Political Thought in Early Irish Exegesis

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Conor O'Brien

Abstract
The two earliest Latin commentaries on the Catholic Epistles probably come from seventh-century southern Ireland and both suggest that christians only owe obedience to kings who actively punish the wicked and praise the good. This may reflect an ideology of punitive christian kingship which seems particularly prominent in Munster during the second half of the seventh century.

Keywords
exegesis, glosses, kingship, Munster, political thought.

Conor O'Brien

~~*Department of Medieval History*~~

~~*King's College, London*~~

~~*conor.1.obrien@kcl.ac.uk*~~*The Queen's College*

University of Oxford

conor.obrien@queens.ox.ac.uk

How the early medieval Irish thought about their kings has long been a subject of scholarly interest. Much of this work has focused on vernacular texts or on the hugely influential Hiberno-Latin treatise *De duodecim abusiuis (saeculi)* ('On the Twelve Abuses [of the World']); the evidence of early Irish Latin commentary on scripture has not, so far, played much of a role in the scholarship on the island's earliest recorded political thought. But the Bible undoubtedly played an important role in shaping how christians in the early middle ages addressed the question of in what circumstances they ought to obey political authorities. Verses like 1 Peter 2.13–14 provided them with guidance: 'Be ye subject to every human creature on account of God; whether it be to the king as excelling or to the governors (*duces*) sent by him to punish

evildoers, and to praise the good'.[1] Scholars of early medieval Ireland ought to be particularly interested in this verse, since the three earliest works of commentary on the Catholic Epistles (to which 1 Peter was traditionally assigned) all probably come from the seventh- and eighth-century Insular world. Bede's medieval 'best-seller' on the Catholic Epistles is the latest and best known of these, but the two earlier texts are almost certainly Irish and have the potential to make an interesting contribution to the study of early medieval Irish political thought. That they have, hitherto, failed to have an impact is undoubtedly because of the shadow which recent debates continue to cast over the very existence of any exegesis that can be called Irish.

Individual scriptural commentaries first received Irish attributions in the early twentieth century, before Bernhard Bischoff in 1954 proposed a whole body of exegetical material as being Irish or Irish-influenced;[2] Bischoff's methods have been criticised, however, most extremely by Michael Gorman around the turn of the century, who sparked a fierce argument over whether early medieval Ireland produced any biblical commentaries at all.[3] Without getting sucked into a quagmire of polemic, I think it possible to posit grounds for a consensus position. I would suggest that the scholarship has shown: that the interpretation of the bible obviously happened in an Irish christian context and some of the results of that interpretation were recorded on parchment, even if those records rarely amount to anything like a detailed and systematic prose commentary on the scale of, say, Jerome's works; that a small core of surviving early medieval exegetical material is undoubtedly Irish, although genuine debate remains (and almost certainly always will) over the exact extent of the corpus of Irish exegesis; that Irish exegesis arose from the mainstream, Latin tradition of patristic scriptural interpretation and is not radically different to that produced elsewhere. Nonetheless, ~~that~~ the proximity of a number of specific features in a single text may be suggestive of Irish connections, even if no one factor is definitively, or exclusively, Irish. Irish exegesis reminds one of the so-called Canterbury school of exegesis: the grandest claims made for its unique features and importance are rather implausible, but there can be no doubt that it provides an important source for the exploration of early Insular Christian culture.[4]

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[1] *Subiecti estote omni humanae creaturae propter Dominum sive regi quasi praecellenti / sive ducibus tamquam ab eo missis ad vindictam malefactorum laudem vero bonorum.* I draw here on the Douay Rheims translation. This article was written while I was a Research Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge; I remain grateful to the College and the Isaac Newton Trust for generously supporting my work. Máire Ní Mhaonaigh helpfully commented on an early draft and Tessa Webber, with typical kindness, shared her notes on Salisbury Cathedral, MS. 124. All errors remain my own.

[2] Bernhard Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte in der Geschichte der lateinischen Exegese im Frühmittelalter', *Sacris Erudiri* 6 (1954) 189–279; rev. ed. in Bernhard Bischoff, *Mittelalterliche Studien: Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte*, 3 vols (Stuttgart 1966–67, 1981) i, 205–73, translated by Colm O'Grady in Martin McNamara (ed), *Biblical studies: the medieval Irish contribution* (Dublin 1976) 74–160.

[3] For this debate, see Michael Gorman, 'The myth of Hiberno-Latin exegesis', *Revue Bénédictine* 110 (2000) 42–85, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Bischoff's Wendepunkte fifty years on', *Revue Bénédictine* 110 (2000) 204–37, and Charles D. Wright, 'Bischoff's theory of Irish exegesis and the Genesis commentary in Munich clm 6302: a critique of a critique', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 10 (2000) 115–75. For critical discussion, which nonetheless avoids the extremity of Gorman's position, see Clare Stancliffe, 'Early "Irish" biblical exegesis', *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975) 361–70; Michael W. Herren, 'Irish biblical commentaries before 800', in Jacqueline Hamesse (ed), *Roma, magistra mundi: itineraria culturae medievalis*, 2 vols (Louvain 1998) i, 391–407; Mark Stansbury, 'Irish biblical exegesis', in Roy Flechner & Sven Meeder (eds), *The Irish in early medieval Europe: identity, culture and religion* (London 2016) 116–30.

[4] On exegesis from Canterbury, see Bernhard Bischoff & Michael Lapidge, *Biblical commentaries from the Canterbury school of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge 1994); for important correctives to some of the more extravagant claims made regarding the Canterbury school, see Michael Gorman, 'Theodore of Canterbury, Hadrian of Nisida and Michael Lapidge', *Scriptorium* 50 (1996) 184–92, Bernice Kaczynski, 'The seventh-century school of Canterbury: England and the continent in perspective', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 8 (1998) 206–15, and Emma Vosper, 'A reassessment of the biblical glosses of Theodore and Hadrian's Canterbury school'. Unpublished University of Nottingham doctoral thesis (2019)~~'Reforming the early English church: Bede and Archbishop Theodore', unpublished PhD University of Nottingham 2021 (forthcoming~~).

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Taking such a starting-point, it should prove possible to explore Irish exegesis with questions of content, and not just of provenance, in mind, the kinds of questions that have become standard in scholarship of early medieval scriptural commentary more generally.[5] This article asks how early Irish exegetes understood 1 Peter 2.13–14, why they interpreted it in the way they did, and what that might tell us both about political thought in early medieval Ireland and, indeed, early Irish exegesis.

The earliest dedicated work of commentary on the seven Catholic Epistles is that preserved in Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibl., MS Aug. perg. 233, fols 1^{r}–40^{v}, an early ninth-century manuscript (Bischoff dated it to the first third of the century) from Reichenau.[6] The Irish origins of this work have been recognised for a long time: although it is anonymous, it not only displays a number of what Bischoff called 'Irish symptoms', but more importantly contains two Old Irish glosses and cites as authorities five individuals with Irish names.[7] Among those who have been identified are Laidcend mac Baíth Bannaig, author of the well-known epitome of Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob*, known as the *Egloga*, who died in 661, and a Mainchéne, described as 'our teacher' by the author of the commentary, probably the scholar of that name also named as a teacher in that unusual work of Irish exegesis, the *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, who appears to have died in 652.[8] The other named Irish authorities have also been associated with figures whose obits appear in the Irish annals, all of whom died in the mid- to late-seventh century, and all of whom were based in Munster.[9] We can be reasonably sure then that this text was written in southern Ireland around the middle or second half of the seventh century. While for identification I will call it the anonymous commentary on the Catholic Epistles, the epithet commentary is perhaps rather generous;[10] succinct in style, the work usually simply provides a swift gloss on the biblical text or specific words from it. In this it calls to mind the Canterbury materials that Bischoff and Lapidge published.

This brevity is clear in the interpretation of 1 Peter 2.13–14:

> *Be subject*, that is humble. *To every human creature*, that is because he spoke as if generally. He indicated in a few cases, saying *either to the king*. *On account of God*, that is not on account

[5] For the exploration of political ideas in early medieval exegesis, see, for example, Mayke de Jong, 'The empire as *ecclesia*: Hrabanus Maurus and biblical *historia* for rulers', in Yitzhak Hen & Matthew Innes (eds), *The uses of the past in the early middle ages* (Cambridge 2000) 191–226; Mayke de Jong, 'Exegesis for an empress', in Esther Cohen & Mayke de Jong (eds), *Medieval transformations: texts, power, and gifts in context* (Leiden 2001) 69–100; Conor O'Brien, 'Kings and kingship in the writings of Bede', *EHR* 132 (2017) 1473–98.

[6] James F. Kenney, *The sources for the early history of Ireland: an introduction and guide, 1: ecclesiastical* (New York 1929; repr. Dublin 1978) 105; Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte', 266, trans. O'Grady, 141; Michael Lapidge & Richard Sharpe, *A bibliography of Celtic-Latin literature, 400–1200* (Dublin 1985) 97 (no. 340); Joseph F. Kelly, 'A catalogue of early medieval Hiberno-Latin biblical commentaries (II)', *Traditio* 45 (1989–90) 393–434: 430; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium: medieval Irish books & texts (c. 400–c. 1600)*, 3 vols (Turnhout 2017) i, 125–26. On the manuscript, see Bernhard Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts (mit Ausnahme der wisigotischen)*, 3 vols (Wiesbaden 1998–2004) i, 361 (no. 1721).

[7] For Bischoff's 'Irish symptoms' see Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte', 215–22, trans. O'Grady, 82–88; Ó Cróinín, 'Bischoff's Wendepunkte', 226–29, 233–34; Wright, 'Bischoff's theory', 135–45; Padraig P. Ó Néill, *Biblical study and mediaeval Gaelic history*, Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Mediaeval Gaelic History 6 (Cambridge 2003) 18.

[8] *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, PL 35 (Paris 1861) 2149–2200. A new edition is in preparation.

[9] Mario Esposito, 'A seventh-century commentary on the Catholic Epistles', *Journal of Theological Studies* 21 (1919–20) 316–18; Paul Grosjean, 'Sur quelques exégètes irlandais du VII^{e} siècle', *Sacris Erudiri* 7 (1955) 67–98; Aidan Breen, 'Some seventh-century Hiberno-Latin texts and their relationships', *Peritia* 3 (1984) 204–14: 204–07; Gorman, 'Hiberno-Latin exegesis', 75–78; Ó Cróinín, 'Bischoff's Wendepunkte', 219–20.

[10] Gorman, 'Hiberno-Latin exegesis', 49, describes the work as 'classroom notes'.

> of wealth or cruelty. *On account of God*, that is that one of the faithful ought not consent to him [the king] in any wicked things, or in the worshipping of idols.[11]

The first part of 1 Peter 2.13 looks very much like a rather generalised call for christians to subject themselves to each other. The political application of the verse is a specific example of this general point it seems. When it comes to the political reference, the exegete carefully limited the kind of duty that christians owed to a king — and in this the Irish author was in good company. The basic point that one's duty to rulers obviously cannot justify breaking the core tenets of the christian faith was made by other Insular writers, all probably inspired by patristic tradition where Augustine, in particular, was adept at showing that christians obey secular rulers only as regards secular matters.[12] The interpretation may suggest that the exegete thought that the possibility of kings demanding that christians worship idols was still a contemporary concern, or it may simply derive from this patristic tradition, which emphasised obedience to power, except when idolatry was involved. What is clear is that the Irish author strongly emphasised a hierarchy of loyalties, where earthly kingship lay under divine rulership.

Indeed, the anonymous exegete seems to go on to further extend the limitations on lawful obedience, stating: '*Just as by him*, that is by the king. He adds for what reason they are sent, saying *in order to punish*. Obedience is owed to such kings'.[13] I read this as the exegete, commenting upon verse 14, suggesting that only kings who take their duty of punishing the wicked (and presumably praising the good) seriously deserve obedience; christians obey 'such kings', which implies that they ought not obey other kings. This goes rather beyond the previous point that one should only obey laws compatible with Christianity (as I say, a long-established patristic principle) to imply that one should only obey rulers who punish the immoral. The comment is very brief, and we must be cautious when reading a lot into it, but comparison with other Irish exegesis will prove illuminating.

Our second Irish commentary is the treatise on the seven Catholic Epistles ascribed to Hilary and claimed for the fourth-century Hilary of Poitiers in a twelfth-century English manuscript (Salisbury Cathedral, MS 124, fols 42^{v}–49^{v}) and for the fifth-century Hilary of Arles in the late nineteenth century.[14] Both ascriptions are impossible, however, as the work draws upon Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville and, it would appear, the anonymous commentary just discussed;[15] it displays a number of Bischoff's 'Irish symptoms', uses some words (like *princeps* and *bestia*)[16] in a manner suggestive of Hiberno-Latin, and seems to have

[11] Anonymous commentary on the Catholic Epistles (hereafter Anonymous), edited by Robert E. McNally, *Commentarius in epistolas catholicas scotti anonymi*, CCSL 108B (Turnhout 1973) 32: *'Subiecti estoto', id est humiles. 'Omni humanae creaturae', id est quia quasi generaliter dixit. In paucis ostendit dicens, 'siue regi'. 'Propter Deum', id est non propter diuitias siue crudelitatem. 'Propter Deum', id est ne illi consentiret aliquis fidelium in aliquibusdam rebus malis, siue in idolis colendis.*

[12] e.g., Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* CXXIV.7, in Eligius Dekkers and Johannes Fraipont (eds), CCSL 40 (Turnhout 1956) 1841–42; Gildas, *De excidio Britonum* 4, in Michael Winterbottom (ed & trans), *Gildas: the ruin of Britain and other works* (London 1978) 90; Bede, *In proverbia Salomonis*, in David Hurst (ed), *Bedae venerabilis opera exegetica 2.B*~~XXXXXXXXXXXXX~~, CCSL 119B (Turnhout 1983) 123.

[13] Anonymous (McNally, *Commentarius*, 32): '*Tamquam ab eo', id est a rege. Subiungit ad que mittuntur, dicens* '*ad uindictam'. Istis regibus oportet obedientia.*

[14] Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte', 266–67, trans. O'Grady, 141–43; Lapidge & Sharpe, *Celtic-Latin literature*, 99 (no. 346); Kelly, 'Catalogue', 431; Gorman, 'Hiberno-Latin exegesis', 78 (arguing against this as Irish, but unaware of the Salisbury manuscript); Wright, 'Bischoff's theory', 140; Ó Corráin, *Clavis*, i, 126. This commentary is edited as a work of Hilary of Arles in PL Supplementum 3 (Paris 1963) 59–131. On the Salisbury manuscript, see Teresa Webber, *Scribes and scholars at Salisbury cathedral c. 1075–c. 1125* (Oxford 1992) 61–62.

[15] On the relationships between the Insular commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, see Robert E. McNally, Scriptores Hiberniae minores 1, in CCSL 108B (Turnhout 1973) xii–xv.

[16] On *bestia*, see Pseudo-Hilary, On the seven Catholic Epistles (hereafter Pseudo-Hilary), Robert E. McNally (ed), *Tractatus Hilarii in septem epistolas canonicas*, CCSL 108B (Turnhout 1973) 70, and Michael W. Herren, 'Old Irish lexical and semantic influences on Hiberno-Latin', in Próinséas Ní Chatháin & Michael Richter

been known to Bede in the early eighth century, when he dismissed one of its interpretations as ridiculous.[17] Pseudo-Hilary only survives in its entirety in an Italian manuscript from the first half of the ninth century (Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS Vind. lat. 4, fols 1[r]–48[r]), but the fragmentary Salisbury text probably derives from an Insular exemplar, strengthening the likelihood that this is an early Insular work of exegesis, probably dating from the late seventh century and possibly from the same Munster background as the anonymous commentary.[18] Generally more extensive than the anonymous commentary, the Pseudo-Hilary text tends to go beyond the simple gloss approach, though unfortunately its comments on 1 Peter 2.13–14 are not very extensive.

Once again, our exegete led with the general application of Peter's command, though now with a much heavier ecclesiological emphasis: 'Now the head of the Church, Peter, imposes the common rule of daily life, and joins every member of the Church in concord'.[19] This focus on Peter's headship of the Church (Pseudo-Hilary called him 'the leader of the entire world', elsewhere in the commentary[20]) and the issue of concord and unity may reflect a seventh-century southern Irish perspective on the Insular Easter controversy.[21] At this point the commentator immediately went off on a scientific tangent inspired by the word *creatura* which need not concern us, but when he returned to the scriptural text a few lines later ecclesiastical unity was still on his mind: '*On account of God*, that is recommending peace with all people. *Either to the king as excelling*, because there is no power, except from God. *Or to the duces*, that is to the *duces* who punish wickedness and praise the good'.[22]

Pseudo-Hilary combined Peter's command to be a good subject with Paul's from Romans 13, but once again the suggestion appears that only some rulers are deserving of obedience. The commentary essentially followed the biblical text here, but in a way which strongly implied that *duces* who failed to punish wickedness were not owed obedience; note the subtle shift from the *duces* sent to punish the wicked in the biblical text to the *duces* who do punish wickedness in Pseudo-Hilary. Reading on a little bit in the commentary, we find that the exegete continued to urge concord upon his readers in his interpretation of verse 16 (where

(eds), *Irland und Europa: die Kirche im Frühmittelalter / Ireland and Europe: the early church* (Stuttgart 1984) 197–209: 207; on *princeps*, see below n. 24.

[17] Pseudo-Hilary (McNally, *Tractatus Hilarii*, 102): '*Sed Spiritu sancto inspirati loquiti sunt', id est more fistulae*.; Bede, *In epistolas septem catholicas* II, in David Hurst (ed), *Bedae venerabilis opera exegetica* 3XXXXXXXXXXXXX, CCSL 121 (Turnhout 1983) 267: *Ridicule quidam haec beati Petri uerba interpretatus est dicens quod sicut fistula flatum oris humani …*. On Bede and Irish exegesis in general, see Joseph F. T. Kelly, 'The Venerable Bede and Hiberno-Latin exegesis', in Paul E. Szarmach (ed), *Sources of Anglo-Saxon culture* (Kalamazoo, MI 1986) 65–75; Giovanni Caputa, *Il sacerdozio dei fedeli secondo San Beda: Un itinerario di maturità cristiana* (Vatican City 2002) 52–60, raises significant doubts as to the influence of the Irish commentaries on Bede's interpretation of 1 Peter. The southern Irish scholarly circle in which this exegesis emerged very likely did have Anglo-Saxon connections; see Ó Néill, *Biblical study*, 14–15. Also on the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon reception of Pseudo-Hilary, see M. B. Parkes, *Scribes, scripts and readers: studies in the communication, presentation and dissemination of medieval texts* (London 1991) 135–41.

[18] Breen, 'Seventh-century Hiberno-Latin texts', 213, suggests that a southern Irish provenance for Pseudo-Hilary is probable, but not proven. See also n. 21 below. On the Naples MS., see Bischoff, *Katalog*, ii, 310 (no. 3582).

[19] Pseudo-Hilary (McNally, *Tractatus Hilarii*, 84): *Nunc caput aeclaesiae Petrus communem regulam cotidie conuersationis imponit, et omnia membra aeclaesiae in concordiam coniungit.*

[20] Pseudo-Hilary (McNally, *Tractatus Hilarii*, 88): *princeps totius mundi Petrus*.

[21] The exegetical circle from which the anonymous commentary derives has been presented as Roman leaning, the southern Irish churches having emphasised unity with Rome when accepting the Victorian Easter in the first half of the seventh century; see Pádraig Ó Néill, '*Romani* influences on seventh-century Hiberno-Latin literature', in *Irland und Europa*: *die Kirche im Frühmittelalter*, 280–90.

[22] Pseudo-Hilary (McNally, *Tractatus Hilarii*, 84): '*Propter Deum', id est commendantem pacem cum omnibus. Siue regi quasi praecellenti, quia potestas non est nisi a deo* [Romans 13.1]. '*Siue ducibus', id est ducibus qui malum uindicant et bonum laudant*.

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Peter warned his audience not to make liberty a 'veil of wickedness'), but in a manner which conflated the authority of the Church and that of kings: '*A veil of wickedness* is, if the appearance of religion is held externally, nevertheless internally one is seen to resist the powers of the Church, and of kings, and of *principes*, so that concord is broken'.[23]

All forms of ecclesiastical and social upheaval seem here to be linked; *principes* very probably means the rulers of religious communities, whether they be regular or secular clergy, abbots or lay abbots, a common use of the word in Irish sources which seems to be reflected elsewhere in the commentary.[24] The concord that Pseudo-Hilary desired to maintain existed simultaneously in the ecclesiastical, lay and monastic communal spheres, linked in each case to the acceptance of the appropriate authority.

Both the anonymous commentary and Pseudo-Hilary suggest a link between the moral qualities of kingship, expressed through punishment and reward, and the subject's obedience: kings who punish the wicked deserve obedience. This is not just an 'innocent' or straightforward reading of the Bible. Around 710, when Bede came to interpret 1 Peter 2.13–14 in his turn, the Northumbrian monk went to some trouble to emphasise that, whether or not rulers actually punished the wicked and praised the good or not was irrelevant to this verse and therefore the christian's obedience.[25] Alternative readings of the scriptural text were possible in a time and place not so very distant to that in which the anonymous commentary and Pseudo-Hilary most likely emerged. Why then did they comment on 1 Peter 2.13–14 in the way they did? Can we reconstruct enough of their intellectual context to understand how they approached the Bible? Without specific details of their authorship, or of the date and place they were written, we must proceed carefully. Two major pieces of evidence survive: the commentaries themselves and the fragmentary survivals of the work of those Irish scholars listed as authorities in the anonymous commentary. Together these may allow us to reconstruct the attitudes of the 'Munster circle' of Irish exegetes amongst whom these texts emerged.[26]

Pseudo-Hilary warned that *principes* should use persuasion, not force, when dealing with the laymen underneath them, but this advice was almost certainly directed at religious leaders, rather than secular, political ones.[27] The same commentator took it for granted that kings crush those who stand against them, and indeed assumed that God took an appropriately royal interest in the punishment of those proud above their station.[28] Similarly, Pseudo-Hilary thought that St James had placed his own name at the beginning of his first letter in the manner of a king so that he might be feared and honoured, while the anonymous commentary on the Catholic Epistles stated that Peter wielded his 'apostolic rod in the manner of kings' so that he

[23] Pseudo-Hilary (McNally, *Tractatus Hilarii*, 84): *'Velamen malitiae' est, si forma religionis deforis habeatur, intus tamen potestatibus aecclesiae, et regum, et principum resistere uideatur ut concordia disrumpatur*.

[24] Wendy Davies, 'Clerics as rulers: some implications of the terminology of ecclesiastical authority in early medieval Ireland', in Nicholas Brooks (ed), *Latin and the vernacular languages in early medieval Britain* (Leicester 1982) 81–97; Jean-Michel Picard, '*Princeps* and *principatus* in the early Irish church: a reassessment', in Alfred P. Smyth (ed), *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000) 146–60. See also the use of the term at Pseudo-Hilary (McNally, *Tractatus Hilarii*, 88), another call for social and ecclesiastical concord.

[25] Bede, *In epistolas septem catholicas* II (Hurst 239–40). See Conor O'Brien, '*Subiecti estote omni humanae creaturae*: changing interpretations of 1 Peter 2.13–14 in Insular and Carolingian exegesis', in Gerda Heydemann (ed.), *The Politics of Interpretation: The Bible and the Formation of Legal Authority in Early Medieval Europe* (Ostfildern,forthcoming).

[26] The term is that of Michael W. Herren, 'The pseudonymous tradition in Hiberno-Latin: an introduction', in John J. O'Meara & Bernd Naumann (eds), *Latin script and letters, AD 400–900: Festschrift presented to Ludwig Bieler on the occasion of his 70th Birthday* (Leiden 1976) 121–31: 130.

[27] Pseudo-Hilary (McNally, *Tractatus Hilarii*, 96): *'Prouidentes non' coactos, id est non uim sed suasione.*

[28] Pseudo-Hilary (McNally, *Tractatus Hilarii*, 72, 97).

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would be obeyed.[29] A sense of royal power as something fearsome and punitive does seem to be hinted at in a number of places in these commentaries; the interpretations of 1 Peter 2.13–14 moralise that coercion, demanding that it only be directed towards the punishment of the wicked.

The *Egloga* of Laidcend, whose teaching was cited by the anonymous commentary, provides an obvious place to start exploring the wider 'Munster circle'.[30] How did Laidcend deal with Gregory the Great's political theology as expressed in the *Moralia in Iob*? Unfortunately, Laidcend's distinctive method of working make this hard to determine; his aim seems to have been a radical shortening of Gregory's sprawling, stream-of-consciousness exegesis into a clear commentary on the words of the Book of Job. He did this by identifying brief comments on each verse, usually only a few sentences coming from quite early in the long interpretations Gregory would provide, and excising the rest of what the pope had to say. This makes it difficult to suggest ideological or theological reasons for Laidcend's editing of Gregory; he often took the first succinct comment on each verse which he found and then moved on. The result is a drastically shorter discussion, for example, of the rhinoceros of Job 39, which Gregory famously used to outline his theology of secular rulership, but one that retains the basics of the original interpretation.[31] God has made earthly power subject to him and now the rulers of the world contribute to the work of preaching by stamping down upon those resistant to the word of Christ. Needless to say, that means that Laidcend presented ideas generally in keeping with the ideology of punitive Christian kingship that we have seen in the two commentaries on the Catholic Epistles. For example, in Laidcend's *Egloga* God declares:

> after I enter the mind of elated power, not only do I make it subject to myself, but I even train it to suppress the enemies of the faith so that the powers of this world, bound by the bands of my strength, not only remain believing in me, but also out of zeal for me break the hardness of the hostile heart.[32]

The Gregorian theory of ministerial kingship could shine a negative light on secular rulers, of course; Gregory warned rulers not to delight in being set over men, for in their pride they imitated Satan. The danger of such pride is that wicked rulers drag their subjects down to the abyss with themselves.[33] Many manuscripts of the *Egloga* include the essentials of this warning and hence it appears in Adriaen's modern edition, with an emphasis on the specific

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[29] Pseudo-Hilary (McNally, *Tractatus Hilarii*, 55); Anonymous (McNally, *Commentarius*, 49): *Ostendit 'Petrus' uirgam apostolicam more regum ne condemnetur suum imperium*.

[30] Scholarship on Laidcend is limited: Grosjean, 'Sur quelques exégètes', 92–96; Martin McNamara, 'Hiberno-Latin biblical studies: II. An Irish abbreviation of St Gregory the Great on the Book of Job', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 40 (1973) 367–70; Ó Corráin, *Clavis*, ii, 723–25.

[31] See Gregory, *Moralia in Iob* XXXI.I.1–VII.10 (hereafter *Moralia*), in Marc Adriaen (ed), *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob*, CCSL 143 (Turnhout 1979) 1549–57. For discussion of Gregory's political theology, see Carole Straw, 'Gregory's politics: theory and practice', in *Gregorio Magno e il suo tempo* (Rome 1991) 47–63; J. N. Hillgarth, 'Eschatological and political concepts in the seventh century', in Jacques Fontaine & J. N. Hillgarth (eds), *Le septième siècle: changements et continuités* (London 1992) 212–35; David Hipshon, 'Gregory the Great's "political thought"', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53 (2002) 439–53.

[32] Laidcend, *Egloga de Moralibus Iob* XXXI.V 6 (hereafter *Egloga*), in Marc Adriaen (ed), *Egloga quam scripsit Lathcen filius Baith de Moralibus Iob quas Gregorius fecit*, CCSL 145 (Turnhout 1969) 325: *postquam mentem cuiuslibet elatae potestatis ingredior, non solum eam mihi subditam redo, sed etiam ad conterendos fidei hostes exerceo, ut potestates [potentes] huius saeculi meae fortitudinis loris ligati, non solum in me credentes permaneant, sed pro me et alienati [alieni] cordis duritiam zelantes frangant*. The alternative readings in square brackets are those of Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 88 fol. 148^{r}, a ninth-century manuscript that probably preserves Laidcend's original text better than those on which Adriaen based his edition; see Lucia Castaldi, 'Lathcen', in Paolo Chiesa and Lucia Castaldi (eds), *La trasmissione dei testi latini del medioevo/Mediaeval Latin texts and their transmission*, 5 vols (Florence 2012) iv, 374–87, esp. 386. My thanks to the Librarian of Pembroke College for permission to consult the manuscript.

[33] Gregory, *Moralia* XXIV.XXV 52–55 (Adriaen, *S. Gregorii*, 1226–29).

dangers of pride for the individual in a position of power over others.[34] But a ninth-century Bury St Edmunds manuscript of the *Egloga*, now at Pembroke College, Cambridge, probably preserves a version of the text much closer to what Laidcend wrote, without later Carolingian interpolation, and there this section of Laidcend's abbreviation is even more abbreviated: words like *rector* and *dux* make no appearance, making it a more general, less political, warning against pride.[35] Similarly, Laidcend removed Gregory's long discussion on how God matches the ruler to the morals of the people over whom he rules, wicked rulers being a punishment for communal sin.[36] Readers of Laidcend's work would have come away with less of a sense of the dangers or dark sides of rulership than a reader of the original *Moralia*, while retaining the certainty that once kings had submitted to Christianity they had a duty to use their might in a coercive but moral fashion.

Another of the Irish exegetes whose oral teaching the anonymous commentary on the Catholic Epistles cited, one Bannbannus, was probably the same Banbán who contributed to the fragmentary legal text called *Cáin Fhuithirbe*, promulgated at a joint secular and clerical assembly in West Munster (probably at Muckross, Co. Kerry), *c*. 680, which set down the mutual obligations of the Church and lay society to each other.[37] That work contains the significant statement that 'that which is contrary to conscience they did not allow into this law', suggesting that the authors of the law sought to encourage a moralised, christian legal practice.[38] *Cáin Fhuithirbe* also addressed the question of an unjust ruler who permits turmoil to afflict his people, understood as violence and theft 'without retribution'.[39] In other words, if we look across the works of the 'Munster circle' we can catch a glimmer of a fuzzy, but apparently consistent, political theology. The two commentaries on the Catholic Epistles seem to have urged obedience only to a moral, punitive form of kingship; Laidcend's editing of Gregory's *Moralia* retained that pope's belief that, once converted to Christianity, secular rulerpowers had a responsibility to use their power for the furtherance of the faith, while it downplayed his worries about the dangers of worldly power; *Cáin Fhuithirbe* suggests that thinkers in this circle themselves co-operated with contemporary monarchs in the pursuit of a christianised and punitive legal culture.

Do we then have a specific cultural context here in mid- to late-seventh century southern Ireland where a political theology of christian kingship circulated? Some evidence exists to suggest such a wider context. The obvious comparison to the discussion of kingship in the two Irish works of exegesis is Pseudo-Cyprian's *De duodecim abusiuis (saeculi)* ('On the Twelve

[34] Laidcend, *Egloga* XXIV.XXV 52–53 (Adriaen, *Egloga quam scripsi Lathcen*, 271): *Vnusquisque enim superbus rector totiens ad culpam apostasiae dilabitur, quotiens, praeesse hominibus delectatus, ex imitatione illius qui, despectis angelorum societatibus, dixit: 'Similis ero Altissimo'. Qui exemplo suae superbiae subditos ad impietatem trahunt. Dux autem impius est, qui a tramite ueritatis exorbitat; et dum ipse in praeceps ruit, ad abrupta sequentes inuitat*.

[35] Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 88, fol. 130ʳ: *Unusquisque enim superbus dilectatur ex iminatione illius qui dispectis angelorum societatibus dixit simili ero altissimo qui exemplo suae superbiae subditos ad impietatem trahit.*

[36] Compare Gregory, *Moralia* XXV.XVI 34–41 (Adriaen, *S. Gregorii*, 1259–65) with Laidcend, *Egloga* XXV.XVI 34 (Adriaen, *Egloga quam scripsi Lathcen*, 274).

[37] Liam Breatnach, 'The ecclesiastical element in the Old-Irish legal tract *Cáin Fhuithirbe*', *Peritia* 5 (1986) 36–52: 46–47; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The church and secular society', in *L'irlanda e gli irlandesi nell'alto medioevo*, Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 57 (Spoleto 2010) 261–324: 300–01. Seán Ó Coileáin, 'Mag Fuithirbe revisited', *Éigse* 23 (1989) 16–26, casts doubt on the dating of this assembly; Liam Breatnach, *A companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin 2005) 216–18 defends the traditional dating.

[38] Breatnach, '*Cáin Fhuithirbe*', 43–44: *in ropa dicubhus ni relecsiat isin cain-so*. An ancient origin for such a 'christianised' Irish law was presented elsewhere at roughly the same time as *Cáin Fhuithirbe* was issued: *Córus Bésgnai*, 37, in Liam Breatnach (ed & trans), *Córus Bésgnai: an Old Irish law tract on the church and society* (Dublin 2017) 34.

[39] CIH 764.24–25: *Anflaith gach flaith leigis anbtine fora tuaith .i. is drochflaith in flaith leigis anfethaigh arin ceile .i. in flaith leigis guin 7 gait gen innechadh*.

Abuses [of the World']).[40] The unknown, but certainly Irish, author of that work was also interested in differentiating good and bad, just and unjust rulers; the just ruler provides exactly the kind of harsh but moral justice that our two exegetes seem to have wanted: 'The justice of the king is … to restrain thefts, to punish adultery, not to exalt the wicked, not to support the unchaste and actors, to rid the earth of the impious, not to allow parricides and perjurers to live'.[41] 'On the Twelve Abuses' very probably also comes from southern Ireland in the mid to late seventh century, suggesting that the similarity of these writings' political views may arise from shared local circumstances.[42] Indeed, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín has previously suggested that the ideal of muscular christian kingship in 'On the Twelve Abuses' reflects the early emergence of 'a well-developed institution of kingship'~~development of an aggressive over-kingship~~ in Munster.[43]

The provincial over-kings of Munster, the dominant power in southern Ireland, tend to attract less attention than those of Tara, but in practice they were powerful figures. Over-kingship in Munster seems to have been, by the standards of Irish monarchy, highly intrusive in the fiscal and public life of its constituent kingdoms.[44] The earliest sources we have for the kingship of Cashel (the traditional seat of the Munster hegemons) are already shot through with Christianity, perhaps unsurprisingly for the political centre of a part of Ireland with a long history of connections to the Roman world, from where political and religious ideas could easily be imported.[45] We may get a sense of the ideology of kingship which developed in this context from a bloodthirsty Old Irish poem (the date of which is uncertain) in praise of a seventh-century king of Munster, Móenach, which describes book-reading clerics as champions of the death penalty and praised Móenach as 'a just king by whom evil folk are killed. … a blessing upon the king who has hanged them …'![46] It ended with advice to the king which echoes 1

[40] Ó Corráin, *Clavis*, ii, 745–48. Hans Hubert Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian: De duodecim abusivis saeculi und sein Einfluß auf den Kontinent, insbesondere auf die karolingischen Fürstenspiegel', in Heinz Löwe (ed), *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, 2 vols (Stuttgart 1982) ii, 568–617; Aidan Breen, 'The evidence of antique Irish exegesis in Pseudo-Cyprian, "De duodecim abusivis saeculi"', *PRIA* 87 C (1987) 71–101; Aidan Breen, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* and the bible', in Próinséas Ní Chatháin & Michael Richter (eds), *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission/Ireland and Christendom: the bible and the missions* (Stuttgart 1987) 230–45; Aidan Breen, '*De XII abusiuis*: text and transmission', in Próinséas Ní Chatháin & Michael Richter (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the early middle ages: texts and transmissions/Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Texte und Überlieferung* (Dublin 2002) 78–94.

[41] *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* 9, in Siegmund Hellmann (ed), *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi mundi*, TU 34 (Leipzig 1909) 51: *Iustitia vero regis est … furta cohibere, adulteria punire, iniquos non exaltare, impudicos et striones non nutrire, impios de terra perdere, parricidas et periurantes vivere non sinere …*

[42] Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian', 574–76, argues for a Munster origin; Breen, '*De XII abusiuis*', 83–84, assigns the work to a mid-seventh-century Irish bishop with Roman leanings, which suggests an origin in southern Ireland.

[43] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400–800', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed), *A new history of Ireland. I: prehistoric and early Ireland* (Oxford 2005) 182–234: 226; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (London 1995; 2nd edn; London 2017) 80.

[44] For the power of Munster over-kings, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Celtic kings: "priestly vegetables"?', in Stephen Baxter, Catherine Karkov, Janet L. Nelson & David Pelteret (eds), *Early medieval studies in memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham 2009) 65–80: 72–75.

[45] D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship* (Oxford 1970) 38–43; Charles Thomas, 'Early medieval Munster: thoughts upon its primary Christian phase', in Michael A. Monk & John Sheehan (eds), *Early medieval Munster: archaeology, history and society* (Cork 1998) 9–16; Francis J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high kings* (London 1973; repr. Dublin 2001) 170, 182–84, 187–88; Edel Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the medieval world, AD 400–1000: landscape, kingship and religion* (Dublin 2014) 162–67.

[46] Edited and translated by Kuno Meyer, *Miscellanea Hibernica* (Urbana, IL 1917) 17–18: *Mōinach Casil comdas rí lasa marbtar drochdōini … / … bendacht for ríg rodacroch*; Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland*, 101–02, for an alternative translation. On this poem as a source for seventh-century Munster ideals of Christian kingship, see Mark Zumbuhl, 'The practice of Irish kingship in the central middle ages', unpublished PhD diss., University of Glasgow (2005) 157–61. However, Ó Corráin, *Clavis*, ii, 1199, suggests that it may be tenth-century.

Peter 2.13–14: 'Keep the strong ones in check, have pity upon the wretched folk, / perform the will of God, whatever you may do — that is your true advantage …'.[47]

So, perhaps the anonymous commentary on the Catholic Epistles and Pseudo-Hilary do not necessarily represent 'Irish exegesis' so much as a regional approach, emerging in mid-to-late seventh-century Munster, where a christian and punitive royal authority was being promoted as the only true kingship. The Easter controversy provides the clearest evidence for just such a regional approach to christianity at this time: the churches of southern Ireland accepted the Victorian Easter dating around the 630s, at least in part due to influence from the continent, and Frankia in particular.[48] Similarly the political ideas of the 'Munster circle' may have arisen from the importation and adaptation of ideas circulating elsewhere in the Latin west; Frankish kingship increasingly emphasised its christian credentials in the seventh century, particularly in the wake of Chlothar II's unification of the Merovingian kingdoms, capped by the 614 Council of Paris and the king's subsequent edict.[49] In that text, the king called on Christ's help to repress the arrogance of evil men — just one expression of the christianisation of Virgil's *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* that is particularly noticeable in Latin works of the sixth and seventh centuries.[50] Some scholars have emphasised the role of christian clergy in promoting coercive measures and capital punishment to Irish kings;[51] but there were no fixed and universal ecclesiastical views on such things. My suggestion here is that clerics in a particular historical context in Munster may have been exposed to specific examples emerging on the continent and developed their concepts of kingship in response.

We should not be too swift, however, to assume 'Munster exceptionalism'. The Würzburg glosses, appearing in an eighth-century Irish manuscript of the Pauline Epistles, derive most likely from earlier work which, in the case of at least one glossator, probably went back to the seventh century; they therefore can provide roughly contemporary evidence to our Catholic Epistle commentaries.[52] The Old Irish glosses on Romans 13 (Paul's equivalent to 1 Peter 2.13–14) are suggestive of a similar christian understanding of worldly power to that which we see in the anonymous commentary on the Catholic Epistles in particular. Romans 13.1 ('For there is no power except from God') receives the comment: 'the wicked power he

[47] Meyer, *Miscellanea*, 17–18: *Timmairg na dōini tréna, airchis na dōini trūaga, / tol maicc Dé cecha ndēna, is ē do less …*

[48] Immo Warntjes, 'Victorius vs Dionysius: the Irish Easter controversy of AD 689', in Pádraic Moran & Immo Warntjes (eds), *Early medieval Ireland and Europe: chronology, contacts, scholarship. A festschrift for Dáibhí Ó Cróinín*, STT 14 (Turnhout 2015) 40–96: 63.

[49] Ulrich Nonn, 'Das Königtum der Merowinger und seine christliche Legitimierung', in Matthias Becher & Stefanie Dick (eds), *Völker, Reiche und Namen im frühen Mittelalter* (Munich 2010) 97–111: 110; Régine Le Jan, 'La sacralité de la royauté mérovingienne' *Annales HSS* 58 (2003) 1217–41: 1241.

[50] Chlothar II, *Edictum* 11, edited by Alfred Boretius, *Capitularia Merowingica*, MGH Capit. 1 (Hanover 1883) 22; Virgil, *Aeneid* VI 853, edited by Henry Rushton Fairclough & revised by G. P. Goold, *Virgil*, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library 63 (London 1999) i, 592. See also Cassiodorus, *Variae* VI 5.3 in Theodore Mommsen (ed), *Cassiodori Senatoris variae*, MGH AA 12 (Berlin 1894) 178; Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina* 6.2.33–34, in Friedrich Leo (ed), *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati presbyteri Italici opera poetica*, MGH AA 4.1 (Berlin 1881) 132; *Epistolae aevi Merovingici collectae* 15, in Wilhelm Gundlach (ed), *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini aevi*, MGH Epp. 3 (Berlin 1892) 460.

[51] e.g., Ó Corráin, 'The church and secular society', 294–95, 308–11.

[52] Aidan Breen, 'The biblical text and sources of the Würzburg Pauline glosses (Romans 1–6)', in Próinséas Ní Chatháin & Michael Richter (eds), *Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Bildung und Literatur/Ireland and Europe in the early middle ages: learning and literature* (Stuttgart 1996) 9–16; Pádraig Ó Néill, 'The Latin and Old-Irish glosses in Würzburg m.p.th.f. 12: unity in diversity', in Rolf Bergmann, Elvira Glaser & Claudine Moulin-Fankhänel (eds), *Mittelalterliche volkssprachige Glossen* (Heidelberg 2001) 33–46; Pádraig Ó Néill, 'The Old-Irish glosses of the *prima manus* in Würzburg, m.p.th.f. 12: text and context reconsidered', in Michael Richter & Jean-Michel Picard (eds), *Ogma: essays in Celtic studies in honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin* (Dublin 2002) 230–42.

counteth not for a power'.[53] This radically moralizes secular power in a way that Paul's text does not demand, turning the straightforward declaration that all power comes from God into a suggestion that the wicked cannot legitimately wield power. The exegete seems to have realised how dramatic his interpretation was and taken a more ambiguous line by giving two interpretations of the next part of the verse, 'those [powers] that are, are ordained by God': 'each power, it is God that has ordained it, or the powers that are from God, they are ordained'.[54] Subsequent comments come down more firmly on one side. When Romans 13.3–4 explains that the christian ought not to be afraid of earthly powers, whose purpose is to reward good and punish evil, the gloss states: 'he declares here then what are the powers unto which the service is proper, to wit, they that correct evil and magnify the good'.[55] The implication seems to be the same as that of the two Hiberno-Latin commentaries on 1 Peter 2.13–14: that is, that the christian only owes obedience to kings who punish evil and reward good behaviour.

The evidence of the Würzburg glosses complicates the possibility of a particular Munster political theology because the Old Irish of the glosses may point towards a northern origin (although one should be cautious about drawing too much significance from what are minor hints of potential dialectical variation).[56] They may also share a common source with the Latin gloss on the Pauline Epistles in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS B.10.5, the product of an early eighth-century Northumbrian centre with strong Irish connections (its modern editor suggests Lindisfarne), something which again points towards a northern context.[57] None of this necessarily disproves a specifically Munster context for the original formulation of these ideas in the Hiberno-Latin tradition; the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* was compiled by clerics from both Munster and Iona in the early eighth century, showing that intellectual co-operation across the length of Ireland and beyond was hardly unknown. The evidence for the high -levels of cultural unity across Ireland is unquestionable and we should perhaps be wary of seeing too many fine regional distinctions between the surviving texts.

Whereas I have suggested the importance of contact with the continent in shaping the political theology of the 'Munster circle', traditional historiography concentrated on the ways in which Irish political thought was shaped by vernacular culture (once, but no longer, seen as inherently less christianised than Latin). The tendency to deny obedience to 'bad' wielders of power, something we've seen in anonymous commentary, the Pseudo-Hilary and the Würzburg Glosses, may have its origin in long-established Irish tradition. In Irish political thought one particularly prominent idea is that of the *fír flaithemon*, the ruler's justice, which famously ensured prosperity through fertility and good weather.[58] The Old Irish vernacular tract *Audacht Morainn* ('Testament of Morannd'), probably an attempt from around 700 to synthesise christian and traditional political thought, attests to the centrality of justice to Irish vernacular concepts of kingship, although the particularly punitive aspects of justice highlighted above do

[53] *Würzburg glosses* 6a, in Whitley Stokes & John Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus. A collection of Old-Irish glosses, veres and scholia*, 2 vols (Cambridge 1901) i, 533: *aracumactte nangid níármisom archumactte*.

[54] *Würzburg glosses* 6a (Stokes & Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, i, 533): *nacumactte is dia rodordigestar ł nacumachte file 'a deo' itordigthi*. For the tendency to give multiple interpretations in the Würzburg glosses (although the practice was common throughout Latin exegesis), see Jean-Michel Picard, 'L'exégèse irlandaise des Épîtres de saint Paul: Les gloses latines et gaéliques de Würzburg', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 33 (2003) 155–67: 163.

[55] *Würzburg glosses* 6a (Stokes & Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, i, 534): *assindet sunt tra citné cumacte diandid cóir infognam .i. indí osechat hulcu et mórate mathi*.

[56] Paul Russell, '"What was best from every language": the early history of the Irish language', in Ó Cróinín, *New history of Ireland*, 1, 405–50: 441–42.

[57] Ó Néill, 'The Latin and Old-Irish glosses', 44–45. Unfortunately, the Cambridge manuscript now lacks the glosses on Romans 13; see John Liam de Paor (ed), *The earliest Irish glosses of the Pauline Epistles: an edition of the text and glosses of vulgate manuscript E as found in Cambridge B.10.5* (Freiburg 2016).

[58] Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship*, 9–10. For an early example, see Fergus Kelly (ed), *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin 1976) 12, 18–21.

not feature in it.[59] Later Old Irish narratives suggest that bad judgement effectively unmade a king; an unjust lord (*anflaith*) was a non-lord.[60] When this Irish tendency to differentiate true and false kings on the basis of their 'justice' was applied to the interpretation of biblical texts on the ideal ruler's punishment of the wicked and rewarding of the good, then Munster theologians may have found it easy to decide that kings who failed to impose strict christian justice were not really kings at all. The two works on the Catholic Epistles may, therefore, reflect *both* traditional ideas common across Ireland *and* their modification in a specific regional context where exposure to the continent was particularly great.

In the circumstances, firm conclusions would be foolish. The anonymous commentary on the Catholic Epistles and Pseudo-Hilary on the same text do not give the modern historian a lot with which to work, but they suggest, along with related material reflecting the ideas of the 'Munster circle', a clear idea of a moralised and punitive christian kingship circulating in seventh-century Munster and thereby possibly help to provide a context for 'On the Twelve Abuses (of the World)', one of the most influential Irish texts of the Middle Ages. The appearance of closely related ideas in the Würzburg glosses suggests that these southern texts existed in an 'All Ireland' context, but they also were part of a broader Latin debate about the relationship between Christianity and political power: a debate in which they agreed with seventh-century Frankish writers but disagreed with Bede in early eighth-century Northumbria. To fully understand these early Irish commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, indeed to understand all 'Irish exegesis', we must recognise that they were both more and less than simply Irish. These works arose in specific, if shadowy, local and regional contexts, while also taking their place in the wider intellectual and political culture of early medieval Europe.

[59] Warfare and defence are important to the king's justice, but bloodshed in general is condemned: *Audacht Morainn* 15, 29 (Kelly 7, 11). On the text as a synthesis produced in a Christian environment, see Ó Corráin, 'The church and secular society', 290; Charles Doherty, 'Kingship in early Ireland', in Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The kingship and landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) ~~00~~3–3~~100~~: 27.

[60] Bart Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* (Dublin 2000) 76–81; Ralph O'Connor, *The destruction of Da Derga's hostel: kingship and narrative artistry in a mediaeval Irish saga* (Oxford 2013) 315–16.

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