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THE RHETORIC AND
REALITY OF
REFORM IN IRISH
ESCHATOLOGICAL
THOUGHT,
CIRCA 1000–1150

Ireland developed a tradition of vernacular writing very early in its history, in comparison with other medieval European cultures, and there is a substantial corpus of vernacular texts that has come down to us, dating from the late sixth or early seventh century onward. Because Ireland was never incorporated into the Roman Empire, it had little tradition of Latin literacy before the period of conversion to Christianity, a process that was under way by the fifth century at the latest.¹ Writing in the vernacular seems to have followed very soon after the beginnings of Latin literacy: Latin and vernacular textual cultures thus developed in tandem in Ireland, and they are inextricably linked throughout the Middle Ages. The close relationship between Latin and the Irish vernacular is exemplified in the many bilingual works that survive, ranging from macaronic compositions that alternate between extended passages of Latin and Irish, to texts that use individual Irish words or phrases to gloss, translate, or

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¹ For an overview, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

replace terms in Latin whose meaning might be ambiguous or obscure.² Texts of either language that survive from before about 1200 were almost exclusively written in ecclesiastical centers by an educated clerical or monastic elite: it is likely that, before the end of the twelfth century, many of the vernacular texts that survive from medieval Ireland were written by the same individuals as those in Latin;³ therefore, the one cannot be separated from the other. Indeed, the evidence from early medieval Ireland suggests that Irish scholars treated the vernacular in the same way as they treated Latin: thus we have a large corpus of sophisticated grammatical texts, linguistic treatises, and etymological glossaries from early medieval Ireland, all of which attest to the study of the vernacular at an equally advanced level as Latin.⁴ An important consequence of this is that we cannot automatically assume that a text in Latin was intended for a different audience than a text in Irish. Texts in the vernacular are not necessarily aimed at a more popular or lay audience than are Latin texts; rather, we must read each text individually in order to evaluate its likely intended audience. Homiletic texts in the vernacular provide one instance where we may be justified in positing a wider, nonclerical audience—that is, in addition to, rather than in opposition to, a clerical audience.

Among this rich and diverse body of material are many eschatological texts, and in this as much as other genres both languages are well represented.⁵ Searching for a qualitatively different “vernacular eschatology” (as opposed to eschatology in the vernacular) in Ireland would be fruitless: the same ideas are expressed in both Irish and Latin texts.⁶ However, it is important to consider how the form and function of individual texts influenced

² For example, see Roisin McLaughlin, “A Latin-Irish Text on Fasting in the *Leabhar Breac*,” *Ériu* 60 (2010): 3780, and “A Text on Almsgiving in RIA MS 3 B 23 and the *Leabhar Breac*,” *Ériu* 62 (2012): 113–83; Jacopo Bisagni and Immo Wartjes, “Latin and Old Irish in the Munich Computus: A Reassessment and Further Evidence,” *Ériu* 57 (2007): 1–33, and “The Early Old Irish Material in the Newly Discovered *Computus Einsidensis* (c. AD 700),” *Ériu* 58 (2008): 77–105.

³ Various scholars and poets whose obits appear in Irish annals are noted for their learning in “both languages,” that is, Latin and Irish; see, for example, the mention of Mael Ísu ua Brolcháin (d. 1086) in *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, trans. and ed. Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), 1086.1.

⁴ Thus, for example, the vernacular Irish poetico-grammatical tract *Auricept na nÉces: The Scholars' Primer*, trans. and ed. George Calder (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1917). On glossaries and their educational and linguistic context, see Paul Russell, “Read It in a Glossary”: *Glossaries and Learned Discourse in Medieval Ireland*, Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lectures 6 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic, 2008), and references therein.

⁵ See, e.g., the range of texts edited, translated and discussed in John Carey, Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh, and Emma Nic Cárthaigh, eds., *The End and Beyond: Medieval Irish Eschatology*, 2 vols. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2014).

⁶ On Latin sources for, and influence on, Irish vernacular eschatological texts, see Elizabeth Boyle, “Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland: The Evidence of *Scéla na esérgi*,” *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009): 216–30, and “Eschatological Justice in *Scéla laí brátha*,” *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 59 (2010): 39–54.

authors' linguistic choices: many Irish eschatological texts are homiletic in form, and preaching to the laity, or to a mixed audience,⁷ provides one instance where we may be able to observe subtle but tangible differences in the focus of eschatological discussion and the register in which it is communicated. For example, in texts aimed at lay audiences we might expect to see less discussion of abstract theology and more attention given to the postmortem fate of individuals. The purpose of the present study is to examine eschatological homilies dating from the period circa 1000 to circa 1150, written entirely, or predominantly, in Irish, but these preliminary remarks have been necessary in order to remind us that what follows should not be viewed as disconnected from the Latin ecclesiastical culture of medieval Ireland. The focus of the discussion will be on two interconnected problems: first, the nature and extent of apocalyptic thought, or millenarianism, in eleventh- and twelfth-century Irish eschatological writings; and second, the connections between eschatological thought and ecclesiastical reform.⁸

Manifestations of apocalyptic thought in early medieval Latin Europe have long been the subject of scholarly debate. There are those who would argue that real and widespread panic about the imminent end of the world occurred periodically in many areas of Europe throughout the Middle Ages; others would regard such moments of panic as rare and limited in influence. Some view apocalypticism as proactive, linking it to radical social movements; others view it as essentially reactive, a response to social change or trauma; while yet others would view apocalypticism as a rhetorical device, which could be used to press for the reform of individuals and institutions.⁹ Whether

⁷ In this respect, it is worth emphasizing the significance of the identification of many major ecclesiastical sites from early medieval Ireland as "multifunctional," that is, consisting of episcopal centers, male and/or female monastic communities, and churches providing pastoral care for the tenants of ecclesiastical lands. The work of Colmán Etchingham is particularly significant in this regard: see his *Church Organisation in Ireland, A.D. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth: Laigin Publications, 1999). The existence of such communities suggests a potential need for homilies that operate on a number of levels, serving a diverse audience.

⁸ In this essay I focus on a selection of homiletic texts concerned with eschatological themes, since it is reasonable to suppose that any apocalyptic rhetoric to be identified in medieval Irish homilies are likely to be found in texts on the subject of Judgment Day, universal resurrection, the afterlife, etc. For a survey of the corpus of homiletic literature surviving from medieval Ireland, see Martin McNamara, "Irish Homilies A.D. 600–1100," in *Via Crucis: Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J. E. Cross*, ed. Thomas N. Hall (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002), 235–84, but it should be noted that this survey was preliminary and some of its statements regarding date and authorship cannot be substantiated.

⁹ For a wide range of views see, for example, Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Johannes Fried, *Aufstieg aus dem Untergang. Apokalyptisches Denken und die Entstehung der modernen Naturwissenschaft im Mittelalter* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001); R. A. Markus, "Living within Sight of the End," in

apocalypticism was rhetorical or real, its textual reflexes were inextricably linked to a perceived need for reform—social, moral, or ecclesiastical—and therefore the particular vocabulary of apocalypticism often needs to be disentangled from the more general discourses of penitence, reform, and renewal. Despite the fact that the eschatological literature of medieval Ireland has been the subject of a relatively large amount of scholarly attention, this has generally focused on the development of vision literature, with particular attention given to the “birth of purgatory” (to borrow Jacques Le Goff’s phrase), and on the transmission of motifs derived from biblical apocrypha.¹⁰ Discussion of the social and historical implications of eschatological thought has been limited to what has been understood as a single moment of apocalyptic panic in Ireland in the year 1096.

David Dumville’s article on ecclesiastical reform in Ireland in the period 1066–1166 and Aileen O’Leary’s study of apocalypticism in eleventh-century Ireland both see the year 1096 as a pivotal one in the religious history of Ireland.¹¹ There is a complex set of chronicle references relating to a possible moment of apocalyptic panic in 1096 that scholars have viewed in connection with the devastating winter of 1095–96.¹² Furthermore, scholars have accepted Eugene O’Curry’s suggestion that a bilingual (Latin and Middle Irish) treatise known as *Adomnán’s Second Vision* was composed as part of that panic—whether as provocation or response—and that it is evidence of

Time in the Medieval World, ed. C. Humphrey and M. Ormrod (Woodbridge: York Medieval, 2001), 23–34; Richard Landes, Andrew Gow, and David Van Meter, eds., *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); James Palmer, “Calculating Time and the End of Time in the Carolingian World, c. 740–820,” *English Historical Review* 126 (2011): 1307–31, and *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For conceptual and chronologically wide-ranging discussions (again from very different perspectives), see John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); and Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Groundbreaking scholarship has been published in these areas by Robert McNally, Martin McNamara, Máire Herbert, John Carey, and many others. A bibliography, compiled by Nicole Volmering as part of the *De finibus* collaboration, can be found in Carey et al., *The End and Beyond*, 2:855–912.

¹¹ David N. Dumville, “Frivolity and Reform in the Church: The Irish Experience, 1066–1166,” *Studies in Church History* 48 (2012): 47–64; Aileen M. O’Leary, “Mog Ruith and Apocalypticism in Eleventh-Century Ireland,” in *The Individual in Celtic Literatures*, ed. Joseph Falaky Nagy, CSANA Yearbook 1 (Dublin, 2001), 51–60. See also David N. Dumville, *Councils and Synods of the Gaelic Early and Central Middle Ages*, Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Mediaeval Gaelic History 3 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic, 1997), 37, 40–42.

¹² All of the chronicles record the extreme hardship of the winter of 1095–96. For example, *Annals of Ulster*, 1095.1: “Snechta mór do ferthain in Cetain iar Kl. co ro marb ár doene 7 en 7 cethra [Great snow fell the Wednesday [3rd] after the first of January, and killed men and birds and beasts],” followed by 1095.8: “Teidm mor i nErinn coro marb ár doene o Kl. Auguist co Belltaine iar cinn [in margin: .i. bliadhain na mortla [A great sickness in Ireland that killed many people, [lasting] from the first of August until the following May Day (i.e., the year of the mortality)].”

apocalypticism in Ireland in and around the year 1096.¹³ I suggest that a reexamination of the evidence can yield a new interpretation, one that questions the use of apocalyptic rhetoric in medieval Irish eschatology and that seeks to reassess our understanding of the roles of penitence and reform in religious discourse in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland.

At first glance, we appear to have no surviving evidence of any millennial panic in Ireland at the turn of the year 1000. Rather, scholars' understanding of eschatological thought in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland has been shaped around the events of 1096. Irish chronicles tell us that, in the year 1096, there was a moment of "fear" in Ireland, during which it was determined that an impending calamity could be averted through fasting, prayer, and the donation of alms and land to the church. We have a brief indication of this in some annal entries:

Uamon mór for feraibh Erenn ria feil Eoin na bliadna-sa co ro thesairc Dia tria troisc-tibh comarba Patraic ⁊ cleirech nErenn archena.¹⁴

Bliadain na fele Eoin an bliadainsi for Aoine gur gab eglá mor fir Eirenn inte conidh í comairle ar ar cinnettur clerigh Erenn da dichor .i. tredenus gach mí ⁊ trosgadh gach laoi go cenn mbliadhna ⁊ almsana don Coimhdhedh. Tugset righa Erenn saoire do ceallaibh imdha ro battur a ndocur.¹⁵

However, we are reliant on a seventeenth-century chronicle, albeit one that draws widely on earlier sources, for a fuller account of events:

Feil Eóin for Aoine isin m-bliadhan-si. Ro ghabh imeagla mhór Fíora Ereann reimpi, conadh i comhairle ar-riacht lá cleirchibh Ereann im comarba Phátraicc dia n-imdhidén ar an tedhmáim re tircanadh dóibh ó chéin a forchongra for chach a c-coichtinne tredhenos ó Chedaoin go Domhnach do dénamh gacha mí, ⁊ troscadh gach laoi go

¹³ Eugene O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (Dublin: W. B. Kelly, 1873), 404, 424–25. This was accepted in Whitley Stokes, trans. and ed., "Adamnán's Second Vision," *Revue Celtique* 12 (1891): 420.

¹⁴ "Great fear seized the men of Ireland before the feast of John in this year, and God protected them through the fasts of the successor of Patrick and the other clerics of Ireland" (*Annals of Ulster*, 1096.3). The entry in the related chronicle, *The Annals of Loch Cé: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from A.D. 1014 to A.D. 1590* (trans. and ed. William M. Hennessy, Rolls Series, 2 vols. [London: Longman, 1871; repr., Dublin: Stationery Office, 1939]), is almost identical, although it adds that Patrick as well as God protected the men of Ireland.

¹⁵ "This year was the year of the festival of John on Friday, and great fear seized the men of Erin on account thereof; and the resolution arrived at by the clergy of Erin to banish it was [to order] an abstinence of three days each month, and a fast day each day, to the end of a year, and almsgiving to the Lord. The kings of Erin gave freedom to many churches which were in difficulty" (*Chronicum Scotorum: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1135, with a Supplement containing the Events from 1141 to 1150*, trans. and ed. William M. Hennessy, Rolls Series [London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1866], 1092 [*recte*] 1096).

cenn m-bliadhna, cenmotát domhnaighe, 7 sollamna, 7 aird-fheile, 7 dan do-ratsat almsana, 7 edbarta iomdha do Dhia. Tuccadh dan feranna iomdha do eccailsibh, 7 chléircibh, ó ríoghaibh, 7 taoisechaibh, 7 ro saortha Fir Ereann an tucht sin ar téine na díoghla.¹⁶

We should immediately be wary of the fact that we have great variety in the length and nature of our chronicle accounts: from where did the Four Masters obtain their more detailed information? None of the other accounts articulate the precise nature of the *ecla* (fear), or *ómun* (fear, terror), experienced by the men of Ireland or give the level of detail offered in the *Annals of the Four Masters* regarding the nature of the fasts undertaken. Indeed, it is significant that another chronicle offers no information at all and states only: “Exit malus annus et ueniat bonus annus .i. *bliadain na feli Eoin*.”¹⁷ Scholars have long noted the parallels between elements of the annalistic account in the *Annals of the Four Masters* and the opening of *Adomnán’s Second Vision*:

Uae, uae, uae uiris Hiberniae insolae mandata Domini transgredientibus! Uae regibus et princi[pi]bus qui non di[li]gunt ueritatem et diligunt iniquitatem et rapinam! Uae doctoribus qui non docent ueritatem et consen[t]iunt uanitatibus imperfectorum! Uae meretricibus et peccatoribus qui sicut foenum et stipula concremabuntur a bura ignata in anno bisextili et embolismi et in fine circuli et in Decollatione Iohannis Bautistae! In sexta feria autem plaga conueni[e]t in illo anno, nisi deuota poenitentia prohibuerit, ut Níniuetae fecerunt!¹⁸

¹⁶ “The feast of John fell on a Friday this year; the men of Ireland were seized with great fear in consequence, and the resolution adopted by the clergy of Ireland, with the successor of Patrick at their head, to protect them against the pestilence which had been predicted to them at a remote period, was to command everyone collectively to observe abstinence, from Wednesday until Sunday, every month, and to fast on one meal every day until the end of the year, except on Sundays, solemnities and great festivals; and they also made alms and many offerings to God; and many lands were granted to churches and clergymen by kings and chieftains; and the men of Ireland were saved for that time from the fire of vengeance” (*Annala Ríoghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*, trans. and ed. John O’Donovan, 7 vols., 3rd ed. [Dublin: Hodges, Smith, 1848–51; repr., Dublin: De Búrca Rare Books, 1990], 1096.9). Here we might note the prominent role afforded to Armagh (i.e., to “the successor of Patrick”) in coordinating this penitential act.

¹⁷ “A bad year goes and a good year should come, that is, the year of the festival of John” (Whitley Stokes, trans. and ed., “The Annals of Tigernach,” *Revue Celtique* 16 [1895]: 374–419; 17 [1896]: 6–33, 116–263, 337–420; 18 [1897]: 9–59, 150–303; with corrections in 18 [1897]: 303, 390–91 [repr. in 2 vols., Felinfach: Llanerch, 1993], 1096.0).

¹⁸ “Woe! Woe! Woe to the men of the island of Ireland transgressing the Lord’s commandments! Woe to the kings and princes who do not love truth and love injustice and plunder! Woe to the teachers who do not teach truth and consent to the folly of the imperfect! Woe to the harlots and sinners who will be burned up like hay and stubble by a fire kindled in an embolismic leap year and at the end of a cycle and on the [Feast of] the Decollation of John the Baptist! On a Friday in this year a plague will come, unless devout penance will have prevented it, just as the Ninevites did!” (Nicole Volmering, trans. and ed., “Adomnán’s Second Vision,” in Carey et al., *The End*

After this Latin opening, the sermon continues in Irish, and there are aspects of the vernacular sections of the text that seem to connect it further with some of the annal entries for 1095–96:

Ticfa tra cech duinebad i ndiaid araile doib co dunbad na felí Eoin.¹⁹

Is ead didiu cetharda tímarnad o Dia ⁊ Patraic do breth na plaga for cula o feraib Erenn .i. tredan cecha tremis, ⁊ denum redi do amrédib ⁊ dias cech eclasi De, do aes graid fri bathis ⁊ comaind ⁊ g[ab]ail n-ec[n]arci ⁊ maccu do legend ⁊ soire dómnaig. Croch Críst do foraire in ce[ch teg]dais cen bes creitem in n-Erinn.²⁰

The particular significance of the Feast of the Decollation of John is elaborated in a number of Middle Irish texts, which contain references to the beheading of John the Baptist having been committed by an Irishman by the name of Mog Ruith (who, in other earlier texts, is described as having learned magical arts from Simon Magus).²¹ Medieval Irish apocryphal texts suggest that Ireland will be destroyed as punishment for Mog Ruith's involvement in John's death. Aideen O'Leary has herself noted the narrow chronological and geographical scope of the texts that mention Mog Ruith, in that they are all Middle Irish (i.e., dating from ca. 900 to ca. 1200, at the broadest possibility, but they have not been subjected to close linguistic analysis and may be much closer in date to one another) and all have a focus on the southern Irish province of Munster.²² O'Leary has argued that the character of Mog Ruith played a central role in millenarian expectation in medieval Ireland, but it should be noted that Mog Ruith is not mentioned at all in either *Adomnán's Second Vision* or the annals for 1096.

Máire Herbert has observed, in an unpublished essay, that another time when the Feast of the Decollation of John fell on a Friday was the year

and Beyond, 2:647–81, § 1; I am grateful to Nicole Volmering for having allowed me to see her edition before its publication). See also Stokes, "Adomnán's Second Vision," §§ 1–2.

¹⁹ "One mortality after another, then, will come to them up to the mortality of the Feast of John [the Baptist]" (Volmering, "Adomnán's Second Vision," § 2).

²⁰ "These, then, are the four things commanded by God and Patrick in order to turn the plague from the men of Ireland: that is, a three-day fast every three months; and 'making smooth from rough;' and two ordained men in every church of God for baptism, communion and reciting intercessory prayers, and boys [to be sent] to study; and Sunday free. Christ's cross [is] to be watched in every house for as long as faith is in Ireland" (ibid., § 8). I have adapted Volmering's translation to reflect my differing interpretation of the nature of the "four things." Compare Edward Gwynn, trans. and ed., *The Rule of Tallaght*, *Hermathena* 44, second supplemental volume (Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1927), §§ 60–61.

²¹ Note that these earlier texts connecting Mog Ruith with Simon Magus do not mention the beheading of John the Baptist or connected eschatological beliefs; John Carey, "An Old Irish Poem about Mog Ruith," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 110 (2005): 125.

²² O'Leary, "Mog Ruith and Apocalypticism," 54–55.

1000.²³ The *Annals of the Four Masters* records little about the significance of that year, noting only—in accordance with the phrasing offered in other years—that it is “The Age of Christ, 1000.” But one witness records in a bilingual entry on the millennium: “Hic est octauus sexagissimus quingentissimus ab aduentu sancti Patrici ad bapuzandos Scotos. Bissextilis 7 Embolismus isin bliadain sin. ([In margin:] Hic est millissimus annus ab Incarnatione Domini.)”²⁴ Thus, according to the Ulster annalist, the year 1000 was a bissextile and embolismic year,²⁵ in which the Feast of the Decollation of St. John fell on a Friday, a combination of factors that led Máire Herbert to argue that the idea of 1096 being an inauspicious year was possibly a secondary calculation resulting from the fact that nothing of apocalyptic significance had occurred in 1000.²⁶ Such a secondary calculation might have taken place within the immediate context of the very difficult social and economic circumstances of 1095–96.

There are some differences of detail between the annalistic accounts of 1096 and *Adomnán’s Second Vision*. For example, the *Chronicum Scotorum* and the *Annals of the Four Masters* specify that monthly fasting was enjoined by “the clergy of Ireland” in order to avert disaster; whereas *Adomnán’s Second Vision* specifies fasts once every three months. Indeed, the author of *Adomnán’s Second Vision* seems to view fasting every three months as a long-term practice and not something to be limited to a single year. He states that “this is when the three-day fast is always due,” namely, at the start of “winter Lent” and “spring Lent,” “the Wednesday after Pentecost” and “after the beginning of autumn” (§ 10). If this call for fasting was the result of a council in 1096 that believed that the destruction of Ireland would occur on August 29, planning for autumn and winter fasts seems rather optimistic. Furthermore, one of the penalties against someone who refuses to fast is that “he will not get benefits or gifts for a year” (§ 9), which again seems like an odd punishment in the face of imminent danger. In this respect, I suggest that it

²³ Máire Herbert, “Prophecies of Doomsday ascribed to Colum Cille” (paper delivered at the Fourteenth International Congress of Celtic Studies, National University of Ireland Maynooth, August 2, 2011).

²⁴ “This is the 568th year since the coming of St. Patrick to baptize the Irish. Bissextilis and Embolismus in the above year. [This is the 1000th year since the Incarnation of the Lord]” (*Annals of Ulster*, 1000.1).

²⁵ The annalist was correct in stating that, according to the Julian calendar, the year 1000 was bissextile, but he was incorrect in identifying it as embolismic: such computational mistakes are fairly common in chronicles throughout medieval Europe. What is important for our purposes is his belief that the year was embolismic.

²⁶ In the light of Herbert’s suggestion, one might even consider whether “Adomnán’s Second Vision” might initially have been composed in or around 1000, rather than 1096. The search for an answer to such a question would involve a close linguistic analysis of “Adomnán’s Second Vision,” and this is outside the scope of the present discussion, but there are certainly linguistic oddities in the text that would repay further study.

might be significant that the only place in *Adomnán's Second Vision* where the precondition of the Feast of the Decollation of John falling on a Friday in a bissextile, embolismic year, at the end of a cycle, is explicitly stated is in the Latin opening. It occurs nowhere else in the text. Rather, in the (vernacular) body of the text, one gets the impression that pestilence or “the coming of heathens or mortality or ailment on men or cattle or produce” (§ 9) are recurring rather than eschatological dangers and that the destructive pestilence might come in any year at the Feast of the Decollation of John. One might tentatively suggest that the Latin opening to the text was a later creation, perhaps composed specifically for the year 1096, or indeed 1000, or any other year that met its calendrical criteria.²⁷

What is problematic from a historiographical perspective is how 1096 has become a focal point for any discussion of eschatological thought in Ireland in the eleventh century and indeed ecclesiastical history in medieval Ireland more generally. Aileen O’Leary has argued that it was a “major turning-point in Irish Christian history,” and David Dumville has claimed that it marked the “beginning of a reform movement.”²⁸ As we shall see below, there is no evidence to support either assessment. O’Leary has suggested that “the crisis [of 1096] was based on an accumulation of traumatic experiences in Irish society which can be traced back over a period of three hundred years.”²⁹ This is overstating the case, to say the least. For example, O’Leary cites the arrival of the Vikings as having a destabilizing effect on Irish society, leading to long-term upheaval and “social disorder on a massive scale.”³⁰ It has been argued that the Viking invasions in Ireland were less traumatic than had previously been supposed, and, in any case, by the eleventh century, the Scandinavian-controlled areas of Ireland were thoroughly integrated into Irish political and economic life: one can hardly attribute “apocalyptic” fervor in the 1090s to Viking raids in the 790s.³¹ The identification by both Dumville and O’Leary of the events of 1096 as the primary catalyst for the ecclesiastical reform movement in Ireland is equally insupportable.

²⁷ Indeed, Eugene O’Curry raised the possibility, in a rather oblique way, that “Adomnán’s Second Vision” might be a composite or reworked text in his remarks on its connections with the year 1096: “we may, I think, fairly assume that this version of the vision of St. Adamnan was written (at least in its present form) immediately or shortly before that year, although it is possible that a portion of it, or perhaps some version of the entire, may have been uttered or written many generations before. And the probability of this ‘Vision’ being of the date I assign to it, is further sustained by the fact that the language is not of a more ancient character” (*Lectures on the Manuscript Materials*, 425–26).

²⁸ O’Leary, “Mog Ruith and Apocalypticism,” 51; Dumville, “Frivolity and Reform,” 64.

²⁹ O’Leary, “Mog Ruith and Apocalypticism,” 51.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 57–58.

³¹ See, e.g., Colmán Etchingham, “The Viking Impact on Glendalough,” in *Glendalough: City of God*, ed. Charles Doherty et al. (Dublin: Four Courts, 2011), 211–22, and references therein.

Going further than either Dumville or O’Leary, Benjamin Hudson has written that the panic of 1096 “can be seen as the logical conclusion to ever greater speculations about final judgment that had become embedded in medieval Celtic intellectual and popular culture and reached a climax in Ireland in the eleventh century.”³² Hudson’s wholly inadequate—and frequently inaccurate—account of medieval Irish eschatological thought placed the events of 1096 at the heart of the entire corpus of Irish eschatological writings. He has stated that 1096 was the “crescendo” of centuries of eschatological interest and that the “terrors of that year might have been one of the inspirations not only for the preservation of the earlier eschatological materials but also for the composition of the famous *Vision of Tnúdgal*.”³³ Of course, there is nothing to connect either the preservation of earlier eschatological texts, or the composition of the *Visio Tnúgdali* (on which more below), with the events of 1096. Indeed, Hudson has seen an escalating rhetoric of apocalypticism in texts that are remarkable for their lack of apocalypticism. Thus commentators have fixed on 1096 as a moment of apocalyptic fervor and have tended to view other Irish eschatological texts teleologically, that is, seeing 1096 as the culmination of a gathering storm of apocalypticism in medieval Ireland.

O’Leary’s argument is that the “crisis” of 1096, “and not merely correspondence with external church authorities, served as the catalyst for both a widespread peace movement (which was initiated and largely maintained by the clergy) and a movement for ecclesiastical reform.”³⁴ I have not seen the evidence for a “widespread peace movement” in Ireland (O’Leary cites a forthcoming article by Dumville), but the argument that 1096 was the primary catalyst for ecclesiastical reform seems to me not only to exaggerate the evidence for the political and ecclesiastical significance of that year but also to misunderstand the nature of the rhetoric of reform that is observable in *Adomnán’s Second Vision*.

The author of *Adomnán’s Second Vision* condemns churches for their organisational failings and individuals for their moral failings, accusing supposed Christians of being no better than heathens “except only that they do not worship idols” (*acht na hadrat ídlu namá*; § 6). Indeed, in some respects the author’s contemporaries are worse than heathens because at least heathens abided by their oaths.³⁵ Railing at society for its moral decline, and holding up a past golden age—in this case the age of St. Patrick—to which the Church

³² Benjamin Hudson, “Time Is Short: The Eschatology of the Early Gaelic Church,” in *Last Things. Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 101.

³³ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁴ O’Leary, “Mog Ruith and Apocalypticism,” 59.

³⁵ Volmering, “Adomnán’s Second Vision,” § 6.

should strive to return, is a standard topos of hortatory diatribes.³⁶ However, none of the specific concerns that characterise eleventh-century reform movements are mentioned: simony, clerical celibacy, lay investiture, or diocesan organisation appear to be of no particular interest to the author.³⁷ Rather, the concerns of the author of *Adomnán's Second Vision* are more generic: the failure to adhere to Christian values; moral decline; the lack of proper provision for churches. It is difficult to view such complaints specifically as the catalyst (or “turning-point”) for Ireland’s engagement with Continental reform movements.

The rhetoric of *Adomnán's Second Vision* is by no means confined to the eleventh century. It has been noted by Thomas Clancy, in an unpublished essay, that in ninth- and tenth-century Ireland various disasters were blamed on a lack of religious observance.³⁸ For example, the late ninth-century “Epistle of Jesus,” part of the collection of material relating to *Cáin Domnaig* (the Law of Sunday), states that unless Sunday is observed properly, God will punish Ireland—on the Feast of John—with destructive storms, fire, and invasion.³⁹ *An Leabhar Breac*, which preserves a copy of *Adomnán's Second Vision*, also contains a copy of the *Epistle of Jesus*. There are similarities in the tone and register of both texts, as well as the recurring idea that the Feast of John is a particularly significant date.

The events of 1096 are, at most, a reflection of one particular response to a set of very difficult circumstances. If we examine what was going on elsewhere in Ireland at that time, we can see that the drive for reform was already established. Donnóg Ua hAingliu, bishop of Dublin, who died in 1095, had been trained at Canterbury; and his predecessor, Patrick (d. 1084), had been consecrated in London in 1074 by Lanfranc of Canterbury. At Patrick’s consecration, Lanfranc had written to Irish kings urging reform of various aspects of ecclesiastical organisation in Ireland.⁴⁰ Mael-Ísu Úa hAinmire, educated at

³⁶ See, e.g., Kathleen G. Cushing, “The Rhetoric of Reform,” in *Reform and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century: Spirituality and Social Change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), chap. 6, and the references therein.

³⁷ On the various interconnected aims of eleventh-century reform, see Cushing, *Reform and the Papacy*; Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century*, trans. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³⁸ Thomas Owen Clancy, “Preventing Apocalypse: The Great Irish Panic of 1096” (paper delivered at the University of Edinburgh, February 8, 2000). I am grateful to Clancy for providing me with a copy of his essay.

³⁹ J. G. O’Keefe, trans. and ed., “Cáin Domnaig,” *Ériu* 2 (1905): 196–97. For a discussion of the date and nature of this material, see Liam Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, Early Irish Law Series 5 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2005), 209–12.

⁴⁰ Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson, trans. and ed., *The Letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), nos. 9 and 10, and see also 8 and 49. That Lanfranc wrote equally to the Hiberno-Scandinavian king of Dublin, Gofraid mac Amlaíb (d. 1075), and to his Gaelic overking, Tairdelbach Ua Briain (d. 1086), shows how thoroughly integrated were Hiberno-

Winchester, was consecrated bishop of Waterford by Anselm of Canterbury in 1095 or 1096. Thus the influence of reforming bishops was already being felt in Ireland. If we connect the composition of *Adomnán's Second Vision* with 1096, which, as we have seen, is in itself problematic, we might see it as a response by Armagh to the difficult social and economic events of 1095–96 and perhaps also to the political threat of a reforming movement with its center in Dublin. This might then reflect aspects of the ecclesiastical reform movements already in evidence elsewhere in Ireland, but to describe it as being instrumental in driving ecclesiastical reform in Ireland does not withstand scrutiny.

A secondary calculation of an inauspicious set of calendrical phenomena, previously seen in the year 1000, as an Irish response to the extreme hardship of 1095–96, is consonant with various other European strategies that were adopted in response to the events of those years. In Denmark the *elevatio* of Knud IV (“the Holy”) in 1095, along with the mysterious death (perhaps by suicide or sacrifice) of the reigning king, Knud’s brother, Olaf I (“Hunger”), seem to have been direct responses to a famine and epidemic of sickness, which is described in very similar terms to that in Ireland.⁴¹ Furthermore, Ekkehard of Aura observed that West Franks were easily convinced to leave their lands in order to go on Crusade because of suffering from famine and “excessive mortality.”⁴² Given the wider European context for the events of 1095–96 it is unsurprising that we might witness a comparable series of events in Ireland: the harsh winter and devastating plague are followed by an unspecified “fear,” the prevention of which is expressed in the discourse of penitence: prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. Indeed, we might look to similar events earlier in the eleventh century, which provide parallels for this particular event in Ireland. For example, the impact of a series of particularly traumatic Viking raids in England in the years 1006–7, and 1009–12, has been much studied by scholars of Anglo-Saxon history.⁴³ The law code known as *VII Æthelred*, which sought to institute a national program of penitential fasting, was drafted by Wulfstan the homilist, and drew on the same common

Scandinavians in Irish political and religious life by the late eleventh century and therefore how problematic is O’Leary’s argument that apocalyptic fervor in Ireland had its roots in the trauma of viking attacks in the eighth and ninth centuries.

⁴¹ Fritz Curschmann, *Hungersnöte im Mittelalter: Ein Beitrag zur Deutschen Wirtschaftsgeschichte des 8. bis 13. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1900); Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney: A Scandinavian Martyr-Cult in Context* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 127–33.

⁴² Cited by A. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye-Witnesses and Participants* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1921), 41–42.

⁴³ See particularly Simon Keynes, “An Abbot, an Archbishop, and the Viking Raids of 1006–7 and 1009–12,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 151–220.

Christian vocabulary of penitential and homiletic discourse that we see in *Adomnán's Second Vision*.⁴⁴

If we put *Adomnán's Second Vision* to one side, and examine the corpus of sermons on eschatological themes surviving from eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland, we can see how uncharacteristic that text is in an eschatological context, and to what extent it stands apart from the general development of eschatological thought. Of particular significance are the three vernacular texts on eschatological themes that are preserved in a manuscript compiled in the last years of the eleventh century and first years of the twelfth: Royal Irish Academy MS 23 E 25, known as *Lebor na hUidre* (The book of the dun cow). *Scéla laí brátha* (Tidings of Judgment Day), was added to *Lebor na hUidre* by the scribe known as “H,” and linguistic dating has shown that the sermon is from the eleventh century.⁴⁵ *Scéla laí brátha* begins by outlining the moment of universal judgment, explicating the so-called eschatological discourse of Matt. 25:34–45, in which Christ utters his words of ultimate reward and punishment: “Venite benedicti Patris mei” (Come, ye blessed of my Father) and “Discedite a me maledicti in ignem aeternum” (Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire), although our author reworked his biblical quotations in the vernacular: “Tícid a bennachtnachu selbaid flaith m’athar ro fuired dúib o thosuch domain,”⁴⁶ and “Scuchaid dím a mallachtnachu 7 ercid isin tenid suthain ro fáired do díabul 7 dia drochmuintir.”⁴⁷ The six works of mercy (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, etc.) are emphasized as being the essential criteria for salvation, and these are described as the “six steps” by which the kingdom of heaven is reached. After outlining the events of the day of judgment, the author then goes on to describe the nature of the kingdoms of heaven and hell, and the citizens who inhabit those kingdoms.

What is striking about *Scéla laí brátha* is that the author characterised hell as a perverted monastic community, with the devil as its abbot, and the sinners as monks.

Bíaid dano and sin maigr 7 íachtad. gol 7 egmech. cnet 7 grechach. cach óenbeoil. 7 mallacht cen chumsanad ona pechtachaib fora n-apaíd .i. for Díabul. ar iss ed dosbeirsium ic fulang phéne cach olc dorónsat triana aslachsom. Ocus mallacht dano úadsom

⁴⁴ On the circumstances of the production and promulgation of *Æthelred VII*, see *ibid.*

⁴⁵ For linguistic dating, see the forthcoming edition by Uáitéar Mac Gearailt in the *Corpus Christianorum—Series Apocryphorum—Apocrypha Hiberniae* series (Turnhout: Brepols).

⁴⁶ “Come, blessed ones; possess the kingdom of my father, which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world” (R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre* [Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1929]; translation my own).

⁴⁷ “Leave me, cursed ones, and go into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his evil community” (*ibid.*; translation my own).

fora manchaibimme .i. forsna peccachaib ar is moti a píansom féin cach olc doronsatsom triana aslom forro oc aslach cach uilc. (l.2434–40)⁴⁸

This perverted community is located in a rural environment, filled with stinking lakes and valleys, populated by wild animals, and plagued by constant warfare.⁴⁹ Heaven, on the other hand, is described as the perfect *ciuitas* (the Irish word used is *cathair* [city, stone enclosure, monastic settlement]), in which there is peace, order, and unending joy, but which is also regulated by the laws governing secular relations in medieval Ireland: for example, when Jesus welcomes the righteous into heaven, he welcomes them not only into his *muintir* (which is the Irish equivalent of Latin *familia*) but also into his *comaitches*, which denotes a secular relationship of community. The text also uses a wide variety of terminology deriving from Irish legal tradition (both secular and ecclesiastical), such as *mes* (judgment); *smacht* (rule, command); *recht* (law); *riagail* (rule); *gell* (pledge); and *mesrugud* (moderation, adjudication). Indeed, the author characterises sinners as those who have no regard for *smacht*, *recht* or *riagail* (l.2377–78). However, at no point in the text does our author suggest that the day of judgment is imminent, or approaching. There is, in this text, none of the urgency or hysteria witnessed in *Adomnán's Second Vision*. The author asks rhetorically how Jesus will return, and where, and why. But he does not ask “when.” It seems that the author heeded the Pauline admonition: “But of the times and moments, brethren, you need not, that we should write to you. For yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord shall so come, as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:1–2).

Similarly, *Scéla na esérgi* (Tidings of the Resurrection) is an eleventh- or early twelfth-century Irish eschatological tract that includes no consideration of the imminence, or otherwise, of the day of judgment. This text is also preserved in *Lebor na hUidre*, where it was added by “H” to the manuscript at some point around the year 1100. This text is a detailed exposition on the nature of the resurrected body, with a focus on exceptional cases, such as miscarried fetuses and the deformed. It has been argued that *Scéla na esérgi* is heavily influenced by Neoplatonic thought, and that it provides interesting examples of the transposition of Latin philosophical vocabulary into the Irish vernacular.⁵⁰ Again, the text’s thoughtful and almost scholastic consideration of the mechanism of

⁴⁸ “There will be there, moreover, sorrow and groaning, weeping and wailing, sighs and screaming, from every single mouth. And ceaseless malediction from the sinners on their abbot, i.e., on the devil, for what causes them to be suffering punishment is every evil they did through his temptation; and a malediction, moreover, from him on his monks around him, i.e., on the sinners, because his own pain is greater for every evil that they did through his persuasion, on account of him inducing every evil” (ibid.; translation my own).

⁴⁹ Boyle, “Eschatological Justice,” 41.

⁵⁰ Boyle, “Neoplatonic Thought,” 218–25.

physical resurrection and the problem of reconciling the doctrine of physical resurrection with the idea of the “spiritual body” in heaven, betrays no sense of urgency or panic. The text begins with the bald statement: “Tabrad cách dia airi co ticfa bráth” (l.2495)⁵¹ and ends with a hortatory demand that the audience reform its moral behavior in order to be worthy of a place among the righteous, but it is not apocalyptic in tone. Indeed, the author explicitly rejects the idea of millenarianism, and explains the concept of *cétesérgi*, that is, “the first resurrection” [i.e., of the just], as being metaphorical, that is,

esergi na hanma óna peccaib hi sualachib tri athrigi do denam, 7 ní fil acht dona fire-naib namma ind esérgi sin,⁵²

and again at the end of the text,

Ind fairend immorro atragat innosa tria Crist isin chetna esergi .i. ind esergi bís tria aithrigi, atreset dano thall tria Christ i n-esergi in bethad suthain. (l.2753–54)⁵³

Thus, the “first resurrection” is a resurrection not from death into life, but from sinfulness to virtue, through penitential acts. This is contrasted with the “second resurrection,” which is the moment of collective resurrection and judgment of all mankind at the end of time. This hortatory call to repentance links *Scéla na esérgi* to *Scéla laí brátha*, which explicitly includes “penitents” among those who will reach the heavenly kingdom, and notes that those who turn to a more virtuous life now can “conceal” their past misdeeds, so that at judgment the Lord will “remember” them not for their earlier sins but for their later good deeds (l.2384–86).⁵⁴

Another example is provided by the homiletic vision text known as *Fís Adomnáin* (The vision of Adomnán).⁵⁵ It was probably this text that established Adomnán of Iona as a visionary character to whose divine authority the hortatory diatribe of *Adomnán’s Second Vision* could be ascribed. The text survives in four manuscripts, including *Lebor na hUidre*, and the fifteenth-century religious miscellany the *Leabhar Breac*, which also preserves *Adomnán’s Second Vision*. In *Fís Adomnáin*, the visionary, Adomnán (d. 704), the sev-

⁵¹ “Take heed, all of you, that judgment will come” (Best and Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre*; translation my own).

⁵² “The resurrection of the soul from sins to virtues, through doing penance, and that resurrection is only for the just” (ibid.; translation my own).

⁵³ “Those, however, who arise now through Christ in the first resurrection, i.e., the resurrection that is through repentance, will also arise there through Christ in the resurrection of eternal life” (ibid.; translation my own).

⁵⁴ Boyle, “Eschatological Justice,” 42.

⁵⁵ For discussion of the text, see David N. Dumville, “Towards an Interpretation of *Fís Adomnáin*,” *Studia Celtica* 12–13 (1977–78): 62–77.

enth-century abbot of Iona and hagiographer of St. Columba, is taken out of his body, on the Feast of John, and is taken on a journey through heaven and hell.⁵⁶ The text probably has an original core that is somewhat earlier than the eleventh century, but it was most likely reworked into homiletic form during the eleventh century. As with our other two examples, we find no apocalyptic tension: the focus of the author, rather, is on the nature of heaven and hell, and the rewards and punishments that will be encountered in each kingdom respectively. References to Judgment Day are, again, expressed without any indication that it might be imminent:

Na buidne ocus na hairechta dano filet i tír na náeb amal ro radsem bidat marthanaig isin mórglóir sin co mordail brátha coros córaigea in brithem fíren i llathe ind fugill isna sostaib ⁊ isna inadaib i mbíat oc déscin gnússe Dé cen fial cen forscáth etarru tria bithu na mbetha. (l.1997–2001)⁵⁷

The text is eschatological but not apocalyptic: however, it betrays other close connections with *Adomnán's Second Vision*. For example, the author describes one of the groups of sinners who will be condemned to hell at Judgment Day:

Is iat iarom filet isin phéin sin peccdaig ⁊ fingalaig ⁊ áes admillte eacailse Dé ⁊ airchin-nig etrócair bíte ós inchaib martra na nnáeb for danaib ⁊ dechmadaib na hecailsi. ⁊ dogníat dona indmasaib selba sainrudcha sech aigedu ⁊ aidlicnechu in Comded. (l.2174–78)⁵⁸

The crimes of kin-slaying, the plunder of churches, and the misuse of ecclesiastical wealth strikingly evoke the complaints of *Adomnán's Second Vision* (especially § 6), but the way in which they are framed in *Fís Adomnáin* also relates to the importance of the six works of mercy, so central to the moral message of *Scéla laí brátha*.

Fís Adomnáin holds a significant place in the corpus of eschatological vision texts, and C. S. Boswell was not overstating the case when he entitled

⁵⁶ Whether this refers to the feasts of the Conception, Nativity, or Decollation of John is unclear, but it is surely not unconnected to the fact that Adomnán died on the night of the Feast of the Conception of John.

⁵⁷ “The bands and companies which are in the land of the saints abide continually in even such great glory as aforesaid, until the great Parliament of Doom, when the righteous judge, on the Day of Judgement, shall dispose them in their stations and abiding places, where they shall contemplate God’s countenance, with no veil nor shadow between, through ages everlasting” (trans. C. S. Boswell, in his *An Irish Precursor of Dante: A Study on the Vision of Heaven and Hell Ascribed to the Eighth-Century Irish Saint Adomnán* [London: Nutt, 1908], § 6).

⁵⁸ “They who are tormented thus are sinners, fratricides, ravagers of God’s Church, and merciless Erenachs, who, in presence of the relics of the Saints, had been set over the Church’s tithes and oblations, and had alienated these riches to their private store, away from the Lord’s guests and needy ones” (ibid., § 25).

his classic study of the text *An Irish Precursor of Dante*. The text's influence can be seen most importantly in the twelfth-century Latin vision text, *Visio Tnugdali*, composed in 1149 by an Irish Benedictine monk at Regensburg, Germany, which went on to have a prolific and diffuse transmission, both in Latin and many European vernaculars.⁵⁹ Indeed, *Visio Tnugdali* articulates more explicitly the concerns of the ecclesiastical reform movements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, culminating in Tnugdál's vision of the architects of ecclesiastical reform in twelfth-century Ireland seated alongside St. Patrick in heaven.⁶⁰ *Fís Adomnáin* is further linked to *Scéla laí brátha*, in that the latter text displays the remnants of the four-fold division of souls at judgment, which is more fully articulated as a purgatorial state in *Fís Adomnáin* (and in *Visio Tnugdali*): that is, the *mali ualde* and the *mali non ualde*; the *boni ualde* and the *boni non ualde*. We may note that the author of *Scéla laí brátha* uses the Latin terms, despite the rest of his text being in the vernacular.

With regard to eschatology in the vernacular and its relationship with Latin, the version of *Fís Adomnáin* that occurs in *Lebor na hUidre* has been edited and translated a number of times; the version in the *Leabhar Breac* has not been the focus of such sustained attention. The reason for this might perhaps be discovered in the remarks made just over a century ago by C. S. Boswell, who stated that the *Lebor na hUidre* version of the text is "more attractive from a literary point of view, the [version in the] L[eabhar] B[reac] being somewhat overloaded in places with Latin quotation."⁶¹ The bilingualism of the text as it appears in the latter manuscript is inherently interesting, but among scholars of medieval Ireland there has been a long tradition of privileging the study of purely vernacular texts at the expense of texts that are latinate, or macaronic/bilingual Latin and Irish.⁶²

Insofar as *Fís Adomnáin* has been an object of study, it has largely been in connection with the development of the concept of purgatory.⁶³ However, what has been generally overlooked is the fact that *Fís Adomnáin* is a homily: it is therefore hortatory and didactic. The central purpose of visions of the

⁵⁹ A. Wagner, ed., *Visio Tnugdali: Lateinisch und Altdeutsch* (Erlangen: Deichert, 1882); B. Pfeil, ed., *Die "Vision des Tnugdalius" Albers von Windberg*, Mikrokosmos—Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Bedeutungsforschung 54 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1999); J. M. Picard, trans., *The Vision of Tnugdál* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1989).

⁶⁰ Picard, *Vision of Tnugdál*, 155.

⁶¹ Boswell, *Irish Precursor of Dante*, 28.

⁶² The most extreme example of this is Robert Atkinson, trans. and ed., *The Passions and the Homilies from Leabhar Breac*, Todd Lectures Series 2 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1887), in which Atkinson divided texts up, publishing the vernacular parts (which he considered to be of superior value) separately from the Latin.

⁶³ Boswell, *An Irish Precursor of Dante*; St. John D. Seymour, *Irish Visions of the Otherworld: A Contribution to the Study of Mediaeval Visions* (London: SPCK, 1930); Dumville, "Towards an Interpretation."

afterlife, including *Fís Adomnáin*, was to inspire the reader or hearer to turn to a more virtuous life, and our other eschatological homilies have the same purpose: they seek to inspire the audience to attain the *cétesérgi*, or metaphorical “first resurrection,” that is, “the resurrection of the soul from sins to virtues, through doing penance.” In *Scéla na esérgi*, the notion of the “first resurrection” is a device to inspire the audience to reform its behavior, as is the afterlife vision in *Fís Adomnáin*, and the eschatological discourse of *Scéla laí brátha*. In the eleventh- and twelfth-century Irish eschatological homilies, the call for reform is articulated subtly and implicitly, and is more heavily focused on the moral reform of individuals than on wholesale institutional change.⁶⁴ There is little sense of apocalypticism or of the end being imminent.

I have confined the present discussion to homiletic texts on eschatological themes: a further step, which would be a substantial undertaking, would be to look more widely at the entire corpus of religious literature from medieval Ireland, including all homiletic texts, doctrinal and devotional verse, penitentials and monastic rules, in order to ascertain whether the apocalyptic strand in Irish religious thought has been overstated. In relation to the texts considered here, however, the following conclusions can be drawn: the majority of eschatological homilies produced in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland betrays no apocalyptic tension. Such texts do not offer any inquiries or assertions as to the imminence of the end-time. Rather, they are concerned with particular aspects of the biblical accounts of the eschaton: *Fís Adomnáin* grew out of a tradition of vision literature whose New Testament authority is 2 Cor. 12:1–4;⁶⁵ *Scéla laí brátha* considers Matthew’s account of Judgment Day; *Scéla na esérgi* considers the tensions within the Bible of both the physical and spiritual understandings of collective resurrection. What links all of the texts discussed above, including *Adomnán’s Second Vision*, is not apocalypticism, but rather ideas of penitence and moral reform. All these texts participate in penitential discourse; all seek to reform the behavior of those who read or hear them; all assert that heaven cannot be attained without a reformation of character, a metaphorical “resurrection” to precede the physical one.

⁶⁴ For discussion of the reflexes of ecclesiastical reform in other literary genres, see Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, “Pagans and Holy Men: Literary Manifestations of Twelfth-Century Reform,” in *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century. Reform and Renewal*, ed. Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (Dublin: Four Courts, 2006), 143–61.

⁶⁵ “If I must glory (it is not expedient indeed), but I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), that he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter” (2 Cor. 12:1–4). For a brief survey of scholarship on medieval visionary texts, see Elizabeth Boyle, “Visionary Texts,” in *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms—Methods—Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classen, 3 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 3:2131–35.

James Palmer's study of apocalypticism and the calculation of time in the Carolingian period contains three conclusions of particular relevance to our Irish material.⁶⁶ First, Palmer has noted the diversity of eschatological and apocalyptic thought in the Carolingian world: the same is true for medieval Ireland, of course. Just because some Irish ecclesiastics preached that the destruction of Ireland (or whatever else caused the "fear" recorded in the annals) was imminent in 1096, it does not follow that everyone, or even a significant element of society, believed them. Other eschatological beliefs circulated simultaneously, and I have argued that those less apocalyptic beliefs predominated. Second, Palmer has observed that apocalypticism was situational and contingent. Therefore, the events of 1095–96 in Ireland need to be viewed in relation to the confluence of various political, economic and social factors—we cannot explain this moment of apocalyptic tension by reference to a nebulous centuries-long "tradition." Third, he has observed that there "was a distinct connection between apocalyptic thought and reforming agendas." That the author of *Adomnán's Second Vision* used apocalyptic rhetoric to push a reforming agenda of his own—the correct provision of clergy for individual churches, and so on—places the text firmly within a wider Irish and, indeed, European context that requires further study. However, we should not be too hasty in identifying that context as being the eleventh-century Continental reform movements. That other authors urged individuals to reform themselves and their own behavior, without recourse to apocalyptic rhetoric, allows us to identify the apocalyptic strand as distinct but limited within the broader history of eschatological thought in Ireland.

There is, of course, a difference between those who think that the world will end and those who think that the world will end soon. This important distinction has, on occasion, been blurred in discussions of medieval Irish eschatology; and, as a result, expressions of unexceptional, standard Christian doctrine about the end of the world have been linked mistakenly to a perceived national tendency toward eschatological speculation and apocalyptic panic. Medieval Irish literati were very conscious of being located geographically at the end of the world, but this did not transmute into a perception that they were living at the end of the world in a chronological sense. The development of medieval Irish eschatological thought needs to be judged both on its own terms and within its wider European context, but without necessarily centring the discussion on one brief, and limited, moment of "fear" which seems to have been a response to the exceptional devastation and destruction of the years 1095–96.

The rhetoric of *Adomnán's Second Vision* certainly excoriates Irish Christians for their perceived moral failings and articulates a vision of an ideal,

⁶⁶ Palmer, "Calculating Time and the End of Time."

reformed Church (whether or not we see those ideals as directly connected with those of the so-called “Gregorian” reform, such as ending simony and promoting clerical celibacy, neither of which are mentioned in the text); but the argument that the events of 1096 were the primary catalyst for the twelfth-century ecclesiastical reform movement in Ireland exaggerates the social, religious, and political significance of one particular moment of socioeconomic stress. The roots of ecclesiastical reform in Ireland were already planted by 1096, and the reasons for the progress of reforming movements in Ireland are multifaceted and dependent on both internal and external factors.⁶⁷ We might more profitably view whatever “fear” the “men of Ireland” felt in 1096 as one of those manifold instances of calendrical superstition that so exasperated Abbo of Fleury:

De fine quoque mundi coram populo sermonem in Ecclesia Parisiorum adolescentulus audivi, quod statim finito mille annorum numero Antichristus adveniret, et non longo post tempore universale iudicium succederet: cui praedicationi ex Evangeliiis ac Apocalypsi et libro Danielis, qua potui virtute, restiti. Denique et errorem qui de fine mundi inolevit abbas meus beatae memoriae Richardus sagaci animo propulit, postquam litteras a Lothariensibus accepit, quibus me respondere iussit; nam fama pene totum mundum impleverat, quod, quando Annuntiatio Dominica in Parasceve contigisset absque ullo scrupulo finis saeculi esset.⁶⁸

That such moments were seized upon (or fabricated) by particular ecclesiastics as opportunities to remind priests of their moral failings, and the laity of their moral and financial obligations, is hardly surprising: in the case of Ireland it would appear that Armagh was the driving force behind the promotion of public penitential acts and moral renewal in 1096. But the heightened rhetoric of *Adomnán's Second Vision* is not consonant with the prevailing register of eschatological texts in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland, which predominantly urge the quiet moral reformation of the individual and point predictably but eloquently to penitence, chastity, and the six works of mercy as providing the surest route to eternal salvation.

⁶⁷ Some of these have been discussed by Marie-Therese Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century*, Studies in Celtic History 29 (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010).

⁶⁸ “Concerning the end of the world, as a youth I heard a sermon preached to the people in the Paris church to the effect that as soon as the number of one thousand years was completed, Antichrist would arrive, and not long after, the Last Judgement would follow. I resisted as vigorously as I could to that preaching, citing the Gospels, Revelation, and Daniel. Then my abbot Richard, of blessed memory and keen mind, rejected another error that grew about the end of the world; and after he received correspondence from Lotharingians, he ordered me to answer. For a rumour had filled almost the entire world that when the Annunciation fell on Good Friday, without any question it would be the end of the world” (Abbo of Fleury, *Apologeticus ad Hugonem et Rodbertum reges Francorum*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 139 [Paris, 1853], col. 471A).