national identity', p. 68.

<sup>710</sup> *Downpatrick Recorder*, 13 Jun. 1855.



Victorian sensitivities and the newspapers condemned ‘the indulgence of heathenism and debauchery’ and ‘pious orgies’ during the pilgrimage.<sup>711</sup> At one stage the primate of the Catholic Church in Ireland, Archbishop William Crolly, had the site ploughed up because ‘there was a superstition among the Roman Catholics that it would be sacrilege to break the green sward surrounding the spring’.<sup>712</sup> The pilgrimages, therefore, seem to have ended by about 1870.

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<sup>711</sup> Ibid., 30 Jun. 1860.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid., 4 Oct. 1862.

## Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explain how traditional practices of pilgrimage in Ireland were subject to change over time and how new practices became accepted and embedded, but also how they were, in turn, expanded on. Using four case studies we have seen both continuity and change in the formation and transformation of these new practices over the centuries. With the exception of chapter one, this study has largely dealt with the activities of reforming bishops and clergymen who challenged the old ways of religious observances. Moreover, this study has attempted, where possible, to compare the significant shifts in the nature of the Lough Derg pilgrimage with other Irish pilgrimage sites such as Our Lady's Island, Croagh Patrick and Struell Wells. These pilgrimages were chosen because of the many shared characteristics with Lough Derg. Both Croagh Patrick and Struell Wells were associated with St. Patrick and shared close mythological links. Our Lady's Island was chosen for its cultural distinctiveness and religion, but also its association with the holy well. Both Our Lady's Island and Lough Derg also showed a significant progression towards organisational standardisation in the Tridentine model while the others lagged behind. Ardmore pattern was mainly chosen for its general representativeness of the pattern as a central place of popular culture and religion.

As suggested in chapter one, the sixteenth-century validations of the practice of pilgrimage at Lough Derg were based on hagiography and associated visions and wonders. In Europe, it acquired mythological fame as the location of the most testing, often fatal, trial available to the faithful—a decent into the cave where one could at great peril see and experience Purgatory. Among the Irish, however, the pilgrimage site of St. Patrick's Purgatory was interpreted as a special favour gained for the Irish by their patron St. Patrick, allowing them to cleanse themselves of their sins by experiencing purgatory while still living, and thereby to avoid its pains in the afterlife.<sup>713</sup> Repetition of prayers combined with physical hardship was their idea of penance, not 'marvellous dreams' of an individual shut up solitarily in a cave, but communal, plodding, 'very real penance...the penance of the poor...It knows the secret of pain'.<sup>714</sup> Native Irish poetry from the sixteenth century emphasised the importance of penance in the pilgrim experience as well as focusing on the various elements of the pilgrimage such as the vigil in the cave. The focus of the sixteenth-century poet, Tuileagna Mac Torna Uí Chonaire, was 'this house where Patrick fasted' and 'the lake which will heal

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<sup>713</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage', p. 170.

<sup>714</sup> Corish, 'The marvels of Lough Derg', p. 417.

my wounds'. He was there to repent for his sins and would do this through a visit in the cave. He invoked Saint Patrick, 'judge of Banbha' and 'guardian of my soul'.<sup>715</sup>

Within the native Irish tradition, there was special emphasis on claiming the protection of St. Patrick. Croagh Patrick's significance originated in the stories told of the saint having fasted there for forty days and of the angel having appeared to him promising that Patrick would be judge of the Irish on the last day, a story found in the *Tripartite Life*.<sup>716</sup> Patrick was seen as protector of the country as a whole, and in particular, the patron saint was seen as the one who would judge the Irish on the last day, and had the privilege of taking souls direct to heaven.<sup>717</sup> That people continued to believe in the concept of the saint as judge of the Irish was illustrated by a story preserved in Edmond Campion's 1571 history of Ireland which noted of the Irish:

so light are they in believing whatsoever is with any countenance of gravitie affirmed by their superiours, whom they esteem and honour, that a lewd prelate within these few years needy of money was able to perswade his parish: that St. Patricke in striving with S. Peter to let an Irish Gallowglass into heaven, had his head broken with the keys, for whose reliefe he obtained a collection.<sup>718</sup>

Chapter two explored how the image of St. Patrick was enhanced as part of the Counter-Reformation reforms. The aim of remodelling Patrick was to make him more acceptable to Tridentine standards, thus, promoting spirituality. The very image of St. Patrick and his Purgatory demonstrated the catechetical significance which the Franciscans attached to the example of this holy man, and the one in which they celebrated and promoted to teach the Catholic faith to the Irish people. Mac Aingil presented the ascetic character of St. Patrick's life and mission as a model for the laity to follow. Mac Aingil reminded his readers that 'we have ourselves seen the wells where he prayed, the stones where he slept, the bed of pain where he interceded with God to show grace and mercy to his people'.<sup>719</sup> In this way, the pilgrimage sites were explained as evidence of Patrick's concern with the salvation of the Irish people. When the cave and buildings on the island were destroyed on government instruction in 1632, it was recorded that 'the country people had expected that St. Patrick

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<sup>715</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, pp 168-72.

<sup>716</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, pp 12-15.

<sup>717</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The most adaptable of saints', p. 86.

<sup>718</sup> Edmund Campion, *Historic of Ireland in Ancient Irish Histories* (2 vols, Dublin, 1809), i, 25.

<sup>719</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The most adaptable of saints,' p. 96.

would have wrought some miracle' that would undermine the efforts of the destroyers, an indication of the continued strong local belief in the patronage of St. Patrick.<sup>720</sup>

Our Lady's Island was not the type of pilgrimage where one could gain repentance and satisfaction for their sins, rather the primary aim of the devotional practices performed at this site concerned healing and the preservation of health. Just as penitents claimed the special protection of St. Patrick in the expulsion of their sins, the weak, disabled as well as those suffering from serious ill health, sought the help of Our Lady by 'praying and making some oblations, or extending charitable Benevolence to Indigents there residing'.<sup>721</sup> Yet, at both places there was still a communal performance and sense of tangibility of the natural features of the pilgrimage, such as the water and sacred stones. The dipping of one's feet in the water, the touching of stones all involved a specific directionality of movement, but also a real physical contact with the very elements made holy by the saints.

The most significant shift in the nature of the pilgrimage exercises came about as a result of the Counter-Reformation which placed increasing emphasis on interior piety at the expense of external practice.<sup>722</sup> This had an impact on the conduct of the pilgrimage at Lough Derg as the Franciscans set about adopting the pilgrimage to suit Counter-Reformation standards. In the early seventeenth century, pilgrims performed ritual actions sanctioned by custom and transmitted by oral tradition.<sup>723</sup> But now they were confronted by a printed text which described the standard pattern of the pilgrimage and explained it in terms acceptable to Counter-Reformation clergy.<sup>724</sup> The key features of these written instructions were the scriptural meanings provided for each step of the pilgrimage. The modern pilgrimage was not validated by hagiography and its associated visions and wonders, but instead was presented 'as a scripturally based devotional exercise, invoking the Trinity and supported by the regular celebration of mass and attendance at the sacrament of confession, thereby highlighting the importance of penance'.<sup>725</sup> Despite the reforming impulse many of the older beliefs and practices persisted. The Franciscans thought they were making progress in adapting the pilgrimage to Counter-Reformation standards but the influence of traditional supporters meant that the counter-reformation movement was not always popular. As a result the

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<sup>720</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, pp 79-80. See also Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage', p. 171.

<sup>721</sup> Hore, 'An account of the barony of Forth', pp 53-84.

<sup>722</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage', p. 174.

<sup>723</sup> Gillespie, *Devoted people*, p. 159.

<sup>724</sup> Richardson, *The great folly*, p. 61.

<sup>725</sup> Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The Lough Derg pilgrimage', p. 175.

introduction of new practices and the termination of traditional ones was necessarily a gradual process.

The Counter-Reformation movement was more readily received insofar as Our Lady's Island was concerned. Irish priests who had trained abroad in the new Tridentine Catholicism, returned to Ireland and set about implementing the Tridentine reforms in much the same way as the Franciscans had been doing at Lough Derg. However, they did not have to compromise their mission in the same way that the Franciscans had to so as not to alienate their traditional supporters. The people in the barony of Forth embraced the religious changes wholeheartedly, not only did they keep patron days very devoutly as well as the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist, but they also spent time in private reflection three times a day. In 1629, the bishop of Ferns, John Roche, reported 'the parochial districts are everywhere well defined and pastors may be readily found for the administration of the Sacraments, and the exercise of their ecclesiastical functions'.<sup>726</sup> Yet despite these cultural differences, the conduct of the pilgrimage was much the same as found at Lough Derg. Pilgrims followed a fixed set of devotions that were conducted on the site. The removal of one's shoes was an important body gesture, in that the pilgrim now found himself at once in the grip of a rigid discipline, extremely uncomfortable.<sup>727</sup> The notable act of dabbling in Our Lady's water was undoubtedly something of the spiritual kind. Brullaghan noted in his description of the stations in the water at Lough Derg:

Having finished the stations of the penal beds, we begin the station in the water...we go round the stones, standing in the water three times, to satisfy for the sins of our will, memory and understanding; saying, in the meantime, five Paters, five Aves and one Creed, to redeem the punishment due to the sins of our five outward senses; then humbly kneeling on the sharp stones...from whence we advance to a round stone, a distance out in the lough, on which we stand, and say one Pater, one Ave and one Creed to signify that we beg one thing to God, to wit, life everlasting.<sup>728</sup>

As with practices at localized pilgrimages such as holy wells, there were social dimensions to the pilgrimage that the clergy disapproved of. Having completed the pilgrimage, pilgrims reintegrated themselves into the secular world with suitable activities. Pilgrimages were also occasions for drinking, carousing, dancing and the peddling of pre-Tridentine material. While Lough Derg and Our Lady's Island were free from the alleged debaucheries of other sites, the boisterous patterns at Croagh Patrick, Struell Wells, and Ardmore was well documented in

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<sup>726</sup> P. H. Hore, *History of the town and county of Wexford* (6 vols, London, 1900-11), vi, 314.

<sup>727</sup> Curtayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 167.

<sup>728</sup> Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, pp 134-35.

late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As always with the pattern the common participation of the lower clergy made it more difficult to suppress. The degeneration of patterns into violence and ‘faction-fighting’ was also a common feature. The antiquarian, Thomas Crofton Croker, noted that loss of life was common at patterns owing to faction-fighting. At Ardmore, for example, this ‘want of piety’ and in particular the combination, as described in Croker’s 1810 account of the Ardmore pattern, of ‘bloody knees from devotions and bloody heads from fighting’, represents succinctly the juxtaposition of the sacred and profane.

In an attempt to eradicate these practices, the church authorities set about the task of imposing higher standards of behaviour and performance among the clergy. At Croagh Patrick some small attempt was made by the priests to prevent such allegedly sacrilegious activities from taking place on the holy site. At Ardmore, Pilgrims at St. Declan’s Stone were horse-whipped in an attempt to drive them away.<sup>729</sup> Church authorities also made genuine efforts to ensure the strict observance of church practice in the discipline of the sacraments. The introduction of strict controls in the nineteenth century may have been an easier transition for Our Lady’s Island than for the other sites, as the early exposure to an official Church involvement would have paved the way for later reforms. It seems to be a theme that the pilgrimages which survived did have more early contact with the official Church than the sites which were abandoned.

Yet for all these important indications of change, there were also signs of resistance. At Lough Derg, the pilgrimage authorities put an end to all doubts and difficulties connected with the pilgrimage when they closed up the caves in 1780. The reason given for this new ruling was that the caves had become dangerous to pilgrims because of the large number that used to crowd into them at once.<sup>730</sup> More importantly, by closing the caves, the authorities put a stop to the devotional practices that were associated with the cave. The Mass that customarily preceded the descent into purgatory was now abandoned and no longer was the purification ritual that had traditionally followed the release from purgatory carried out. The Franciscans understandably were greatly angered by the closing of the caves. After all they had protected the old world, and the cave with its association with St. Patrick was a vital part of that traditional world. Thus, the importance of tradition, supported by the lay community,

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<sup>729</sup> Broderick, ‘Devotions at holy wells’, pp 53-74.

<sup>730</sup> Curtayne, *Lough Derg*, p. 103.

was one of the main retardants of change and why it took the authorities another decade to finally shut the caves down.

The Famine accelerated the transformation of the Catholic Church in Ireland. According to Whelan, in the pre-Famine period, a vernacular Catholicism had established deep roots among those social formations that the Famine would decimate.<sup>731</sup> This ‘vernacular inheritance evolved within an agrarian society, its ritual rhythm dominated by calendar custom and inhabiting a numinous landscape of holy wells and pilgrimage sites’.<sup>732</sup> In this cultural mix, behaviour was regulated by custom: central religious events were the rites of passage and communal occasions that included the pattern, wake and station. The trauma of the Famine, the associated decline of vernacular religion and popular culture as well as the erosion of the Irish language created a cultural vacuum that was filled by the more ritualistic practices associated with the devotional revolution—the institutionalisation of mass-going, new devotional practices such as novenas, the Way of the Cross, benediction, the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>733</sup> Irish Catholicism became more public, more assertive, more Roman in character, as the institutional Church eclipsed its linguistic predecessor. At Our Lady’s Island, the devotional revolution was made possible by the involvement of the local community and the religious figures of Thomas Furlong, William Whitty and the Redemptorists. At the heart of the revival we find the people who were not only capable but also willing to adapt. By reviving the pilgrimage the past was being celebrated alongside the new philosophy of the Catholic population which celebrated religion through strict adherence to church policies.

In the revival of pilgrimages the elements of modern Irish cultural identity were also brought together. The rhetoric surrounding the revived pilgrimages fused elements of the Catholic and the Gaelic with the Irish. National distinctiveness and a heightened sense of Irish identity could be symbolically enacted through participation in pilgrimages. Healy perceived Croagh Patrick as a symbol of Ireland’s nationality and religion. In his sermons he spoke about St. Patrick’s vigil on Cruachán Aigli, ‘they alone had always venerated the footsteps of St. Patrick and they alone practiced the fasting and prayer of which (St. Patrick) was himself so

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<sup>731</sup> Kevin Whelan, ‘The cultural effects of the Famine’ in Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (eds), *The Cambridge companion to modern Irish culture* (Cambridge, 2005), pp 137-55.

<sup>732</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-139.

<sup>733</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-55.

bright an example'.<sup>734</sup> One of the unique features of the Lough Derg pilgrimage was its ability to retain links to its original format in spite of the changes it underwent. The pilgrimage exercises essentially appear to have retained much of the character and order they had throughout the history of the pilgrimage tradition. The crude appearance of the penitential beds even moved an American visitor in 1857 to offer a substantial sum of money to the diocese in order to have the beds completely renovated in cut stone. But the offer was politely declined by the bishop who added that the beds 'venerable for their antiquity, speak trumpet-tongued of the glorious past; to touch them would be simply to destroy their value as historical monuments'.<sup>735</sup> According to O'Connor, it is quite possible that the reasons Lough Derg maintained its popularity and respect was because it had 'not become modified'.<sup>736</sup> He suggested:

At Lough Derg the discipline of penance is as unchanging as when St. Patrick and the Holy Coenobites, who imitated his extraordinary mortification, peopled those cells or beds, round which a moving line of pilgrims may be seen reciting their devotions throughout the Station season.<sup>737</sup>

Cardinal Logue, the head of the Irish church, expressed this same feeling of contact and continuity with the past when he visited Lough Derg in 1913. In his address at the shrine, he said, 'I have no doubt that whatever else changes in Ireland, Lough Derg will never change. It is as unchangeable as the hills by which we are surrounded....It is as undying as the faith of Ireland itself'.<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>734</sup> Hughes, *Croagh Patrick*, p. 24,

<sup>735</sup> O'Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, p. 213.

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>738</sup> Gibbons, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, pp 69-70.



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## Structure

- 1.1 Newspapers
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