

Assignment 1 – HPCS 6015 – Celtic Sanctity and Spirituality.

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What makes a saint a saint rather than merely a good Christian?

Introduction

This essay will examine the question of what makes a saint a saint, rather than merely a good Christian. Initially the essay will examine various definitions of what it means to be a saint, the process of a person becoming a saint, both historically and currently, and then looking at how this can be related to various Celtic saints such as Saint David, Saint Patrick and Saint Non. The essay will also examine how the church has grouped or classified saints as a way of understanding the attributes that may be associated within sainthood, and finally look at what it might mean to merely be a good Christian.

What is a saint?

If we look at a dictionary definition of the word *Saint*, we can find that it is defined as:

The title given to a person who has received an official honour from the Christian, especially Roman Catholic, Church for having lived in a good and holy way.¹

If we contrast this to a definition of a ‘good Christian’ below that comes from a teacher of theology at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, we can see parallels between the two definitions:

It simply means a conscious life according to the grace that God reveals to us in nature, in ourselves, and in Jesus.²

Both of these viewpoints would suggest similar behaviours would be required to be defined as a saint or a good Christian.

We can also look at a definition provided by Grace Theological Seminary that states:

In its most basic sense, a saint is a “holy one”, someone who is set apart for God’s special purposes. As a result, every follower of Jesus Christ is a saint.³

We can see a similar perspective put forward by Pope Francis in a meditation delivered in January of 2016. The meditation itself was in relation to King David, however, the opening

¹ Cambridge Dictionary, *Saint* (2023) <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/saint>> [accessed 22 March 2023].

² Baptist News, *What Does It Mean To Be A ‘Good Christian’?* (2021) < <https://baptistnews.com/article/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-good-christian/>> [accessed 22 March 2023].

³ Grace Theological Seminary, *What Does Saint Mean?* (2021) < [What Does Saint Mean? - Grace Theological Seminary](#)> [accessed 22 March 2023].

line of the meditation stated, 'Despite their sins, every man and every woman has been chosen to be a saint'.⁴

It is easily possible to see the parallels between the thoughts of Pope Francis and the thoughts put forward by the Grace Teaching Seminary. If we contrast these definitions to the previous ones, we can see a somewhat more philosophical viewpoint, but still one that could suggest similar behaviours that would be required to be defined as both a saint and a good Christian. We can also find in Leviticus 11:44 'Ye shall be holy; for I am holy'.⁵ We can see from this a parallel with the definition provided by Grace Theological Seminary. However, accepting that not everyone has had the title of saint bestowed upon them, we must accept that there is some differentiation between a 'good Christian' and a saint, if we if we accept that we are all holy within the eyes of God, and it is this differentiation that needs to be understood to be able to answer the question posed within this essay.

We can look to the formal process for canonisation to try and understand what an individual needs to have done to be recognised as a saint. This examination will begin by looking at the current process for recognising an individual as a saint. There are several stages in the process of canonisation, that is the process of being recognised as a saint, the first of which is to understand whether the individual who is being proposed as a saint is as a result of martyrdom or as a result of the religious or holy life that they have led, which would then lead to slightly different qualifying criteria. Following their death, a period of five years is required to start the process of canonisation, although the Pope does have the right and authority to waive this time period, as was the case with the beatification of Mother Teresa.⁶ The second stage is to investigate any evidence that is being presented to ensure that the individual has lived a life of virtue or has indeed been martyred for their religious beliefs. This evidence is reviewed by a bishop of the diocese where the proposed individual died. Assuming that this evidence is found worthy, it is then presented to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints within the Vatican.⁷ This evidence is then further reviewed by the church, including by the general promoter of the faith or so-called Devil's advocate, who's role is to question and critically examine the evidence to try and find any flaws within it, such that the full story of the person's life is known and understood.⁸ Once this stage has been completed, and the bishops are satisfied with the evidence presented to them, it is passed to the Pope, who can then assuming that they are satisfied with the evidence, grant the title of venerable to the candidate.⁹ The next stage is an assessment in readiness for beatification, i.e. that the person who is being proposed for sainthood has lived a Holy life.¹⁰ For an individual to be beatified, the church needs to verify that a miracle can be attributed to the individual,

⁴ The Holy See, *Saint And Sinner* (2016) < https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20160119_saint-and-sinner.html > [accessed 23 March 2023].

⁵ *The Holy Bible* Leviticus 11:44, King James Version, Oxford University Press.

⁶ BBC, *How Does Someone Become A Saint?* (2014) < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-27140646> > [accessed 23 March 2023].

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Britannica, *Canonisation* (2023) < <https://www.britannica.com/topic/canonization> > [accessed 23 March 2023].

⁹ BBC, *How Does Someone Become A Saint?* (2014) < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-27140646> > [accessed 23 March 2023].

¹⁰ Cambridge Dictionary, *Beatification* (2023) < <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/beatification> > [accessed 13 April 2023].

and that this miracle has occurred after the persons death, and that the miracle is a direct result of them interceding with God after prayers have been made to them.¹¹ It is also at this stage that there is the potential for a difference of process, dependent upon whether the individual has been proposed for sainthood as a result of martyrdom, or as a result of their holy life. It is the case that with martyrdom, the requirement for attributing and proving a miracle to be beatified is not required.¹² The final stage is that of canonisation. To achieve this their needs to be verified evidence of a further miracle that can be attributed to the individual as a result of prayer and their intercession following their beatification. This requirement needs to be met for both martyrs and people who have lived a holy life. Once all of these requirements have been met, the individual can be declared a saint, by the Pope, at a special Mass.¹³

However, it needs to be recognized that a formal process of canonisation only came into existence in 1234, having been created by Pope Gregory IX.¹⁴ Prior to this, the process was regulated solely by the Bishops within their diocese with a martyr effectively becoming a saint when their remains were buried within a church,¹⁵ or those deemed to be holy being recognised as such by the church.¹⁶ As was noted by Catholiceducation.org, this led to saints being created based on legend and, as was the case with a Swedish church, a monk being canonised ‘who was killed in a drunken brawl’ even though the monk themselves had been drunk at the time.¹⁷ Ultimately the Catholic Church reviewed its list of saints in 1969 to determine if there was actual evidence that saints had lived and if they had whether they had lived a life that was holy. It is noted by Catholic.org that this review revealed that there was ‘little proof that many saints, including some very popular ones ever lived’.¹⁸ They further note that this led to the feast day of St Christopher being removed from the general calendar of feast days for saints.¹⁹ From all of this we can start to understand that the definition of what makes a saint a saint, rather than merely a good Christian has evolved during the course of history, an evolution that is important when assessing the specific attributes of Celtic saints, due to the time period in which they would have been recognised. To understand this further we will now look at some of the attributes in relation to specific Celtic saints, starting with Saint David.

St David is well known and recognised as the patron saint of Wales. To understand the history of Saint David we will examine his life as documented by Rhygyfarch. What we

¹¹ BBC, *How Does Someone Become A Saint?* (2014) < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-27140646>> [accessed 23 March 2023].

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Catholic Education Resource Centre, *The Process Of Becoming A Saint* (1998) < <https://catholiceducation.org/resources/the-process-of-becoming-a-saint>> [accessed 23 March 2023].

¹⁵ Britannica, *Canonisation* (2023) < <https://www.britannica.com/topic/canonization>> [accessed 23 March 2023].

¹⁶ Catholic Education Resource Centre, *The Process Of Becoming A Saint* (1998) < <https://catholiceducation.org/resources/the-process-of-becoming-a-saint>> [accessed 23 March 2023].

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Catholic Online, *Frequently Asked Questions About Saints* (2022) < [Frequently Asked Questions about Saints - Saints & Angels - Catholic Online](https://www.catholic.org/saints/faq/)> [accessed 24 March 2023].

¹⁹ Ibid.

know about Rhygyfarch is that he lived in the mid to late eleventh century,²⁰ which places him approximately 500 years after the time of Saint David himself. The significance of this is that it already places a main source document about the life and works of David as one that would have relied upon ‘knowledge’ contained within existing documentation of the time that it was written, rather than first hand eye-witness account from the author. Whilst this doesn’t necessarily discredit the information held within Rhygyfarch’s *Vita*, it does mean that we need to be careful of the interpretation of it, and understand the historical context of it. The first thing that can be noticed within the *Vita* is that Rhygyfarch refers to Saint David. From a chronological perspective, this raises concerns as David was not canonised until 1120 by Pope Callixtus II,²¹ however, Rhygyfarch himself is noted as having died in 1099, some 21 years before David’s canonisation. It should also be noted that the canonisation of David by Pope Callixtus II took place before a formalisation of the process by Pope Gregory IX in 1234. However, for the purposes of this essay, we will concentrate on the actions and deeds of David that Rhygyfarch noted.

Within the *Vita*, Rhygyfarch notes many miracles that are attributed to David, and as noted by J Wyn Evans, ‘Miracles are what defines a saint as a saint’.²² These can be said to have begun even before his birth. Within chapter 3 on the *Vita* we learn that the birth of David was foretold by an angel during a conversation with St Patrick.²³ We also learn that in chapter 5 of the *Vita* that St Gildas was unable to preach in the presence of the unborn David.²⁴ If we move forward in time in the life of David we learn that when he was baptised, a spring of water appeared where there hadn’t previously been a spring, and that the water from this spring restored the sight of a blind man.²⁵ We can find a repetition of this miracle in chapter 11 when David heals the eyes of Paulinus by touching his hands to them.²⁶

If we go further through ahead in time, we come to what may be regarded as the greatest miracle recounted in Rhygyfarch’s *Vita*, which occurred when David declined to preach at a synod. Within this aspect of the *Vita* having declined to preach himself at the synod, he offered prayers instead, and then ultimately asked a young boy to speak in his place, causing the ground to rise up beneath the boy.²⁷ It is possible to view this episode as an intercession as David offered prayers instead of his own voice to preach at the synod. However, again we find this miracle being performed whilst David was alive rather than an intercession following prayers after his death.

²⁰ Richard Sharpe, ‘Which Text Is Rhygyfarch’s Life Of St David?’, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 90-105 (p. 90).

²¹ St. David Of Wales, *Saint David And Saint Davids Day* (2023) < https://sdow.org/saint-david/?doing_wp_cron=1680609643.1298520565032958984375 > [accessed 28 March 2023].

²² Right Rev J. Wyn Evans, *Lecture On St David* [video]. < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYcWeC7lkRs&t=3s> > [accessed 28 March 2023].

²³ Rhygyfarch’s Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 111).

²⁴ Rhygyfarch’s Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 113).

²⁵ Rhygyfarch’s Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 117).

²⁶ Rhygyfarch’s Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 119).

²⁷ Rhygyfarch’s Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 143-145).

If these miracles that Rhygyfarch has attested to David are compared to the various criteria that have been examined previously in this essay, we can find that against the criteria stated by the Right Rev J Wyn Evans, David would be classified as a saint, as he had performed miracles. If however we compare these to the criteria set out by the Vatican, it is possible that David would not have met these, as the miracles were performed before his death, and were not an intercession to God through prayer subsequent to his death. With these criteria should we then still regard David as a saint?

It is also possible from the *Vita* to look at other aspects of David's life that have been mentioned. We learn that David founded twelve monasteries during his lifetime including Glastonbury, Bath Raglan and Llangyfelach.²⁸ With these actions it would be possible to argue that David had led a religious and holy life, which as has been examined earlier, is one of the starting criteria or being proposed for canonisation under the current process used by the Vatican. However, it is possible to contrast this to the founding of the first abbey of what became the Cluniac monastic order which was founded in 910 A.D. by William who was the then Duke of Aquitaine.²⁹ William was not made a saint as a result of these actions, and yet they are arguably similar to the founding of churches by David. To this the question must then be asked as to why one person was made a saint and the other not? Does this make William a good Christian instead? It could be argued that William did not follow a religious way of being in other aspects of his life whereas David did, and there is no evidence to suggest that he did lead an overtly religious life, other than the founding of monasteries which Geneanet.org notes as being 'numerous'.³⁰ However, it could also be argued that David did perform miracles which William did not. As such, as stated by Right Rev J Wyn Evans, 'Miracles are what defines a saint as a saint', would appear to hold true.³¹

If we now turn our attention to a different Celtic saint, namely St Patrick, we can conduct a similar examination. St Patrick is another very well-known Celtic saint and is recognised as the patron Saint of Ireland. It has been documented that Patrick was born circa 400 A.D.,³² and as we can learn from reading Rhygyfarch's *Vita* of St David, Patrick was already alive some 30 years prior to the birth of David.³³ As has already been noted in relation to David, Rhygyfarch refers to Patrick as Saint, within his writings, and as has already been noted, there was no formal process for canonisation at the time that Rhygyfarch would have written the *Vita* of St David. It is interesting to note that Irishcentral.com stated that 'Patrick has

²⁸ Rhygyfarch's Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 119-121).

²⁹ Abbaye de Cluny, *History Of The Monument* (2018) < [³⁰ Geneanet.org, *Duke William I *The Pious* Of Aquitaine* < \[³¹ Right Rev J. Wyn Evans, *Lecture On St David* \\[video\\]. < \\[³² Patrick, *Patrick In His Own Words* \\\(Veritas Publications, 1975\\\) p. 53.\\]\\(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYcWeC7lkRs&t=3s> \\[accessed 28 March 2023\\].</p>
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³³ Rhygyfarch's Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 111).

never been canonised by the Catholic Church and is a saint in name only'.³⁴ In the article it was further stated that the Church had previously given the title of saint to those who had been 'recognised by tradition as being exceptionally holy during their lifetimes' so it is to these actions, as well as any miracles that we need to look to determine what made Patrick a saint.³⁵

In the book *Discovering Saint Patrick* by Thomas O'Loughlin, a Professor of Historical Theology from Nottingham University, we learn that Patrick was born into a family that O'Loughlin has described as 'gentleman farmer class', and that Patrick was proud of this social status.³⁶ If we compare this statement to the teachings that can be found in the book of Proverbs in the Holy Bible we learn that according to Proverbs 11:2 'When pride cometh, then cometh shame',³⁷ and that according to Proverbs 16:5 'Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord'.³⁸ It might be considered somewhat astonishing that a person who proclaims their pride would then ultimately be considered a saint when considering these teachings, especially at when considering at the time that there was no formal canonisation process, and that as such it would have been common consent that would have proclaimed Patrick as a saint. It is an argument that could be reinforced by the teaching found in Matthew 5:5 which states, 'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth'.³⁹

However, this is perhaps offset by his other actions during his lifetime. Our Lady of the Rosary Library (OLRL) cites *Saints Who Raised the Dead: True Stories of 400 Resurrection miracles* by the Rev. Fr Albert J. Herbert, which describes that Patrick 'consecrated 350 bishops, erected 700 churches, and ordained 500 priests'.⁴⁰ In this we can see perhaps that Patrick did indeed lead a holy life, as opposed to one of pride, as evidenced by how he spread the Catholic religion throughout Ireland. We also learn from this article that Patrick is accredited with having performed a great many miracles during his lifetime. Again, we can find from the OLRL article, that Patrick is credited with having performed resurrection miracles. Citing a 12th century Cistercian monk, Jocelin from Furness,⁴¹ the article tells us that Patrick resurrected thirty-three men, some of whom had been dead for 'many years'.⁴² This theme of resurrecting the dead was also noted and attested to David, within *Rhygyfarch's Vita*, and indeed in chapter three of the *Vita* Rhygyfarch notes that Patrick 'raised up an old man, named Cruimther, who had been buried near that shore for twelve years'.⁴³ Whilst Patrick's reasons for this were not made clear within the *Vita*, it would undoubtedly be

³⁴ IrishCentral.com, *St Patrick Was Never Canonized A Saint By The Catholic Church* (2023) <[Patrick was never canonized a saint by the Catholic Church \(irishcentral.com\)](https://www.irl.org/lives/patrick.shtml)> [accessed 30 March 2023].

³⁵ IrishCentral.com, *St Patrick Was Never Canonized A Saint By The Catholic Church* (2023) <[Patrick was never canonized a saint by the Catholic Church \(irishcentral.com\)](https://www.irl.org/lives/patrick.shtml)> [accessed 30 March 2023].

³⁶ Thomas O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), p. 47.

³⁷ *The Holy Bible* Proverbs 11:2, King James Version, Oxford University Press.

³⁸ *The Holy Bible* Proverbs 16:5, King James Version, Oxford University Press.

³⁹ *The Holy Bible* Matthew 5:5, King James Version, Oxford University Press.

⁴⁰ Our Lady of the Rosary Library, *Resurrection Miracles Performed By St. Patrick, Apostle Of Ireland* <<https://www.olrl.org/lives/patrick.shtml>> [accessed 30 March 2023].

⁴¹ Other sources have the names spelt as Jocelyn.

⁴² Our Lady of the Rosary Library, *Resurrection Miracles Performed By St. Patrick, Apostle Of Ireland* <<https://www.olrl.org/lives/patrick.shtml>> [accessed 30 March 2023].

⁴³ Rhygyfarch's Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 113).

classified as miraculous, and provides us with two separate occurrences of Patrick performing this miracle.

The last miracle that will be examined in relation to Patrick is the driving out of snakes from Ireland. It is possible to find different accounts of this, and it is questionable as to whether this miracle is based in legend and folklore, or whether it actually happened. Irishcentral.com, again referring to the writings of Jocelyn of Furness, states that having been attacked by snakes during a fast that he was conducting on a hillside ‘chased the snakes and they never returned to the island’.⁴⁴ Other sources seek to refute claims that Patrick driving out snakes from Ireland was a metaphor for removing druids from Ireland. The website for the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids (OBOD) notes that ‘druids were sometimes referred to as ‘adders’’,⁴⁵ which may account for how this legend/miracle came into being, although it has also been suggested that this particular miracle was not associated with Patrick until recorded by Jocelyn of Furness in the 12th century.⁴⁶ With all of the information about Patrick's life, what we see is a person who greatly increased the popularity and spread of the Christian Catholic religion within Ireland, and to whom a great many miracles were attested. In parallel with David, we find that the miracles associated with him occur prior to his death and are not necessarily an intercession as a result of prayer, which as we have previously seen, would be a requirement under the standard current process for canonisation. What we can also note within the life of Patrick, is that there has never been a formal canonisation, and that as such he could be considered a saint by tradition and popular belief.

Having looked at the specifics of two Celtic saints to determine common attributes, we can now look at how the church itself has viewed saints and classified them to help to understand what makes a saint a saint. In the book *Why Can The Dead Do Such Great Things?* Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at the University of Saint Andrews, noted that the church separated saints into different categories,⁴⁷ and also notes that ‘Sanctity is not an identifiable feature but an attribute: saints are people who are treated as saints’.⁴⁸ These specific categories were separated as The Virgin Mary, angels, apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins. For the purposes of this essay, it is possible to ignore the first three of these categories in relation to Celtic saints as they are distinct categories that that will not change. We can however look at the remaining categories and assess how David and Patrick may fit within this. We know from Rhygyfarch's *Vita* of Saint David and from documents of Patrick's life, that neither of them were martyred for their faith, David dying in a monastery ‘at the hour of Matins’,⁴⁹ whilst Patrick died at monastery in Ulidia having been told by an angel to

⁴⁴ IrishCentral.com, *St Patrick Was Never Canonized A Saint By The Catholic Church* (2023) <[Patrick was never canonized a saint by the Catholic Church \(irishcentral.com\)](https://www.irishcentral.com/st-patrick-was-never-canonized-a-saint-by-the-catholic-church)> [accessed 30 March 2023].

⁴⁵ OBOD, *Animal Lore* <<https://druidry.org/druid-way/teaching-and-practice/druid-animal-lore>> [accessed 30 March 2023].

⁴⁶ Ireland's Folklore and Traditions, *St Patrick: False Myths, Folklore And Traditions Of His Feast Day* (2017) <<https://irishfolklore.wordpress.com/tag/the-snakes-were-druids/>> [accessed 30 March 2023].

⁴⁷ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can The Dead Do Such Great Things?*, (Woodstock, Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 150.

⁴⁸ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can The Dead Do Such Great Things?*, (Woodstock, Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 137.

⁴⁹ Rhygyfarch's *Life Of St David*, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 151).

return to the monastery,⁵⁰ so they would obviously not fall into this particular classification. For the classification of confessor, we need to understand the distinction between a martyr and a confessor. Bartlett notes that the title of confessor arose in the fourth century following persecution of the Church and recognising that not all Holy people suffered a violent death as a result of their religion.⁵¹ Again, with this categorisation, it must be questioned whether either David or Patrick would be recognised as fitting within, when the evidence of their lives would not suggest persecution as a result of their faith.

The final category that Bartlett described was that of virgin. Bartlett notes that this almost exclusively pertains to female rather than male saints.⁵² With this in mind, we can look at Saint Non as an example, and again refer to Rhygyfarch's *Vita*, where she is referred to as Saint Nonnita. Rhygyfarch notes that Nonnita was a nun and also a virgin. However, Nonnita was raped by the King of Ceredig and conceived David.⁵³ From a physical perspective, Nonnita would no longer have been a virgin. However, as noted by Bartlett, 'a virgin who intended to remain so but was in fact raped still earned the crown'.⁵⁴ From this, we can see that Nonnita, St. Non, would be categorised as a saintly virgin within the criteria described by Bartlett. We also learn from Rhygyfarch's *Vita* that miracles were associated with Non, such as giving birth to David, bathed in golden light, even though a storm raged in the area at the time.⁵⁵ As is noted on the St. Davids Cathedral website, there are parallels that can be drawn between this story and the story of the birth of Jesus, with these parallels existing for the purpose of highlighting the holy nature of the individuals within the story, in this case David and Non. It does however mean that we must treat the story with a certain amount of caution as to whether it can be regarded as real or whether it should be regarded as legend. It would be possible to suppose that this aspect of predominantly female sanctity derives from Mary being a virgin and Jesus being the result of immaculate conception, thereby placing creating a direct link between virginity and Godliness. We can also look at how David and Patrick might be regarded for this particular categorisation. Within the book *Discovering Saint Patrick*, O'Loughlin notes that within Patrick's own writing, in this particular instance the *Confessio*, that Patrick refers to 'the religious chastity that I have chosen for Christ' as well as giving praise to women who have remained virgins.⁵⁶ It would be possible from these particular statements to believe that Patrick was unmarried, chaste, and potentially a virgin, and so could potentially satisfy the classification described by Bartlett, and it is indeed the conclusion of O'Loughlin that Patrick 'was one of those fifth-century clerics who believed that a perfect minister of grace would be celibate'.⁵⁷ We could also draw a similar conclusion

⁵⁰ IrishCentral.com, *How Did St. Patrick Die?* (2023) < <https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/how-did-saint-patrick-die> > [accessed 31 March 2023].

⁵¹ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can The Dead Do Such Great Things?*, (Woodstock, Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 185.

⁵² Robert Bartlett, *Why Can The Dead Do Such Great Things?*, (Woodstock, Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 202.

⁵³ Rhygyfarch's Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 113).

⁵⁴ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can The Dead Do Such Great Things?*, (Woodstock, Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 202.

⁵⁵ Rhygyfarch's Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 115-117).

⁵⁶ Thomas O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), p. 50.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

in relation to David. Within the *Vita*, Rhygyfarch noted in relation to David that ‘he grew in virtues and merits, and keeping his flesh innocent of a wife’s embraces, he was made a priest’.⁵⁸

We have examined in detail, some of the attributes of specific Celtic saints. If we compare these to what would define a good Christian. ChristianWeek.org defines a good Christian as:

...kind and decent people. Christians are compassionate, generous and resourceful. Good Christians are relentless advocates for those who find themselves on the wrong end of the score and diligently work to address the injustice.⁵⁹

If we look at this specific definition, it would be difficult to argue that if a Christian displayed these particular characteristics, that they would not be defined as a good Christian. It should also be noted that these particular characteristics are not unique to the Christian faith, and as such displaying these does not make a person Christian, and indeed that these characteristics are promoted in other religions. It could be argued that these particular characteristics are just what represents being a nice person, irrespective of what religion is followed or indeed if no religion is followed. From that we could suggest that there must be something else that makes the person not just a good person, but a good Christian. Compassion.com defined a Christian as:

...someone who has put faith and trust in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ through His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection, our behaviour mirrors, reflects and resembles Christ.⁶⁰

From this we can see that to be a good Christian would be a combination of the faith in the work of Jesus, and displaying the sorts of deeds described by ChristianWeek.org. Compassion.org goes further than this however, and by saying that it is not just about good deeds, that it also requires the person to have a good heart.⁶¹ They define this by saying:

When we commit our lives to serving Him and serving others as He served us, our behaviour and mindset reflects the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Christ is with us and in us.⁶²

We can now start to see that the lives and acts of the saints that we have examined within this essay fulfil the requirements that have been suggested for a good Christian. It would be possible to suggest that the requirements of being a good Christian are perhaps a prerequisite for becoming a saint, that they are not mutually exclusive. Although not a Celtic saint, we could look at the example of Mother Teresa of Calcutta as a more contemporary example of this. It would be difficult to argue that

⁵⁸ Rhygyfarch’s Life Of St David, in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation* ed. by J. Wyn Evans & Jonathan M. Wooding (Boydell Press, 2007) pp. 107-155 (p. 117).

⁵⁹ Christian Week, *What Does It Mean To Be A Good Christian?* (2020) < <https://www.christianweek.org/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-good-christian/> > [accessed 3 April 2023].

⁶⁰ Compassion.org, *What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?* (2023) < <https://www.compassion.com/about/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-christian.htm#:~:text=As%20a%20Christian%2C%20someone%20who,others%20is%20behaving%20like%20Christ.>> [accessed 3 April 2023].

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

her actions throughout her life as a nun would not satisfy the criteria that have been suggested by ChristianWeek.org and compassion.org, and indeed she was canonised by Pope Francis I in 2016.⁶³

Conclusions

To try and provide an answer to the initial question of what makes a saint a saint, rather than merely a good Christian we have examined some of the attributes of specific Celtic saints, the process that exists for a person to become a saint, and also what might be said to define a good Christian. From all of this, what we can see is that at different points in time, what would define a saint as a saint can be said to be different. Prior to 1234 we have found that there was no formal process in existence and that the application of the title saint to an individual was done by a more localised bishop, based upon popular thoughts and beliefs. We can also see that in our current time period, the Celtic saints that we have examined may not have been classified as saints within this current process, based upon the information presented within the historical records, as the miracles that have been attested to them occurred prior to their deaths and as such do not act as an intercession with God. What is perhaps of greater interest is the similarities that exist between what defines a good Christian and what would define a saint. To denote a good Christian as someone who commits their life to serving God, puts their faith and trust in the work of Jesus Christ, and being advocates for those in need are all attributes that could be applied to the saints as well as good Christians, so we could easily come to the conclusion that it is the performing of miracles that differentiates a good Christian from a saint. We could also easily argue that some of the miracles that have been attributed to the Celtic Saints that have been examined within this essay would not be deemed socially acceptable within our modern time period, specifically the resurrection of the dead, as some of these resurrection miracles could be deemed to be for questionable purposes such as the resurrection, by Saint Patrick, of a man who testified to the innocence of Saint Patrick when he had been accused of stealing and had been sentenced to death.⁶⁴ However, it is perhaps best summed up by the Saint David's Cathedral website which says:

We may think of a saint as being someone who is perfect, but many saints lives tell a different story. They tell of people following God, but often failing or having things happen to them which are cruel or unjust. What marks them out is that they hold to their faith and find that God is with them, no matter what.⁶⁵

Word Count: 4663

⁶³ Britannica, *Mother Teresa* (2023) < <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mother-Teresa> > [accessed 3 April 2023].

⁶⁴ Our Lady of the Rosary Library, *Resurrection Miracles Performed By St. Patrick, Apostle Of Ireland* < <https://www.olrl.org/lives/patrick.shtml> > [accessed 30 March 2023].

⁶⁵ Saint Davids Cathedral, *Who Is Saint Non?* (2023) < [Who is St Non? | St Davids Cathedral](#) > [accessed 4 April 2023].

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