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Historiographical Observations

The only words attributed to Laurence O'Toole are those lamentations spoken on his death bed in Normandy and captured in his *Vita S.Laurencii* by an unnamed canon of Eu.¹ None of Laurence O'Toole's correspondence survives. Much of what we know about the archbishop's actions come from records of events where Laurence was present or that he influenced, church councils and political treaties, and from foreign observers such as Gerald of Wales. Laurence lived at a time when the careful production of manuscripts was making written historical records much more common, but his *Vita* bears the many legendary and miraculous attributes of the ancient Celtic saints such as Kevin, his predecessor in Glendalough. The *Vita* must then be compared to the historical records and analyses that do exist.

While the various authors who have described Laurence all had their biases, all these writers, apart from Donnchadh Ó Corráin, have found only good things to say about Laurence's character and qualities as an archbishop. Gerald of Wales, hardly an ally of the Irish, memorialised Laurence as "a worthy and just man," and credits his shrine in Normandy with producing miracles: "the Lord did not suffer his light to be hid."²

The historians who have studied the life of Laurence O'Toole have predominantly been Irish Catholic clergy, such as F.X. Martin, Aubrey Gwynn, and John O'Hanlon, with Charles Plummer, an Anglican, and Goddard Henry Orpen, an agnostic, being notable exceptions. The most recent biography of Laurence was written by Desmond Forristal in 1973, himself a Catholic priest. Ó Corráin, while highly familiar with the Irish Catholic Church, was also a member of the laity. With the dearth of sources on Laurence's life, priests have been the most likely scholars to be motivated to conduct the difficult research into Laurence's life. Indeed, most discussions to be found in internet search results on the topic of Laurence are those of Irish Catholic dioceses and parishes, such as the Archdiocese of Dublin, and parishes named for Laurence inside and outside of Ireland. Even in France, the home of the community that advocated for Laurence's canonisation, and which maintained Eu as a shrine to the saint, there are few mentions of Laurence. The very limited sources on his life, and the connection of those that exist to his holy works and canonisation, means Laurence remains, where he is discussed at all, an Irish Catholic saint before anything else. Unlike other Irish saints such as Patrick, Laurence is not venerated in other churches such as the Orthodox churches and the Church of England, further limiting the scope of historical interest. Even Kevin of Glendalough, a saint whose history contains no contemporary sources, is venerated by the Eastern Orthodox Church, a distinction that Laurence did not receive.

¹ There exist several Lives of Saint Laurence, including perhaps multiple Lives written in support of Laurence's canonisation, but only the one by Surius (a pseudonym), a canon of Eu, appears to be complete. Desmond Forristal located several other Lives, which he credits Maurice F. Roche for identifying and editing, but despite Forristal's claims about their wide availability in 1973, they are not easily accessible in 2024.

² Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis Containing the Topography of Ireland, and the History of the Conquest of Ireland* (London, G. Bell & sons, 1913), pp. 292–93 <<http://archive.org/details/cu31924060299470>> [accessed 22 September 2024].

As Ireland's most recently canonised saint prior to 1973, there was a revival in interest in his career and miracles during the closing decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of which surrounded the Easter Uprising of 1917. As such, Irish interest in Laurence dramatically increased, with the corollary that works on Laurence of this period are strongly influenced by the anti-British sentiment of the period. Likewise, the earlier suppression of Catholicism in Ireland likely precluded scholarly works on the archbishop during the many centuries of English rule. As contemporary sources that focus on Laurence are meagre, and with his saint's *Vita* written decades after his death, it is fortuitous for history that Laurence, as Archbishop of Dublin, was, as Forristal notes in the title of his biography, *the man in the middle* of the conquest.

The Dictionary of Irish Biography's (DIB) entry on Laurence, authored by Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, is thorough and comprehensive. Mac Shamhráin taught and studied at many of Ireland's most prominent universities, including Trinity University and University College Dublin. Mac Shamhráin's biography of Laurence collects many aspects of Laurence's career that are difficult to locate in other publications, and there are several instances where Mac Shamhráin directly addresses the *Vita S. Laurencii* and its claims about Laurence.³

Donnchadh Ó Corráin (1942-2017) was one of the most accomplished Irish scholars on the topic of medieval Ireland and the early Irish church of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The scope of Ó Corráin's 45 years of work, with his concentration on pre-Norman studies and especially his interest in Irish Christianity, combined with his thorough knowledge of medieval Irish, makes him an obligatory source on the topic of Laurence's time and the political and ecclesiastical Ireland preceding Laurence's career. His 2017 work *The Irish Church, Its Reform and the English Invasion*, takes much of the existing scholarship on the pre-Norman Irish Church and overturns it. Ó Corráin's

Ó Corráin distributes his criticism among secular and church leaders alike, while also studying low-ranking priests, monks, and the Irish laity. One of the most important aspects of Ó Corráin's work is his determination to demystify the ecclesiastical and monastic structure of pre-Norman Ireland, a topic that Ó Corráin claims has been heavily neglected by historians of his and previous eras.

Malachy is the subject of much of Ó Corráin's criticism. While he found Malachy to be an exceptionally competent leader and organiser, he argues Malachy's introduction of the Augustinian and Cistercian orders had a lasting negative impact on the Irish Church by encouraging land and income confiscation by a new class of bishops.⁴ In short, Ó Corráin believes "church reform" was simply a more polite method of stating "confiscation." He also finds fault with Malachy's actions as Archbishop of Armagh and as Bishop of Connor after he was persuaded to step down from his position as primate, finding himself bitter and frustrated in his new diocese. Ó Corráin holds Malachy's disdain for his new community produced exaggerations and rumours about abuses, "barbaric" customs, and sinful behaviour attached to the Irish that Canterbury and

³ Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Ua Tuathail, Lorcán (O'Toole, Laurence)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. by James Quinn (Royal Irish Academy, 2009), doi:10.3318/dib.008757.v1.

⁴ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *The Irish Church, Its Reform and the English Invasion*, Trinity Medieval Ireland Series, 2 (Four Courts Press, 2017), p. 119.

Rome treated as grave fact.⁵ Ó Corráin is disdainful of Malachy's hagiographer, Bernard of Clairvaux, who he finds to have uncritically documented and repeated what Ó Corráin considers untruths about of the Irish clergy and laity in his letters. Given Bernard's status as one of the most widely read authors in Christendom, his accusations unsurprisingly formed the core of Adrian IV's commission to Henry II in *Laudabiliter* and Alexander III's condemnation of "crimes and enormities" among the Irish.⁶ Ó Corráin is also highly critical of Alexander, finding him willing to ignore clear evidence of genuine reform in Ireland in favour of rehabilitating Henry II after the murder of Thomas Becket - likely because Alexander needed Henry to counterbalance Frederick Barbarossa's antipopes and campaigns against Rome.⁷ Lastly, Ó Corráin argues that the Irish bishops - to include Laurence - wilfully submitted to Henry at the Second Synod of Cashel and gave him broad authority over the Irish Church that even *Laudabiliter* did not authorize.⁸ This willingness to group Laurence with members of the clergy that Ó Corráin criticises effectively makes Ó Corráin the only source on Laurence that is at all critical, although he does not single out Laurence.

John O'Hanlon (1821-1905), one of the most accomplished Irish historians of all, wrote the first modern biography of Laurence, with his footnotes cataloguing every medieval source available on the saint. Besides his detailed chronicle of the events of Laurence's life, he briefly discusses the family ancestry of Laurence, the political environment of Ireland, especially the role of Diarmait Mac Murchada, and includes a long section on the cult of Laurence at Eu, including the efforts of the monastic community of Eu to protect the saint's relics.⁹ Desmond Forristal (1930-2012) was the author of *The Man in the Middle* (1973), the most recent biography of Laurence. Forristal, who was a priest, playwright, and documentary television producer experienced in media distribution, builds on the work of O'Hanlon and brings Laurence's story to a twentieth century audience. Forristal adds narrative flourishes to bring Laurence's story to a wider audience.

Aubrey Gwynn (1892-1983) and John A. Watt produced two of the most extensive studies on medieval Ireland of the 20th century, Gwynn's *The Irish church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries* (1992) and Watt's *The Church and the two nations in medieval Ireland* (1970). Neither is focused directly on Laurence, but both closely analyse the political and ecclesiastical events of his day, and the archbishop's role is discussed repeatedly in the context of Irish church reform and the consequences of the invasion. Gwynn, a Jesuit priest, was a Chair of Medieval History at University College Dublin, and Watt was the Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Hull. Watt cites Gwynn in his acknowledgements as one of his primary sources. Watt's material on Laurence does not last more than a few pages, but he is effective in comparing Laurence to Malachy, discussing his relationship with Henry II and the English Church, and even comparing

⁵ Ó Corráin, p. 47.

⁶ Ó Corráin, p. 45.

⁷ Ó Corráin, p. 112.

⁸ Ó Corráin, p. 114.

⁹ John O'Hanlon, *The Life of St. Laurence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin: And Delegate Apostolic of the Holy See for the Kingdom of Ireland* (John Mullany, 1877), p. 139.

him to his Anglo-Norman successor in the pontificate.¹⁰ Watt provides copious perspective on the implications of the loyalty pledged to Henry by the Irish bishops.¹¹ Gwynn has more to say about Laurence, with his helpful remarks on Laurence's cooperation with the Anglo-Norman lords to improve Christ Church Cathedral,¹² the consequences of Laurence's presence at the Third Lateran Council,¹³ his attendance at church councils in Ireland, the extent and motivations for his cooperation with the Normans, and the four demands on his political and ecclesiastical loyalties, of which Gwynn names three - to Leinster (and Diarmait Mac Murchada), the High King, Henry II, and a fourth, the Pope, who is not included by Gwynn, but is understood through Laurence's many interactions with Rome.¹⁴ Gwynn helpfully provides a discussion on Laurence's involvement in the rivalry between the two episcopal sees of Armagh and Dublin,¹⁵ which is not found in other works on Laurence. Gwynn also theorises that Henry and Christian (Gilla-Crist), Bishop of Lismore, were cooperating to assure Henry received the loyalty of the Irish church.

Francis Xavier Martin succeeded Aubrey Gwynn at University College Dublin as Chair of Medieval History. Martin was an Augustinian friar, the same order that Laurence would join shortly after becoming Archbishop.¹⁶ Among many publications on the Irish Revolutionary period of the early 20th century, medieval Ireland, and medieval Europe, Martin wrote the articles *Ireland in the Time of St. Bernard, St. Malachy, St. Laurence O'Toole* in 1992, and *No hero in the house: Diarmait Mac Murchada and the coming of the Normans to Ireland* in 1975. The former carefully examines Laurence's leadership at Glendalough and Dublin and discusses his importance to the reform movement; Martin indeed considers Laurence's appointment as archbishop to be "the most striking evidence of the Irish and Continental reform movements."¹⁷ Martin also provides his own account of the invasion and its consequences for Laurence while critically appraising earlier sources. Martin does not cite Forristal despite writing nineteen years after *The Man in the Middle*, suggesting Martin considered Forristal's work to be too focused on a general, not academic audience. The latter article is something of an apology for Diarmait, who Martin recognizes as an ambitious and violent man, but who Martin then defends by contrasting him with his fellow warlike Irish nobles.¹⁸

J.F. O'Doherty's *St. Laurence O'Toole and the Anglo Norman Invasion* (1937) is an excellent resource. In addition to his summation of the challenges inherent to studying Laurence,

¹⁰ John A. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge [England] University Press, 1970), pp. 49–50 <<http://archive.org/details/churchtwonations0000watt>> [accessed 9 September 2024].

¹¹ Watt, p. 41.

¹² Aubrey Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Blackrock, Kill Lane, Co. Dublin : Four Courts Press, 1992), p. 51 <<http://archive.org/details/irishchurchinele0000gwyn>> [accessed 9 September 2024].

¹³ Gwynn, p. 136.

¹⁴ Gwynn, p. 141.

¹⁵ Gwynn, p. 141.

¹⁶ 'Papers of Professor F.X. Martin' (University College Dublin), p. iv <<https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/p0189-martin-fx-descriptive-catalogue.pdf>> [accessed 20 September 2024].

¹⁷ F. X. Martin, 'Ireland in the Time of St. Bernard, St. Malachy, St. Laurence O'Toole', 1992, p. 12.

¹⁸ F. X. Martin, 'No Hero in the House: Diarmait Mac Murchada and the Coming of the Normans to Ireland', 1975, p. 24.

O'Doherty divides his article into two sections. The political context of the invasion is addressed largely in the first half of the article, while Laurence's actions during the invasion and his relationship with King Henry is found in the second. While the entire article is important, O'Doherty's arrangement is advantageous when focusing specifically on Laurence. O'Doherty's careful analysis of the Second Synod of Cashel¹⁹ is essential to understanding the context and implications of this event and must be included with the perspectives on Second Cashel from Ó Corráin, Watt, and Gywnn. O'Doherty also addresses the Treaty of Windsor in detail and analyses what he believes Laurence's role was in its signing.²⁰

O'Doherty laments the small number of sources to draw from when studying Laurence. "In the first place, there is an almost complete absence of direct reference to Laurence in the sources....neither the native Annals nor the foreign historical compilations give the student much help... The result is that, in view of this paucity of references, we must, if we wish to give an account of the work of Laurence, proceed frequently by the unsure path of inferences from the known history of the period."²¹

Eoinn MacNeill (1867-1945) wrote *Phases of Irish History* (1920). It contains very few references to Laurence, but his careful description of Irish society and culture before the invasion provides helpful context. MacNeill is notably critical of Goddard Henry Orpen (1852-1932), a highly readable Irish historian who carefully documents the events surrounding the invasion in *Ireland Under the Normans 1169-1216* (1911). Orpen was perceived during his career as being favourable to the English cause and to have attempted to justify the Anglo-Norman conquest, for which he was pilloried by other Irish historians. MacNeill wrote "Mr. Orpen's history is largely a laboured attempt to prove that the backward state of Ireland was the cause and justification of the invasion."²²

John Lanigan's (1758-1828) impressive four-volume work, *An ecclesiastical history of Ireland, from the first introduction of Christianity among the Irish, to the beginning of the thirteenth century* (1829), must be included in any study of medieval Ireland. Lanigan's work studies Laurence's life and features criticism of Gerald of Wales (*Giraldus Cambrensis*). Gerald was a Cambro-Norman priest whose *Conquest of Ireland (Expugnatio Hibernica)* serves as the primary contemporary source on the Anglo-Norman conquest and captures several key moments in Laurence's pontificate. Gerald was a partisan supportive of the Anglo-Norman cause and consistently attacks the Irish, though he makes exceptions for certain members of the clergy, Laurence included. Martin describes Gerald as "brilliant yet malicious" and concedes "in the heel of the historical hunt Gerald of Wales still stands as an unavoidable primary source."²³ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland (La Geste des Engleis in Yrlande)* is an incomplete Anglo-Norman epic poem containing the perspective of the conquerors, appearing previously

¹⁹ J.F. O'Doherty, 'St Laurence O Toole and the Anglo-Norman Invasion', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Fifth, Vol. L. Nov., Dec., 1937. Vol. LI. Feb., 1938 (1937), pp. 449-77; 600-625 (pp. 601-11).

²⁰ O'Doherty, pp. 621-25.

²¹ O'Doherty, p. 451.

²² Eoin Mac Neill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, Gill, 1920), p. 303

<<http://archive.org/details/phasesofirishhis1920macn>> [accessed 16 June 2024].

²³ F.X. Martin, 'Ireland in the Time of St. Bernard, St. Malachy, St. Laurence O'Toole', pp. 1-5.

in English as *The Song of Diarmait and the Earl*. It was given this title by Orpen, who considered the poem one of the most important contemporary records of the Anglo-Norman invasion,²⁴ translated it into English and published it in 1892.²⁵ The 2002 version used here is edited by Evelyn Mullaly of Queen's University Belfast. While it mentions Laurence, as *Seint-Laurence*, exactly once, it is indispensable as one of the few medieval sources to address the events of the conquest in detail. The anonymous author claims to have documented the poem's events from Maurice Regan, the interpreter to Diarmait Mac Murchada.²⁶

To paraphrase O'Doherty, it is necessary to draw inferences and extrapolations from better-documented people around Laurence. Fortunately, Laurence engaged with many of the premier leaders of his day. Gerald of Wales, while hardly an unbiased source when it comes to Ireland, recognised Laurence's reputation as a holy and devoted Archbishop and documents Laurence's presence at several crucial events. The life of Diarmait Mac Murchada, King of Leinster, is well-documented, and Diarmait must be included in any study of Laurence. Laurence also worked closely with the victorious Anglo-Norman adventurers, High King Ruadri Uí Conchobair and the Irish clan leaders. Most important was Laurence's relationship with King Henry II. Of all these, it is of greatest shame that records of the interactions between Laurence and Henry have not survived. The documentation of the Becket controversy only ten years earlier is amazingly well recorded, yet no correspondence between Henry and Laurence survives.

²⁴ Henry Goddard Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans* v 1, 1911, p. 9 <<http://archive.org/details/orpen-ireland-under-the-normans-v-1>> [accessed 16 June 2024].

²⁵ 'The Athenaeum', 3380 (1892).

²⁶ Evelyn Mullaly, *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland =: La Geste Des Engleis En Yrlande: A New Edition of the Chronicle Formerly Known as The Song of Dermot and the Earl* (Four Courts, 2002), p. 53.

As with most medieval persons, the Irish of the 12th century bore names that can be written many ways in modern English. Because of the complexities of the Irish language, modern English speakers, and the speakers of the earlier evolutions of English, to say nothing of the Anglo-Norman dialect of French that most of the English lords and knights spoke in the 12th century, faced difficulty properly rendering Irish names into English, resulting in a vast number of different renditions of Irish given names and family or clan names. To this also can be added the Latin names by which important Irish were referred to by the clergy. The subject of this work referred to himself as *Laurentius Dublinensis*. Modern English names him Laurence O'Toole. *Lorcán Ua Tuathail* will be referred to as Laurence in most situations. To discuss him and his fellow Irish in a more consistent manner, the most common modern English renditions of their names in recent scholarly works will typically be used, with their Irish names being noted alongside them. The King of Leinster, Diarmait mac Murchada, liege lord and frequent oppressor of the Ua Tuathail family, Laurence's brother-in-law, and the instigator of the Anglo-Norman invasion, bears a tricky name that can be written many ways in modern English. He will be referred to Diarmait. The High King of Ireland and King of Connacht, Ruaidrí mac Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair, easily anglicised as "Rory O'Connor," will be Ruaidri. Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Striguil, Diarmait's ally and leader of the conquest of Ireland, will be referred to by his more evocative and memorable name of "Strongbow." In most cases, given names will be used to refer to other Irish, Anglo-Norman, and French persons, as well as those of the Vatican's hierarchy, except where their title makes more sense, such as "king," "pope," "archbishop," *et cetera*. Cities and other geographic names will be referred to in modern English.

Introduction

On October 12, 1975, Pope Paul VI, in his homily at St. Peter's, announced the canonisation of Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, the most significant victim of the Popish Plot, who had died a martyr's death at Tyburn in 1681. Paul VI praised this Irishman in part:

*"In his pastoral activities, his exhortation had been one of pardon and peace. With men of violence he was indeed the advocate of justice and the friend of the oppressed, but he would not compromise with truth or condone violence: he would not substitute another gospel for the Gospel of peace."*¹

Irish Catholics and the international press both noted that Oliver Plunkett was the first Irish saint to be canonised in nearly 700 years. The New York Times, in observing the occasion, ended its description of Plunkett's life with this afterthought:²

"He is the first Irish person to be canonized since Laurence O'Toole, an Archbishop of Dublin, was made a saint in 1225."

The topic of why so many centuries needed to pass between canonisations of Irish saints is a complicated topic deserving of its own study, but it is likely the widespread poverty that existed in Ireland through much of its history prevented the financing of the necessary inquiries to pursue a prospective saint's cause with Rome.³ Paul VI's praise for Oliver Plunkett recalls Laurence, his fellow archbishop, whose life came to an end not at a gallows, but of illness and exhaustion far from his see in Dublin in the village of Eu in Normandy. Like Plunkett, Laurence O'Toole was a voice of reason in a turbulent time, a lover of virtue, charity, and temperance while surrounded by men of great passions. Laurence too was "the advocate of justice and the friend of the oppressed," and Laurence too "would not compromise with truth or condone violence: he would not substitute another gospel for the Gospel of peace." Laurence's pontificate saw him confronted with extraordinary situations where he could have advocated for war, but instead chose the path of peace and reconciliation, notably at the gates of Dublin, Second Cashel, and Windsor.

Patrick, Brigid and Colmcille (Columba) are traditionally considered the three greatest saints of Ireland, with Brendan the Navigator and Kevin of Glendalough following them in the early medieval period. These saints are widely studied, depicted in statuary, serve as the namesakes of cathedrals, schools, and other landmarks, and, in the case of Patrick, are known world-wide. To encounter Laurence in Irish history would require

¹ '12 October 1975: Canonization of the Irish Martyr Oliviero Plunkett | Paul VI' <https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/homilies/1975/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19751012.html> [accessed 9 September 2024].

² 'Pope Canonizes Oliver Plunkett, First Irish Saint in 700 Years', *The New York Times*, 13 October 1975 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1975/10/13/archives/pope-canonizes-oliver-plunkett-first-irish-saint-in-700-years.html>> [accessed 9 September 2024].

³ 'Why Ireland Remains The "Land Of Uncanonized Saints And Scholars"', *Religion Unplugged*, 2024 <<https://religionunplugged.com/news/2024/6/21/why-ireland-is-the-land-of-uncanonized-saints-and-scholars>> [accessed 28 September 2024].

dedicated study of the twelfth century, for he is often left out of histories that do not focus on the church - largely because few sources discuss him. We are given a clue to his actual importance with the recognition that it is not Patrick but Laurence who is the patron saint of Dublin, for Laurence had a crucial role to play in that city's history, and in the history of Ireland at large. Laurence O'Toole was Archbishop of Dublin from 1162 to 1180, the first Irishman to hold that office, and his career encompassed a critical period of the complicated political and religious relationship between Ireland and England, including the initial Anglo-Norman incursions into Ireland, the collapse of the authority of the Irish Kings, and the expansion of the Angevin empire of Henry II.

Laurence, son of a noble family who spent years as a hostage and was drawn to the Church and a life of austerity, became Abbot of Glendalough at the youngest possible age of 25, and from there became Archbishop of Dublin at age 34. He attended the Third Lateran Council in Rome and was there appointed Papal Legate to Ireland. With an extraordinarily rapid ascent from impoverished captive to Archbishop, and with his high esteem on both sides of the Irish Sea, Laurence was emerging as one of Western Christendom's most effective and devoted leaders, with remarkable accomplishments in Ireland and *bona fides* in Rome that might have one day propelled him to the seat of Saint Peter. Instead, in defence of the liberty of his see, Laurence exhausted himself in his journeys to negotiate with King Henry II and died of illness in Normandy at the age of 46. Laurence's pontificate saw the English conquest, perhaps the singular event in Irish history, and he unhesitatingly involved himself in the conflict, vigorously defending the rights of the church and Dublin before Anglo-Norman conquerors, King Henry, and the Pope.

Laurence would be the last Irish Archbishop of Dublin for three centuries. As Laurence's achievements in Dublin were built upon by Anglo-Norman clergy, his legend was growing in Normandy, where the canons and people of Eu had adopted the late archbishop as their own. *Saint-Laurent D'Eu* found a new career in the Norman calendar of saints. Miracles associated with Laurence were carefully documented by Eu Abbey, and petitions of the monks of Eu successfully obtained a bull of canonisation from Rome in 1226.

Laurence's life and work bear some parallels with his fellow Irish saint, Malachy (1094-1148), who died while Laurence was just beginning his labours in Glendalough Abbey. Both were products of traditional Irish monasticism, both were introduced to and adopted the Gregorian reform movement that sought to align the Irish church with Rome, both served as archbishop and papal legate, and both were buried not in Irish soil but in France.⁴ Malachy and Laurence were also the first two Irish saints to be formally canonised. While not documented anywhere in the meagre records of Laurence's life, he was surely aware of and influenced by Malachy's work. Their careers as reformers differ in that Malachy was a key player in the beginnings of the Roman reform in Ireland, which was brought about – at least in a legal sense – so rapidly that Laurence spent more of his life enforcing the reforms than he did implementing them. A very important

⁴ Watt, John A., *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge [England] University Press, 1970), p. 47. <<http://archive.org/details/churchtwonations0000watt>> [accessed 9 September 2024]

difference between the two is Malachy's advantage of his friendship with (Saint) Bernard of Clairvaux, the highly influential French monk who served as his hagiographer, while Laurence's life was pieced together after his death by the canons of Eu.

The Ireland of the Kings and the Pre-Conquest Church

Laurence was born into an Ireland under the complete control of the Gaelic clans. The provinces of modern Ireland, Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connacht, along with Meath as the fifth province, that is, “*the fifths*,” existed with varied boundaries in medieval Ireland¹; Meath holding the distinction of sites tied to the ancient kings of Ireland, notably the Hill of Tara. Meath was the traditional seat of the *Ard-Ri*, the overking or High King of Ireland². The provinces of Ireland were each typically ruled by a king, or sometimes multiple (and usually feuding) kings, who, theoretically, were then ruled by the High King.

The *Ard-Ri*’s title of has an air of authority, but the violent clashes between provincial kings and clans and between the regional kings and High Kings (and the claimants to that position) show the position of high king was insecure and largely ineffective.³ This environment compared poorly to the effective baronial lordships that served the powerful monarchy established by William the Conqueror’s descendants in Anglo-Norman England.

Only Brian Boru, who won the title of *ard-ri* in 1002 when he overthrew the sitting high king in Meath, approached, though never achieved, the power of a true monarch.⁴ The high king’s weakness would be proven when Strongbow’s forces quickly conquered Leinster despite being vastly outnumbered by the Irish forces of High King Ruadri Ua Conchobair, and again when Ruadri conceded the lordship of Ireland to Henry II, when much of Ireland was hardly loyal to the *ard-ri* himself.

The scattered regional clan governance in pre-Norman Ireland resulted in a state where warfare and vendettas were common. This disorganisation was likely the result of Ireland’s de facto isolation from the rest of Europe. Ireland was never held by the Roman Empire and did not experience the imposition of Roman standards of rule and organisation. Ireland was spared the “barbarian” invasions of people such as the Franks, who had spent many years as Roman *foederati* and therefore admired and attempted to preserve many of the institutions of the old empire.⁵ Neither was the isolation and disunity of Ireland a total disadvantage. The preservation of ancient literature and ecclesiastical works by Irish clergy would hardly have been possible in a land easily accessible to foreign invasions; likewise, the very disunion of Ireland, with no ruling family, no monarch, no national army, and no capital city to conquer, enabled Ireland to absorb and subvert the Viking invaders, and, to an extent, the Anglo-Normans and English (likely recognised by Oliver Cromwell centuries later in his determination to subjugate the entire island).⁶

¹ Henry Goddard Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans v 1*, 1911, p. 21. <<http://archive.org/details/orpen-ireland-under-the-normans-v-1>> [accessed 16 June 2024]

² Orpen, p.23

³ Eoin Mac Neill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, Gill, 1920)

<<http://archive.org/details/phasesofirishhis1920macn>>, pp. 266-68 [accessed 16 June 2024],

⁴ Orpen, p.30

⁵Orpen, p. 26.

⁶ Orpen, p. 27.

Gaelic-ruled Ireland ended under King Henry II, the Conqueror's great-grandson, son of Empress Matilda, King Henry I's daughter. Henry, styling himself "Henry Fitz-Empress" after his mother's title,⁷ dominated England and much of what is now France for fifty years. His lands in England, Normandy, Anjou, and Aquitaine are generally referred to as the Angevin Empire by modern historians.

Ireland at the beginning of the twelfth century hosted a church led by many bishops with varying roles and varying titles. Some served as bishops and heads of monastic houses; some also ruled large areas of land as lords did elsewhere in Europe.

Chorepiscopi served as junior bishops who tended to the needs of smaller areas of large dioceses. *Conepiscopi* were the vicars of the senior bishops.⁸ These were supported by a class of monks far more independent than those of the Continental monastic orders.

There was no Irish monastic rule; a fair number of monks were itinerant storytellers and relic-sellers. Monks who did live in communities could not possess private property, but neither could they withdraw into isolation.⁹ Of great authority were hereditary family organisations that maintained the parishes and dioceses, with the term *coarb* referring to the individual with ancestral responsibility over that ecclesiastical region. It was not uncommon for a *coarb* to be a layman, possibly because Viking raids had once made it difficult to fill church offices with ordained clergy. The *coarb* of Armagh, who held the seat of Saint Patrick, or the Hill of Patrick, claimed seniority in the Irish church, and for two hundred years, Armagh was held by a layman of the Ui Sinaich clan.¹⁰

The nascent Irish church reform movement of the early twelfth century did not have any single origin,¹¹ but may have its roots in the False Decretals of Ps-Isidore, a series of forgeries that profoundly influenced the Roman church and the Gregorian Reforms,¹² and in the influence of Lanfranc and Anselm, Archbishops of Canterbury, who held the primacy consecutively between 1070 and 1109.¹³ Lanfranc, along with Pope Gregory VII, corresponded with the O Briain clan, the Kings of Munster,¹⁴ while Anselm's letters convinced Gillebertus, Bishop of Limerick from 1106 to 1140, of the necessity of redeveloping the Irish church.¹⁵ The latter's work *De Statu Ecclesiae* laid out an Irish church structure reorganised into the Roman model.

⁷ Matilda had been wedded to German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Their marriage was annulled, but Matilda retained the title of Empress.

⁸ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *The Irish Church, Its Reform and the English Invasion*, Trinity Medieval Ireland Series, 2 (Four Courts Press, 2017), pp. 5–7.

⁹ Ó Corráin, pp. 10–11.

¹⁰ Watt, John A., *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge [England] University Press, 1970), p. 5. <<http://archive.org/details/churchtwoations0000watt>> [accessed 9 September 2024],

¹¹ Watt, p. 5.

¹² Ó Corráin, pp. 9–10.

¹³ Aubrey Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Blackrock, Kill Lane, Co. Dublin : Four Courts Press, 1992), p. 1 <<http://archive.org/details/irishchurchinele0000gwyn>> [accessed 9 September 2024].

¹⁴ Watt, p. 5.

¹⁵ John Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland, Vol. IV*, (Dublin : Printed for J. Cumming, 1829), p. 28 <<http://archive.org/details/ecclesiasticalhi04lani>> [accessed 9 July 2024],.

Muirchertach O Briain, having attained the high kingship, convened the First Synod of Cashel in 1101, the first major reforming Catholic synod of the century.¹⁶ First Cashel was part of his campaign to extricate Ireland from the metropolitan control of Canterbury. Muirchertach granted his lands at Cashel to the church, allowing the Irish bishops the necessary leverage to successfully promote Cashel to the Vatican as the second ecclesiastical centre of Ireland.¹⁷ Cashel also - very significantly - prohibited the holding of church titles by laymen.¹⁸

The entrenched Irish church order would be weakened when Cellach, the Ui Sinaich coarb who inherited Armagh in 1105, was ordained as a priest.¹⁹ In 1111, Muirchertach, along with Cellach, who had been consecrated Archbishop of Armagh, and Gillebertus, bishop of Limerick, who now held the title of papal legate, convened the synod of Ráth Breasail. At Ráth Breasail, Canterbury's claims to primacy over Ireland were rejected, and Ireland gained "a paper Constitution of the approved Roman and Catholic type."²⁰

Cellach in turn broke his clan's control over Armagh when he arranged for Máel Máedóc Ua Morgair (Malachy) to succeed him. His rapid rise from deacon to priest to abbot of Bangor monastery culminated in his consecration as Archbishop of Armagh in 1132, over objections from the Ui Sinaich, who unsuccessfully attempted to retain the coarbship.²¹ Malachy attempted to bring an end to lay control of bishoprics and familial inheritance of church provinces, and he enforced Roman customs in his diocese in Armagh, focusing on the order of the mass, the abolition of superstitious practices, and the replacing of local traditions with Roman traditions, focusing on the sacraments of confession, confirmation, and matrimony.²² He also obtained archbishops' pallia for the new metropolitan sees of Armagh and Cashel from Pope Innocent II, along with appointment as papal legate. Malachy inspired a new generation of Irish reformers, and his accomplishments became well-known outside Ireland thanks to his friend Bernard of Clairvaux.²³ Bernard was well-regarded in Rome, and his hagiographical *Life of Malachy* would lead to Malachy becoming the first canonised Irish saint. However, Bernard's work was also very critical of the Irish, and his condemnations of what he and Malachy reported as persistent vices in the Irish church and laity caused the Vatican to regard Ireland as a backward land that ignored the church's catechism.²⁴ This influence was reflected in the later policy of Adrian IV and Alexander III towards Ireland.

Where Malachy had encountered opposition, the successive class of Irish bishops made significant gains. The 1152 Synod of Kells completed the *de jure* process of Romanisation. This synod, led by Papal Legate Cardinal John Paparo, was also attended by Malachy's successor at Armagh, Gelasius (Gilla Meic Liac), and Christian, Bishop of Lismore. Paparo provided four pallia for Armagh, Cashel, Dublin, and Tuam – one for

¹⁶ Ó Corráin, p. 65.

¹⁷ Ó Corráin, p. 65.

¹⁸ Gwynn, p. 156.

¹⁹ Gwynn, p. 112.

²⁰ Ó Corráin, pp. 70–74.

²¹ Ó Corráin, p. 76.

²² Lanigan, pp. 63–64.

²³ Watt, pp. 19–21.

²⁴ Martin, 'Ireland in the Time of F. X. Martin, 'Ireland in the Time of St. Bernard, St. Malachy, St. Laurence O'Toole', 1992, p.15

each Irish province. Kells detached Dublin from Canterbury and brought Ireland into alignment with Rome nearly two decades before the Anglo-Norman adventurers arrived.²⁵ Yet it appeared that Rome could not discern the success of the native Irish church reformers, possibly because Canterbury was steering Adrian IV toward the path of intervention.²⁶

Adrian's bull *Laudabiliter* gave Henry II the authority to enter Ireland and obligate the Irish church to conform to the Continental Roman standard. Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury and friend of the Pope, advocated for the issuance of the bull, and John of Salisbury, secretary to Theobald and his successor Thomas Becket, claimed personal responsibility for Adrian IV's order to Henry. John also reinforced *Laudabiliter* by claiming that the Irish church was completely disorganised, full of heresy, sin, and vice, and devoted to pagan practices.²⁷

²⁵ Ó Corráin, pp. 91–92.

²⁶ Ó Corráin, p. 47.

²⁷ W.L. Warren, *Henry II* (University of California Press, 1973), p. 195.

Ui Muiredaig and Glendalough

Laurence's biography is relatively brief; it could hardly have been otherwise with the limited information about his life, although O'Hanlon and Forristal do their best to illuminate what is available.

Born to Muirchertach Ui Tuathail, chief of the Ui Muiredaig (or Hy-Murray) clan, a vassal of King Diarmait Mac Murchada of Leinster, Laurence was the youngest of thirteen brothers and sisters. His birthplace is believed to be the modern Castledermot, County Kildare.²⁸ On the way to the child's christening, his mother and father encountered a "prophet" who instructed the family not to name the boy Conchobhar as planned, but instead advised them: "This child will be magnificent on earth, and glorious in heaven, and will rule over many... and his name shall be *Lorcán*." This name was given to the child upon his baptism by the Bishop of Kildare at the shrine of St. Brigid in *Cill Dara*, "the church of the oak."²⁹

The politics of Leinster affected Laurence at an early age, when his father was forced to give hostages to King Diarmait, and Laurence, as the youngest son, was chosen. While Diarmait promised to treat his hostage well, Laurence was instead held "in a desolate place" and subjected to mistreatment and the barest of sustenance for several years. Muirchertach's response upon discovering of his son's predicament was to capture a group of Diarmait's soldiers and demanding Laurence's release in exchange. Diarmait released the boy to the Abbot of Glendalough, the ancient shrine of Saint Kevin, where, after a few days of residing and praying with the monks, he was reunited with his father.

Muirchertach, relieved at the safe recovery of his son, promised the abbot that he would give one of his sons into the priesthood to thank God. When he explained to Laurence that he would have to decide which of his sons to send to Glendalough by casting lots, Laurence laughed and told his father there was no need, for he had already decided to "make the Lord part of his inheritance" and become a monk.³⁰ His father immediately went to Saint Kevin's shrine and dedicated the young Laurence's life to the saint.

As part of Saint Kevin's (Coemgen) community, Laurence was heir to one of Ireland's most famous saints. Kevin's storied holiness, gentleness, patience, and steady stream of miracles, as well as Glendalough's proximity to Dublin, led to Glendalough growing into one of Ireland's premier monastic centres and pilgrimage sites by the time of Laurence's birth. Laurence clearly attempted to model his life after Kevin and maintained a close association with Glendalough for the rest of his life.

Laurence, "educated by the Holy Spirit," became one of the most devoted, studious, and hardest-working of the monks of Glendalough, for "the grace of God was in him...rejecting the world and the mundane...fervent in hearing, skilful in repeating, prudent in discerning, For in the law his will was the will of the Lord, and he meditated

²⁸ John O'Hanlon, *The Life of St. Laurence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin: And Delegate Apostolic of the Holy See for the Kingdom of Ireland* (John Mullany, 1877), p. 17.

²⁹ O'Hanlon, p. 15.

³⁰ O'Hanlon, p. 25.

on it day and night.”³¹ Laurence’s holiness and diligence must have inspired his community, for when the old Abbot at last “fell asleep in Christ” in 1152, the brothers of Glendalough elected Laurence his successor. By 1157, Laurence’s reputation was such that he was offered the position of Bishop of Glendalough, which he refused on the grounds of his youth.³²

The abbacy of Glendalough was one of the foremost monastic appointments in all Ireland, where Laurence would have been in correspondence with other church leaders. In this role, Laurence could not have been unaware of the Irish church reform movement. Malachy, whose reputation was well-known throughout the Irish church, had died while Laurence was a young monk, and the topic of his life must have been contemplated at the abbey and steered Laurence toward the path of reform. This influence on Laurence can be seen in the construction of Saint Saviour’s Priory during Laurence’s abbacy³³, which was founded as a home for Augustinian canons.³⁴

Ráth Breasail had partitioned Dublin from Glendalough as a separate diocese. Tiardelbach O Conchobair, King of Connacht, interested in maintaining tight control of Dublin, sent a candidate, Greine, a Danish deacon, to the Archbishop of Canterbury to be consecrated as bishop of Dublin. While Cellach, in the primacy at Armagh, initially refused to seat Greine, Canterbury’s candidate, Cellach’s death in 1129 led to Greine becoming Bishop of Dublin.³⁵ Surprisingly, Canterbury did not make any discernible attempt to use this incident to reassert its authority over Ireland. The Synod of Kells in 1152 brought Greine an Archbishop’s pallium, completing Dublin’s rise from a suffragan of Glendalough to archdiocese in just over forty years. Greine would serve until his passing in 1161.

³¹ O’Hanlon, p. 26.

³² Watt, John A., *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge [England] University Press, 1970), p. 48. <<http://archive.org/details/churchtwonations0000watt>> [accessed 9 September 2024].

³³ F.X. Martin, ‘*Ireland in the Time of St. Bernard, St. Malachy, St. Laurence O’Toole*’, 1992, p. 15. Ó Corráin believes this introduction of Augustinians at Glendalough may have happened later during Laurence’s tenure as archbishop.

³⁴ Desmond Forristal, *The Man in the Middle St. Laurence O’Toole : Patron Saint of Dublin* (Veritas, 1988), pp. 32–33.

³⁵ Ó Corráin, p. 75.

The Irish Archbishop of Danish Dublin

Dublin (*Baile Átha Cliath*, or “the town by the black pool,” which remains its name in Irish) was the main population centre of Leinster, and it remained a Danish colony at the beginning of the twelfth century. The Viking raids of the previous centuries had developed into colonisation, and the Danish colonists were losing their Scandinavian identity and gaining an Irish one¹ Most significantly for Laurence's story, the Vikings who settled in Ireland adopted Christianity. The Danes, who the native Irish frequently alternated between allying with and warring with, were referred to by the Irish as the “Ostmen.”²

Laurence was one of the primary candidates to replace Greine as Archbishop of Dublin, as he was well known thanks to his position as Abbot of Glendalough. The *Vita* does not discuss specifically why Laurence was chosen. Forristal notes that the *Vita* simply indicates “...although there were some who considered themselves to be worthy of the prelacy by reason other lineages and learning, the Abbot Laurence was the only one considered by the people and clergy to be worthy to take the place of so important a prelate.”³ Diarmait mac Murchada was likely to have seen the appointment of the city's Archbishop as an opportunity to place Laurence, one of his Leinstermen in the see.⁴ Forristal believes Diarmait would have tried to influence the election, and O'Hanlon notes that Mac Murchada's marriage to Laurence's sister Mor would have made Diarmait more likely to favour the Ua Tuathails.⁵ Lanigan believes that Laurence had no ambition to become archbishop; the abbot would have considered it impossible; Dublin was a Danish city, and the Danes would be sure to choose another one of their number; the eventual request from the electors of Dublin to Laurence being a surprise.⁶

Gelasius, the venerable Archbishop of Armagh, assisted by the Bishops of Ferns and Leighlin, consecrated Laurence. The absence of any representative from Canterbury was a clear indication that the English primate did not consider pressing the case for supremacy over Ireland any longer.⁷ Upon assuming his see, Laurence was quickly confronted with the question of his successor as Abbot of Glendalough. Laurence's choice was Thomas, his nephew and one of the current monks in the abbey, who Laurence was familiar with and knew to be a holy and just man. Diarmait, however, had his own candidate, “a very unworthy ecclesiastic,”⁸ and, before any election could take place, sent his men in force to Glendalough to install his choice as Abbot.⁹ Laurence

¹ Desmond Forristal, *The Man in the Middle St. Laurence O'Toole : Patron Saint of Dublin* (Veritas, 1988), p. 37.

² O'Hanlon, p. 50.

³ Forristal, p. 36.

⁴ Forristal, p. 37.

⁵ O'Hanlon, pp. 13–14.

⁶ John Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland, Vol IV* (Dublin : Printed for J. Cumming, 1829), <<http://archive.org/details/ecclesiasticalhi04lani>> [accessed 9 July 2024]., p. 177.

⁷ Forristal, p. 39.

⁸ O'Hanlon, p. 36.

⁹ Forristal, p. 50.

responded by withholding recognition of Diarmait's henchman, and, when Diarmait saw that Laurence would not consent, he yielded, and Thomas was elected Abbot.¹⁰

One of Laurence's first major acts of reform, in 1163, was to convince the secular canons of Christ Church Cathedral to adopt the Augustinian Rule as practiced by the French monastery of Arrouaise; the recently founded Arroasian and Cistercian orders being two of the premier monastic orders of France. Laurence himself joined the rest of the Christ Church canons in becoming an Arroasian Augustinian, with the cathedral becoming a monastery. Laurence successfully obtained Papal approval for the establishment of Christ Church as an Arroasian monastery. Although this was not obligatory, it may have been that some of the secular canons opposed the conversion to the Augustinian Rule.¹¹ The site of Dublin was likely why Laurence did not attempt to invite the equally popular Cistercian order into Christ Church, as the Cistercians required a remote site on a large area of land, something not offered by Dublin. Laurence would also have probably had more difficulty convincing the canons to accept joining the very austere Cistercians.¹²

The *Vita*, which, notably begins by referring to the Irish as barbarians, lists the practices that Laurence preached against to be "the infamous trinity of vices, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride," which gave rise to "the swiftest deadly streams of iniquity, drunkenness, debauchery, and the burning fire of lust, strife, robbery, mutual injury, murder, and other infinite evils." This is strong language that condemns grave sins that the Church condemned everywhere in Europe, and likely common to any large city, but specific abuses against the catechism of the church are not mentioned.¹³

Laurence foresaw the need for the rapidly growing Dublin to build churches that would equal the great churches being constructed in England and on the Continent, and his pontificate would see the improvement of Christ Church cathedral, construction of the churches of St. Paul, St. Andrew, St. Nicholas Within, and St. Mary del Dam, and, in 1166, Diarmait Mac Murchada, attempting please God to atone for his less holy acts, commissioned the Arroasian monastery of All Hallows,¹⁴ and later the convent of St. Mary de Hogges.¹⁵

Archbishop Laurence could not dispense with all the trappings of high office, but he made every effort to minimise them, and to deny himself privileges whenever his station would allow. He wore his monk's habit under his pontifical vestments, and a hair shirt underneath. Laurence would was fastidious at meals, which he ate communally with his Augustinian brothers as he would have in Glendalough, taking only the bare necessities, and would dilute his wine with water to maintain the appearance that he was partaking.

¹⁶ This suited his purposes to remain clear-headed to pursue God's work and to heed the

¹⁰ O'Hanlon, p. 36.

¹¹ P.J. Dunning, 'The Arroasian Order in Medieval Ireland', *Irish Historical Studie*, IV.16 (1945), pp. 297–314 (p. 308).

¹² Forristal, p. 43.

¹³ *Analecta Bollandiana 1914: Vol 33 (Plummer)*, 1914, pp. 142–143

<http://archive.org/details/sim_analecta-bollandiana_1914_33> [accessed 29 August 2024].

¹⁴ Dunning, p. 308.

¹⁵ Forristal, pp. 48–49.

¹⁶ O'Hanlon, pp. 43–44.

apostle Paul's warnings about the sin inherent in drunkenness.¹⁷ He encouraged hymn performances "of the greatest exactitude and musical skill" during divine services, would offer his personal devotions in church prostrate before the crucifix after Matins and Lauds, and would assist his brothers in singing the midnight office.¹⁸ In the early morning, Laurence would walk in the small cemetery outside the cathedral, offering prayers for the souls of the faithful departed.¹⁹

In 1167, Laurence was one of the senior members of the clergy, along with Irish princes, participating in Ruadri Ua Conchobair's convention at Athboy, which the newly recognised high king had called to address governmental business in the northern half of Ireland.²⁰ Among the decrees were those relating to ecclesiastical discipline. While this was not a church council, it did indicate that close cooperation with secular rulers seen previously at First Cashel and Ráth Breasail was a familiar practice in the Irish church, foreshadowing the cooperation of the church with Henry II at the Second Synod of Cashel.

While serving as archbishop, Laurence did not forget Glendalough, retiring during Lent to Kevin's hermitage and to "Saint Kevin's Bed,"²¹ the rocky alcove high above the lough, to spend these days in fasting, prayer, and contemplation as Kevin did.²²

¹⁷ Romans 13:13, 'New American Bible, Revised Edition', <https://www.biblegateway.com/>, 2024 <<https://www.biblegateway.com/>> [accessed 17 September 2024].

¹⁸ O'Hanlon, p. 35.

¹⁹ Forristal, p. 44.

²⁰ Lanigan, IV, p. 188.

²¹ O'Hanlon, pp. 38–40.

²² Forristal, pp. 50–51.

Diarmait, Strongbow, and the Conquest of Ireland

Along with Strongbow, Diarmait Mac Murchada is the deuteragonist of *The Deeds of the Normans*. The many sources that attack Diarmait, Gerald of Wales included, typically describe him as a violent, cruel, lustful tyrant who exploited his subjects, assaulted the church, and a man who was only too ready to enrich his personal power over the interests of the Irish. O'Hanlon introduces Diarmait as "the wicked tyrant."¹ Favourable sources instead portray him as a brave and determined man whose persistence led him to bring the civilising rule of the English to Ireland, and *The Deeds of the Normans* begins the description of Diarmait with "In Ireland at this time there was no king as worthy as he."²

In addition to his patronage of monasteries, Diarmait convened a church council at Clane. This council, at which Gelasius presided, prohibited the hereditary inheritance of the *coarbship* of Armagh.³ Yet Diarmait also abused the church. *The Deeds of the Normans* depicts Diarmait and Strongbow plundering Glendalough abbey, though the Norman hagiographer is careful to emphasise that Diarmait "seized the booty without giving or receiving a blow."⁴ Whatever Diarmait's role was in the affairs of the church, his most important role was unquestionably his triggering of the Anglo-Norman invasion.

A feud with Tighearnan Ua Ruairc, King of Breffny led to High King Ruadri's invasion of Leinster and the removal of Diarmait as King. The furious Diarmait retreated across the Irish Sea to seek aid from Henry II. The king was too busy in Aquitaine to directly assist, so he instead referred Diarmait to his barons for support. Diarmait found allies among the Marcher lords of Wales, of which Earl Richard De Clare (Strongbow) was foremost, along with Robert FitzStephen and Maurice FitzGerald. For the purposes of Laurence's story, the military aspect of the conquest needs little attention. It suffices to say that Diarmait picked effective allies. The Anglo-Norman adventurers quickly seized Waterford and Wexford. In the autumn of 1170, Laurence and the citizens of Dublin found a powerful Irish and English army outside the city walls led by Maurice FitzGerald and Diarmait himself. Laurence, the most respected citizen of Dublin, led a peace delegation outside of the city walls. Gerald of Wales credits Laurence with convincing both parties to agree to a truce.⁵ However, during the negotiations, two of the Anglo-Norman knights, Miles Cogan and Raymond le Broc, led their men over the walls of Dublin, followed by the rest of the army. The city fell that day in mayhem and chaos. While the lord of Dublin, Hasculf, and leaders of the Ostmen escaped in their ships,⁶ Laurence remained in the city to attempt to limit the damage, as described vividly by O'Hanlon:

¹ John O'Hanlon, *The Life of St. Laurence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin: And Delegate Apostolic of the Holy See for the Kingdom of Ireland* (John Mullany, 1877), p. 22.

² Mullally, Evelyn, *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland =: La Geste Des Engleis En Yrlande: A New Edition of the Chronicle Formerly Known as The Song of Dermot and the Earl* (Four Courts, 2002), p. 53

³ Henry Goddard Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans* v 1, 1911, pp. 62–63

<<http://archive.org/details/orpen-ireland-under-the-normans-v-1>> [accessed 16 June 2024]

⁴ Mullally, p. 78.

⁵ Giraldus, p. 215.

⁶ O'Hanlon, pp. 54–55.

St. Laurence O'Toole rushed to the scene of danger, and in imminent peril of his life , which the invaders spared -probably from the respect due to his character he was seen in every place, endeavouring to interpose his person between the infuriated victors and their unresisting victims. To the dying, he administered the rites of religion; to the dead, the ceremonies of decent sepulture. In the plunder of the city, the ornaments and books of the various churches had been sequestered by the soldiers ; these were restored through the exertions of the archbishop , and when the victors sought the removal of many of the native clergy from their benefices, the representations of St. Laurence induced them to abandon this contemplated design . His charities to the wounded survivors, and towards the numerous poor, who in consequence of the assault and subsequent plunder of the city, were thrown helpless and destitute on the attentions of their holy archbishop , called forth the admiration even of the enemies of his country.⁷

King Ruadri was now forced to respond to the invaders, and he set about gathering his allies to lay siege to the city. Gerald of Wales believed Laurence was one of Ruadri's accomplices in this effort, with the archbishop dispatching letters to request assistance in support of the high king.⁸ Martin is sceptical about whether Laurence was involved in this, and states there is no evidence to believe this claim of Gerald's, although Martin also appears to accept Gerald's statement that Laurence led the peace talks prior to the fall of Dublin.⁹ Assuming Laurence assisted Ruadri's call for aid, it would represent Laurence's most significant act of defiance against the invaders. While Ruadri successfully assembled a vast army to retake Dublin, the Normans decided against enduring a siege or surrendering and decided to sortie against the Irish instead. Ruadri's army was caught completely by surprise, with the Norman knights scattering the Irish in a rout, capturing their supplies, and nearly capturing Ruadri himself. Strongbow's hold on Dublin was no longer questioned.¹⁰

Shortly after the capture of Dublin, the Irish church held a general synod at Armagh, likely attended by Laurence, with the primary topic being the consequences of the Anglo-Norman invasion. This synod unanimously decreed that Ireland was suffering divine punishment for purchasing and holding English slaves; now God threatened to enslave Ireland to the English. The synod ordered all English slaves held in Ireland should be freed.¹¹

Strongbow, meanwhile, was a victim of his own success. Henry, looking for an opportunity to remove himself from his domains in the aftermath of the Becket murder, and to avoid Papal agents who threatened to make impose further decrees of punishment against the king, decided to assemble his best knights and equipment and pay a visit to Strongbow. Henry, mindful of the independent Norman kingdom in Sicily, and of Strongbow's status as Diarmait's heir in Leinster, also wanted to preclude Strongbow from developing any regal ambitions of his own.¹²

⁷ O'Hanlon, p. 56.

⁸ Giraldus, p. 221.

⁹ F.X. Martin, 'Ireland in the Time of St. Bernard, St. Malachy, St. Laurence O'Toole', 1992, p. 27.

¹⁰ Martin, pp. 28–29.

¹¹ John Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland, Vol IV* (Dublin : Printed for J. Cumming, 1829), <<http://archive.org/details/ecclesiasticalhi04lani>> [accessed 9 July 2024], pp. 195–96.

¹² W.L. Warren, *Henry II* (University of California Press, 1973), p. 199.

Once the king had established himself in his newly-built wicker palace in Dublin (willingly built by the Irish), Henry surely displayed the charismatic and friendly side of his personality, which he employed when making promises he did not intend to fulfil.¹³ Ruadri and the other Irish kings would have to decide whether or not to attack the powerful Henry or attempt to come to some sort of agreement with him. Most of the Irish lords elected to do homage to Henry, though Ruadri at first avoided making this commitment. Henry obtained vows of loyalty from many Irish princes and from Strongbow and his knights. Believing he had suitably cowed the Irish and brought his barons to heel, Henry sailed for England in April 1172. This was motivated by news of Pope Alexander III's forthcoming judgement on the murder of Becket, but Henry never returned to Ireland.¹⁴ To help reinforce his claims, Henry sent a delegation to Waterford in 1175 to call on the Irish bishops, where *Laudabiliter* and a bull from Alexander III confirming Henry's authority over Ireland were publicly read for the first time.¹⁵ That same year, the High King decided to yield to Henry.

This resulted in the Treaty of Windsor, signed at Michaelmas in 1175. Laurence was a witness. It is likely, given his history, that Laurence assisted in the negotiations, especially considering his determination to bring peace between the Irish and the Anglo-Normans.¹⁶ Henry recognised Ruadri as king of Ireland, excepting the conquered lands of Dublin, Meath and Leinster, in exchange for Ruadri's loyalty. The assertion of English hegemony over Ireland had been only a matter of time, especially with a powerful king like Henry ruling across the Irish Sea.¹⁷ Martin cites several examples of other Irish lords who unsuccessfully attempted to request Anglo-Norman aid before Diarmait, and he argues that Diarmait simply sped up the kindling of Plantagenet interest in Ireland.¹⁸

Strongbow died at Dublin in June 1176, where Archbishop Laurence conducted his funeral. Like Diarmait, Strongbow too had committed some of his wealth to the church, founding a priory of the Knights of St. John near Dublin with King Henry's confirmation. The lord of Leinster, which title Strongbow had inherited upon Diarmait's death, was interred in a tomb in Christ Church cathedral.¹⁹ The cathedral was now built of stone, thanks to Strongbow assisting Laurence in funding the project.²⁰ This place of honour was reflective not only of Laurence's magnanimity and forgiveness toward a man whose forces had ravaged Dublin, but of the ongoing transformation of Irish social and ecclesiastical culture to adapt to the political reality that the English now ruled.

¹³ John Guy, *Thomas Becket* (Penguin, 2012), p. 336.

¹⁴ Lanigan, IV, p. 217.

¹⁵ Lanigan, IV, p. 222.

¹⁶ J.F. O'Doherty, 'St Laurence O Toole and the Anglo-Norman Invasion', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Fifth, Vol. L. Nov., Dec., 1937. Vol. LI. Feb., 1938 (1937), pp. 449–77; 600–625 (pp. 621).

¹⁷ Orpen, p. 20.

¹⁸ F. X. Martin, 'No Hero in the House: Diarmait Mac Murchada and the Coming of the Normans to Ireland', 1975, pp. 3–4.

¹⁹ Lanigan, IV, p. 230.

²⁰ Gwynn, pp. 51–53.

Laurence, Henry II, and Second Cashel

The most controversial act of Lawrence's career as archbishop, at least to Irish historians, was his attendance at the second council of Cashel, which had been called by Henry. By this time, most of the Irish kings and lords had submitted their loyalty to Henry, with the situation in the church being somewhat more ambiguous. This council produced a few canons related to maintaining order in the Irish church, mostly a reiteration of past councils held in Ireland. Gerald of Wales recorded the most significant eighth canon as, "...that all divine matters be henceforth conducted agreeably to the practices of the holy Church, according as observed by the Anglican Church."¹ Watt describes the result thusly: "the introduction of Anglo-Angevin feudalism made of the bishop a tenant-in-chief of the Crown and as such in a special relationship to it."² O'Doherty argues instead that the bishops only agreed to follow the practices of the universal church and did not consent to "subjection by Canterbury."³ The real controversy arises with the loyalty oath Laurence and the bishops attending this council agreed to give Henry, who was not in attendance. Ó Corráin describes the bishops' actions at Cashel a total capitulation to Henry and considers the actions of the bishops as unnecessary and cowardly: "they gave what was not theirs to give, and what Adrian IV had not given."⁴

Here it is worth mentioning that whatever oath the bishops gave to Henry, it is extremely likely that it contained some form of the phrase "saving my order," an escape clause appearing in the Constitutions of Clarendon designed to allow bishops (and Thomas Becket specifically) to swear allegiance to the king except where their duties to the church took precedence; that is, "saving my order."⁵ If this language appeared in the highly restrictive Constitutions, it is nearly certain to have been used at Second Cashel as well.

Ó Corráin also contends the bishops compiled a report on the myriad abuses extant in the Irish church and sent it to the pope.⁶ Lanigan dismisses this as a "tale of a silly lying faction," and generally considers criticism of Second Cashel as the result of historians misinterpreting the triumphant commentary of Gerald of Wales in his account as reflecting the actual proceedings of the council.⁷ However, Alexander III's letters indicate he indeed received a report from the bishops, wherein Alexander was scandalised by what appeared to be gravely incestuous marriage and concubinage among the Irish. This topic is extremely complicated because the medieval Irish understanding of consanguinity was broader than the Vatican's far narrower definition,

¹ John Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland, Vol IV* (Dublin : Printed for J. Cumming, 1829), <<http://archive.org/details/ecclesiasticalhi04lani>> [accessed 9 July 2024]., pp. 204–7.

² Watt, John A., *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge [England] University Press, 1970) , p. 40. <<http://archive.org/details/churchtwoations0000watt>> [accessed 9 September 2024]

³ J.F. O'Doherty, 'St Laurence O Toole and the Anglo-Norman Invasion', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Fifth, Vol. L. Nov., Dec., 1937. Vol. LI. Feb., 1938 (1937), pp. 449–77; 600–625 (pp. 610).

⁴ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *The Irish Church, Its Reform and the English Invasion*, Trinity Medieval Ireland Series, 2 (Four Courts Press, 2017), p. 109.

⁵ Watt, p. 46.

⁶ Ó Corráin, p. 109.

⁷ Lanigan, IV, pp. 204–5.

and this will not be further discussed. Alexander responds by complimenting Henry on correcting *enormitates et vicia*, but this is in character with Alexander's other letters about Ireland.⁸

Orpen notes the two primary sources Alexander III called upon when describing the "enormities and crimes" of the Irish, were the legate, Bishop Christian of Lismore, as well as Ralph of Llandaff, Henry's chaplain who was present at Cashel.⁹ Both of these men, as close allies of Henry, would have had reason to provide the pope with as many accounts of Irish outrages as possible to further enhance the usefulness of Alexander's letter to Henry's cause. Another role of Christian must also be accounted for. Gwynn proposes Christian may have been secretly coordinating with Henry. Gwynn admits there is no direct evidence for this, but Henry met Christian at shortly after arriving in Ireland. Christian may have been advised by Henry of his plan to travel to Ireland and hold a council; and Christian would therefore have had ample opportunity to lay the groundwork for his fellow bishops to swear loyalty to the king.¹⁰

It seems likely, though, while Ó Corráin makes the case that they were exaggerated, various forms of abuses undoubtedly existed among the Irish laity and in some parts of the Irish church. If they were not at the level of the scandals that Gerald of Wales and Bernard unhesitatingly repeated or those that were presented to Adrian and Alexander, who never questioned them, the evidence is clear that Laurence and the other bishops were confronted with abuses at council after council; the most persistent appearing to be those of the old Irish church traditions – family inheritance of church land and the holding of the same by laymen.

Were there reasons for Laurence and the rest of the Irish bishops to consider Henry to be a more suitable overlord for Ireland than Ireland's own kings? Henry was violent, underhanded, intolerant, and possessed of the interminable desire for land and revenue that characterised all medieval lords to some extent, and this was without considering the Becket controversy and its bloody end. But how would Henry compare to the Irish kings? Most of them favoured violence, and where sacrilege was concerned, there may have been no Irish king who hesitated to plunder monasteries and convents.¹¹ Diarmait Mac Murchada himself ordered the rape of the Abbess of Kildare, for the sole reason that denying her of her virginity would make her ineligible to lead the convent – and thereby vacating the position for Diarmait to install a cousin in Kildare instead. And this was recounted in F.X. Martin's *apology* for Diarmait. This was Martin's way of

⁸ Henry Goddard Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans v 1*, 1911, pp. 302–3

<<http://archive.org/details/orpen-ireland-under-the-normans-v-1>> [accessed 16 June 2024].

⁹ Orpen, pp. 302–3.

¹⁰ Aubrey Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Blackrock, Kill Lane, Co. Dublin : Four Courts Press, 1992), pp. 303–305. <<http://archive.org/details/irishchurchinele0000gwynn>> [accessed 9 September 2024].

¹¹ Lanigan, iv, p. 55. "we find terrible oppressions and cruelties perpetrated in said times by Irish kings or dynasts, who did not scruple to plunder, devastate, and burn churches and religious places." Lanigan includes several examples, including a church at Ardraccan, with people inside, and the adjacent village, being burned and pillaged in 1109, repeated plundering of the monastery of Clonmacnois in 1111 and 1115, the murder of the Abbot of Kells in 1117, and the burning of steeple of the church of Trim, also with people inside, in 1127. Lanigan's explanation is "several of the Irish princes and chieftains had imbibed the spirit of the Danes," though this would have been "held in abhorrence by their ancestors."

demonstrating that despite Diarmait's notoriety, he was in truth one of the less violent Irish lords.¹²

Viewing all this together favourably for Henry leaves one reason why the Irish bishops would have hesitated to support Henry: patriotism. How much would that have meant to them? Irish loyalty was to the clan; there was no nation of Ireland. The prospect of peace would have been no minor consideration for Laurence, who was present in Dublin during its fall, and he was witness to the depravity of a victorious medieval army. The archbishop had seen his people suffering greatly as he raced about the city desperately trying to use his authority to restrain the horrors and protect church buildings. We know from the *Vita* that Laurence loved his flock, especially the poor, and unquestionably he saw many friends wounded or slain that day. A Laurence who had experienced that would certainly do anything necessary to protect the sanctity and dignity of Dublin, and, with this disaster on his mind, it is easy to imagine Laurence viewing Henry, whose presence had stopped the Anglo-Norman raids, as a stabilising force whose rule would prevent Dublin from becoming the victim of yet another war. In cooperating with Henry, Laurence would have been confident that he was not accepting Henry as his lord, but serving an imperfect temporal prince appointed by God to establish order so that the Kingdom of God could be advanced. Simply put, Laurence "had good cause to know, in practice, there was no alternative way of restoring peace."¹³

Furthermore, the scripture he would have spent much of his life studying would logically provide guidance to his actions. Romans 13:1-7¹⁴ and I Peter 2:13¹⁵ may well have guided Laurence, by which we are reminded that Laurence's first loyalty was not to Ireland, Dublin, Henry, or even the Pope – it was to "Christ, and Him Crucified."¹⁶

The attack on Laurence at Canterbury is one of the more curious incidents from Laurence's life. While making a pilgrimage to Canterbury along with King Henry in 1175 to the shrine of Thomas Becket, Laurence, while saying mass, was attacked by an apparently deranged man and struck violently over the head with a club.¹⁷ The congregation feared Laurence had been killed; however, Laurence rose from the ground,

¹² Martin, p. 15.

¹³ O'Doherty, p. 608.

¹⁴ New American Bible, Revised Edition', <https://www.biblegateway.com/>, 2024
<<https://www.biblegateway.com/>> [accessed 17 September 2024]. ¹ Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God. ² Therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves. ³ For rulers are not a cause of fear to good conduct, but to evil. Do you wish to have no fear of authority? Then do what is good and you will receive approval from it, ⁴ for it is a servant of God for your good. But if you do evil, be afraid, for it does not bear the sword without purpose; it is the servant of God to inflict wrath on the evildoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to be subject not only because of the wrath but also because of conscience.

¹⁵ New American Bible, Revised Edition', <https://www.biblegateway.com/>, 2024
<<https://www.biblegateway.com/>> [accessed 17 September 2024]. ¹³ Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the approval of those who do good. ¹⁵ For it is the will of God that by doing good you may silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Be free, yet without using freedom as a pretext for evil, but as slaves of God. ¹⁷ Give honour to all, love the community, fear God, honour the king.

¹⁶ 'New American Bible, Revised Edition'. I Corinthians 2:2

¹⁷ O'Hanlon, p. 78.

asked for water, washed the wound, and resumed the mass as if nothing had happened. This event would later be considered one of Saint Laurence's miracles. Gerald, the source for this event, states the assassin was a lunatic who sought to murder another archbishop in Canterbury Cathedral and create another saint. This story and motive fit the characterisation of the attacker as a mentally unstable person. Forristal, however, insinuates that Laurence's attacker may have been an assassin sent by Henry.¹⁸ At this time, Henry and Laurence's relationship had not deteriorated to the point where it was nearly unsalvageable, as it was by 1180 after the Third Lateran Council.¹⁹ Therefore, it seems unlikely that Henry would go so far as to attempt to murder yet a prominent Archbishop, despite his highly dubious role in the death of Becket. A major factor against such a scenario is that such an assassin would rightly be fearful of being put to death on the spot no matter the outcome of the attempt. And in fact, Gerald says that Henry immediately ordered the assailant to be put to death. But Laurence forgave the man and pleaded with the king to do the same, and so this would-be assassin lived. Despite Henry's reputation for hot-headed behaviour, if he had truly been responsible no amount of pleading by Laurence would have spared the man's life, as the assailant's death would neatly remove incriminating evidence. Yet the fact that Laurence was deemed a suitable target of sufficient holiness for this man suggests that Laurence's fame as a holy and devout man was widely known in Canterbury and throughout England.

1175 saw Laurence assent to Henry's appointment of the Bishop of Waterford. Henry appointed an Irishman, Augustine, to the vacant see and directed him to return to Ireland accompanied by Archbishop Laurence, there to be examined by his metropolitan, the Archbishop of Cashel. Henry was exercising a variant of his ancestral authority over the English church to appoint bishops, although he wisely involved the Irish church hierarchy in the process. This event, while it allayed possible Irish fears of a reassertion of Canterbury's supremacy, nevertheless represented the beginning of the anglicisation of the Irish church.²⁰

Cardinal Vivian, papal legate to Scotland and Ireland, visited Dublin in 1177 and held a synod, which Laurence was likely to have chaired, in which he reiterated the pope's order to respect Henry's authority over Ireland. Disobedience of this command would result in excommunication. The same cardinal, along with Laurence, then presided at the dedication of the Victorine Augustinian abbey of Saint Thomas the Martyr in Dublin, where the King's ambassadors were present.²¹ Henry had financed this house as part of his effort across his empire to make amends with the church after the Becket affair.²²

¹⁸ Desmond Forristal, *The Man in the Middle St. Laurence O'Toole : Patron Saint of Dublin* (Veritas, 1988), p. 97.

¹⁹ O'Hanlon puts this event in 1175, while Forristal places it in 1179, when Laurence was on the way to Rome for the Third Lateran. Forristal's later date, which was after the Pope had issued summons to the council, is the reason he is willing to imply Henry's involvement, on the grounds that the invitation of the Irish bishops would have angered Henry enough to attempt to remove Laurence from the picture.

²⁰ Watt, pp. 43–44.

²¹ John Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland* (Dublin : Printed for J. Cumming, 1829), iv <<http://archive.org/details/ecclesiasticalhi04lani>> [accessed 9 July 2024]., pp. 232–33.

²² The abbey honoured the now-canonised Thomas Becket.

Given the extensive cooperation the Irish bishops had offered him, Henry must have been pleased with Laurence, who seemed the opposite of Becket - a cooperative and respected archbishop who appeared happy to smooth over the process of establishing Henry's rule in Ireland.

Rome, Legate, Eu and Laurence's Legacy

In 1179, Laurence and his fellow Irish bishops were summoned to attend the Third Lateran Council by Alexander III. Henry detained them on their way through England and made them swear an oath to do nothing at Rome that would interfere with his rights as overlord of Ireland.¹ Laurence and five other Irish bishops travelled to Rome as intended, but Laurence likely informed the pope of difficulties the church in Ireland had experienced under English rule. The result was Alexander III's issuance of a bull confirming the privileges of the Archepiscopal See of Dublin, with Glendalough, Ferns, Ossory, Kidare, and Leighlin as suffragans. Alexander also appointed Laurence Papal Legate to Ireland.²

Laurence returned to Ireland to find famine in the land, requiring him to expand his already generous charity work to further support the people of Dublin, including giving alms to five hundred of the poor daily. Over the course of the famine, two hundred children were left at the door of the archbishop's residence, and Laurence ensured they were cared for.³ As legate, Laurence convened the Irish bishops to condemn bad conduct within the church, focusing on and unchaste clerics, and one hundred and forty found guilty of this were sent by Laurence to Rome for absolution.⁴ Lanigan believes this was necessary because of clergy of the "adventuring and fighting" sort, newly arrived from England and Wales.

The new legate also used his authority to call the Synod of Clonfert in late 1179, at which many of the abuses condemned at previous church synods were again addressed, to include reinforcing the prohibition on giving holy orders to the sons of bishops and priests and the persistent holding of bishoprics by laymen. This last was such an ingrained practice in parts of Ulster and Connacht that seven laymen were documented to be holding ecclesiastical sees in direct violation of the canons of the First Council of Cashel (1101).⁵ Laurence clearly had a significant task before him in enforcing the decrees of the church's councils.

The few times Laurence's decisions resulted in disagreements in the Irish church involved acts perceived as insults by the archdiocese of Armagh. In 1177, a relic known as *Bachall Iosa*, "the Staff of Saint Patrick," was ordered by an Italian papal legate to be kept in Dublin instead of Armagh. As this was before Laurence's own appointment as legate, he was forced to yield to the legate's decision.

¹ Desmond Forristal, *The Man in the Middle St. Laurence O'Toole : Patron Saint of Dublin* (Veritas, 1988), p. 95.

² John O'Hanlon, *The Life of St. Laurence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin: And Delegate Apostolic of the Holy See for the Kingdom of Ireland* (John Mullany, 1877), pp. 76–81.

³ John Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland, Vol IV* (Dublin : Printed for J. Cumming, 1829), <<http://archive.org/details/ecclesiasticalhi04lani>> [accessed 9 July 2024], p. 242.

⁴ Lanigan, IV, pp. 241–42.

⁵ Aubrey Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Blackrock, Kill Lane, Co. Dublin : Four Courts Press, 1992), pp. 136–38. <<http://archive.org/details/irishchurchinele0000gwyn>> [accessed 9 September 2024],

A far more significant event took place in 1180, when Laurence was himself legate. His choice to fill the vacant see of Armagh was Tomaltach Ua Conchobair, Bishop of Elphin in Connacht and nephew of High King Ruadri. Armagh was furious at the imposition of a man of Connacht in the primate's seat.⁶ Yet Laurence's appointment of a member of the high king's family addressed four concerns, and indeed Martin considers this act a work of genius by Laurence.⁷ Placing Ruadri's nephew in the primacy helped ensure the high king's interest in keeping him there. This would have been important to Laurence because he was still pressing to end the familial inheritance of dioceses that had been condemned at the Council of Clane; Armagh was the site of Malachy's struggle with the Ui Shinaig clan over the *coarbship* of Patrick.⁸ The appointment helped assure Ruadri's support of Laurence as he defended the reforms made to the church. Finally, this prevented Henry from attempting to install an English primate; Ruadri remained High King of Ireland under the Treaty of Windsor, and Henry could not attempt to dislodge Tomaltach without risking an abrogation of the treaty.⁹ These developments, with Laurence's open defiance of Henry, direct negotiations with the Pope, and Laurence's appointment as papal legate, were likely to have reminded Henry of Becket. Now Henry was in no mood to accommodate Laurence any further, and he refused to allow the archbishop into his presence again.¹⁰

In 1180 Laurence again departed for England, this time with one of Ruadri's sons, who was intended as a hostage for Henry. The king, however, refused to see Laurence, ordered that he be forbidden to return to Ireland, and departed for Normandy. Laurence, after residing at a monastery for three weeks, decided to follow Henry to Normandy. Shortly after arriving, the archbishop became ill with a fever, which became so serious that Laurence realised he was dying. The nearest town was Eu, the site of a Victorine Augustinian monastery.¹¹ Upon approaching Eu and its church dedicated to the Virgin, both Gerald of Wales and the *Vita* record the ailing Laurence as reciting Psalm 132:14, "This shall be my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have a delight therein."¹²

Received by the monks, Laurence was confined to bed and received the *Viaticum*. The dying prelate received some good news when he learned David, one of the priests in his traveling party, had located King Henry and persuaded him to agree to "some terms." What these terms were is unclear, although they may have involved the handover of Ruadri's son to reinforce the treaty between Henry and Ruadri. On November 14, Laurence requested to join the Canons of Eu, which the abbot happily agreed to, and received the sacrament of extreme unction. The extent of Laurence's rejection of the typically regal life of an archbishop is revealed when, asked to make a will, he laughed

⁶ Gwynn, p. 141.

⁷ F.X. Martin, 'Ireland in the Time of St. Bernard, St. Malachy, St. Laurence O'Toole', p. 32.

⁸ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *The Irish Church, Its Reform and the English Invasion*, Trinity Medieval Ireland Series, 2 (Four Courts Press, 2017), p. 78.

⁹ Martin, 'Ireland in the Time of St. Bernard, St. Malachy, St. Laurence O'Toole', 1992, p. 32.

¹⁰ Martin, p. 32.

¹¹ Lanigan, IV, p. 244.

¹² Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis Containing the Topography of Ireland, and the History of the Conquest of Ireland* (London, G. Bell & sons, 1913), p. 293.

<<http://archive.org/details/cu31924060299470>> [accessed 22 September 2024]

and replied, "Of what do you speak? I thank God I have not a penny left in the world to dispose of."¹³

Laurence may well have feared for the future of Ireland in the wake of Henry's growing hostility and broken promises, as his dying words in the *Vita*, spoken in Irish, were "*Ah! foolish and insensible people, what now shall become of you ? Who will relieve your miseries? Who will heal you?*"¹⁴

At Second Cashel, Laurence may well have seen Henry's rule as the path to peace he sincerely desired. Disaster would have surely been in store for Dublin should the Irish have gone to war against Henry, even in the unlikely event of victory. Laurence, however, was to learn that Henry's vows often meant nothing, like his promises to Becket, Alexander III, and even to his queen Eleanor and his sons.¹⁵ The ferocious side of Henry Laurence saw after the Third Lateran may have filled him with regret. When Henry was absent from Ireland, his barons freely raided Irish territory,¹⁶ before and after the Treaty of Windsor.¹⁷ As long as his barons were loyal, and his territory secure, the king had little interest in anything other than a steady stream of silver from Ireland. Upon learning of Laurence's death, Henry immediately dispatched a chaplain to Dublin to take custody of the revenues of the archdiocese.

John Comyn, Laurence's English successor as Archbishop of Dublin, also called church councils to address some of the same abuses Laurence did, and he specifically denounced clerical incontinence.¹⁸ In a sign of the character of the new order in Dublin, John laboured under the heavy-handedness of the ruling barons, going so far as to lay an interdict on the city after a violent dispute with the royal justiciar over church property.¹⁹ When he learned of the inquiry into Laurence's potential canonisation, John was supportive, and found the time to travel all the way to Eu, where he personally documented a miracle at Laurence's tomb, where a man who had spent fifteen years deaf and dumb was restored to health.²⁰

Henry's successors did not improve the situation for the Irish. John Lackland, when charged by Henry to administer his father's lands in Ireland, managed to offend both the Norman settlers and the native Irish and endanger Henry's legacy in Ireland.²¹ The peaceful Christian administration of Ireland that Laurence had hoped for never came to pass. Henry's biographer W.L. Warren recognizes that the partition policy that Henry followed "was unsatisfactory: his proposal to unify the country under his son is proof enough of that; but with John's failure he was obliged to revert to it. The preoccupations

¹³ Lanigan, IV, pp. 244–45.

¹⁴ O'Hanlon, p. 95.

¹⁵ John Guy, *Thomas Becket* (Penguin, 2012), p. 343.

¹⁶ Lanigan, IV, p. 224.

¹⁷ Lanigan, IV, p. 237.

¹⁸ Watt, John A., *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge [England] University Press, 1970), p. 50. <<http://archive.org/details/churchtwonations0000watt>> [accessed 9 September 2024]

¹⁹ Watt, p. 69.

²⁰ Daphne D. C. Pochin Mould, *The Irish Saints* (Clonmore & Reynolds Ltd., 1964), p. 212 <<http://archive.org/details/irishsaints0000daph>> [accessed 29 August 2024].

²¹ W.L. Warren, *Henry II* (University of California Press, 1973), p. 204.

of his successors perpetuated the pattern.”²² When Gerald of Wales attempted to shame the Irish for their lack of martyrs in a sermon at Christ Church in 1186. Matthew, Archbishop of Cashel warned Gerald, “now a people has come into our kingdom who know how to make martyrs and are accustomed to do so. Soon Ireland will have martyrs, like any other country.”²³

Seven centuries later, an unnamed Irish nationalist (likely to have been a priest) wrote a patriotic litany to Saint Laurence, praying for the saint’s intercession against the ruling English. Its opening paragraph follows:²⁴

"O most patriotic and venerable O'Toole, who didst innocently and without guile transmit to thy unworthy successor the livery of heaven to be defiled by serving two masters, to thee we turn in our affliction, of thee we implore that inspiration to love for the Old Land, which thou didst, while Archbishop of Dublin, endeavor by word and deed to infuse into the Irish heart in repelling the Anglo-Norman with all his works and pomps. Explain to my once anti-Irish master, Adrian, the sad consequences of his bull in our land, which, through his kind but unsolicited exertions in benefitting the soul, has brought unremitting pain and misery on the body."

Lorcán Ua Tuathail, like Malachy, was an extraordinarily gifted prelate whose determination to achieve his goals changed the political and ecclesiastical landscape of Ireland. For Malachy, the objective was to overturn what he saw as the corrupt practices of the ancient Irish church and restore them to harmony with Rome. Laurence shared some of this with Malachy, but Laurence was also challenged with responding to the sudden imposition of the Anglo-Norman domain, loyalty to Henry, and the customs of the English church, along with the warfare and strife accompanying them. Time and again Laurence chose “the gospel of peace” over confrontation; we see this at the fall of Dublin, at Second Cashel, and at Windsor. Laurence may best be characterised by Martin, who finds him to be often misunderstood as either a pro-English or pro-Irish partisan. Martin, whose career spanned much of the Irish nationalist period and saw the worst of “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland, was in an excellent position to understand Laurence’s responses to the dilemmas he faced. Laurence lived Mark 12:17 literally; the archbishop was “willing to render to Caesar the things that were Caesar’s and to adapt to a succession of political masters (Diarmait Mac Murchada, the Hiberno-Norse of Dublin, the Norman adventurers, and Henry II).”²⁵ It can be difficult to understand Laurence without recognising his overarching devotion to the church’s Gospel mission; to reach Martin’s accurate conclusion that Laurence “was that rare phenomenon, a religious leader without political affiliations, a pastor whose care was equal for all members of a flock composed of Hiberno-Norse, Irish, and newly arrived Normans.”²⁶

The Augustinian canon Laurence must have often recalled Augustine himself as he managed the tremendous burdens of his station. “And when the prophet Jeremiah

²² W.L. Warren, *Henry II* (University of California Press, 1973), p. 206.

²³ Gwynn, p. 143.

²⁴ ‘St. Laurence O’Toole’s Litany - De Profundis Clamavi, Appealing for O’Toole’s Intercession in Freeing Ireland from English Rule,’.

²⁵ Martin, pp. 31–32.

²⁶ Martin, pp. 30–31.

predicted to the ancient People of God the coming captivity, and bade them, by God's inspiration, to go obediently to Babylon, serving God even by their patient endurance, he added his own advice that prayers should be offered for Babylon, 'because in her peace is your peace.'"²⁷

Over the centuries that the clergy of Eu served as custodians of Laurence's relics, the monks had to foil many attempts to steal or destroy Laurence's relics, particularly during the Huguenot Rebellion, and constantly during the French Revolution.²⁸ Laurence's relics probably would have remained little known outside of scholars and the Catholics of Dublin and Normandy were it not for an incident that occurred in 2012. Thieves, whose identities have never been disclosed, broke into the reliquary of Christ Church cathedral in Dublin and made off with the heart of Saint Laurence.²⁹ Clearly these thieves had not read the warnings of Gerald of Wales on the nature of Irish saints, for they apparently suffered many calamities in their lives before deciding that the heart of Saint Laurence should be returned. In April 2018, the heart was found by Gardaí in Phoenix Park after a long investigation and handed over to the Church of Ireland (Anglican) Archbishop of Dublin. The dean of Christ Church was pleased to return Laurence's heart to its place in the reliquary.³⁰

²⁷ Augustine, *City of God* (Penguin, 2003), p. 892.

²⁸ O'Hanlon, pp. 127–28.

²⁹ Nick Maxwell, 'The Curse of St Laurence O'Toole', *History Ireland*, 2018
<<https://www.historyireland.com/the-curse-of-st-laurence-otoole/>> [accessed 28 September 2024].

³⁰ 'Heart of St Laurence O'Toole to Be Returned Six Years after It Was Stolen', *The Irish Times*
<<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/heart-of-st-laurence-o-toole-to-be-returned-six-years-after-it-was-stolen-1.3475027>> [accessed 29 September 2024].

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Major Events in the Life of Saint Laurence O'Toole (Lorcán Ua Tuathail), Archbishop of Dublin (1128-1180)

1128 (?)	Birth, Leinster.
1142-1144 (?)	Hostage to Diarmait Mac Murchada, King of Leinster
1152 (?)	Abbot of Glendalough
1162	Archbishop of Dublin
1169	Anglo-Norman forces arrive in Ireland
1171	Henry II visits Ireland
1175(?)	Visit to Canterbury to meet Henry II, assassination attempt.
1179	Third Lateran Council, Rome (Alexander III) Appointed Papal Legate to Ireland
1180	Travels to England and Normandy to appeal to Henry II Death, Eu, Normandy.
1226	Canonisation by Pope Honorius III