



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

***Continuity through change:
A study of the pilgrimage to Lough Derg
In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.***

By

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SUMMARY

St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg has long been an important site of pilgrimage in Ireland having caught the attention of the literary world in the twelfth century. This pilgrimage has continued to exist and develop throughout some of the most turbulent times of Irish history and stands as a monument to Irish Catholicism.

In this thesis I have looked at how this pilgrimage survived and developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when faced with much difficulty and opposition from many ranks of society. In order to deal with these issues effectively, I have divided this thesis into three chapters.

The first chapter deals with the period of 1700-1780. During this period, Ireland was subject to the Penal legislation, which placed serious limits on the practice of Catholicism in Ireland. In this chapter I have looked at the effects of the Penal legislation on Lough Derg and its pilgrimage and how in spite of these laws the pilgrimage continued often with the support of the local Protestant community of the Parish of Templecarne. I have also looked at the topography of the island in the eighteenth century and at the exercises performed by the pilgrims at this time.

The second chapter deals with the period of 1780-1850. Over this period of time, St Patrick's Purgatory was to witness many changes. The Clogher Diocesan clergy took over the running of the pilgrimage and much development of its facilities took place. New Churches and accommodation for the pilgrims were built during this time. This chapter also deals with the impact of the Great Famine on this pilgrimage.

Chapter three deals with this pilgrimage tradition in the post famine period. It looks at the 'devotional revolution', which swept Ireland at this time and its impact on this historical pilgrimage. This chapter also looks at the further development of the island and the pilgrimage exercises.

In spite of the many hardships it faced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the pilgrimage to Lough Derg continued and it maintained its esteemed position in society. I believe this sacred site and its pilgrimage tradition a worthy topic of study.

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CHRONOLOGY

1. **1697:** Banishment Act imposed.
2. **1704:** Act to Prevent the further growth of Popery, (2Anne;c.6), imposed.
3. **1714:** Cave of Purgatory rebuilt.
4. **1751:** Pope Benedict XIV issues a decree reorganising the Irish Church.
5. **1763:** Church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Angels built on Station Island, Lough Derg.
6. **1780:** Clogher Diocese take over the administration of St Patrick's Purgatory. Patrick Murray, Clogher Diocesan Cleric appointed Prior. Caves Closed.
7. **1782:** Catholic Relief Acts introduced.
8. **1790:** Caves filled in. St Patrick's Chapel built on Station island, known as Prison chapel.
9. **1795:** St Patrick's College Maynooth founded. Orange order founded. 93 Pilgrims die when boat sinks on Lough Derg.
10. **1800:** Rev Patrick Bellew appointed Prior of Lough Derg.
11. **1802:** Dr James Murphy succeeds Hugh O' Reilly as Bishop of Clogher.
12. **1813:** Three-day order of exercises becomes the norm.
13. **1830:** Rev Daniel Boylan appointed Prior of Lough Derg.
14. **1831:** Rev Patrick Moynagh appointed Prior of Lough Derg.

15. **1834/5:** Ordnance Survey visit Station Island and its environs.
16. **1845:** Ireland is hit by Famine and will face much hardship until 1851.
17. **1850:** Paul Cullen appointed Archbishop of Armagh. Reform of the Irish his priority.
18. **1857:** Rev Edward Mc Kenna appointed Prior of Lough Derg.
19. **1860:** The number of pilgrims had dropped to one tenth of the 1846 figure. Pilgrimage suspended due to development and renovations of the Island.
20. **1870:** Pilgrimage suspended due to development and renovations of the Island.
21. **1877:** Rev James Mc Kenna appointed Prior of Lough Derg.
22. **1879:** St Patrick's Purgatory visited by Archbishop John Joseph Lynch of Toronto.
23. **1882:** Archbishop returns to Lough Derg and ordains Rev Charles Hegarty and Rev Andrew Cassidy to the priesthood on the island.

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Introduction:

Lough Derg providing continuity through change.

Snuggled amongst the barren mountains and fields of a remote area of Donegal is where St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg can be found. A sacred place surrounded by much legend and myth since the early Christian history of this country. Since before and particularly after its entry into the world of literature in the twelfth century, the pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg has continued to thrive and develop in spite of the difficult situations it found itself facing.

With access to the island achieved only through one road and a boat trip, its remoteness seems to have contributed to its survival and evolution. But how is this so? St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg has been regarded as a revered place of devotion for many centuries and has a wide and varied history. Many local legends and myths surround this sacred site. One such legend describes how St Patrick visited the island. Local tradition regarded the island with fear, as they believed its cave was filled with evil spirits. When St Patrick reputedly visited the area he rowed to the island and entered the Cave in which he remained for forty days in fasting and prayer. Tradition tells that he succeeded in driving out these evil spirits and that he also obtained from God the privilege of seeing the pains by which temporal

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punishment due to sin is expiated in Purgatory.¹ There is little evidence to suggest that St Patrick ever graced the shores of Lough Derg, however it is reputed that St Patrick drifted towards isolated areas where he could pray and reflect.

In the eighteenth century people were beginning to learn that although everywhere present, God has His times and His places and they believed that God had marked out certain places especially destined to receive the prayers of men², thus they followed St Patrick's example and retreated to Lough Derg. The oldest versions of the Lives of St Patrick do not mention his reported trip to Lough Derg, however modern folklore records a visit of St Patrick to Lough Derg. Oral tradition tells that while reading one day on the shores of the lake a salmon jumped out of the water and splashed water on St Patrick's book. Patrick thus put a curse on the salmon and banished them from the water. To this day no salmon are found in the waters of Lough Derg so although there is little sound evidence to prove his presence on the island, St Patrick's name has been irrevocably linked to it.

Much study has been undertaken regarding the emergence and the early development of the pilgrimage station to Lough Derg, however in this

¹ Canon Mc Kenna, *Lough Derg: Ireland's national pilgrimage*, (Dublin, 1928), p 2.

² Canon Mc Kenna, *Lough Derg: Ireland's national pilgrimage*, (Dublin, 1928), p 6.

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thesis I will be concerned with a later period of its development, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During these centuries Ireland underwent much change, politically and socially, as did attitudes to religion and pilgrimages. During the eighteenth century Ireland was subject to penal legislation, most of which were introduced in the late seventeenth century. Many restrictions were placed on the Catholic clergy and public worship was affected. However from further study into this area it is evident that the penal legislation was not always enforced and that certain aspects of the Catholic tradition continued to thrive throughout this period.

Despite being specifically mentioned under the Popery Act of 1704, (2 Anne, c.6) which forbade all meetings and assemblies held at 'pretended places of sanctity such as St Patrick's Purgatory in Co Donegal', the pilgrimage to Lough Derg was kept alive.³ In spite of the threat of punishment under these laws the pilgrims continued to flock to Lough Derg and carry out their station in harsh circumstances.

During this period of study Ireland was hit by more hardship with the onset of the Great Famine in the nineteenth century. This had a much more devastating effect on the population of Ireland but still the pilgrimage to Lough Derg survived. So what was

³Maureen Wall, *The penal laws 1691-1760*, (Dundalk, 1967), p 58.

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it about this island in Donegal that attracted people in their masses its hallowed shores in spite of the many difficulties and hardships they had to face?

Lough Derg is a place of much intrigue, legend and myth and the source of many a tale but it is also much more. Its tradition and survival against all the odds is an indication of the position of esteem in which this pilgrimage was

held. Attitudes towards this pilgrimage have often undergone change and it has also survived many periods of attack from its earliest times through to the attack in the early seventeenth century of James Spottiswood, the Anglican bishop of Clogher. This has all contributed to its unique and varied history. Lough Derg and its development and survival against all the odds is a worthy area of study. As Sir Shane Leslie states in his forward to *St Patrick's Purgatory: a record from history and literature*,

'St Patrick's Purgatory was the medieval rumour which terrified travellers, awed the greatest of criminals, attracted the boldest .Oknight-errantry, puzzled the theologian, englamoured Ireland, haunted Europe, influenced the current view and doctrines of Purgatory and not least inspired Dante'.⁴

⁴ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory: a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p vii.

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Chapter 1:

The long eighteenth century.

The eighteenth century was a particularly long and difficult one for the population of Ireland, the Catholic population in particular. It was an era of change and those changes were not always for the good of the people nor were they welcomed. The Penal legislation, which had been introduced and implemented in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, was to affect every aspect of the lives of the people and the free practice of their religion.

The situation of the people:

There are many arguments regarding the purpose of this legislation. One such argument suggests that this legislation was designed to make those in the higher echelons of the Catholic population weak and would in time lead them into a state of poverty and subjection. Under this legislation they were excluded from positions of influence and authority most importantly from the general political community. With their removal from this position and their resulting lack of representation it was inevitable that they would suffer greatly in the times that lay in front of them. They were not only subject to ruthless legislation but they would now remain powerless to

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change it. Serious restrictions were placed on them regarding their ability to work and inherit land. They

were not permitted in the professions, save that of medicine, they were only permitted to hold a lease on land for thirty-one years and were by law restricted in their inheritance of land.

There had also been serious restrictions imposed on the Catholic clergy, which affected their ability to minister to their congregations. The Banishment Act, which had been implemented in 1697, meant that many bishops and regular clergy were forced to leave the country and were forbidden to return under penalty of incurring death for high treason. Under this legislation however one priest was permitted to remain in each parish provided they registered. However no bishops were permitted under law in the country. The purpose of this statute was to ensure that no ordinations could legally take place in Ireland. This, the English legislators believed would have a serious detrimental effect on the Catholic population of Ireland and if implemented fully it would succeed in the eradication of Catholicism in Ireland. So as we can see at the turn of the eighteenth century life did not seem too promising for the Catholic population of Ireland.

It was at times of hardship and uncertainty like this that the population turned to tradition, a trait that was

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extremely important in the Irish mindset. At this point it would be important to address what exactly

was meant by Catholicism in Ireland in the early eighteenth century. The Old World of superstition and idolatry was still very much at large in society and what can be termed as 'the old religion' was still widely practiced. The rites of passage were important in this 'old religion' and these rites were often accompanied by much celebration, drinking and inappropriate behaviour. The clergy waged a long and bitter struggle against wakes in particular which were the scene of all night dances and debauchery.⁵ 'Traditional lamentation or keening came in for constant criticism as did the games held in the wake houses in the very presence of the corpse...such as bawdy songs, wanton mimes and after dark filthier work of darkness'.⁶ There were often problems of celibacy and drunkenness with the clerical ranks.⁷ Pilgrimages also concerned the Christian authorities. Thus in eighteenth century Ireland Christianity in effect co-existed with the traditional religion and both the laity and the clergy found it difficult to escape from it.

However from the Council of Trent, a real effort was made by the Catholic Church to reorganise the Roman

⁵ Oliver Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster 1603-1983*, (London, 1993), p 101.

⁶ Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic community in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, (Dublin, 1981), p 38.

⁷ Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic community in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, (Dublin, 1981), p 69.

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church. Under the Tridentine system the diocesan bishop was to be the key figure of the Church in any

given area. Parish organization, record keeping and a greater emphasis on Mass and the church building were to be instigated. This system was however not easily introduced onto Irish society partly due to the penal statutes and also due to the widespread practice of 'the old religion'.

We have looked so far at some of the penal legislation and changes in the Church system, which affected the lives of the Catholic masses in Ireland. However we must now look at the effects of such legislation in reference to the pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg. This pilgrimage had thrived from at least the twelfth century to the mid seventeenth centuries, when it began to feel the pain of persecution. However the eighteenth century was to bring much further hardship on this pilgrimage tradition.

The legislators and Lough Derg:

In 1704 the Act to prevent the further growth of popery was passed in the reign of Queen Anne, (2Anne;c.6). This act was widely considered as the most notorious and comprehensive of all the penal codes. Apart from the social implications this act implemented, it was to have significant consequences for the traditions and religious practices of the Catholic masses. It outlawed all meetings and

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assemblies held at 'pretended places of sanctity such as St Patrick's Purgatory, Co Donegal'. Pilgrimages

to holy wells were also forbidden as it was presumed that they were a threat to the government and to the peace. These restrictions were implemented as according to this act such places added to an increase in superstition and popery, which were exactly what the government was trying to eradicate. There were severe penalties included in this Act, which were to be imposed on anyone who violated this law. Anyone convicted before a magistrate was to pay a fine of ten shillings, or in default of this to be publicly whipped.⁸

Thus here we see the attitude of the governing authorities to an Irish practice and tradition, which they did not fully understand and which filled them with fear and trepidation. Rather than try and understand the customs of the people it was thought better to crush them. The Irish Parliament grew increasingly worried by these superstitions and practices of the Irish. Such places of popery seemed to have more control over the people that they themselves did. This Act, (2Anne;c.6), was to have a vast impact on St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg. We can assume that as it was specifically mentioned in this statute that it was a very popular place of pilgrimage at the beginning of the eighteenth century and as such it was perceived as being a threat to the authorities.

⁸ Maureen Wall, *The penal laws*, (Dundalk,1967), p 58.

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The legacy of Lough Derg:

The pilgrimage to Lough Derg has been extremely popular since the twelfth century when its legend entered literature, but what attractions did it provide to the population of Ireland and further a field? St Patrick's Purgatory is a place surrounded by much legend and literature dating back to the times of St Patrick to the present day. It was believed that if one made 'the station' on the island they would be freed from the pains of purgatory and would not be lost. It was also renowned as a place for repentance. According to Sir Shane Leslie,

'it was not the pious who were attracted to the purgatory but famous sinners who could not get absolution otherwise, the type of misdoer who today finds his misdeeds reserved to the Grand Penitentiary of the Roman Church. Lough Derg was then the last throw of the desperate against the Devil'.⁹

As St Patrick's Purgatory entered the literary world, its terrors and wonders were reprinted re-glorified and thus attracted many to its shores.

⁹ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p. xvii.

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Topography of the island:

St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg often suffered greatly at the hands of various iconoclastic groups. The island had been plundered and its valuables removed but it also suffered destruction. Although it lies outside the realm of this work, it is important to note that Rev James Spottiswoode, the Anglican bishop of Clogher supervised the destruction of the island by an order of the Privy Council dated September 13, 1632.¹⁰ It is in this context and possibly from other like attacks that we gain a description of the island from Archdeacon Hewson in 1701. From his description we discover that the island remained to some extent in ruin in 1701. All around the island small heaps of stones marked the sites of shrines, which had been destroyed in years previous. Hewson also provides us with a great description of the Saints beds, a prominent feature of the pilgrimage exercises, stating that they

'are six circles of stone: four of them put carelessly together about a foot high and five or six in diameter with a gap on one side of each: and the floors rocky and uneven...the last two beds have their walls better made and somewhat higher and one of them twice as large as any of the rest. They bear the names of Brendan, Bride, Catherine, Colum, Patrick, Molassa and Avoige'.¹¹

¹⁰ Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), p 44.

¹¹ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 111.

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We also learn that there were a number of huts used for the reception of pilgrims. The Cave of purgatory does not appear to have been in use in 1701.

By 1714 we learn that the Cave had been rebuilt and by 1727 we see further developments in the topography of the island. The ruins of the Church described by Hewson had to some extent been repaired. We learn from Rev John Richardson that it is 'open on the side next the old Church and hath an altar on the south side, four feet high covered with a flat stone'.¹² We also see that the Cave of Purgatory had been repaired by this time.

'The cave commonly called St Patrick's Purgatory...is about ten foot distant from the Church; it is twenty two foot long two foot and one inch wide and three foot high; it hath a bending within six foot of the far end, were there is a very small window or spike hole to let in some light and air to the pilgrims that are shut up in it'.¹³

Richardson also makes us aware of the significance of Leac Na mbonn. This was an important part of the pilgrimage in the eighteenth century. We learn that this stone is 'two foot and a half under water, it is flat and smooth having a hole in the middle in which there is another stone like the stump of a broken cross and it

¹² Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), p 7.

¹³ Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), p 9.

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was believed to have the virtue of curing the bruised and injured feet of the pilgrims'.¹⁴

By 1735 Fr Dominick Brullaghan informs us that a second cave built of stones and dedicated to the honor of St Patrick was in use on the island due to the large number of pilgrims wishing to make their station.¹⁵ If this second cave did not succeed in accommodating the pilgrims they would then make their vigil in the Chapel. Judging by this it is to be presumed that the number of pilgrims was growing steadily in the early eighteenth century in spite of the penal legislation. However no record of the exact numbers making the pilgrimage at this time exists. Bishop Thomas de Burgo also leaves us a description of Lough Derg in his *Hibernia Dominicana* in 1748. From his description it is evident that some further development of the island had taken place. He informs us that although the island is scarcely three quarters of acre, the pilgrim walks two miles at each station.¹⁶ From his work we are also made aware of the fact that in the eighteenth century the pilgrims rest on hay or straw without the luxury of a blanket or pillow.

However from the descriptions left of the topography of the island in the eighteenth century it is evident that the island had been developed from the ruinous scene described by Archdeacon Hewson in 1701 to a much-

¹⁴ Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), p 9.

¹⁵ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 118.

¹⁶ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 121.

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improved facility. Structures, which had been destroyed by the iconoclasts, were repaired and new buildings were being planned and developed. The building of a church on the island dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Angels in 1763 brought the first real signs of renewal.¹⁷ The Church had been built under the watchful eyes of the Franciscan order who looked after the administration of this pilgrimage. So clearly in the face of adversity the pilgrimage succeeded not only in surviving but also in developing further.

The pilgrim's practices:

It is traditionally believed that the pilgrimage to Lough Derg and the exercises involved in it have remained the same throughout its history. To many it provides continuity from the time of St Patrick to the present day, but in a world of change such as that of the eighteenth century could it be that this pilgrimage did not feel the necessity to change?

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the pilgrimage exercises were well ordered and adhered to by the pilgrims, respecting the traditions of past pilgrims. We learn that this sacred island was treated with much wonder and respect by the Catholic masses at least. 'As soon as the pilgrims come within sight of the holy island they pull off their shoes and

¹⁷ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 125.

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stockin[g]s, and uncover their heads, and walk thus with their beads in one hand and sometimes a Cross in the other, to the lakeside'.¹⁸ These pilgrims would then have to obtain the permission of the Prior to undertake the pilgrimage as soon as they landed on the island and this once granted enabled them to begin their station. According to Bishop Hugh Mc Mahon, 'from the beginning of June to the end of August there crowd from all parts, even remote parts of this Kingdom, thousands of men and women of every age and condition, who there spend nine days living on one meal of oaten bread and water... they rest upon the ground, walk barefoot and their feet are frequently cut and bleeding'.¹⁹

The pilgrimage exercises themselves seem to be very structured and well ordered in the early eighteenth century and John Richardson leaves a very detailed account of these in his work, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*. When the pattern of the exercises are examined in detail many regard them as being very superstitious. We learn that the pilgrims go to certain stones and altars where they kneel down, kiss them and repeat numerous prayers. They walk around the inside of the chapel praying before making their way to the penitential beds, 'everyone of which they surround

¹⁸ Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), p 49.

¹⁹ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 112.

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thrice outwardly saying three Paters, three Aves and one Creed'.²⁰ These prayers they repeat kneeling in the center of the bed also. They were expected to perform this at each of the seven beds which when completed they would make their way to the water. 'In the water they would go round the metamorphosed stones called Caoranach thrice, saying in the meantime five Paters, five Aves and one Creed... after which they go further into the water to Leac na mbonn and stand upon it saying one Pater, one Ave and one Creed with their hands lifted up'.²¹ In the Chapel they would repeat the Lady's Psalter, and this would complete one station.

Three such stations were to be completed daily while the pilgrim existed on a diet of bread and water once daily. We learn that for the three months during which the pilgrimage lasts, Masses are celebrated from dawn to midday: confessions are heard; and sermons are preached a number of times a day. On the ninth day the pilgrims enter the Cave of Purgatory having made Confession of their sins, received the Blessed Sacrament and the Prior's blessing. Here they remained for twenty-four hours. This was the culmination of the pilgrimage experience. As we can see the Cave of Purgatory was considered to be an extremely important place in Lough Derg. It was

²⁰ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 115.

²¹ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 115.

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considered by the Church of Rome as the most holy and most memorable place in Ireland.²² The original Cave of Purgatory which legend tells was frequented by St Patrick was situated on Saints Island but the one frequented at this time by the pilgrims was a replica of this cave now situated on Station Island to which the pilgrimage had been moved.

The Cave considered to be the focal center of the pilgrimage, received much attention, not all of it welcomed as a result. The authorities were extremely suspicious of this Cave and the controversy that surrounded it. As the pilgrims entered the Cave to pray and keep watch they believed they were following in the footsteps of St Patrick but the authorities saw this as an extreme example of superstition and idolatry.

Religious reorganization:

It is clear that the eighteenth century was a time of a great number of changes in Ireland. Religious intolerance spread at the beginning of it at the same time as the Catholic Church was undergoing its own transformation. As has been stated changes had been implemented in the authority and organization of the Church in Europe instituted by the Council of Trent and these were slowly beginning to have an impact in

²² Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), p 8.

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Ireland. Their impact was not as evident in Ulster as elsewhere. This at times caused some confusion among the populations but also more significantly the attitudes of the people were slowly beginning to change.

As we have seen the pilgrimage to Lough Derg was thriving at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Here the spiritual needs of the pilgrims were catered for by the Franciscan friars despite the fact that they were banned from the country.²³ However as we will learn not everyone was in awe of this great pilgrimage. Attitudes towards it and its exercises varied greatly between members of the lay population and the clergy.

Archdeacon Hewson of Armagh was less than impressed by what he witnessed on his visit to Lough Derg in 1701. He ridicules the pilgrimage and it is clear that he believes it to be an example of the worst of the excesses of Roman superstition. He describes the island simply as being 'a barren rocky piece of ground'. He is equally scathing of the shrines and places of exercises of the pilgrims, describing St Patrick's altar as 'a small heap of stones with a shank of a Cross in it' and a 'heap of rubbish which is called St Patrick's Cave'.²⁴ We can see here from his

²³ Oliver Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster 1603-1983*, (London, 1993), p 68.

²⁴ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 111.

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language that Archdeacon Hewson was not very impressed by this pilgrimage tradition, and that he considers it to be superstitious and contrary to Christianity. However he does leave us with a great description of the topography of the island in 1701 and also a good description of the Cave of Purgatory.

We learn from his work that pilgrims embarking on the twenty-four hour vigil in the purgatorial cave, were warned by the priests upon entering it that 'the devil will carry them away if he catches them napping'.²⁵ He also states that when they emerge from the Cave they immerse themselves naked in the lake three times. In 1701 the pilgrims had 'a sermon preached to them in Irish about one o' clock after which they always go in procession about the Chapel singing a Litany'.²⁶ At this time we learn that as much tobacco, snuff and cold water could be consumed as the pilgrims wished. Despite his obvious dislike of and prejudice towards 'the turas', Archdeacon Hewson leaves us a very important and interesting description of station island Lough Derg at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Though equally biased in his writings, Bishop Hugh Mc Mahon, bishop of Clogher also leaves us an excellent description of the island, in an account he sent to Rome on the condition of his diocese in 1714.

²⁵ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 112.

²⁶ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 112.

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He describes Lough Derg as 'that most celebrated place'.... where 'from the beginning of June to the end of August, there crowd there each year, from all parts even the remotest part of this Kingdom, thousands of men and women of every age and condition'.²⁷ Here we learn of the popularity of this pilgrimage and we see that those who frequented its shores were not just from the Ulster or Clogher diocesan area but often came from further a field. Bishop Mc Mahon gives us a brief description of some of the exercises carried out by the pilgrims and describes for us how 'on the ninth day having first made a general confession, having expiated all the faults of their life, and being nourished with the Bread of Life they enter before twilight a subterraneous pit'.²⁸ We see that he is dissatisfied with some reports about this pilgrimage, 'to which idle inventors have added so many exaggerations about specters and visions, which never had any existence save in the distorted imaginations of such story tellers'.²⁹ Thus we can see that it is Bishop Mc Mahon's intention to give a fair and honest description of this pilgrimage and to avoid the superstitious nature that surrounded it. But to what extent can we take his work to be truthful and unbiased? He too being the bishop of Clogher must to some extent be biased towards 'this most celebrated place'.

²⁷ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 112.

²⁸ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 112.

²⁹ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 112.

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We see later in his account to Rome that 'it is regarded by all as little short of a prodigy how this pilgrimage though prohibited by men ... under the most severe penalties by Act of Parliament, suffered little or no interruption from the bitter Scotch Calvinists living in the neighborhood'.³⁰ Indeed we see that the interdenominational relations in this area were even in 1714 quite good. Hugh Mc Mahon himself reports to being received kindly by a minister of the Church of Ireland of this district. It is Hugh Mc Mahon's opinion that despite the prevalent persecution of the penal legislation, the exercise of religion on Lough Derg was in 1714, 'free and public which is ascribed to a special fervour of Divine Providence and to the merits of St Patrick'.³¹ Some members of the Protestant population regarded this type of statement, as a further example of the superstitions that surrounded this area.

An interesting point of note in his account is his description of the Mass celebrated for those about to enter the Cave, the Missa de Requiem. We see that he does not regard this Mass to be appropriate, at least on Sundays or feast days. Thus we see even the Catholic clergy had some issues and problems regarding some of the pilgrimage exercises at this time.

³⁰ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 113.

³¹ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 113.

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Rev Calhoun was the minister who received Bishop Mc Mahon so kindly upon his visit to the area. He was Rector of the Templecarn parish from 1698-1717 and was accused of not preventing the growth of the pilgrimage tradition to Lough Derg. Some intolerant members of his congregation believed that he was to a degree running the pilgrimage himself for his own financial benefit.³² He was also further accused of ferrying the pilgrims 'into this idolatrous place to commit the[ir] sins'.³³ Clearly then not all members of the Protestant churches were supportive of this pilgrimage. There was a great variety of opinions among the congregations. Some like Reverend Calhoun we see were willing to accept and interact with the Catholic population of the area while other members of his congregation remained intolerant to the pilgrimage and the Catholic population as a whole.

However it is evident that the pilgrimage continued without much opposition of the local Protestant community, who were not adverse to the benefits, financial or otherwise that the pilgrims brought with them. It is worthy of note that despite what seems to be the tolerant relationship and attitude the pilgrimage received in its local area, further a field it was not so well received or respected.

³² John B. Cunningham, 'Lough Derg and its unusual guardian', in *Clogher Record*, X no 3, (1971), p 421.

³³ John B. Cunningham, 'Lough Derg and its unusual guardian', in *Clogher Record*, X no 3, (1971), p 421

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Again it is John Richardson's work, *the great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), that shows how this pilgrimage was generally received in the Protestant mindset. In this work we see that it is the belief of Rev Joseph Story, that the Irish are excessively addicted to pilgrimages and that 'the invocation of Saints, worshipping of relicks, the delusions about purgatory, work of supererogation and transferring of the pretended merits of one to another being apparently kept up and propagated by this practice'.³⁴ It is clear that he believes the tradition of pilgrimage among the Catholic population was one laden with superstition and idolatry. Richardson also believes that when 'the invocation of saints and angels was brought into the Church; the abuse of pilgrimage crept in also and e[I]ncreased daily, until at last it became extremely corrupt and scandalous'.³⁵ It is his belief that the sole reason this pilgrimage survived was due to the greedy clergy who were fooling the people into belief in the superstitions of such a place, as it was profitable and convenient for them.

Richardson also introduces us to another ritual, which was widely practiced in the early eighteenth century. We learn that 'if anyone cannot conveniently perform this penance, [the pilgrimage] himself, when he

³⁴ Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), sig B2^v.

³⁵ Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), p 11.

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comes to the place, he may obtain license from the prior for another to do it for him'.³⁶ This was considered to be a fine example of the abuses that were allowed to occur in this sacred island.

But Richardson believed that those who came to do the pilgrimage in Lough Derg could not achieve the solitude necessary to undertake a pilgrimage or retreat here. He believed that there were too many pilgrims on the island for any of them to achieve the space and solitude necessary for them to address the important decisions, which they had to face. He believed that 'the self examination and repentance are duties which would be performed much better in peoples own homes'.³⁷

Richardson gives us a fantastic insight into the Protestant attitude regarding the pilgrimage to Lough Derg in the early eighteenth century and introduces us to some of the prejudices that were held against it. He also gives us a clear view of the reasons why the pilgrimage was held with such little regard with some Protestants at this time. He indicates to us some of the practices and abuses that were insulting to them and their beliefs such as the invocation of saints and

³⁶ Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), p 62.

³⁷ Rev John Richardson, *The great folly, superstition and idolatry of pilgrimages in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1727), p 76.

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the payment of priests in return for hearing the pilgrim's confessions.

Father Dominick Brullaghan's guide to Lough Derg printed in Louvain in 1735 gives us an insight into this pilgrimage in the first half of the eighteenth century. He presents us with a great description of the vigil held within the Cave and how upon emerging from it the pilgrims cast off their clothes and immerse themselves in the lake three times in the name of the Holy Trinity. It is noted in his work that the male and female pilgrims immerse themselves separately in the lake. He also informs us in this work that as the number of pilgrims was so great in the 1730s another cave had been constructed on the island to accommodate them. In the 1730s the pilgrimage was still of nine days duration and the Missa de Requiem was still being celebrated before the pilgrims entered the Cave in spite of Hugh Mc Mahon's reservations about this in 1714.

Despite the hardships of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and in spite of the varying opinions towards it, the pilgrimage continued to flourish. However in the late 1700s the Franciscans found themselves unable to cope with the increasing demands placed on their order and found themselves unable to continue ministering to the pilgrims who came to Lough Derg. Thus in 1780 the Clogher diocesan clergy resumed the running of this

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pilgrimage. The year 1780 was ebb tide in the history of this pilgrimage. After this year many changes would occur in its administration and function but not necessarily in its practices.

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Chapter 2:
Reorganisation and relief.

The 1780s brought a great many changes to St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg in its administration, its topography and its appeal to its pilgrims. It is clear that the Franciscans played an extremely important role in Lough Derg in their administering to the hordes of pilgrims who flocked there. However in 1780, the administration of the pilgrimage was taken over by the Clogher diocese and its clergy. It was felt that the Franciscan friars could no longer continue with their administration of the island due to a decrease in their numbers. The Franciscans tried to give these pilgrims a sense of order in their religious practices and had administered effectively throughout the Penal days. Their involvement with the island and its pilgrimage was not severed at this point however. As the Clogher diocesan clergy settled into their role on the island the Franciscans remained there to assist them and guide them. They also continued to help in the ministering of the sacraments to the pilgrims into the nineteenth century. The Franciscans had developed Lough Derg greatly bringing with them their continental training and enlightened Tridentine approach.

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The Clogher diocesan clergy effectively took over the running of Lough Derg in a completely different era from that which was encountered by the Franciscans. By this time the Penal laws had effectively fallen into disuse and in the early days of their ministry in Lough Derg we see the Catholic Relief Acts being implemented. The Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 and 1782 effectively removed most of the restrictions on Catholic education and regulations on land ownership and inheritance. The Relief Act of 1782 also contained a number of laws concerning the clergy.

Despite these relief measures however, not all grounds for Catholic grievances had been addressed. Catholics were still excluded from the political nation but in face of a war with France in 1793 more concessions were granted to the Catholic population.

Changes in the administration and topography:

When Patrick Murray became the first of the modern line of priors, from the Clogher diocesan clergy, appointed by Bishop Hugh O' Reilly in 1780, he brought with him a new enthusiasm and an enlightened idea of his role in the ministry. He realised that some change would prove essential in order for the effective running of the pilgrimage. Prior Murray was well aware of the contribution the Franciscan Friars had made to the successful running

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of the pilgrimage and it was his intention to develop their contribution further. Upon taking over the administration of the pilgrimage, Prior Murray closed the Cave, which the pilgrimage had previously been centred around. This was an extremely radical approach but he believed that these caves had become no longer viable to cater to the amount of pilgrims who wished to frequent them. They proved to be at risk of suffocation through overcrowding. The Cave as we have seen was also the subject of much unwanted attention and controversy.

One must not underestimate the effect that the closing of the Caves had on the pilgrimage tradition and on the pilgrims themselves. The Caves had always been the focal point of the pilgrimage and many were to feel betrayed by their closure. The Caves had appeared on many of the early maps of the country and thus were a hugely significant part of the pilgrimage. The pilgrims were to see their closure as the Church imposing its will on traditional religion and not all of the pilgrims were immediately accepting of the Churches reforms.

The Cave was closed in 1780 and appears to have been replaced by a temporary structure by 1786. Philip Skelton, the Protestant rector of Templecarn, gave an account of Lough Derg in 1786. From this description we learn that at this time

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‘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.’³⁸

By 1790 the Cave was filled in. ‘From then on the extraordinary chamber could work only as a spiritual metaphor’.³⁹ A new Church however was built on the island by 1790, which was to replace the Caves. This Church was dedicated to St Patrick but it was also popularly known as the ‘Prison Chapel’ due to its purpose of replacing the Caves. People on vigil were to be shut up in this Chapel, as it was here that the pilgrims would now undertake the twenty-four hour vigil, which was an essential part of the pilgrimage experience. This new Church was ‘seventy-two feet long by twenty-four wide’⁴⁰, and clearly provided a significant improvement. This Church could accommodate many more pilgrims and was also used for various other functions of the pilgrimage.

Prior Murray took over the running of the pilgrimage at a time of much hostility towards it. The pilgrimage tradition had been a very important part of the

³⁸ Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg*, (London, 1932), p 125.

³⁹ Michael Dames, *Ireland: a sacred journey*, (Dorset, 2000) P 29.

⁴⁰ Daniel O Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg*, (Dublin, 1903), p 177.

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'Traditional religion' of the people and as such was not highly regarded with those of a Tridentine education. 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'.⁴¹ 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. Thus it is evident that the new and ordered religious practice had not displaced the old pattern of life.⁴² Clearly there were numerous problems associated with the pilgrimage traditions and feast days celebrated by the people. These pilgrimages however provided a very important service for their adherents. The Church thus did not want to see these pilgrimages abolished but rather they wanted to eradicate the abuses associated with them. However some forms of reform were to be achieved by a number of methods and Lough Derg was to play a significant part in the development of these reforms.

⁴¹ Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic community in the seventeenth and eighteenth century*, (Dublin, 1981), p 113.

⁴² Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic community in the seventeenth and eighteenth century*, (Dublin, 1981), p 38.

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In 1802, Dr James Murphy succeeded Hugh O' Reilly as bishop of Clogher. He had a number of concerns with the diocese when taking its reigns but one of his principal concerns was the pilgrimage to Lough Derg and its administration. By this time Rev. Patrick Bellew had become the prior of Lough Derg and Bishop Murphy wrote to him with a list of regulations, which needed to be implemented with regards, the pilgrimage to Lough Derg. 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'. In this document he states that all persons attending Lough Derg must receive the Sacrament of Confession and all pilgrims must have complied with their Easter duty. He also addresses the issue of the teaching of the catechism on Lough Derg and we see a willingness to address the problems associated with the island. The formal practice of religion was not hugely popular but the clergy hoped to rectify this situation by teaching their congregations about the catechism and the fundamental beliefs of their religion. In order to achieve this Lough Derg employed a number of lay catechists who attempted to impart sound teaching to the pilgrims. Their role on the island was an extremely important one in the running of the pilgrimage.

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Lough Derg had long been associated with St Patrick and Purgatory but we now also see a greater emphasis placed on the sacraments. The practice of examination before receiving the sacraments became quite widespread and was much resented by the laity.⁴³ They objected to what they saw as an interrogation of their beliefs. In order to gain admittance to the island from 1802 the prospective pilgrim must have taken part in the Easter ceremonies and received written confirmation of such from their parish priest. Lough Derg placed great emphasis on the Sacrament of Confession during the twenty-four hour vigil. Here the pilgrim had time to examine their conscience and get in touch with their beliefs and faith with the help of the catechist who would have given them some instruction on such matters.

1795: A year of change.

1795 was to prove to be an extremely important and highly significant year for Catholicism in Ireland and one, which would have a number of implications for St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg. Given the unstable situation on the Continent, the bishops pleaded with the government to make provisions for clerical education in Ireland.⁴⁴ The bill to establish a Catholic Seminary in Ireland, later to become the Royal College of St Patrick, was given the royal consent in the summer of 1795. This was to prove a

⁴³ Oliver P Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603 – 1983*, (London, 1993), p 103.

⁴⁴ Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic community in the seventeenth and eighteenth century*, (Dublin, 1981), p 92.

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monumental event for the Church in Ireland and in particular for the diocese of Clogher. The Catholic Church in Ulster at this time was not in a healthy state. It suffered from a lack of accommodation, resources and, for the greater part, an educated clergy. Bishop Hugh Mc Mahon had 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 era.⁴⁵ Thus the laity of this area effectively remained stagnant in their beliefs and remained tied to the old pre- Tridentine traditions. They remained ignorant of the Catechism and the basic tenets of their faith.

With the founding of the Seminary in Maynooth, priests were better educated and thus they were able to enlighten and educate their congregations. 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 suspended from his duties'.⁴⁶ Clearly then the Church was making strident efforts at self-reform.

Lough Derg was to witness the worst boating tragedy ever in 1795. On the twelfth of July 1795 pilgrims gathered on the shore of the lake on their way to undertake the pilgrimage on the island. Ninety-three people set off on the short boat trip over to Station

⁴⁵ Oliver P Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603 – 1983*, (London, 1993), p 70.

⁴⁶ Oliver P Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603 – 1983*, (London, 1993), p 102.

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Island amid reports that Mc Teague; the boatman appeared to be under the influence of alcohol. As the boat made its way towards the island, it began to take in water and the passengers quickly became uncontrollable. People began to stand up in the boat with the result that the boat capsized.⁴⁷ This occurred in a shallow part of the Lough, however due to the fear and panic of the pilgrims, only three of those on board the boat survived.

Meanwhile on the island quay a crowd of people had gathered and watched in horror as the tragedy unfolded.⁴⁸ One of the priests on the island gave a conditional absolution to those who were drowning and the priests offered masses for the souls of the deceased.⁴⁹ According to O' Connor all the 'bodies of the deceased were recovered from their watery grave and twenty or more were interred on the highest point of Friars Island where a dense cluster of firs can now be seen'.⁵⁰ It is quite hard to estimate the effect this tragedy had on the pilgrimage numbers and on the attitude of the pilgrims towards it at this time.

In 1795 there was a rise of sectarianism and agrarian violence with the foundation of the Orange Order. The Catholic Relief Acts of the 1780s and 1790s had added to Protestant grievances. Interdenominational

⁴⁷ Joseph Mc Guinness, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg*, (Dublin, 2000), p 51.

⁴⁸ Joseph Mc Guinness, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg*, (Dublin, 2000), p 51.

⁴⁹ Daniel O Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg*, (Dublin, 1903), p 181.

⁵⁰ Daniel O Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg*, (Dublin, 1903), p 182.

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relations between these groups, which had up until this period been quite good were now greatly affected. 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.⁵¹ This rise in sectarianism led to an increasing breakdown in relations between the various denominations and this was to have a particularly negative effect in Ulster.

With the rise of 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. Having previously, even during the penal era, enjoyed the support of the different local communities we see a rise in intolerance and hostility towards the pilgrimage and its adherents.

Changing attitudes:

As early as 1786 the Protestant rector of Templecarne Rev Philip Skelton, appears quite scathing of this pilgrimage tradition. His description of the island is less than complimentary, describing the most hallowed Saints beds as 'seven little heaps of rude stone'.⁵² He also suggests that 'to prevent the danger of a nap each penitent is armed with a large pin to be

⁵¹ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London, 1989), p 272.

⁵² Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 125.

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suddenly inserted into the elbow of his next neighbour at the first approach of a nod'.⁵³

Many accounts of the pilgrimage and its tradition also began to appear in the Protestant periodicals at this time. One particularly biased and prejudiced account appeared in the Protestant periodical, *The Christian examiner*, entitled 'a pilgrimage to Lough Derg'. This periodical was a pamphlet for evangelists edited by Caesar Otway and Rev Dr Singer. This particular piece was written by William Carleton, the Co Tyrone novelist, who himself once aspired to the priesthood after he had undertaken the pilgrimage himself in the early nineteenth century. In this work he was not totally scornful of the pilgrimage and could see some benefits to it, 'the loneliness of the place, its isolation and remoteness form the habitations of men, all this put together joined to the feeling of deep devotion in which I was wrapped, had really a sublime effect on me'.⁵⁴ However the completed work did not show Lough Derg in as favourable a light. Otway as editor exercised his prerogative and inserted many anti Catholic interpolations in this work. In effect this work is scathing of the pilgrimage and makes a mockery out of it. Carleton received much unfavorable reaction and public outrage after this work was published and many people were never to

⁵³ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 125.

⁵⁴ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 127.

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forgive him for his betrayal of this pilgrimage and their religion.

Caesar Otway, Carleton's patron, described Lough Derg in his guidebook to the *Northern highlands of Ireland*. His description is of an extremely bleak, sombre, desolate area having visited the site out of season. The lake itself he believed 'was deformed so much by its Purgatorial island 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'.⁵⁵ Otway seemed to be obsessed with painting this pilgrimage in an unfavorable light stating that it was run solely to make money for the Catholic clergy.

Johnson the ferryman, himself a Protestant, was also accused of trying to ruin the pilgrimage in the early nineteenth century. He was accused of holding patterns on the shore of the lake where music, dancing and drinking were the core elements of the pattern, very much in contrast with that which was undertaken on the island. These 'patterns' on the shore brought the place into disrepute and caused great annoyance and scandal.⁵⁶ The prior of the island took counter measures in order to secure the reputation and dignity

⁵⁵ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 129.

⁵⁶ Daniel O Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg*, (Dublin, 1903), p 187.

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of the Lough Derg pilgrimage by suspending it for this season.

Not all accounts of the pilgrimage at this time were negative however. An anonymous letter, (no 5), in a book entitled *Excursions in Ulster* provides us with what appears to be a complimentary view of the island. Written in 1824 the author states that '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'.⁵⁷ Henry Inglis also gives us a great description of the exercises undertaken by the pilgrims in his *A journey through Ireland in 1834*. From this we learn that the pilgrims were still only permitted one meal of bread and water a day and that many of the pilgrims brought their own meals with them. At this time pilgrims also partook of wine. The water of the lake is boiled and blessed and this is called wine.⁵⁸ This we learn was given to faint pilgrims.

It is clear that the pilgrimage to Lough Derg had re-entered the literary world and had gained much publicity in the public sphere so clearly it was a very significant part of life in the early nineteenth century. In order for the Protestant writers to feel the need to

⁵⁷ Desmond J. Keenan, *The Catholic Church in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dublin, 1983), p 173.

⁵⁸ Sir Shane Leslie, *St Patrick's Purgatory, a record from history and literature*, (London, 1932), p 130.

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defame it they must have seen its pilgrimage as a great threat to their own religion and their power.

The Ordnance Survey memoirs and letters prove a very useful source when looking at the condition of Station Island, Lough Derg and its pilgrimage in the 1830s. John O' Donovan composed the letters and the memoir of the parish of Templecarne, where this island is found, was composed by Lieutenant W. Lancey. These sources came about due to the desire of making a valuation of the land of Ireland. The letters I am dealing with give an amazing insight into all aspects of pre-famine life in this area of Co Donegal.

Lieutenant W. Lancey was a soldier and he brought many of his own interests to his work compiling the memoirs such as his interest in flora, fauna and art. Thus he provides us with a detailed analysis of the wildlife found in this area at this time. However he was not good at eliciting information from the local people himself. Perceived as an outsider, people were reluctant to share information with him and he often had to resort to printed material in order to gain the information he needed. In spite of this however he remained very detailed in the picture he presented of the area. He was however very critical at times in his writings, which did nothing to endear him to or improve his relationships with the local people. His

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work however, does contain a very important study of the pilgrimage to Lough Derg.

John O' Donovan, compiler of the letters was a very intelligent and diligent scholar, employed by Thomas Larcom in 1830 to research the ancient forms of place names with the object of arriving at an approved orthography of each name to be marked on the Ordnance survey maps.⁵⁹ John O Donovan had benefited greatly from an education and was familiar to an extent with the Irish language.

The Ordnance survey letters are commentaries written regularly from the field between 1834 and 1843 detailing the progress of O' Donovan and his fellow workers. O' Donovan shows an amazing familiarity with a great range of sources, many of them in manuscript form such as the Annals of the Four Masters. O' Donovan was aware of the ghosts of the old Gaelic order who still haunted the landscape he was naming and he wrote of those apparitions with understanding and affection.⁶⁰ His knowledge and understanding of the Irish landscape and its inhabitants allowed a relationship to develop between himself and the locals. He was able to communicate with them through their own medium. He gained their trust and respect and in turn they opened up to him, something that Lieutenant Lancey could not

⁵⁹ John O' Donovan, *Ordnance survey letters*, pp xi, xii.

⁶⁰ Brian Friel (ed), *Ordnance survey letters*, p vii.

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achieve. This enabled him to provide a more detailed, more rounded subject analysis.

The Ordnance Survey memoirs give us a great description of Station Island Lough Derg in November 1835. From this work we learn that Station Island was 2,112 feet from the east coast of the Lough. Its accommodation at this time had increased significantly from the eighteenth century. The island now had a ferry house, the Prison chapel, a second chapel, the prior's house, four of five lodging houses and two outhouses. According to Lieutenant W. Lancey, the prior and up to seven priests were resident on the island during the pilgrimage season. The need for an increase of accommodation also points to the healthy stream of pilgrims who were frequenting the island at this time. He informs us that the pilgrimage constituted for most of the traffic in Pettigo, the nearest town to the pilgrimage site. Lancey states that from the first of June to the fifteenth of August about 15,000 persons visit the island.⁶¹ He also informs us that the boatmen averaged the number of pilgrims at three hundred a day in 1834 making a total of 22,800 for the season. However these figures may not be totally reliable. His figures vary greatly with John O' Donovan's. John O' Donovan takes a much more critical stance in relation to Lough Derg. He reports that about 7,000

⁶¹ Lieutenant W. Lancey, *Ordnance survey memoirs, vol 39, Parishes of Co Donegal II, 1835-36*, P 160.

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pilgrims from all England, Scotland and Ireland visit during the Station season.⁶²

However despite the discrepancies in the pilgrim numbers between these works by the Ordnance Survey one thing remains clear, Lough Derg had undergone considerable improvements and developments since the Clogher diocesan clergy had assumed control of the island and it still continued to attract many to its shores. Significant also was the fact that John O' Donovan informs us that pilgrims did not just come from Ireland but from England and Scotland also.

As we have seen Lieutenant Lancey gives a figure of 22,800 for the season of 1834 while O' Donovan puts the figure closer to 7,000, a huge disparity. A detailed analysis of the pilgrim numbers lies outside the scope of this thesis but it would be fair to say that the actual number was most likely closer to the figure of O' Donovan. His access to information appeared to be superior to that of Lancey. The locals probably greatly exaggerated details when dealing with Lancey, an outsider they did not trust.

The Second Reformation:

The Second Reformation was the name given to the movement in Ireland whose aims were to convert non-Protestants to Christianity and to convert

⁶² John O' Donovan, *Ordnance survey letters*, p 131.

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Protestants to a more evangelical life.⁶³ This movement appeared in the early 1800s and was hailed as an evangelical revolution. However the formation of groups such as the Hibernian Bible society in 1806 and the Scripture Readers Society in 1822 did little to help develop relations between the various churches. Bible reading was not a common feature of everyday life at this time and these societies aimed to rectify this by making scripture accessible to everyone. Their aims may have seemed reasonable but their method of achieving them was not, nor was it welcomed. The Second Reformation was to have a hugely significant impact on Irish society in the early nineteenth century. These societies appeared to have strong connections with the secret sectarian societies and there was a distinctly anti Catholic feeling to them.

‘It is hardly surprising [then], that in the light of these events that a deep distrust between the Catholics and the Protestants, and a determination by each side to maintain its territory against the encroachments of the other continued throughout the nineteenth century to influence all parts of Ireland and all social classes’.⁶⁴

⁶³ Desmond J. Keenan, *The Catholic Church in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dublin 1983), p 171.

⁶⁴ Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1994), pp 21/22.

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The Second Reformation had a particular impact on the religious and political development of Ulster Protestantism.⁶⁵ This movement which was intended to spread the idea of Christianity but it actually divided the people of Ireland and Ulster particularly. The divisions between these groups now ran very deep. Clergymen who had previously been willing to work together on matters of common concern now came to regard each other as rivals and potential aggressors.⁶⁶ The well meant endeavors of various evangelical bodies to convert the Catholic poor poisoned relations between the churches until the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷

The second reformation is often looked upon in a very negative light among many groups in Irish society, but it served an extremely important function. This proved to be a great era of public theological dispute and polemical sermons.⁶⁸ This movement by the Protestant church in the early nineteenth century contributed greatly to the reform of the Catholic Church. There was a determined Catholic counter attack spearheaded by the Redemptorists and other missionary orders⁶⁹ in response to the second reformation. At this time we also see the rise of

⁶⁵ Oliver P Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603 – 1983*, (London, 1993), p 111.

⁶⁶ Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1994), pp 26.

⁶⁷ Desmond J. Keenan, *The Catholic Church in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dublin 1983), p 173.

⁶⁸ Desmond J. Keenan, *The Catholic Church in Nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dublin 1983), p 148.

⁶⁹ Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1994), p 26.

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Catechists within the Catholic communities. The catechists were to play an extremely important role for the development of the Catholic religion. They aimed to impart sound teaching to the Catholic masses informing them of the fundamentals of their religion and providing more informed adherents. Now armed with an informed knowledge of their beliefs, the Catholic masses were to become great defenders of their religion.

Such catechists were to play a huge role on St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg and became an essential part of the administration of this pilgrimage. There was increasing emphasis placed on Catholic interpretations of Dogma, transubstantiation and the veneration of the Saints.⁷⁰ With the rise in the education standards of the people in the basic tenets of their faith and the accompanying rise in devotional practices, Lough Derg was to receive a renewed interest and there was a great increase of pilgrims to the island in the early nineteenth century. In the 1820s an estimated six thousand pilgrims would flock each year to the island. In the 1830s twelve to fifteen priests were daily engaged in hearing the confessions of the pilgrims and in attending to the other duties of the pilgrimage.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Desmond J. Keenan, *The Catholic Church in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dublin 1983), p 164.

⁷¹ Daniel O Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg*, (Dublin, 1903), p 195.

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The Famine and its effects on the pilgrimage:

In spite of the rising importance of Lough Derg in Catholic Ireland and its popularity in the 1830s, the pilgrimage was to suffer in the 1840s. Although the status of those in the higher echelons of Catholic Ireland was rising at this time the greater majority lived in a state of poverty and lived a mono crop existence. Upon reading the Ordnance Survey documents in 1835 the parish of Templecarn, where St Patrick's Purgatory is to be found appeared to be an agricultural district with little promise. Their farming methods were limited and the area was remote from markets. There was little industry in the area and people gained their sustenance from potatoes, milk and meal occasionally supplemented with fish from the numerous lakes in the area. Here we see a way of life, which was common throughout Ireland. People generally relied on agriculture, and outdated methods of utilising the land. They were also over reliant on the potato crop due to the huge increase in population from the end of the eighteenth century. It is therefore not surprising to note that Ireland suffered a great catastrophe when famine struck in 1845 and repeatedly until 1851. Ireland was to suffer a hugely significant change in its social make-up and composition. Many of its inhabitants died or emigrated during this period.

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It is important to note how such a national catastrophe affected the pilgrimage to Lough Derg and to look at how the pilgrimage tradition continued to exist through one of the darkest periods of Irish history.

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 when compared with other areas of the country. Lieutenant W. Lancey reports that there were 1,728 members of the Established church and 2,568 Roman Catholics in the parish in 1835. When Famine struck this parish did not suffer a depletion of its numbers to as great an extent as other areas. The Census of 1841 put the number of residents of this parish at 4,272 and by 1851 this figure had decreased marginally to 4,077.⁷²

As we have seen learned there was a great increase in devotion among the Catholic community in the early nineteenth century. At times of hardship people turned towards religion and God. In the 1846 season it is reported that 30,000 pilgrims came.⁷³ It seems unusual that so many pilgrims would attend this pilgrimage in such a year of hardship. However many 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

⁷² Census returns 1841, 1851, on microfilm in John Paul II Library, NUI Maynooth.

⁷³ Laurence J Flynn, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg Co Donegal*, p 14.

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with religious significance. This may explain the rise in numbers that year however the figure of 30,000 does appear to be quite excessive. With the repeated failure of the potato crop however it was inevitable that the number of pilgrims resorting to Lough Derg would fall, yet in spite of the hardships, which the population at this time had to contend with, the pilgrimage to Lough Derg continued. It can thus be presumed that the local population, were responsible for the continuance of the pilgrimage during this period.

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***Chapter three:
Devotion and development.***

Like much of the period under study in this thesis, the Famine experience instigated a remarkable change in the way of life of the Irish people in the 1850s, as various and significant changes occurred in Irish society at this time. A depopulation of the country occurred due to death, disease and emigration as a result of the Great Famine. There were also a great many changes in the farming methods of the people combined with a general change in their lifestyle and attitudes towards authority and the Church.

In chapter two we have seen that the Catholic Church in Ireland had made strident efforts to reform its administration and practices and also to develop the knowledge of its adherents. During the Famine period however the efforts made by the Church became stagnant as the great majority of the people and to an extent the clergy struggled for survival. During this period little change was implemented. However with the arrival of Paul Cullen as archbishop of Armagh in 1850, the improvements made in the structure of the Church in the pre Famine period were to be expanded upon and developed further. There was a great move to bring the Irish Church in line with European Catholicism.

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The 'Cullenisation' of Ireland:

Born in 1803, Paul Cullen spent many years in Rome after his ordination where he was influenced strongly by the Tridentine Ultramontanism that was so prevalent on the Continent. This new ideology, 'Ultramontanism, was distinguished by its political conservatism, its exaltation of papal authority and its acceptance of a dogmatic, combative theology'.⁷⁴ Now Rome was to have authoritarian power over all the Catholic Church and the National Churches had little right to administer for themselves. Up until the arrival of Paul Cullen, there was little acknowledgement of this system in Ireland. It was his aim to instill the importance of the Papacy into the minds and hearts of all Irish Catholics. He was convinced that clerical discipline was generally lax in Ireland and the spiritual condition of the people unhealthy.⁷⁵ Cullen wanted to reform the Catholic Church in Ireland from the top down. He believed that the seminarians needed to be trained in the theology of Papal authority and that the internal discipline of the seminaries needed tightening.⁷⁶ This was an attempt to ensure that efforts made in the proper education of the clergy in the pre Famine era would remain effective and would be developed

⁷⁴ Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1994), p 13.

⁷⁵ Oliver P Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603 – 1983*, (London, 1993), p 136.

⁷⁶ Sean Connolly, Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1994), pp 13/14.

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further. By instilling internal discipline among the ranks of the clergy, they would better know their role in society. As they themselves would be governed by strict regulations they would thus administer efficiently to their congregations and instill a system of discipline upon them. New levels of morality were expected of them, as was a greater level of social order and adherence to the law.

With the influence of Paul Cullen, religious practices continued to become more formalised. The Church building became the centre for prayer, worship and devotions. Church building increased greatly in the post Famine period and this led to a decline in the reliance of stations in private houses. The ratio of priests to people also improved greatly 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 6,500.⁷⁷ With such large numbers under the guidance of each priest, it is little wonder that the congregations relied less on the guidance of the priest and did not frequent the Church building regularly. However 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 1,100.⁷⁸ Not only was the population decreasing; the number of priests increased by twenty per cent and the number of nuns

⁷⁷ R.F.Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London, 1989) p338.

⁷⁸ R.F.Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London, 1989) p338.

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by fifty per cent.⁷⁹ Thus in the post Famine era, priests had to minister to less people per head and were thus enabled to administer to them more efficiently. They could now hold a greater influence over their congregations and provide them with a better example of which to follow. The population decline, the result of the Great Famine left the country more disposed to the full effects of Ultramontane Catholicism.⁸⁰ Catholicism in the post Famine age provided a highly organized, coherent identity that helped Irish society cope with the psychological impact of disruption.⁸¹

Cullen gained support at the Synod of Thurles in 1850, to attempt to cleanse the Church of folk religion and the organisational abuses of former times.⁸² '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'.⁸³

Devotional Revolution:

As we have seen in Chapter two, great efforts had been made in the devotional life of Catholics. These improvements in striving towards a devotional life in

⁷⁹ R.F.Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London, 1989) p338.

⁸⁰ Oliver P Raftery, *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603 – 1983*, (London, 1993), p 104.

⁸¹ R.F.Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London, 1989), p 340.

⁸² K Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800, conflict and conformity*, (London, 1989), P157.

⁸³ K Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800, conflict and conformity*, (London, 1989), P157.

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the post Famine period led to what has been termed as a devotional revolution. Many Para liturgical devotions such as benediction became popular at this time. This resulted in 'the replacement of kin-group centered, lay controlled and semi pagan devotional practices like patterns and wakes with standardised usually imported clerically vetted alternatives, performed in the local church building'.⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ These tended to replace holy wells, bonfires, patterns, wakes, charms, effigies and celebrations of high points in the agricultural calender.⁸⁶ It is possible that the trauma of the Famine helped destroy the psychological reliance on magical practices 'to control' patterns of crop yields, subsistence and disease.⁸⁷ 'Many traditional places of popular pilgrimage were simply abandoned while others were sanitized and made safe for Ultramontane orthodoxy such as St Patrick's Purgatory in Co Donegal'.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ S.J. Connolly, *The Oxford companion to Irish history*, () p 145.

⁸⁵ R.F.Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London, 1989), p 340.

⁸⁶ R.F.Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London, 1989), p 340.

⁸⁷ R.F.Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London, 1989), p 340

⁸⁸ K Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800, conflict and conformity*, (London, 1989),p 152.

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In the pre Famine period the Catholic population did not always adhere to their religious obligations. In some cases popular magic had been partly Christianised. Catholic emblems and rituals were reinterpreted in magical terms: prayers were incorporated into protective charms, blessings and other rituals were often seen as having magical efficacy and priests were credited with supernatural powers.⁸⁹ However in the post famine period 'Catholicism far more than Protestantism succeeded in ridding itself of certain popular practices repugnant to the apostles of polite belief and reformed manners'.⁹⁰

By the early nineteenth century growing literacy and rising standards of living and exposure to outside influences had begun to undermine attachment to traditional attitudes and customs.⁹¹ With this increase in the education of the Irish population, the post famine era saw attendance at mass almost treble and attending Mass become an important aspect of the Catholic psyche. The obligations of receiving Holy Communion and making Confession also became more widespread. 'New improved Church buildings, more elaborate vestments and lavish altar furnishings allowed services to be conducted with new emphasis

⁸⁹ Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1994) p 50.

⁹⁰ K Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800, conflict and conformity*, (London, 1989), p 168.

⁹¹ Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1994), p 52.

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on external magnificence and display'.⁹² By the end of the nineteenth century most of the aspects of Irish social life, which had been a cause of major concern to the Church authorities, wakes, patterns, recreational violence, the various forms of popular magic, had disappeared or greatly declined.⁹³

Lough Derg in the post-famine era:

The post Famine era clearly provided a great opportunity for the Irish Church to reform its structures. Lough Derg also seized this opportunity to examine its pilgrimage and to implement some changes in its administration. The religious devotion and piety of the people developed and deepened greatly at this time.

The pilgrimage to Lough Derg continued to thrive and flourish in the post famine period. Unfortunately an in-depth study of pilgrim numbers lies outside the scope of this thesis so I will be using figures found in the notes of James Canon Mc Kenna, which are printed in Joseph Mc Guinness' book *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg*. These figures prove to be highly significant as they give us some indication of how the pilgrimage continued over this time. We have seen that an estimated 30,000 pilgrims made the pilgrimage in 1846, but by 1856 the numbers had been reduced to 10,000 and by 1860 they had dropped

⁹² Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1994), p 54.

⁹³ Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1994), p 5.

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further to a mere 3,000.⁹⁴ From Canon Mc Kenna's figures it is estimated that over the period 1861-1900, the average number of pilgrims per year was 2,880, a far cry from the numbers in the pre- Famine period.

However we must look at the decline in pilgrim numbers in context. Much study has already taken place to show that there was a great depopulation of the country in the 1840s. In 1845 the estimated population of the country was 8.5 million but by 1851 a mere six years later, this figure had dropped to 6.5 million. There are a number of reasons for this, due to the repeated crop failure, people died from starvation and many emigrated to England and America. The advent of the devotional revolution also took its toll on the pilgrim numbers to Lough Derg. As a result of this movement there was a multiplication of facilities for missions and retreats throughout Ireland.⁹⁵ Now missionaries travelled around the country from parish to parish conducting retreats and missions for the congregations thus making the trip to St Patrick's Purgatory may not have seemed necessary for many. After the terrible tragedy that struck the population, a decline in the numbers making the pilgrimage would be expected. The traditions associated with the pilgrimage itself, were maintained inspite of the famine period although

⁹⁴ Laurence J Flynn, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg, Co Donegal*, p 14.

⁹⁵ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1903), p 195.

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the devotional revolution did impart some new methods of worship to the pilgrimage exercises.

The Pilgrimage exercises:

As in the past, in this period of study, 1850- 1900, the pilgrims having made their decision to go on pilgrimage arrived at the shores of the island fasting. If they arrived not having fasted this resulted in them having to remain on the Island for an extra day. The once daily meal of bread and tea or wine remained and pilgrims were only permitted to receive their first meal after having completed one station.

There was a great emphasis placed on preaching, confession, the Eucharist and the way of cross as part of the pilgrimage exercises in the post famine period, possibly due to the advent of the devotional revolution. Confession had always been an extremely important part of this pilgrimage and this continued with the aid of special thought provoking sermons and the aid of the Catechists employed on Lough Derg.

The station exercises remained quite structured. We see that that each station began with a visit to St Patrick's Church, which was followed by a visit to St Patrick's Cross. At twelve o'clock each day, there is a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in St Patrick's Church followed by a spiritual lecture.⁹⁶ Pilgrims would also

⁹⁶ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1903), p 212.

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attend evening prayer, which was followed by Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.⁹⁷ Public exercises of the day are brought to a close at 9p.m. with the devotions of the way of the Cross, conducted by one of the officiating clergymen.⁹⁸ Here we see a much greater emphasis being placed on the devotions and sacraments, which is in line with the devotional revolution and the teachings of Paul Cullen.

We also notice a break with the tradition of pilgrims taking pebbles from the shore of Lough Derg and water from the lake in the post famine period.⁹⁹ In the past these items were thought to have healing properties and were used to ward off bad spirits etc. Those associated with the pilgrimage to Lough Derg did not want it to be associated with such superstitions. There was a danger that undue value may have been placed on such items.¹⁰⁰

We can see the influence of Ultramontanism and the Devotional revolution in the sermons preached at Lough Derg during this period, which were a hugely significant part of the pilgrimage itself. According to Rev O Connor

⁹⁷ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1903), p 212.

⁹⁸ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1903), p 212.

⁹⁹ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1903), p 212

¹⁰⁰ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1903), p 215.

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'the religious discourses here delivered are of the most practical kind: and are well calculated to awaken in the hearts of the pilgrims a lively sense of the eternal truths and of their religious obligation; and being so abundantly aided by Divine Grace afford the pilgrims great help in preparing for Confession and Holy Communion'.¹⁰¹

The sermons preached were evidently very thought provoking and were designed to live on in the minds of the pilgrims as a way of guiding them in their lives off the island.

During this period, the pilgrimage season on Lough Derg began on the 1 June and closed on the 15 August. In 1869 however this time was limited to the 1 July to the 15 August. Having suffered a decline in pilgrim numbers in the post Famine period the 1870s saw the numbers rise. Thus by the 1880s the original station season of 1 June to the 15 August was reverted to.¹⁰² There was also a great improvement in the manner in which the pilgrimage exercises were carried out. Many pilgrims returned to Lough Derg having made the pilgrimage previously and they were thus able to lead those there for the first time through the various exercises by example. In 1876 a large number of copies of the authorized devotional exercises were printed to aid the pilgrims in

¹⁰¹ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 212.

¹⁰² Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1903), p 209.

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completing their pilgrimage, a copy of which can be found in Rev O' Connor's book, (1895).¹⁰³

By the end of the nineteenth century we see a little deviation in the pilgrimage exercises according to Daniel O' Connor. 'At 2p.m. each afternoon, the pilgrims boat leaves for Saints Island about two miles distance from Station Island; and a more delightful trip could hardly be imagined. During this passage the pilgrims employ their time in singing litanies and hymns and occasionally the sound of instrumental music may be heard. They spend usually an hour on this exercise'.¹⁰⁴ This excursion served two purposes. During the time the pilgrims were away from the station island, visitors having received a permit from the prior were admitted to Station Island to look around it.¹⁰⁵ This increased the interest in the place. More importantly however those who were undertaking the pilgrimage were brought to the site of the original pilgrimage. This had a huge effect on them. They were provided with the chance to visit the site where St Patrick was reputed to have visited and where the site of the original purgatorial cave was located. Thus it is evident that the authorities in Lough Derg recognised the importance of its tradition

¹⁰³ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 210.

¹⁰⁴ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 242.

¹⁰⁵ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 242.

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in spite of the influences Paul Cullen and the devotional evolution had upon it.

Development of the Island:

From a study of various sources, such as the Ordnance Survey memoirs and letters, we are able to gain a picture of the topography of Station Island in the early nineteenth century. We have also learned that much of the development and building on the island took place in the mid nineteenth century. The further development of the island remained a very important factor in the post Famine era. It was felt that the resources available for the pilgrims were no longer sufficient. Existing buildings needed to be repaired and accommodation for the pilgrims was urgently needed.

By 1860 a number of repairs were needed on some of the existing buildings and it was thus thought by the Prior Rev Edward Mc Kenna, better to suspend the pilgrimage for this season. He thought it better to halt the pilgrimage for one year rather than to interrupt its traditional order. Halting the pilgrimage would have fewer interruptions than allowing it to continue. 1860 saw repairs to St Mary's Chapel, which had seen previous renovations in 1835. The Presbytery, which had been erected in 1816, was also remodelled

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internally in 1860.¹⁰⁶ St Patrick's Church was also the subject of improvements in the 1860 season when it too was remodelled by Rev Mc Kenna. He removed its galleries, which were approached by stone steps from the outside of the gables.¹⁰⁷ 1864 saw further improvements when the presbytery was in great part rebuilt at a cost of £164. This could indicate that more priests were in attendance on the Island or that Lough Derg authorities thought very highly of their contribution and wished to express this in the type of accommodation it offered to them.

Despite the renovations of 1860, St Mary's Chapel was entirely taken down in 1870 when 'it was replaced by a very substantial and handsome Gothic ediface'.¹⁰⁸ During this year, 1870, the pilgrimage was once again suspended by Prior Edward Mc Kenna. 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 new church contained a number of Confessionals, which were to provide the pilgrim with some privacy when making their confession. A bell was also erected at this time all at a cost of little over £500. These building expenses were met by voluntary contributions of the

¹⁰⁶ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 191.

¹⁰⁷ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1903), p 179.

¹⁰⁸ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 190.

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pilgrims. This would suggest that there was quite a large volume of pilgrims frequenting the island in the latter half of the nineteenth century or that those who did attend were reasonably well off at this time. It was thought better to suspend the pilgrimage in this year as to carryout the building works simultaneously with the pilgrimage would only result in tampering with the sacredness of the pilgrimage. St Patrick's Church also underwent further improvements in 1875 at a cost of £200.¹⁰⁹

The continuous development of the island and its facilities show us something of its standing in society at this time. The diocese of Clogher evidently was convinced of its important status and popularity and were willing to finance any necessary improvements. Their willingness to improve and develop the island shows that it was very much a highly regarded part of the diocese of Clogher.

The relationship of the pilgrimage authorities with the landlord John Leslie worsened however in the late nineteenth century. Upon embarking on a building project, the pilgrimage administrators found themselves facing a law suit brought against them by the landlord who accused them of 'wrongfully entering the plaintiffs land of Station Island, Lough

■ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 190

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Derg in the county of Donegal, and depositing earth and materials there, and in the said Lough and building thereon'.¹¹⁰ 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.¹¹¹ However this case never reached the courts. As the court date approached the defendants solicitor approached the bishop of Clogher with a settlement from Sir John's counsel, 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 water upon which the Hospice abutted at one shilling a year.¹¹² In spite of this offer, which the bishop duly accepted, the relationship between the Lough Derg authorities and the landlord were irreparably damaged, which in turn led to a further disintegration of the relations between the Catholics and Protestants in this area of County Donegal.

The development of the 1870s:

The 1870s was to provide a further period of great development in the history of the pilgrimage to Lough Derg. In this decade we see building works but also and possibly more importantly we see a significant rise of its profile both in Ireland and abroad. Once

¹¹⁰Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 227.

¹¹¹ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 227.

¹¹² Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 228.

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again this sacred site entered the world of literature in a highly significant way. Having suffered a decline in pilgrim numbers in the post famine period in the 1870s the numbers seemed to rise slightly and almost 3,000 pilgrims arrived annually.

1879 proved to be the most significant year of this decade for St Patrick's Purgatory. In 1879 it is 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'.¹¹³ Among some of 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. Upon their arrival on the island 'they made a strict examination of the pilgrimage and expressed great delight at the edifying spectacle, which the pilgrims, engaged in their station duties presented'.¹¹⁴ The 1870s brought a new wave of devotion and the pilgrimage became more popular. As it entered the media and its fame once again spread the pilgrimage numbers were affected for the better.

In July 1879 John Joseph Lynch, the archbishop of Toronto, visited the island while on route to Rome,

¹¹³Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*. (Dublin, 1895), p 220

¹¹⁴Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 220.

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amongst great excitement. He was accompanied by a number of priests and the bishop of Clogher. They arrived on the island on 11 July; 'the pealing of the island bell notified to all within reach that an event of unusual importance was taking place'.¹¹⁵

It is clear that the archbishop was extremely impressed by what he found at Lough Derg. In a sermon he preached to the pilgrims he bestowed a fitting tribute of admiration upon the heroic penances and most edifying piety of the pilgrims, believing Lough Derg to be one of the holiest and certainly to be one of the most penitential institutions on the face of the earth.¹¹⁶ He also indicated a belief that Lough Derg was hugely significant in developing and maintaining the faith of the Irish people and instilling a passion and love of the religion in the hearts of all who frequented its shores. The archbishop himself undertook the pilgrimage and offered his services in hearing the confessions of the pilgrims and three days later after having completed his station took leave of the island with the bishop of Clogher having firstly bestowed another blessing on the pilgrims.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ O' Connor, Rev Daniel, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 222.

¹¹⁶ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 223.

¹¹⁷ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 223.

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The archbishops visit to Lough Derg and his completion of the pilgrimage undoubtedly raised the profile of the sacred site immensely with reports of his visit being printed in the *Freeman's journal*. The archbishop also wrote back to Toronto telling of this pilgrimage tradition and the exercises performed here. This further raised the profile of this pilgrimage abroad as people could no longer fail to recognise the importance of this hallowed site.

So enamoured was Archbishop Lynch with his pilgrimage to Lough Derg, he returned in July 1882. He arrived at the shores of Lough Derg on 7 July once again accompanied by the bishop of Clogher (Dr Owens) and a number of priests and ecclesiastical students. According to Rev Daniel O' Connor the president of All Hallows Missionary College Dublin, Very Rev Dr Fortune, also arrived with two deacons. Rev Charles Hegarty for the diocese of Toronto and the Rev Andrew Cassidy for the distant Wellington, New Zealand.¹¹⁸ Their arrival on the island was to prove hugely significant and extremely monumental. By their arrival Lough Derg was to break with tradition slightly when these deacons were to be ordained on the island. News of both the visit of the archbishop and the pending ordinations had spread throughout the country and many pilgrims travelled from across the country to bear witness the

¹¹⁸Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 231.

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remarkable occurrence which was to take place on Sunday the 9th July. 'so great was the assemblage that the ferryman assured me that no less than 1,200 pilgrims and visitors were ferried across during the day.'¹¹⁹ If this reported number of pilgrims who arrived is correct, it is astonishing the furore surrounding this event.. The ceremony took place with much celebration to mark such a significant event. Two priests were ordained and they administered blessings to those pilgrims and visitors that requested them.

On the same day at 2pm the archbishop unveiled a statue dedicated to 'Our Blessed Lady of Lough Derg', which had been presented, by Mr and Mrs John Mc Caffrey of Scotland. In 1891 two further statues of St Joseph and St Patrick were also erected on the island.

Changing attitude towards the pilgrimage:

In the late nineteenth century there was a rise in Nationalism and movements such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood became extremely popular. This rise in nationalism and patriotism led to an increased awareness of all things Irish. Anything that was distinctly Irish was hugely significant in the eyes of the Fenians etc. thus the national shrine to the country's patron St Patrick was a prime target for

¹¹⁹ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1855), p 232.

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their interest. However there was also a negative side attached to this increased interest in Lough Derg and its sacred site. There was an increasingly growing anti-Catholic feeling in Ulster and this hampered the pilgrimage tradition. As we have seen even in the Penal times relations between the Catholic and Protestant communities in the area around St Patrick's Purgatory had remained quite good. However in the post Famine period these relationships disintegrated considerably.

In 1845 the first Catholic ferryman, Daniel Campbell took charge of the boats which transported the pilgrims to their station. He was succeeded by his sons who in turn were succeeded by Thomas Flood of Pettigo.¹²⁰ This shows that the pilgrimage authorities wished to employ Catholics over their Protestant counterparts. Education in the area of Pettigo was denominational which shows that relationships between the different denominations had become increasingly strained towards the end of the nineteenth century. We have also witnessed the strained relationship between the landlord, John Leslie and the pilgrimage authorities in the diocese of Clogher during the late nineteenth century. In spite of the apparent breakdown in relations between the denominations and the strain this caused, by the end of the nineteenth century the pilgrimage to St

¹²⁰ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1903), p 158.

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Patrick's Purgatory continued to hold a stable and healthy position in society. As we have seen its fame had once more spread and pilgrims were attending from far and wide.

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Conclusion:

Tradition and transformation.

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the pilgrimage tradition to St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg, over the period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and to look at how this pilgrimage was influenced by political and social factors of the time. As we have seen over the two hundred year period covered in this thesis, St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg was the witness to many a turbulent and triumphant scene. Some of those investigated were, the Penal legislation, the Great Famine, the arrival of Paul Cullen in Ireland, the influence of Ultramontaniam and the Devotional revolution. Of course there were many other issues flooding the Irish countryside at this time but due to constraints imposed it is not viable to look at all the various political struggles and social changes affecting Irish life over this period. What is evident however is that St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg was faced with many a struggle over this period from many different parties and at times it received the wrath even of the congregation it served and the Roman Catholic clergy. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a time of great change in all aspects of Irish life, social, culture and political. All these events can be seen to have taken an affect of the pilgrimage to Lough Derg.

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It is evident that this pilgrimage suffered greatly and yet it continued to survive and minister for its pilgrims who continued to flock there in spite of the persecution they faced. After the introduction of Tridentine measures, Ultramontanist and the Devotional revolution into Ireland, this pilgrimage was in danger of being outlawed by the Church authorities, but it managed to maintain its status and place in Irish society.

One of the unique features of this pilgrimage was its ability to retain its links to its original format in spite of the changes it faced. During this period of study, we have seen that much development occurred on the island with the building of new Churches and accommodation for the pilgrims but possibly the most significant change in terms of the topography of the island was the closing of the Purgatorial cave, which had been the main focus of the pilgrimage in the past. The Saints beds remained the prominent feature they were before and the Vigil continued as it had previously now in St Patrick's Church as opposed to the Cave. St Patrick's Church was thus known amongst the pilgrims as the 'Prison chapel'.

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The pilgrimage exercises essentially appear to have retained much of the character and order they had throughout the history of the pilgrimage tradition to Lough Derg, which first entered the literary world in the twelfth century. According to Rev Daniel O' Connor, it is quite possible that one of the reasons Lough Derg maintained its popularity and respect was because it had 'not become modified'.¹²¹

'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'.¹²²

However it is important to note that with the introduction of Lay Catechists and the drive to educate the Catholic masses in the tenets of their faith, the pilgrims of the later nineteenth century were able to engage more fully in the pilgrimage and its exercises. A break was also made with some of the more superstitious elements of this pilgrimage over this period of time. The physical presence of the Purgatorial cave disappeared and was replaced metaphorically by St Patrick's Church, the Prison Chapel. Practices such as the worshipping of various

¹²¹ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 238.

¹²² Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), p 238.

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stones such as Leac na mbonn and the immersing of oneself naked in the water also appear to have disappeared over the course of this study. Pilgrims were no longer permitted to take home stones from the island or other such artefacts, which could have been used, in idolatrous practices of worship.

Lough Derg often found itself at the mercy of societies varying attitude towards religion and tradition, but it still remained a prominent feature of religious worship. We have seen that Catholic and Protestant relationships in the countryside surrounding Lough Derg were quite good in the early part of this thesis. These different denominations appeared to socialise and indeed work together side by side in spite of the penal legislations and those placed upon the sanctuary of Lough Derg in particular. Indeed Protestants actually appeared to assist in the continuous running and administration of this pilgrimage, and even if this was only for their own benefit they were defying the laws introduced by Queen Anne in support of the Catholic population of Ireland and of the parish of Templecarne.

However with the rise of sectarianism witnessed in the second and third chapters of this thesis and the advent of many secret societies, relations between the various religious denominations inevitably broke down. The rise of the Orange Order and the Irish Republican Brotherhood in particular can be

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accredited for assisting the changing attitudes of the various denominations. The Protestant people were fearful of losing their privileged positions while the Catholics in turn wanted a greater equality with them.

This inevitably led to tension, anger and hostility among these various groups. The foundation of the I.R.B. and movements such as the Gaelic League all awakened and instilled in the majority of the Catholic population of Ireland, a love for the Irish nation, its heritage and its culture. It is possible that many saw making the pilgrimage to Lough Derg as an outward sign of this love for Ireland. If this is the case it is interesting to note the effects the I.R.B. had in the continuity of this pilgrimage.

However the most significant change in attitude towards the pilgrimage came from within the ranks of the clergy itself. As we have seen during the course of this thesis, many of those within the ranks the Catholic clergy were opposed to this pilgrimage, seeing it as a manifestation of the Traditional religion of the Irish, as opposed, (in opposition to) the teachings of Trent. Bishop Troy of Ossory was one of those opposed to such gatherings. However due to Lough Derg's esteemed position and the challenge of its pilgrimage, the station to Lough Derg was permitted to continue. In the early nineteenth century however, the Church acknowledged and embraced the need for some change in the order of this pilgrimage

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and these changes were initiated and overseen by Dr James Murphy the bishop of Clogher in 1802. These changes brought the pilgrimage more into line with European Catholicism but ensured that it did not break with the tradition of the pilgrimage. These changes allowed the pilgrimage to evolve, develop and regain its status and respect.

As we have seen it is clear that many changes occurred at this time, but Lough Derg provided continuity through these changes. In essence the very nature of the pilgrimage remained the same. The pilgrims continued to flock to the island while maintaining to uphold the Lough Derg fast, the carried out the penitential exercises of the pilgrimage as so many thousands had done before them, they upheld the tradition of the Vigil and continued to participate fully in the station exercises. In trusting themselves to its timeworn disciplines and its mantra like repetition of vocal prayer, [the pilgrims], find some of that peace with themselves, with their neighbour and with their God which is the goal of so much human searching.¹²³

Writing in 1895, Rev O' Connor states that,

‘at this shrine a true spirit of fraternity and equality prevails. Dignitaries, honours,

¹²³ Laurence J. Flynn, *St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg Co Donegal*, p 18/19

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wealth, education and social position find here no special distinction or acknowledgement. The prince, the peasant, the highborn dame and the lowly cottage maiden must here alike submit to the station discipline, which knows no relaxation except for sufficient cause submitted to and approved of by the Prior.¹²⁴

This is an example of Lough Derg and its timeworn principles. Everyone is equal in the eyes of God. This has been one of the most important aspects of the pilgrimage since its very beginning right up to the present day. Lough Derg has shown its ability to embrace change while continuing to embrace the traditions associated with its pilgrimage and thus essentially has provided pilgrims over many centuries with a sense of continuity through change.

¹²⁴ Rev Daniel O' Connor, *St Patrick's Purgatory Lough Derg, its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings*, (Dublin, 1895), pp 237 238.

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