

Authority and Duty: Columbanus and the Primacy of Rome

Damian Bracken

Abstract. Columbanus's letters are among the earliest examples of literature written by an Irishman and one of the first acknowledgements of the primacy of Rome from the pen of a barbarian. Many scholars have discerned a truculence, if not arrogance, in his letters to the popes. In many cases, his direct manner of speaking has obscured for a modern readership the extent of his knowledge of the nature of Roman primacy and his acceptance of many of the principles on which that primacy rests. Particularly in his letter to pope Boniface IV, Columbanus draws on these principles, in the first instance to acknowledge the primacy of the bishop of Rome, but also to remind the pope of the duties of leadership. Columbanus wrote Letter 5 at the time of the Three Chapters controversy when, following the doctrinal wavering of pope Vigilius, the churches of the West had either broken off communion with Rome or viewed its bishop with suspicion. In that context, Columbanus's call on the bishop of Rome to fulfil his role of 'watchman' of the church was less an affront to his dignity than an affirmation of his authority.

Keywords: Columbanus, authority, Three Chapters controversy, Gregory the Great, Leo I, Boniface IV, Rome, primacy of Rome, role of bishop, *caput ecclesiae*, early Ireland.

Damian Bracken
Department of History, NUI Cork
d.bracken@ucc.ie

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IRELAND—ROME—CONSTANTINOPLE

The Irish missionary and founder of monasteries, Columbanus (†615), crossed into Italy in 612 and established his last foundation at Bobbio under the patronage of the Lombard king, Agilulf.¹ Probably in the following year he sent his last letter, to pope Boniface IV, calling on him to take action and heal the divisions in the Italian church caused by the Three Chapters schism.² The papacy had gone through a particularly

1. Accounts of Columbanus's career are found, most conveniently, in T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early christian Ireland* (Cambridge 2000) 344–90; D. A. Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus', M. Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: studies on the Latin writings*, *Studies in Celtic History* 17 (Woodbridge 1997); P. Brown, *The rise of western christendom: triumph and diversity, AD 200–1000* (Oxford 1996) 148–66.

2. G. S. M. Walker (ed. & tr.), *Sancti Columbani Opera*, SLH 2 (Dublin 1957). I have followed his translations, apart from some minor changes. See also the corrections suggested by J. W. Smit, *Studies on the language and style of Columba the Younger (Columbanus)* (Amsterdam 1971). The notes and references in the edition by W. Grundlach (ed.), *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi* i, MGH *Epistolae* 3 (1892) 154–82, are still useful. N. Wright, 'Columbanus's *Epistulae*', Lapidge, *Columbanus*, argues that Letter 5 is Columbanus's last and that Letter 6 printed in Walker is not his work. On Letter 5, or aspects of it, see J. Rivière, 'Saint Columban et le jugement du pape hérétique', *Revue des sciences religieuses* 3 (1923) 277–82; G. Bardy, 'Saint Columban et la papauté', in *Mélanges colombaniens: actes du congrès international de Luxeuil, 1950* (Paris 1950) 103–24, disagrees with Rivière's juridical interpretation; C. Cahill, 'San Colombano e la con-

rough time. The Three Chapters³ controversy had compromised the authority of the Holy See. The African bishops and north Italian sees of Milan and Aquileia broke off communion with Rome. The Illyrian bishops were suspicious of the popes. The Gaulish episcopacy, at most times resentful of what was considered Roman interference, were cordially hostile. Roman leadership of the empire was once seen as grounds for the primacy of the Roman church.⁴ With the collapse of the Empire in the West, the tables had turned: Constantinople, the New Rome and imperial capital, was now claiming equality of privileges with Rome on the same basis and the bishop of Ravenna, seat of the imperial administration in the West, was becoming worryingly independent.⁵ When the political focus of the empire had shifted to the East, Leo the Great was forced to respond to Constantinople's claim that its rank in the ecclesiastical pecking order should reflect its political dominance. His actions have been seen as a defence against the perceived threat to Rome. But the refusal of Leo and his successors to accept Constantinople's claim to an enhanced status made in Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon⁶ (AD 451) was a defence not just of Roman

troversia dei Tre Capitoli', in *Atti del convegno internazionale di studi colombaniani* (Bobbio 1973) 127–60; M. Winterbottom, 'Columbanus and Gildas', *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976) 310–17; P. T. R. Gray & M. W. Herren, 'Columbanus and the Three Chapters controversy—a new approach', *J Theol Stud* 45 (1994) 160–70; K. Schatz, *Papal primacy from its origins to the present*, tr. J. A. Otto & L. M. Maloney (Collegeville 1996) 53–54; J. F. O'Doherty, 'St Columbanus and the Roman see', *Ir Ecclesiast Rec* 42 (1933) 1–10; K. Hughes, 'The Celtic church and the papacy', C. H. Lawrence (ed), *The English church and the papacy in the middle ages* (London 1965); P. J. Corish, 'The early Irish church and the Western patriarchate', P. Ní Chatháin & M. Richter (ed), *Ireland and Europe: the early Church* (Stuttgart 1984) 9–15; M. Richter, *Ireland and her neighbours in the seventh century* (Dublin 1999) 110–12. Columbanus's letter was pressed into action in nineteenth-century religious polemic. Charles O'Connor adopted the name Columbanus in his diatribe against 'foreign influence in the nomination of bishops to Irish sees' because, he wrote, Columbanus, in Letter 5, 'most clearly pointed out the true line of distinction, between ... Ecclesiastical obedience, and Ecclesiastical servility', *Columbanus ad Hibernos*, No. 2 (London 1810), iv.

3. On the controversy, see C.-J. Héféfé, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, 3 (Paris 1870) 407–519; E. Amman, 'Trois chapitres', DTC 15, 1868–1924; J. Richards, *The popes and the papacy in the early middle ages, 476-752* (London 1979) 139–161.

4. M. Maccarone, 'Apostolicità, episcopato e primato di Pietro: ricerche e testimonianze dal II al V secolo', *Lateranum* 2 (1976) 1–341: 27–29 for a discussion of this idea in the works of Irenaeus of Lyon.

5. For an account of the actions of the Ravenna bishops and *soi-disant* archbishops in the time of St Gregory the Great, see R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his world* (Cambridge 1997) 126, 146–51.

6. Text, French translation, and commentary in Héféfé, *Conciles* 3, 123–32. The Fathers had awarded Rome its status because, 'cette ville était la ville impériale, et s'inspirant de ce point de vue, les cent cinquante évêques ont arrodé les mêmes privilèges au très-saint siège de la nouvelle Rome ...'. See P. McShane, *La 'Romanitas' et le pape Léon le Grand* (Tournai 1979) 160–64. For recent scholarship on canon 28, see A. De Halleux, 'Le vingt-huitième canon de Chalcédoine', E. A. Livingstone (ed), *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989) 28–36; P. L'Huillier, 'Problèmes primatiaux au temps du concile de Chalcédoine', *Messenger de l'Exarchat du Patriarche Russe en Europe*

primacy, but of the episcopacy itself: its origins are divine and a bishop's status should not depend on secular associations. The papacy shifted the emphasis from imperial to Petrine Rome with the effect of underlining the superiority of the spiritual over the secular.⁷ In so doing, the papacy saw itself as defending the institution of the episcopacy and, at the same time, rejecting the basis of Constantinople's claims. Some of these concerns may have been in Leo's mind when he asserted that Rome's status as the *caput mundi* was realised not by its founders, Romulus and Remus, but by the apostles Peter and Paul.⁸

For these [Peter and Paul] are the men through whom Christ's gospel shone on you, Rome, and you, who were made the teacher of error, became the disciple of truth⁹ ... they built you under much better and happier auspices than they, by whose zeal the first foundations of your walls were laid and of whom, he that gave you your name, defiled you with his brother's slaying.¹⁰

Occidentale 76 (1972) 35–62; idem, 'Un aspect estompé du 28^e canon de Chalcédoine', *Revue de droit canonique* 29 (1979) 12–22.

7. Leo's letter to emperor Marcian makes explicit his view of the superiority of the spiritual over the secular: 'Alia tamen ratio rerum saecularium, alia divinarum, nec praeter illam petram quam Dominus in fundamento posuit, stabilis erit ulla constructio' (PL 54, 993), quoted in P. Stephanou, 'Sedes apostolica, regia civitas', *Orientalia christiana periodica* 33 (1967) 563–82: 568n, who comments: '... en d'autres mots, non seulement la condition du siège de Rome, mais toute la hiérarchie ecclésiastique et tout le pouvoir qu'elle exerce proviennent de la volonté du Christ qui a fait de l'apôtre Pierre le fondement de son Église. On ne pouvait, il faut l'avouer, formuler une déclaration plus prégnante et plus claire de la primauté de droit divin du siège de Rome et de sa fonction envers toutes les églises particulières'. W. Ullmann, *A short history of the papacy* (London 1972) 6–7, 22–23.

8. On this theme, see Michele Maccarrone, 'Apostolicità', 50–56; idem, '*Sedes apostolica—vicarius Petri*: la perpetuità del primato di Pietro nella sede e nel vescovo di Roma (secoli III–VIII)', P. Zerbi, R. Volpini & A. Galuzzi (ed), *Romana ecclesia, cathedra Petri*, Italia Sacra: Studi e Documenti di Storia Ecclesiastica 47 (Rome 1991) 6–8; idem, 'La concezione di Roma città di Pietro e di Paolo da Damaso a Leone I', *ibid.* 200–06 (I am very grateful to Professor Éamonn Ó Carragáin for this reference); McShane, *La 'Romanitas'*, 230–33; Schatz, *Papal primacy*, 24–33; J. M. R. Tillard, *The bishop of Rome*, tr. John de Satgea (London 1983) 90–101; Vincent Twomey, '*Apostolikos thronos*': the primacy of Rome as reflected in the Church History of Eusebius and the historico-apologetic writings of Saint Athanasius the Great, *Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie* 49 (Münster 1982) 65–78; R. A. Markus, 'Chronicle and theology: Prosper of Aquitaine', C. Holdsworth & T. P. Wiseman (ed), *The inheritance of historiography, 350–900*, Exeter Studies in History 12 (Exeter 1986) 37–39.

9. On Rome's change from *magistra erroris* to *filia veritatis*, see McShane, *La 'Romanitas'*, 91–97; Maccarrone, 'La concezione di Roma', 201.

10. 'Isti enim sunt viri per quos tibi evangelium Christi, Roma, resplenduit; et quae eras magistra erroris, facta es disciplina veritatis ... te ... multo melius multoque felicius condiderunt, quam illi quorum studio prima moenium tuorum fundamenta locata sunt: ex quibus is qui tibi nomen dedit fraterna te caede foedavit', Leo, *Sermo* 82 (on the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul, AD 441), PL 54, 422; this and following translations from Leo's works are based on the translations in the series *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2.

The universal extent of the empire, ruling ‘almost all nations’, was designed by Providence to bring christianity to all. Providence made Rome the head of an empire, but Rome, ‘ignorant of the author of its advancement’ (*ignorans suae provectionis auctorem*), ‘was a slave to the errors of all the nations’ (*omnium gentium serviebat erroribus*) they had conquered and betrayed that trust. However, that universal mission was realised by Peter and Paul who made the city the ‘head of the world’.

These are they [Peter and Paul] who advanced you to such glory, that as holy nation, a chosen people, a priestly and royal state [1 Pt 2:9], and made the head of the world [*caput orbis*] through blessed Peter’s holy See, you preside over a wider sway by divine religion than by earthly government.¹¹

Leo’s assertion that the spiritual empire of Christian Rome had surpassed imperial Rome in its territorial extent has been noted in parallel passages in the work of Leo’s contemporary and fellow anti-Pelagian, St Prosper of Aquitaine.¹² There is a question whether this can be taken literally. It may reflect Leo’s ecclesiology and understanding of the church of Rome as the *ecclesia universalis*.¹³ Recently, T. M. Charles-Edwards has suggested that, in the light of other selections from Prosper’s writings, Leo may refer here to Ireland, the area to experience the first extension of christianity beyond western limits of the empire. If so, this can be interpreted as a shrewd response to Constantinople’s developing claims to be the patriarchal see second only to Rome on the basis, firstly, of Constantinople’s political importance and, secondly, in the responsibility assigned to its patriarch in Canon 28 in ministering to barbarians beyond the empire. According to Prosper, pope Celestine I sent the mission headed by Palladius to the Irish in 431.¹⁴ This mission showed the bishop of Rome’s role in evangelising the barbarians outside the empire¹⁵ two decades before the synod of Chalcedon and, at the same time, pointed to the superiority of christian Rome in surpassing the secular empire in its geographic extent. Furthermore, the conversion of the Irish showed that the spiritual mission of Rome did not depend on political support; it continued to grow after the decline of the empire in the West. These same

11. ‘Isti sunt qui te ad hanc gloriam provexerunt, ut gens sancta, populus electus, civitas sacerdotalis et regia, per sacram beati Petri sedem caput orbis effecta, latius praesideres religione divina quam dominatione terrena’ (PL 54, 422–23). On this passage, see Maccarrone, ‘La concezione di Roma’, 195–97.

12. PL 54, 423 with Quesnel’s identification of the parallels in two codas Prosper added to his *De uocatione omnium gentium*, ii 16; Markus, ‘Chronicle and theology’, 37–39; McShane, *La Romanitas*, 90–91; Maccarrone, ‘La concezione di Roma’, 198–201; T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: mission and primatial authority’, D. N. Dumville (ed), *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493–1993* (Woodbridge 1993) 1–12.

13. Maccarrone, ‘La concezione di Roma’, 198.

14. Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma Chronicon*, MGH, AA 9, 473; *De gratia dei et libero arbitrio contra Collatorem*, 21 (PL 51, 271).

15. This point is made by Charles-Edwards, *Early christian Ireland*, 206–07; Maccarrone, ‘La concezione di Roma’, 192n, 198–99.

points are made by Theodoret of Cyrus (one of the Three Chapters condemned at Constantinople II) in a letter to Leo. He says that Rome's primacy rests on its status as the greatest of cities but more so on its association with Peter and Paul who 'have made your see the most noble: this is the supreme of all your goods'.¹⁶ The Irish mission may therefore have been significant when Rome, the apostolic city, emphasised its Petrine over its imperial origins and the sacred over the secular in response to the growing prestige of Constantinople, the royal city.

COLUMBANUS AND ROMAN PRIMACY

Leo's predecessor, Innocent I (401–17) promoted Rome as the teaching church from which all others must learn. Rome was founded by Peter, he wrote in his letter to Decentius of Gubbio (AD 416), and preserved the apostolic tradition and practices established there at the beginning. Differences emerged when others deviated from the apostolic norm maintained at Rome.¹⁷ Indeed, as the foundational see, no church had been established in the West, 'in all Italy, Gaul, Spain, Africa, Sicily or any of the islands lying between except those for whom the venerable Apostle Peter or his successors appointed bishops'.¹⁸ 'Therefore', Innocent continues, 'they should follow what is done in the Roman church, from which—let there be no doubt—they derive their own origin'.¹⁹ Theories of the apostolic—both Petrine and Pauline—origins of the Roman see were developed as further grounds for Rome's rejection of Constantinople's attempts to enhance its status. Canon 28 was, in essence, an elaboration of Canon 3 of Constantinople I (AD 381) in claiming equality of prerogatives for the New Rome with the Old Rome.²⁰ This attention to Rome's apostolic origins against

16. 'Hi sedem vestram nobilissimam reddiderunt; hic bonorum vestrorum est apex', Theodoret, *Ep.* 113 (PG 83, 1311–18: 1314).

17. For a discussion of this idea, going back as far as Irenaeus, see G. Dix, *Jurisdiction in the early church, episcopal and papal* (London 1975) 112; E. Molland, 'Irenaeus of Lugdunum and the apostolic succession', *J Theol Stud* 1 (1950) 12–28.

18. '... in omnem Italiam, Gallias, Spanias, Africam atque Siciliam et insulas interiacentes nullum instituisse ecclesias, nisi eos quos venerabilis apostolus Petrus aut eius successores constituerint sacerdotes', R. Cabie (ed), *La lettre du pape Innocent I^{er} a Décentius de Gubbio (19 mars 416): texte critique, traduction et commentaire*, Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique 58 (Louvain 1973) 18–20; M. F. Connell, *Church and worship in fifth-century Rome: the letter of Innocent I to Decentius of Gubbio*, Joint Liturgical Studies 52 (Cambridge 2002) 20; Eno, *Teaching authority*, 155. On this letter, see Markus, *Gregory*, 75; P. Meyvaert, 'Diversity within unity, a Gregorian theme', *Heythrop J* 4 (1963) 141–62; repr. as section 6 of Meyvaert, *Benedict, Gregory, Bede and others* (London 1977) 141.

19. '... oportet eos hoc sequi, quod ecclesia Romana custodit a qua eos principium accepisse non dubium est ...' (text and translation from Connell, 21).

20. 'Canon III: Constantinopolitanus episcopus habeat priores honoris partes post Romanum episcopum, eo quod sit ipsa nova Roma' (P. Labbe & G. Cossart, *Sacrosancta concilia ad regiam editionem extracta* 2 (Venice 1728) 1125). De Halleux ('Le vingt-huitième canon de Chalcédoine', 34), argues that the reading of canon 6 of Nicea's treatment of Rome's primacy developed in the

the pretensions of Constantinople is found in the *acta* of the synod of Rome held in the following year,²¹ in Leo's letters²² and, perhaps most forcefully, in Gelasius I's Letter 42 (*Decretalis de recipiendis et non recipiendis libris*) of 495. Gelasius says that the christian church has spread throughout the world. The Roman church, however, is unique. All other churches were founded by ecclesiastical synods; Rome was founded by the word of God in the Gospel. Gelasius quotes the central Petrine biblical text (Mt 16:18) and claims that Paul and Peter founded the Roman church. They were both martyred on the same day in the city in the reign of Nero and, in the triumph of that martyrdom, established Rome as the primatial see for the whole world.²³ Rome's foundation by Peter and Paul gave it a special role; it is the church from which all others were established. Rome's imperial past is not mentioned. The divine origins of the church of Rome, not its associations with the political might of the empire, entitled Rome to universal respect and adherence to its doctrine and practices was the proof of orthodoxy.

The principle of Rome's primacy based on the notional accounts of its early foundation is found in Cyprian of Carthage, but with a different emphasis. He wrote of the special role of the church of Rome as the principal see (*ecclesia principalis*) and source of unity for the universal church. But his reading of 'principal see' has been interpreted to mean 'first founded see' rather than a formal recognition of Rome's position as the leader of the church.²⁴ In *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate* he spoke of

time of Damasus and Leo I may have been a reaction against canon 3 of Constantinople.

21. Ullmann, *Short history*, 10.

22. *Ep.* 104 to Marcian Augustus, 'Alia tamen ratio rerum saecularium, alia divinarum Non dedignetur regiam civitatem, quam apostolicam non potest facere sedem' (PL 54, 995); *Ep.* 105 to Pulcheria Augusta (PL 54, 997–1002: 999, referring to Anatolius, Leo says, 'supra mensuram sui honoris accensus est'); in *Ep.* 106 Leo says to Anatolius, bishop of Constantinople, that the bishops of Constantinople will find greater rewards 'si magis humilitates virtute nitatur, quam si spiritu ambitionis inflectur' (PL 54, 1005); see Stephanou, 'Sedes apostolica, regia civitas', 568–70.

23. 'Post propheticas et evangelicas atque apostolicas scripturas, quibus Ecclesia catholica per gratiam Dei fundata est, etiam illud intimandum putavimus, quod, quamvis universae per orbem catholicae diffusae Ecclesiae unus thalamus Christi sit, sancta tamen Romana ecclesia nullis synodicis constitutis ceteris ecclesiis praelata est, sed evangelica voce Domini et Salvatoris primatum obtinuit ... [Mt 16: 18 follows] ... Addita est etiam societas beatissimi Pauli apostoli vasis electionis ... uno eodemque die gloriosa morte cum Petro in urbe Roma sub Caesare Nerone agonizans, coronatus est: et pariter supradictam sanctam Romanam ecclesiam Christo Domino consecrarunt, aliisque omnibus urbibus in universo mundo sua praesentia atque venerando triumpho praetulerunt'. Gelasius continues to say that after Rome come the other Petrine sees: Alexandria, founded by Peter's disciple, Mark, and Antioch. Text in A. Thiel, *Epistolae romanorum pontificum genuinae et quae ad eos scriptae sunt a S. Hilario usque ad Pelagium II* (Brunswick 1867), i 454–71: 454–55. Similar sentiments are expressed by Eusebius, HE ii 27.7; see Twomey, 'Apostolikos thronos', 64–66.

24. J. E. Merdinger, 'Optatus reconsidered', E. A. Livingstone (ed), *Studia Patristica* 22 (1989) 294–99, esp. 299 for discussion of *princeps*; R. B. Eno, 'The significance of the lists of the Roman bishops in the anti-Donatist polemic', *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993) 158–69 for discussion of *principalitas*.

the church dividing into many streams and spreading wide, but unity is maintained for all flow from a common source.²⁵ In Letter 36 (AD 397), St Augustine of Hippo quotes his correspondent who calls Peter the *apostolorum caput, caeli ianitor, et Ecclesiae fundamentum*. Peter taught the Romans and their faith is now made known 'to the whole world' (Rm 1:8).²⁶ Another letter, co-signed by Augustine and four other African bishops, was sent to pope Innocent I informing him of the decisions of two councils held in the provinces of Numidia and Carthage.²⁷ The councils had condemned Pelagianism and the pope is called upon to show his support and declare that his faith is at one with theirs. The letter uses the Cyprianic image of the source and streams to illustrate the relationship between the churches of Africa and Rome. In careful wording, the Africans declare that in writing to Rome, they do not presume that their little stream is needed to augment the pope's plentiful source.²⁸ They wanted it to be shown that their 'paltry stream flows from the same source of the rivers as your abundant stream'.²⁹ The point is that these churches, being in communion and sharing the same faith, are part of the apostolic church whose source is Christ. With this metaphor, the letter implies that while the Roman church enjoys a special position in the West, recognition of that position does not imply recognition of the rights of its bishop to impose decisions on the African church. R. A. Markus points out that, in reply, Innocent took up the image of the Church spreading though the world as water emanating from the source and dividing into many channels. These streams maintain the purity of their original and common source: '... just as all waters issue from their original source and flow through the various regions of the whole world, they retain the pure waters of their untainted spring'.³⁰ Unity is maintained and orthodoxy guaranteed when all churches receive the life-giving water from this same source. For Innocent and his successors, Rome is more than a channel

25. 'Ecclesia una est quae in multitudinem latius incremento fecunditatis extenditur ... et cum de fonte uno riuus plurimi defluunt, numerositas licet diffusa uideatur exundantis copiae largitate, unitas tamen seruatur in origine ... Sic et ecclesia ... profluentes largiter riuos latius spandit, unum tamen caput est et origo una, et una mater fecunditatis successibus copiosa' (CCSL 3, 253). This occurs after Cyprian discusses Peter as the focus of unity in the church.

26. The letter alludes to the tradition of Peter's confrontation with Simon Magus in Rome: 'Petrus etiam, apostolorum caput, caeli ianitor, et Ecclesiae fundamentum, extincto Simone qui diaboli fuerat nonnisi ieiunio vicendi figura, idipsum Romanos edocuit, quorum fides annuntiat uniuerso orbi terrarum', quoted in Batiffol, 'Petrus initium episcopatus', 446n.

27. On this letter, see R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: history and society in the theology of saint Augustine* (Cambridge 1989) 128–29; idem, *Gregory the Great*, 202

28. 'Non enim rivulum nostrum tuo largo fonti augendo refundimus ...' (PL 20, 571–82: 582).

29. '... utrum etiam noster licet exiguus ex eodem, quo etiam tuus abundans, emanet capite fluentorum hoc a te probari volumus'.

30. *Ep. 29 (De requirendis)*, AD 417: '...velut de natali suo fonte aquae cunctae procederent et per diversas totius mundi regiones puri latices capitis incorrupti manarent ...' (H. Denzinger et al. (ed), *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (Barcelona 1984) 50; PL 20, 582–88: 583).

from that source; it is the source. Rome is the *fons et origo* (spring and source) of the church, the *mater omnium ecclesiarum*, the foundational church of the West.³¹

Columbanus's view of Roman primacy has been hotly debated and a consensus has yet to emerge among scholars. One general observation (and as a general observation it does not apply to all) can be made about attempts to interpret his view: they tend to see the primacy of the Roman church as something static, established by c.AD 600 and overlook the stages the theories of primacy went through in the process of development. Primacy could mean different things at different times. To attempt to gauge Columbanus's views by measuring his writings against an ill-defined or non-defined 'Roman supremacy' is to beg the question. A study of Columbanus's understanding of all aspects of Rome's primacy is beyond the scope of this article,³² but it is possible here to examine how he viewed two essential elements in Rome's claim: its status as the foundational church and its claim to be the source (*fons*) of the authority (*auctoritas*) of all other churches.

The subject of Letter 5 is ecclesiastical leadership and, more than once in that letter, Columbanus draws attention to the fact that he is Irish and refers to standards of ecclesiastical leadership among the Irish.³³ He declares, 'we ... are bound to St Peter's chair' (*nos ... devincti sumus cathedrae sancti Petri*). He refers to the greatness and fame of Rome (*Roma magna est et vulgata*), but for the Irish that greatness results only from the city's association with Peter's chair (... *per istam cathedram tantum apud nos est* [sc. *Roma*] *magna et clara*). This city was founded for almost all nations (*omnium prope gentium*), but through christianity its influence has now spread over the whole earth (*totum per orbem*). The ideas here strongly recall the theories of Rome's imperial extent over most of the earth and how this secular empire has been surpassed by the christian faith; the spiritual has overtaken the secular and Rome's universal mission has been realised, not by its army, but by Peter and his successors. In the remarkable passage that follows, Columbanus writes of the miraculous spreading of christianity, overcoming the natural threats of the sea, to reach Ireland in 'the Western regions of the earth's farther strand' (... *in occidua transmundialis limitis loca*). The conversion of Ireland, the furthest island in the West, therefore marked the point at which christian Rome not only surpassed its imperial forerunner, but realised its universal mission. Columbanus uses the arresting image of the chariot overcoming the turbulent sea to represent the arrival of christianity in Ireland. That chariot is drawn by Peter and Paul, 'Christ's twin apostles' (*Christi geminos apostolos*) and guided by Christ, 'the charioteer of Israel'. In the *Ecclesiastical history* of Eusebius (a source known to Columbanus in Rufinus's

31. On these terms, see De Halleux, 'Le vingt-huitième canon de Chalcédoine', 34; R. B. Eno, 'The significance of the lists of Roman bishops', 160; idem, 'The work of Optatus as a turning point in the African ecclesiology', *Thomist* 37 (1973) 668–85: 676–77.

32. I have in preparation a study of Columbanus's attitudes to Rome's role as leader of the Church; and his advice on what to do when, in his view, that leadership is indecisive.

33. This, and what follows, is from *Ep.* 5, 8, 11

translation)³⁴ Peter is described as the bringer of light who journeyed from east to west.³⁵ A synopsis account of Peter as the light bearer from the *HE*, with the unflattering portrayal of pre-Petrine Rome omitted, is found in the *Quaestiones uel glossae in euangelio nomine* of Angers, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 55, a work which some believe has Hiberno-Latin associations.³⁶ The representation of Peter as the sun, rising in the east and spreading his rays of light into the west, was popular in the East.³⁷ Solar imagery also seems to be behind Columbanus's portrayal of Christ the charioteer in his journey westwards. He calls Christ the 'supreme driver of that chariot ... true father, charioteer of Israel' (*supremus ipse auriga currus illius ... pater verus, agitator Israel*). This is based on the passage in the Fourth Book of Kings where Elijah ascends to heaven in the fiery chariot and Elisha proclaims him 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the driver thereof' (*Pater mi, pater mi, currus Israel, et auriga ejus*: 4 Kgs 2:12). Columbanus (as, indeed, had Patrick in his *Confessio*)³⁸ sees Christ represented typologically as Elijah and figuratively as the sun. The coming of christianity to Ireland is dramatically represented as the sun that rises in the east and crosses the sky into the west. Now that the sun has reached Ireland, it has reached the furthest point in the west and its journey is complete. The conversion of Ireland marks the culmination of the process of christianisation. Significantly, Columbanus shows this being achieved by the Roman church for the chariot is drawn by 'Christ's twin apostles' Peter and Paul. The conversion of the Irish is also, therefore, the realisation of Rome's universal mission.

From the time of the coming of christianity to Ireland, Columbanus continues, the popes are great and famous (*magni et clari*) and Rome nobler and more famed (*nobilior et clarior*) through the apostles Peter and Paul. Columbanus applies the

34. Wright, 'Columbanus's *Epistulae*', 73–74.

35. K. Lake (tr), *Eusebius. The ecclesiastical history* (2 vols, London 1980), i 140–45 (=HE ii 14–15). Discussion in Twomey, *Apostolikos thronos*, 50–56.

36. CCSL 108 (B), 140–41: '... Claudii enim tempore Petro, qui merito prior erat omnium apostolus, ad ea urbe ire perrexit, id est Roma, qui primatum omnibus gentibus tenebat. Prouidentia diuina ad hanc urbem pugnantium aduersus genus humanum eum deducit; et ibidem euangelii sui clauibus ianuam regni caelestis aperuit. Romanice turbae clare lumen uerbis uidebatur fuisse exortum; et sermo ueritatis qui per Petrum praedicabatur uniuersorum mentis placito, inlustrauit auditum; unde neque auditus eis solis sufficit' (based on HE ii 14–15). The Eusebian source presents Peter's arrival and confrontation with Simon Magus at Rome.

37. Schatz, *Papal primacy*, 28 with reference to Theodoret's Letter 113; Ephraim the Syrian, *Hymni de crucifixione*: 'In Occidente duo astra immerguntur et duo apostolici sepulti iacent; illic perpetuo refulgent radii, qui numquam immersi fuerunt', cited in M. Maccarrone, 'Il pellegrinaggio a S. Pietro', P. Zerbi et al. (ed), *Romana ecclesia, cathedra Petri* (Rome 1991) 207–86: 241. Maccarrone gives further examples on 241–42.

38. Patrick, assaulted in the night by the devil, calls on Elijah and 'Look, the splendour of His sun fell down over me' (*Ecce splendor solis illius decedit super me*) (D. R. Howlett (ed. & tr.), *The book of letters of Saint Patrick the bishop* (Dublin 1994) 64–65). Patrick's linking of Helias and Helios is also found in Sedulius's *Carmen paschale*, '... nam si sermonis Achivi una per accentum mutetur littera, sol est' (PL 49, 572).

words of Ps 18 to ‘Christ’s twin apostles’: ‘Their voice shows forth the glory of God Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world’. The choice of this biblical passage is significant. In patristic literature it is taken to denote, among other things, the role of preachers spreading the Word to all nations. Gregory’s homilies on the Book of Ezekiel, preached in Rome at the end of 593, are one example. Columbanus may have known the homilies—or parts of them—since he asked the pope to send these works (*opuscula*) to him (*Ep.* 1, 9). Commenting on Ez 1:7, Gregory compares the words of the preachers to brass because ‘the metal of brass is exceedingly sonorous. And the voices of the preachers are rightly likened to brass because “their sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world”’.³⁹ According to Columbanus, then, the conversion of the Irish at ‘the edge of the world’ is the work of Roman preachers and missionaries. As we have seen, Leo believed that the spreading of christianity beyond the imperial frontier made Rome the ‘head of the world’. This is precisely what Columbanus argues: Ireland was converted by the Roman church and the success of that mission has made Rome ‘the head of the churches of the world’ (*orbis terrarum caput ... ecclesiarum*; *Ep.* 5, 11). He says explicitly in an earlier passage that the conversion of Ireland is Rome’s doing:

For all we Irish, inhabitants of the world’s edge, are disciples of saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon by the Holy Spirit, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching ... the Catholic Faith, as it was delivered by you first, who are the successors of the holy apostles, is maintained unbroken ... (*Ep.* 5, 3).

This, and other passages in his letters, have been taken as allusions to the Palladian mission sent from Rome ‘to make the barbarian island christian’ recorded by Prosper of Aquitaine and referred to above. However, in none of these passages does Columbanus refer to a specific mission, much less a formal Roman one, but expresses himself in very general terms. It seems more probable that he conceived these lines with reference to the papal theory of Rome’s status as the foundational church from which all others have been established. He therefore recognises Rome, because of its link with Peter and Paul, as the primary see to which all others ultimately owe their institution and authority. This is recognition of one of the key arguments made in support of the primacy of Rome.

Closely linked to this concept is the image of Rome as the source (*fons, origo*) from which flow the streams of true doctrine. In Letter I, Columbanus expresses his

39. CCSL 142, 35; T. Gray (tr), *The homilies of St Gregory the Great on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Etna CA 1990) 33. Future quotations in English from Gregory’s *Hom. in Ez.* are taken from Gray’s translation. On the knowledge of Gregory’s works in early Ireland, see F. Kerlouégan, ‘Grégoire le Grand et les pays celtiques’, J. Fontaine, R. Gillet & S. Pellistrandi (ed), *Grégoire de Grand* (Paris 1986) 589–96.

admiration for Gregory's learning and compliments him on his 'stream of holy wisdom ... shed abroad over the earth with great brightness'.⁴⁰ Here, the stream is a conventional representation of sound learning. The image is found in patristic and in early Irish vernacular and Latin literature.⁴¹ Gregory himself uses the image of the river in another context: to indicate the wisdom of preachers: '... what are holy men but rivers which water the parched earth of carnal hearts? ... Therefore, rivers [like

40. *Ep.* 1, 4: '... clarissima per orbem ... sacri ingenii diffusa sunt flumina ...'. The translation is Walker's who does not take *clarissima* with *flumina*. For *flumina*, Grundlach gives *lumina* and Smit, *Literary style*, 78–80, supports him. Most recently, R. Stanton, 'Columbanus, *Letter 1*: translation and commentary', *J Mediev Latin* 3 (1993) 149–68: 160, finds that '*flumina ingenii ... with diffusi* makes excellent sense'.

41. For example, the term 'stream' is applied in the early law tract *Míad̄slechta* to the highest learned grades: *ánrad* (*án̄sruth*, 'noble stream') and *sruth do aill* ('stream from a cliff/precipice'), CIH 582.32–589.32: 586.16–21; see E. Mac Neill, 'Ancient Irish law: the law of status or franchise', *Proc Roy Ir Acad (C)* 36 (1921–24) 313. These legal sources that represent the words of the wise as a torrent flowing from a cliff have a striking parallel in the Latin *Hisperica famina*, for which see M. Herren (ed. & tr.), *The hisperica famina: I. the A-text* (Toronto 1974) 35, 64–65, 69. Wisdom is represented as a stream in the earliest Hiberno-Latin literature: see my review of M. Bayliss & M. Lapidge (ed), *Collectanea Pseudo-Beda* (Dublin 1998), in *Peritia* 15 (2001) 382–84 and 'Virgilius Grammaticus and the earliest Hiberno-Latin literature', M. Richter & J.–M. Picard (ed), *Ogma: essays in honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin* (Dublin 2002) 253–60. Virgilius Grammaticus compares the flowing stream to philosophical wisdom in *Epist. praef.* (G. Polara & L. Caruso (ed. & tr.), *Virgilio Marone grammatico: Epitomi ed epistole*, Nuovo Medioevo 9 (Naples 1979) 174–76). Other early Irish, or possibly Irish, sources that compare the stream to wisdom include Ps-Hilary, *Comm. in septem epistolas canonicas*, CCSL 108B, 58 and 70; the so-called *Catechesis cracoviensis* (P. David (ed), 'Un recueil de conférences monastiques irlandaises du VIII^e siècle: notes sur le manuscrit 43 de la Bibliothèque du Chapitre de Cracovie', *Revue Bénédictine* 49 (1937) 62–89: 85); the Genesis commentary of the *Commentarii in Pentateuchum* draws on Augustine's *De genesi ad litteram* 5, 9–11 in the comment on Gn 2:6 (*Fons autem ascendebat*) and compares the spring to 'wisdom that waters the whole church' (PL 91, 205). Many early Insular (?) writers make the standard comparison of true words to a pure spring; these include the *Collectaneum miscellaneum* compiled by Sedulius Scottus (CCCM 67, 364 §19); the *Florilegium Frisengense* (CCSL 108D, 130) and the amusing dialogue *Senex et adulescens* that precedes the *Prouerbia Graecorum* in Hellmann's edition where the young man, having been told to put his finger to his mouth and shut up (...*pone ergo digitum super os tuum et obtumesce*) replies that for him to lie would be as impossible as sweet water flowing from a bitter spring (S. Hellmann (ed), *Sedulius Scottus*, Quellen und Untersuchungen lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 1 (Munich 1906) 120). A very similar image is found in the *Prouerbia Graecorum*, a series of apophthegms which Sedulius included in his florilegium. §59 begins 'Fons mundus sermo innocentis, sermo uero inimici puteus infrustratus, quantum peruersus tantum peruersa locutus est, nec potest ex sordido fonte purus egredi sermo' (CCCM 67, 8). For other examples of learning represented as a stream, see J. J. Contreni, *Carolingian learning, masters and manuscripts* (Hampshire 1992) §1, 'Learning in the early middle ages', 17n (in a letter to Alcuin); 18n (John Scottus Eriugena); §6, 'John Scottus, Martin Hiberniensis, the liberal arts, and teaching', 6–7 (Eriugena). For vernacular Irish examples and discussion, see H. Wagner, 'Studies in the origins of early Irish Celtic traditions', *Ériu* 26 (1975) 1–26 §1, 'Water and wisdom'; K. Muhr, 'Water imagery in early Irish', *Celtica* 23 (1999) 193–210.

preachers] return to the place from which they came in order to flow again, because they always draw the water of wisdom whence it rises ...'.⁴² In appealing to Rome and longing 'to drink that spiritual channel of the living fountain' (*Ep.* 1, 8), Columbanus is like Gregory's preacher/contemplative returning to the spring of faith for refreshment and restoration before continuing the task. Hiberno-Latin (or putatively Hiberno-Latin) sources also compare the stream to preachers. The Lucan commentary in Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, lat. 997 says, 'The river is a figure of the preaching of the teachers because it waters, cleanses, gives life and mortifies',⁴³ and Ps-Jerome, in the *Expositio quatuor evangeliorum*, compares the spring with water welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:14) to the preaching of the Gospels gushing from the mouths of the apostles and believers.⁴⁴ Towards the end of his letter to Gregory, Columbanus expresses his desire to come to Rome, but he is prevented by weakness of the body (*corporis infirmitas*) and care for his fellow pilgrims (*cura comperegrinorum*). He longs to come to Rome and Gregory because there he will find 'the spiritual channel of the living fountain, and the living stream of wisdom which flows from heaven and springs up unto eternal life (Jn 4:14)'.⁴⁵ Letter 5 contains a more forthright declaration that he sees Rome as the source of authority. The reference occurs in the context of his discussion of *doctrina*, the authority of the teacher, his interpretation of scripture and his communication of that interpretation through preaching. As Columbanus was himself a preacher and missionary, this is a subject he must have pondered deeply. He pleads with the pope to consider what he has to say and, if he finds anything worthwhile, the pope should have the credit, for that doctrine 'was delivered by you' (*a vobis ... processit*) to the Irish. Innocent had long before made plain to Augustine how Rome regarded the church of North Africa and how the Africans should view Rome in the matter of authority: the African church was a channel, Rome was the source. Columbanus's choice of words is particularly significant: he is a river, the pope is the source: *non enim rivo puritas, sed fonti reputanda est*, 'for purity is due, not to the river, but the source' (*Ep.* 5, 3). Columbanus's fellow Irishman, Cummian, writing c.631 of an Irish delegation sent to Rome to ask for guidance, says something similar. According to his account, the ecclesiastics who met in council to authorise the delegation had decided to follow the lead of Rome and the practice given 'by the source of our baptism' (*a fonte baptismi nostri*).⁴⁶ When Columbanus uses the image of the river flowing from its source to

42. *Hom. Ez.* 1, 5, 16 (CCSL 142, 65–66; Gray, *The homilies*, 53); cf *Mor.* 18, 54, lines 183–86 (CCSL 143A, 955).

43. 'Flumen enim figura est praedicationis doctorum quod inrigat et purgat et uiuificat et mortificat' (CCSL 108C, 29).

44. '... fons aquae salientis ad vitam aeternam, id est, praedicatio Evangelii ebulliente ex ore apostolorum, sive credentium' (PL 30, 579).

45. '... ut illam spiritalem vivi fontis venam vivamque undam scientiae caelitus fluentis ac in aeternam vitam salientis haurirem' (*Ep.* 1, 8).

46. Maura Walsh & Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed. & tr.), *Cummian's Letter De controversia paschali*

represent the Roman origins of Irish christianity, he expresses the relationship between Ireland and Rome in the terms the popes themselves use to characterise the status of churches in the remote regions of the christian world. His use of this image and his quotation of Ps 18: 5 ('Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world') when writing of Rome's spreading of the faith to Ireland is particularly significant in the context of a letter to the pope. In papal correspondence, Ps 18:5 is quoted to support Roman claims to universal responsibility for all churches (*sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*).⁴⁷ One of the most striking examples of the combination of Ps 18:5 and the irrigation image is found in the reply of Vigilius, the pope whose leadership is the subject of Letter 5, to Profuturus of Braga's questions on various doctrinal matters. Vigilius comments on the leaders of churches in the remotest parts to which the Church had spread and quotes Ps 18: '... their sound is spread throughout the whole world and their words extended to the ends of the earth'. But he commends Profuturus in referring his questions to Rome for he is returning 'to that same source (*fons*) from which flowed the stream (*lympha*) of salvation'.⁴⁸ Columbanus adopts the current terms used by Rome to express its position of primacy in relation to the distant churches under its control. He sees Rome as the source of the institution of the church in Ireland by virtue of its status as the *Mutterkirche*, the foundational see from which preachers were sent to convert the island. The import of these images would not have been lost on his readers: the descriptions applied by the papacy to remote churches were now being quoted by a christian from the remotest of all these churches in his letter to the pope. This is why Columbanus makes so much of his Irish identity in Letter 5; the recognition of the authority of Rome by one from 'the Western regions of the earth's farther strand' was an affirmation of Roman primacy. It would also serve to obtain a favourable hearing. And this is why we should be cautious in seeing what he has to say about the Irish church and Roman primacy as the generally accepted position of the Irish church at the time. Columbanus often expresses his Irish identity with reference to contemporary stereotypes in an effort to secure a sympathetic hearing. In this, he was the first of a long line.

The terms Rome had used to convey its authority and position of primacy within the church recur in Columbanus's letters. Rome or the papacy is referred to met-

and the *De ratione computandi* (Toronto 1988) 90–93.

47. For example, Leo's Letter 10, to the bishops of Vienne (PL 54, 629).

48. '... tuae charitatis epistolas ... gratanter accepimus ... quia tales in extremis mundi partibus dignatus est suis ovibus providere pastores, per quos et pascuis valeant salutaribus abundare, et ab antiqui hostis [iniqui lupi] rapacitate servari ... Et quamvis sonus eorum toto orbe diffusus, et usque ad fines orbis terrae verba eorum distensa, dilectionis tuae corda Christo probaverint esse fidelia; tamen si quid ex his in Ecclesia quae tuae gubernationi Deo auxiliante commissa est, necdum plena luce claruerit, ad eundem fontem de quo illa salutaris manarat lympha, recurritis ...' (PL 69, 15–16). In the edition, the letter is addressed to one Eutherius or Elutherius; the notes say that it was sent to Profuturus.

onymically as *cathedra/sedes Petri* and *sedes apostolica*. Columbanus applies the latter term exclusively to Rome⁴⁹ and not to the other apostolic sees, that is, those churches linked by tradition to an apostolic founder. This is in contrast to Cummian, writing fifteen or so years after his death and for whom the apostolic sees include Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome.⁵⁰ The term *sedes apostolica* came to be applied exclusively to Rome particularly in the pontificate of Innocent I.⁵¹ He used the term in his correspondence with the African bishops where he described Rome as the source of authority and the African church as a channel from that spring.⁵² Columbanus continued to use the term with this meaning even when, in the wake of the Three Chapters schism (the subject of Letter 5), the popes spoke of ‘apostolic sees’.⁵³ Columbanus is familiar to some extent with the terminology of Roman primacy and some of the arguments in support of it. Modern scholarship interprets this terminology in two ways. Walter Ullmann saw these titles, especially *haeres Petri*, ‘heir of Peter’—a title particularly favoured by Leo I—as having a legal force. In Roman law, the heir succeeds directly to the fullness of privileges and prerogatives enjoyed by the original possessor. Each pope therefore owes his authority not to his immediate predecessor, but to Peter and should enjoy the same status that Peter was perceived to have held in the early church.⁵⁴ Other scholars see in these titles the kernel of the theory that Peter continues to be present in a mystical way in each of his successors; their decisions manifest the continuing leadership of Peter over his church acting through his vicar.⁵⁵ Columbanus says something of this sort when he writes (*Ep.* 5, 8) to Boniface that the pope is ‘the sole hope among the chiefs in your power that flows from the honour of St Peter the Apostle’ (*qui unica spes de principibus es per honorem potens Petri apostoli sancti*). The essential consequences of these theories is that the primacy of Peter was maintained by his successors, the bishops of Rome, and that papal authority was, therefore, independent of the moral standing and quality of leadership of each incumbent. The authority of each pope must be

49. *Epp.* 3: 2; 5: 9 where Rome is also referred to as the *sedes principalis; cathedra Petri* in *Epp.* 1: 5; 5: 3, 9, 10, 11.

50. Walsh & Ó Cróinín, *Cummian’s letter*, 70, 90. Unlike Cummian (Walsh and Ó Cróinín, 84), Columbanus applies the term *papa*, ‘pope’, only to the bishop of Rome.

51. On this, and other terms relating to the papacy, see P. Batiffol, ‘Papa, sedes apostolica, apostolatus’, *Rivista di archaeologia cristiana* 1 (1925) 99–116.

52. *Ep.* 29, to the African bishops (Denziger, *Enchiridion*, 50; Maccarrone, *Romana ecclesia, cathedra Petri*, 24).

53. R. B. Eno, ‘Papal damage control in the aftermath of the Three Chapters controversy’, E. A. Livingstone (ed), *Studia Patristica* 19 (Oxford 1989) 54; in contrast to Pelagius I, Gregory saw the apostolic see as Rome and no other, see Markus, *Gregory*, 162; Schatz, *Papal primacy*, 8.

54. Ullmann, *Short history*, 20–21; idem, ‘Leo I and the theme of papal primacy’, *J Theol Stud* 11 (1960) 25–51.

55. This ‘concezione mistico-personalistica’ of primacy is discussed by V. Monachino, ‘La perennità del primato di S. Pietro in uno studio recente’, *Archivum historiae pontificiae* 5 (1967) 325–39, a review of G. Corti, *Il papa vicario di Pietro: contributo alla storia dell’idea papale* (Brescia 1966); Maccarrone, ‘*Sedes apostolica—vicarius Petri*’.

respected not because of his moral principles or standard of leadership, but because he stands in a direct relationship with Peter, and through him, in the words of Leo I, he ‘is placed before the calling of all nations, all the apostles and all the fathers of the church’.⁵⁶ Furthermore, if a pope receives his authority from Peter directly, his authority and the institution of the papacy itself are not compromised by the shortcomings of his predecessors. This understanding of papal primacy presents some difficulties for Columbanus. He shows some knowledge and acceptance of many of the principles of primacy, but for him authority depends on the nature of the origins of the office and on the qualities of the office-holder. Furthermore, he holds open the possibility that the authority of the see of Rome has been compromised by the actions of pope Vigilius and he calls on Boniface to take action (*Ep.* 5, 9–10). The Irish acknowledge Rome as the source of christianity and respected the authority of its bishop. That respect meant more than simple obedience. In Columbanus’s view, the relationship between the church in Ireland and Rome was reciprocal. The Irish respect the authority of Rome, but in return they expect Rome to use that authority by giving effective leadership. When Columbanus perceives that leadership to fall short of the ideal, he has a right and a duty to speak out. His stand on this can be seen clearly in his understanding of the bishop of Rome’s title *caput ecclesiae*, ‘head of the church’.

COLUMBANUS AND THE *CAPUT ECCLESIAE*

Images of leadership recur in Leo I’s *Sermo* 82 and, indeed, throughout his letters and sermons. The Roman church was *caput ecclesiarum*, ‘head of churches’ just as imperial Rome had been destined to be the *caput mundi*, ‘head of the world’. That destiny⁵⁷ was not realised by the empire for it extended over ‘almost all nations’. Now, through Peter’s see and the extension of christianity beyond the bounds of the empire, Rome had indeed become ‘head of the world’ (*caput orbis*) (*Sermo* 82, 2). The christianisation of this classical image and the christian fulfilment of Rome’s destiny was expressed by writers from the beginning. Contemporary poetry honours Constantine as the one who restored to Rome her title *caput mundi*.⁵⁸ This switch from imperial destiny to christian fulfilment was some comfort at a time when Attila and his army had threatened the city almost at its very gates. The account of Leo’s appeal to the invaders found in the later *Life* is based Prosper Tiro’s earlier report.⁵⁹

56. ‘... qui [sc. Petrus] et universarum gentium vocationi, et omnibus apostolis, cunctisque Ecclesiae patribus praeponatur ...’, Leo, *Sermo* 4 (PL 54, 149).

57. On the legend of the Capitoline origin of Rome’s epithet *caput orbis*, see C. Edwards, *Writing Rome: textual approaches to the city* (Cambridge 1996) 84–85. I am grateful to Dr Diarmuid Scully for this reference.

58. Publius Optatianus Porphyrius, writing in the reign of Constantine, says that Rome’s position as the head of the world (*mundi caput*) has been restored, see A. Alföldi, *The conversion of Constantine and pagan Rome*, tr. H. Mattingly (Oxford 1948, repr. 1998) 92n.

59. Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma Chronicon*, MGH AA 9, 482.

Leo asks the invaders to spare Rome, which was ‘once conqueror of the world’. Attila had subdued ‘the lands of the whole world which it had been granted to the Romans, the conquerors of all nations, to overcome’.⁶⁰ Rome was now the head of a spiritual empire at a time when the temporal empire was passing. Prosper provides our firmest evidence of Palladius’s mission sent to Ireland by pope Celestine in 431—the first extension of christianity beyond the imperial frontier in the West. In his poem *De ingratis*, celebrating the defeat of Pelagianism and the spreading of christianity, he may have had that mission in mind when he wrote the following verses:

*Sedes Roma Petri, quae pastoralis honoris
Facta caput mundo, quidquid non possidet armis
Religione tenet.*⁶¹

Rome, the See of Peter, which has been made head
of the pastoral office on earth, holds in religion
what it does not hold by arms.

Writing at a particularly low ebb in Rome’s political fortunes, the mission to Ireland may have been seen as an affirmation of Rome’s status as *caput ecclesiae*, defending orthodoxy and spreading the faith. (So, too, for Columbanus, it is Rome’s role in the conversion of the Irish that makes her ‘head of the churches of the world’ (*Ep.* 5, 11).) The title *caput ecclesiae/mundi* was used to convey Rome’s understanding of its primacy, its literal headship of the body of the Church, its role as a centre of unity and, later, the basis of the authority of its bishop to lead other bishops. It is at once a forceful image and a term that carried a range of concepts and so it appears with a legal force in the documents of the early church. But for Columbanus’s more speculative turn of mind, it is the imaginative side of this representation of Rome’s status that is of particular interest for it allows him, in a remarkably involved and subtle argument, to acknowledge the primacy of the bishop of Rome and, at the same time, to remind him of the duties that primacy entails.

Innocent I was the first to insist, in his letter to Victricius of Rouen and dated to the first year of his pontificate (AD 401), that were important cases (*causae maiores*) to arise, no attempt should be made at a local settlement, they should be referred to the ‘head of cities’ (*ad caput urbium sint referendae*) for his decisions affected all the churches of the world.⁶² The principle was developed by Leo I and maintained by later popes. Vigilius’s letter to Profuturus is particularly significant. It brings together many of the tenets of primacy and succinctly relates the reasons for Rome’s headship

60. ‘... quondam orbis victor’; ‘Subegisti quidem, Attila, omnem terrarum orbem, cui Romanos omnium victores gentium subigere tributum est’, AASS, 2 April, 18.

61. PL 51, 97; Maccarrone, ‘La concezione di Roma’, 198.

62. *Ep.* 2 (PL 20, 473).

and the privileges that that status confers. Rome, he says, is the foundation and model of all churches and no believer is unaware that other churches take their beginnings from it. The apostles were equal in their election, but Peter transcended the others. His name was ‘Cephas’ for he is the head (*caput, kephalē*) and where the head leads, the other members must follow. The church of Rome, sanctified by God and confirmed by the authority of the Fathers, is the head to which major cases must be referred for decision. Then, borrowing the words of Leo I, like many after him, Vigilius states that the *ecclesia prima* (Rome) is called *in plenitudinem potestatis*, ‘to the fullness of power’, while other churches are called *in partem sollicitudinis*, ‘to a share of the responsibility’.⁶³ There are no signs yet of the more conciliatory tone⁶⁴ said to characterise papal correspondence in the wake of the Three Chapters controversy that was to erupt five years after Vigilius wrote this. But in this letter, the legalistic definition of Rome’s status in relation to other sees and the justification of its pre-eminence in the ecclesiastical power structure are predicated on its position as the *caput ecclesiae*. Vigilius’s fanciful etymological linking of Cephas with *caput* (*kephalē*), ‘head’, had a long history, even when he was writing in the middle of the sixth century. Optatus of Mileve was the first to make the connection in his anti-Donatist polemic of c.364: ‘... you cannot deny that you know that the first episcopal see was set up in Rome, which was occupied by Peter the head (*caput Petrus*) of all the Apostles (for which reason he was called Cephas) so that in this one see unity might be preserved by all’.⁶⁵ By analogy with the description of Christ as the head of the body of the Church in 1 Cor 12:12, Rome came to be characterised as head of the

63. ‘Nulli vel tenuiter sentienti, vel pleniter sapienti dubium est, quod Ecclesia Romana fundamentum et forma sit Ecclesiarum, a quo omnes Ecclesias principium sumpsisse nemo recte credentium ignorat. Quoniam licet omnium apostolorum par esset electio, beato tamen Petro concessum est ut caeteris praeemineret; unde et Cephas vocatur, quia caput est et principium omnium apostolorum: et quod in capite praecessit, in membris sequi necesse est. Quamobrem sancta Romana Ecclesia ejus merito Domini voce consecrata et sanctorum Patrum auctoritate roborata, primatum tenet omnium Ecclesiarum; ad quam tam summa episcoporum negotia, et judicia, atque querelae, quam et majores Ecclesiarum quaestiones quasi ad caput semper referenda sunt. Nam et qui se scit aliis esse praepositum, non moleste ferat aliquem esse sibi praelatum. Ipsa namque Ecclesia quae prima est, ita reliquis Ecclesiis vices suas credidit largiendas, ut in partem sint vocatae sollicitudinis, non in plenitudinem potestatis’ (PL 69, 19).

64. Eno, ‘Papal damage control in the aftermath of the Three Chapters controversy’, 52.

65. ‘Negare non potes scire te—in urbe Roma—Petro primo cathedram episcopalem esse conlatam, in qua sederit omnium apostolorum caput Petrus, unde et Cephas est appellatus, in qua una cathedra unitas ab omnibus servaretur ...’ (text in Batiffol, ‘Petrus initium episcopatus’, 445; tr. M. Edwards, *Optatus: against the Donatists*, Translated Texts for Historians 27 (Liverpool 1997) 32); on Optatus, see R. B. Eno, ‘The work of Optatus as a turning point in the African ecclesiology’, *Thomist* 37 (1973) 668–85; J. E. Merdinger ‘Optatus reconsidered’, E. A. Livingstone (ed), *Studia Patristica* 22 (1989) 294–99; on the history of the philological association *Cephas-kephalē*, see Y. Congar, ‘Cephas—céphalè—caput’, *Revue du moyen âge latin* 8 (1952) 5–42. References to Rome, the papacy or individual popes as *caput* are gathered in Batiffol, ‘Petrus initium episcopatus’, 445–48.

body in its command of the western church. Leo's Letter 14 to Anastasius, the difficult bishop of Thessalonica, expresses the same ideas as Vigilius: the apostles are equal in their election, but Peter is their leader. The letter quotes Paul (1 Cor 12:12) on the church as a body and the episcopacy is compared to a body supported by all its members. But, while there is harmony among the members, there is also a distinction of rank for Peter is the head. Therefore, 'the care of the universal church should flow together (*conflueret*) to Peter's one see, and nothing anywhere should be separated from its head (*caput*)'.⁶⁶

In time, *caput ecclesiae* became a title applied by others to the bishops of Rome. The letter *Quod semper* from the bishops of the council of Sardica (Sofia) of 344 to pope Julius was addressed 'to the head (*ad caput*), that is, to the see of Peter the apostle'.⁶⁷ It is not difficult to see why the words of Philip, legate of pope Celestine at the synod of Ephesus (AD 431), riled the Eastern ecclesiastics: 'Peter is the prince and head (*caput*) of the Apostles ... who till now and forever lives and judges through his successors'.⁶⁸ Two decades later, the letter from the divines of the council of Chalcedon to Leo addressed him as one placed as the head above the members (*tu tanquam caput membrum praepositus*).⁶⁹ Sources from the first half of the seventh century show that the Irish were aware of the legal import of this title. Cummian, writing c.631, echoes Innocent's injunction that important cases (*causae maiores*) should be referred to the 'head of cities' (*ad caput urbium*),⁷⁰ as does early Irish canon law.⁷¹ At the end of the century, Adomnán of Iona wrote of how the fame of Colum Cille, the subject of his *Vita Columbae*, had spread even as far as Rome, 'the head of all cities' (*caput omnium civitatum*).⁷² None of the Irish churches was as aggressive, or as successful, as Armagh in promoting its cause by analogy with Rome. Armagh was the head of the churches of Ireland as Rome was head of the universal Church. In the *Life of Patrick* by Adomnán's contemporary, Muirchú, the saint journeys to the apostolic see, the 'head of all the churches of the whole world' (... *ad sedem apostolicam ... ad caput utique omnium ecclesiarum totius mundi*).⁷³ There he studied 'in order to preach and bring divine grace to the peoples beyond the

66. '... ad unam Petri sedem universalis Ecclesiae cura conflueret, et nihil usquam a suo capite dissideret' (PL 54, 676).

67. '... ad caput, id est ad Petri apostoli sedem ...' (Denziger, *Enchiridion*, 35); see McShane, *La 'Romanitas'*, 153.

68. 'Petrus apostolorum princeps et caput ... qui ad hoc usque tempus et semper in suis successoribus vivit, et iudicium exercet' (Denziger, *Enchiridion*, 57).

69. *ibid.* 72.

70. Walsh & Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's letter*, 93.

71. CH 20 (*De provincia*), 3 (*De non degradanda provincia, ut dijudicet causas suas*) (some MSS only): 'Canones roman. dicuntur: Causa uniuscujusque provinciae non referenda ad alteram, si autem cause majores fuerint exortae, ad caput urbium sunt referendae'.

72. A. O. & M. O. Anderson (ed. & tr.), *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (London 1961) 542.

73. L. Bieler (ed. & tr.), *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh*, SLH 10 (Dublin 1979) 70.

Empire'.⁷⁴ The mid-seventh-century⁷⁵ *Liber angeli* records the angel's grant of supremacy to Patrick. It sets out Armagh's appellate jurisdiction in terms similar to those Innocent had used for Rome: any exceptionally difficult case (*causa ualde difficilis*) 'must be referred to the see of the archbishop of the Irish, that is, (the see) of Patrick'. If no settlement can be reached, it must be sent 'to the apostolic see, that is, to the see of Peter the apostle'.⁷⁶ Rome held a position of pre-eminence because it was the site of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, but also because it is where their relics, and the relics of other great martyrs, are preserved. For this reason Armagh claims to hold portions of the relics of Peter, Paul, Stephen, and Lawrence for these are the principal martyrs whose relics are venerated in Rome.⁷⁷ If the church of Armagh is presented as analogous to Rome, its bishop's status over the Irish church is modelled on the primatial position of the bishop of Rome. Peter established the first see at Rome, therefore, to maintain the apostolic succession, all other sees must have been founded from it. Patrick founded the first see in Ireland at Armagh. For this reason, the *Liber angeli* (§21) claims jurisdiction over every 'city of episcopal rank', *ciuitas ad episcopali gradu*, in Ireland. Armagh is referred to as an apostolic see (*Liber Angeli*, title), its bishop is 'heir' *heres* (title, §§14, 20, 21) of the apostolic teacher (§§13, 17). If the *electos* referred to in §10 are the 'bishops' of Armagh (and this is very far from certain) or, more generally, the leaders of the Irish church, the words used by Patrick to describe his relationship with them are remarkable: they are 'dear to me as if they were issue of my own body' (*caros quasi proprios corporis mei editos*). If these words apply to the rulers of Armagh, the immediacy of the connection implies a continuation of the 'apostolic' status of Patrick in the rulers of Armagh. Each ruler governs with the same status and prerogatives over the Irish church as Patrick held by virtue of his being the first bishop because every subsequent bishop succeeds him *directly* as his son. If the words apply less specifically to the rulers of the Irish church, they express the respect Armagh feels these rulers owe to its bishop as the occupant of the see of the first evangeliser of the Irish.

The association of the ecclesiastical leader with the head is sometimes more specific when he is linked to the sense of sight. The leader's duty is to watch and to

74. *ibid.* 71.

75. On the date of this text and valuable comments on Armagh's contacts with Rome, see Charles Doherty, 'The monastic town in early medieval Ireland', H. B. Clarke & A. Simms (ed), *The comparative history of urban origins in non-Roman Europe*, Br Archaeol Rep Int Ser 255 (i) (London 1985) 56; *idem*, 'The cult of St Patrick and the politics of Armagh in the seventh century', J.-M. Picard (ed), *Ireland and northern France, AD 600–850* (Dublin 1991) 70. Doherty holds that *Liber angeli* was the result of direct contacts between Armagh and Rome and that the description of Armagh as *urbs* was an attempt to present Armagh as the Rome of Ireland.

76. '... ad cathedram archiepiscopi Hibernensium, id est Patricii ... referenda'; 'ad sedem apostolicam ... id est ad Petri apostoli cathedram' (Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 188–91).

77. The claim is made in the *Liber angeli* (Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 186) and in Tírechán's *Life of Patrick* (*ibid.* 122). The relics of Stephen and Lawrence (counterpoints to Peter and Paul) were venerated in the church of St Lawrence outside the Walls from an early date.

give warning when dangers are detected. Leo I wrote of Peter as the head of the body of the Church in *Sermo* 82, but in the same sermon he also wrote of the church ‘whose head is Christ (Eph 1:22) and who established [Peter and Paul] as the twin lights of the eyes’ of the church.⁷⁸ In the ninth century, the papal librarian Anastasius Bibliothecarius compared the five apostolic sees to the five senses. Rome is the sense of sight because it is the most acute of the senses and is connected to the others.⁷⁹ The ecclesiastical leaders’ responsibility to keep watch is inherent in the word *episkopos*, ‘bishop’ and its Latin equivalent *speculator*, ‘watchman, overseer, sentinel’.⁸⁰ The very first entry in the *Collectio hibernensis*, quoting Isidore of Seville’s *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, explains the development of the word:

*Episcopus nomen a graeco ductum, os in us convertens, quod latine super-speculator sive superintensor dicitur.*⁸¹ ‘Bishop is a word taken from Greek by changing [*episkopos*] into [*episcopus*], which means watchman or supervisor in Latin’.

The word *speculator* goes back to Ez 3 and 33 where the prophet, set as a watchman over Israel, must be vigilant and warn the Israelites of their sins.⁸² If he neglects his duty, the watchman is answerable for his own shortcomings and for the sins of those he was set to watch over and led astray. The word, calling to mind its attendant responsibilities, is applied to monastic leaders⁸³ but, more usually, to bishops. The *Hibernensis* quotes the homilies on Ezekiel by Columbanus’s contemporary, pope Gregory I, and his paraphrase of Ezekiel.

Gregorius: Sanguis morientis de manu speculatoris requiritur, quia peccatum subditi culpa praepositi deputatur, si tacuerit. Unde quoque hic additur: si autem tu adnuntiaveris, et ille non fuerit conversus ab impietate sua et a via sua

78. ‘... cui caput est Christus, quasi geminum constituerit lumen oculorum ...’ (PL 54, 427).

79. ‘... patriarchales sedes ... in cuiusque mortali corpore sensus locaverit Inter quas videlicet sedes quia Romana praecellit, non immerito visui comparatur: qui profecto cunctis sensibus praeeminet, acutior illis existens, et communionem, sicut nullus eorum, cum omnibus habens’ (Mansi 16, 7; Schatz, *Papal primacy*, 49).

80. On *episkopos*, see C. Mohrmann, ‘Les innovations sémantiques dans le grec et le latin des chrétiens’, *Humanitas* 13/14 (1961–62) 322–35: 330–31; R. E. Brown, ‘*Episkopē* and *episkopos*: the New Testament evidence’, *Theol Stud* 41 (1980) 322–38.

81. CH 1, 1 (a); cf. Isid., *De ecc. off.* 2,5, 8.

82. Columbanus’s use of the term *speculator* and its background in Ezekiel are discussed, briefly, in C. Mohrmann, ‘The earliest continental Irish Latin’, *Vigilae Christianae* 16 (1962) 216–23: 220 and, more fully, in Smit, *Literary style*, 40–47.

83. ‘For you know that you will have to give an account of for the whole flock over which the Holy Spirit appointed you as watchman ...’ (Orsisius, *Liber* 17, 40, writing to monastic leaders; quoted in P. Rousseau, *Ascetics, authority and the church in the age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford 1978) 61).

*impia, ipse quoque in iniquitate sua moritur; tu autem animam tuam salvasti.*⁸⁴ 'Gregory says: The blood of the dying is required from the hand of the watchman (cf. Ez 3:20; 33:6) because the sin of the inferior is imputed to the fault of the superior if the superior kept silent. Therefore this is also added: if indeed you gave warning and he did not turn from his wickedness and evil way, indeed he shall die in his wickedness but you have delivered your soul (cf. Ez 3:19; 33:9).

The *Catechesis celtica* quotes the same source⁸⁵ and there is a close parallel in the so-called *Catechesis cracoviensis*.⁸⁶ Columbanus, it has been noted, uses the term *speculator* when addressing the popes.⁸⁷ His first letter, to Gregory, is addressed 'to the distinguished watchman', *egregio speculatori* (*Ep.* 1, 1), and Letter 5 (to Boniface) links the pope's titles of head of the Church and watchman in the opening salutation: 'to the head of all the churches of the whole of Europe ... to the most reverend watchman' (*omnium totius Europae ecclesiarum capiti ... reverendissimo speculatori*; *Ep.* 5, 1). The most extensive, and probably earliest, Hiberno-Latin consideration of the duties of the bishop based on Ezekiel is found in the impressive mid-seventh-century *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*.⁸⁸ The tenth *abusio* is the careless bishop, *episcopus negligens*, who concerns himself more with the honour the office brings than in fulfilling the duties it imposes:

First, let it be asked of the bishop what the dignity of his title holds, since 'bishop' is a Greek word that means 'watchman' in Latin. In fact, the Lord himself reveals why [the name] 'watchman' is applied and what is required of the watchman when, in the person of the prophet Ezekiel, he declares to the bishop the principles of his duty, saying thus: I have given you as a watchman to the house of Israel. Therefore, when you hear the word from my mouth, you shall announce it to them from me. If, however, you see the sword coming (cf. Ez 33:6) and you give no warning for the wicked man to turn from his way, that iniquitous man will die in his wickedness and I will require his blood at your

84. CH 37, 22 (b), excerpting Gregory, *In Ez.* i 11, 10–11.

85. A. Wilmart (ed), *Analecta reginensia: extraits des manuscrits latins de la reine Christine conservés au Vatican*, Studi e Testi 59 (Vatican 1933) 51.

86. P. David, 'Un recueil de conférences monastiques irlandaises du VIII^e siècle', *Revue Bénédictine* 49 (1937) 62–89: 78.

87. Mohrmann, 'The earliest continental Irish Latin', 220; Smit, *Studies of the language*, 40–47; Stanton, 'Columbanus, Letter 1', 156–57; Winterbottom, 'Columbanus and Gildas', 311n; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts 400–1000', M. J. Green (ed), *The Celtic world* (London 1995), 703–36: 724.

88. On this work, see Aidan Breen, 'The evidence of antique Irish exegesis in Pseudo-Cyprian, *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*', *Proc Roy Ir Acad (C)* 87 (1987) 71–101; idem, 'De XII abusiuis: text and transmission', P. Ní Chatháin & M. Richter (ed), *Ireland and Europe in the early middle ages* (Dublin 2002) 78–94.

hand. If, however, you give warning and he does not turn [from his way], he shall die in his wickedness but you have saved your soul (cf. Ez 3:17–19; 33:7–9). It is therefore proper for the bishop diligently to watch for the sins of all over whom he has been placed on the watchtower (*specula*), and after he as taken heed, he is to correct by word and, if he is able, in actions; and if he is not able, he is to shun the workers of iniquity according to the rule of the gospel.⁸⁹

De duodecim abusiuis saeculi sets out the duties of the bishop and the sequence of these duties: watchfulness, followed by warning and, if necessary, by rebuke or punishment. As will be shown, this order of responsibilities is significant. Although written in Ireland and more than a generation after his death, this text puts into sharp focus Columbanus's paraphrasing of Ezekiel 3 in his reminder to Boniface of the duties of the watchman.⁹⁰ As the chief watchman, Boniface must guard the faith and take action when it is threatened by heresy and schism. Columbanus was writing at the behest of Agilulf, king of the Lombards and Theodelinda, his wife. Agilulf was Arian and although Theodelinda was catholic, the north Italian church was not in communion with Rome. In the long reign of Justinian (527–65), the divided loyalty of the papacy put the institution under severe strain. Out of loyalty to the empire, the popes tried to pull into line Western bishops, who did not agree with the theological position adopted by the emperor in support of Eastern monophysite ecclesiastics. Events reached breaking point after the Second Council of Constantinople (553) and the renewed condemnation of the persons and, or, writings of Theodore of Mop-suestia, Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Ibas of Edessa—the Three Chapters. Pope Vigilius (537–55) was taken to Constantinople and, under extreme pressure, signed up to the condemnation. For the Western bishops, this was a repudiation of the synod of Chalcedon's definition of the dual nature of Christ and the vacillating Virgilius's back-tracking did nothing to placate them. Indeed, the spectacle of a pope seeming to

89. 'Primum namque ab episcopo quid sui nominis dignitas tenet inquiratur, quoniam episcopus cum Grecum nomen sit, speculator interpretatur. Quare vero speculator ponitur et quid a speculatore requiritur Dominus ipse denudat, cum sub Ezechielis prophetae persona episcopo officii sui rationem denuntiat, ita inquiens: speculatorem dedi te domui Israhel. Audiens ergo ex ore meo sernuntiabis eis ex me. Si autem videris gladium venientem et non annuntiaveris ut revertatur impius a via sua, ipse quidem impius in iniquitate sua morietur, sanguinem autem ejus de manu tua requiram. Si autem tu annuntiaveris et ille non fuerit reversus, ipse quidem in iniquitate sua morietur, sed tu animam tuam liberasti. Decet ergo episcopum omnium quibus in specula positus est peccata diligenter attendere et postquam attenderit, sermone si poterit et actu corrigere, et si non poterit iuxta evangelii regulam scelerum operarios declinare' (S. Hellmann (ed), *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De xii abusiuis saeculi*, Texte und Untersuchungen 34 (Leipzig 1909) 53–54).

90. 'Then, since according to the Lord's warnings the blood of so many will be sought for at the hands of their shepherds, careful watch must be kept, that is, the word of the Lord must be often preached, and preached by the shepherds, by the Church's bishops (*speculatoribus*) and teachers, that none may perish through ignorance; for if he perishes through lack of heed, his blood will lie on his own head' (Walker, *Sancti Columbani opera*, 43). The editions (Grundlach, Walker) give no reference to Ezekiel.

admit that he was wrong greatly damaged Rome's prestige and reputation as the 'teaching church' from which all others learn. In Letter 5, Columbanus calls on the supreme watchman, the bishop of Rome, to take action, eradicate heresy, and restore the schismatics to the fold. This attempted reconciliation was nothing less than the first attempt to detach the Italian church from the political dominance of Constantinople.⁹¹ Letter 5, then, calls on the pope to proclaim the orthodoxy of the Roman see—something that the popes in fact did in the aftermath of Three Chapters controversy⁹²—and to take action against those in Italy who do not concur with that orthodoxy. The bishop is charged with guarding the faith, warning when that faith is threatened and taking action, even at the price of personal safety, to secure the faith and restore unity.

Letter 5 is regarded as one of Columbanus's finest compositions and images of sight and watching run through it giving the text focus and unity. Michael Winterbottom discerned Columbanus's wordplay on *speculator*, 'watchman', and the name Vigilius, 'one who watches'.⁹³ He was not, however, the first to play upon the similarity in meaning in the words *speculator* and *vigilantia*, 'watchfulness, vigilance' when calling attention to the duties of the bishop. Leo associated the terms in his Letter 4 to various Italian bishops warning them that 'If we do not punish these things with the vigilance (*vigilantia*) we ought to use, we cannot excuse ourselves to him who wished us to be watchmen (*speculatores*)',⁹⁴ an oblique reference to Ezekiel's warning to negligent pastors. The duty of the pastor is to keep watch, but also, if necessary, to punish. Columbanus's wordplay on *speculator* and *vigilare* is evidently intended to goad Boniface into action; but even his barbs to the pope have a Leonine pedigree. Another of Leo's letters (*Ep.* 167) brings together the standard representations of the ecclesiastical leader: the helmsman (*gubernator*), the shepherd (*pastor*) and the watchman (*speculator*). All of these have the duty to keep watch (*vigilare*).

91. So says Markus, *Gregory*, 139, with reference to P. Delogu, 'Il regno longobardo', *Storia d'Italia i. Longobardi e Bizantini* (Turin 1980).

92. Eno, 'Papal damage control', 53.

93. Winterbottom, 'Columbanus and Gildas', 311n; Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society', 724, noted Columbanus's use of the word *speculator* and *theoria*, on which latter, see below.

94. '... quae si non qua debemus vigilantia reseceamus, illi qui nos speculatores esse voluit excusare non possumus' (PL 54, 610); see Tillard, *The bishop of Rome*, 91. Boniface, in his letter (72 [78]; PL 89, 763–68) to archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury, associates these terms in his consideration of the duties of bishop. The letter has a long quotation from Ezekiel omitted in the English translation by E. Emerton, *The letters of saint Boniface* (New York 2000) 114–19. But this was not the first time Boniface's message failed to hit target. Wulfstan's Homily 16 (a), *Verba Ezechielis prophete de pastoribus non recte agentibus*, begins with a paraphrase of the passage in Ezekiel concerning the duty of the *speculator* to watch and give warning. Wulfstan includes the stock images of poor ecclesiastical leaders, including the silent *speculatores* who fail to give warning (*taciti speculatores*), and the good leaders who keep watch (*pastores ... uigilantes*) and who preach to all, great and small, rich and poor alike (*praedicantes maiori ac minori, diuite et pauperi*) (D. Bethurum (ed), *The homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford 1957) 239).

... who will steer the ship through the sea's waves, if the helmsman is absent; who will guard the sheep from the attacks of the wolves, if the shepherd does not keep watch (Jn 10: 12); finally, who will oppose the thieves and robbers, if the love of repose entices the watchman who is placed to be the lookout from the zeal of his responsibility?⁹⁵

This letter (or at least parts of it) was known in some form in early Ireland. The piece above is quoted in early Irish canon law, but in abbreviated form.⁹⁶ (The summary nature of the quotation and the attribution to Augustine make it unlikely that the canonists were familiar first-hand with Leo's letter.) The words *vigilantia* or *vigilare* occur some fourteen times in Columbanus's letter and draw attention to the bishop's primary function to watch for the faith and to take action when it is threatened. His impassioned tone is revealed in the eight times the verb appears in the imperative. In §5, Columbanus writes: 'Watch (*Vigila*) therefore, I beg you, pope, watch, and again I say, watch; since perhaps Vigilius was not very vigilant' (*non bene vigilavit Vigilius*). His punning on the name of the pope meaning 'the vigilant one' and his implication that the pope failed to live up to his name (*Vigilius, speculator*) may seem, at first sight, to be somewhat audacious; it is an accusation that the pope failed in the primary duty of his office. But to appreciate the subtlety of his argument, it must be taken with what precedes it in the letter. Columbanus writes:

... *vigilanter insistas officio tuo pastorali, stans super custodiam die ac nocte, ut videas baculum illum nuceum, quem uncinum postea videre merearis tempore fructus colligendi veros.* '... do you fulfil your pastoral duty with all vigilance, standing on your guard day and night, that you may see that almond staff which afterwards you may deserve to see as a crook (*uncinum*, 'hook') at the time of gathering the true fruits' (*Ep. 5, 4*).⁹⁷

This passage is worth examining in detail to appreciate Columbanus's understanding of the nature of papal authority or, at the very least, to grasp the complexity of his line of reasoning. The passage is a combination of biblical verses. The first is Jer 1:11, 'And the word of the Lord came to me, saying: What do you see, Jeremiah?'. In the Vulgate, the prophet replies, 'And I said: I see a rod watching' (*Et dixi: Virgam vigilantem ego video*). But instead of 'watchful staff', *virgam vigilantem*, Columbanus gives the *Vetus Latina* reading of *baculum nuceum* which was taken to mean

95. '... quis inter fluctus maris navim deriget, si gubernator abscedet? Quis ab insidiis luporum oves custodet, si pastoris cura non vigelet? Quis denique latronibus obsistet et furibus, si speculatorem in prospectu explorationis locatum, ab intentione sollicitudinis amor quietis abducat?' (PL 54, 1201).

96. CH 39 (*De monachis*), 4 (b): 'Augustinus: Quis navem agit, si gubernator abscedat, quis ab insidiis luporum custodit oves, si pastoris cura non vigelet, quis latronibus et furibus resistit, si speculatorem non habuerit?'

97. Walker, *Sancti Columbani opera*, 40–41; Walker's translation has been changed slightly.

‘almond staff’. The choice of this verse is apposite because it reflects the general theme of watchfulness; God tests his prophet by requesting him to report what he sees. The reference to the staff or rod makes the verse all the more relevant in the context of a consideration of the duties of the bishop. The bishop’s staff (*baculus*, *virga*) was a symbol of his office and of his duty to succour members of his flock in difficulty and to give timely chastisement to those he considers to be in need of it. It symbolised the dual nature of the bishop’s duty both to support and to discipline. According to the Isidore of Seville, these duties are ceremonially evoked at the bishops’ consecration: ‘When the bishop is being consecrated, a staff is given him so that by his symbol he may both rule and correct the people in subjection to him, and support the weaknesses of the infirm’.⁹⁸ For Gregory, ‘What does the law signify through the staff, but pastoral care?’⁹⁹ Both passages appear in early Irish canon law, the *Hibernensis*,¹⁰⁰ and there is an echo from Isidore in Ps-Bede’s *Collectanea*.¹⁰¹ Ps-Jerome’s commentary on the Gospels, which some date to the middle of the seventh century, puts these duties of encouraging and chastising succinctly. The commentator quotes Paul’s 1 Cor 4:21, ‘What do you wish? Shall that I come to you with a rod (*virga*), or in love and the spirit of gentleness?’. The comment sees both functions as the duties of the bishop and says simply: ‘Comforting or discipline are understood by the rod (*virgam*)’.¹⁰² Jeremiah 1:11, therefore, brings to mind the central theme of the letter: the nature and duties of episcopal office. The Vulgate reading, with the word *vigilare* used so often by Columbanus in this letter and to such effect in the pun on the name Vigilius, would have suited his purpose in drawing attention to the bishop’s role of vigilance, in particular, the vigilance expected of the bishop of Rome. Columbanus’s use of the Vetus Latina *baculum nucuum* over the Vulgate may have been dictated by his sources or it may suggest a desire to draw attention to a particular point.

Jerome seems the likeliest source for Columbanus’s variant reading. In his commentary on the Book of Jeremiah he summarises Pliny’s report that the almond flowers in early spring while all others are still dormant.¹⁰³ The almond was therefore a

98. Isid. *De eccl. off.* 2.5.12: ‘Huic [sc. episcopo] autem, cum consecratur, datur baculus, ut ejus indicio subditam plebem vel regat, vel corrigat, vel infirmitates infirmorum sustineat’ (PL 83, 783–84).

99. Gregory, *Hom. in evang.* 2, 22, 9: ‘Quid lex per baculum nisi pastorem custodiam designat?’ (CCSL 141, 191).

100. The Isidorian example is found in CH 1, 6 (a), *De baculo et annulo episcopi*; the Gregorian in CH 1, 6 (b), ‘Quid per baculum nisi pastoralis cura signatur? Baculus enim sustentat, custodit, erigit’.

101. M. Bayliss & M. Lapidge (ed. & tr.), *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, SLH 14 (Dublin 1998) 174.

102. PL 30, 562: ‘Per virgam, consolationem, sive disciplinam ostendit, ut Paulus ait: Quid vultis in virga veniam ad vos, an in spiritu mansuetudinis, et consolationis?’.

103. ‘Floret prima omnium amygdala mense Ianuario, Martio vero pomum maturat’, *Thesaurus linguae latinae*, s.v. ‘amygdala’, with reference to Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, 16, 42; see H. Rack-

traditional symbol of watchfulness and vigilance. He says here, and in his commentary on Ecclesiastes,¹⁰⁴ that for the Vulgate reading of ‘a rod watching’ [*uirga uigilans*], the Septuagint gives ‘a rod of almond’ [*baculus nuceus*] and then spells out the semantic similarity in the Hebrew words for ‘vigilance, watching’ and ‘almond’.

*Pro ‘uirga uigilante’ LXX ‘baculum nuceum’ transtulerunt. Laborandum igitur nobis est, ut breuiter hebraeam ἐπιμολογίαν latinus lector intellegat. ‘Saced’ ‘nux’ dicitur, ‘uigilia’ autem uel ‘uigil’ siue ‘uigilare’ appellatur ‘soced’ ... ab eo igitur quod dicitur ‘nux’, propter uerbi similitudinem ad ‘uigilis’ intellegentiam nomen adlusit ...*¹⁰⁵ For ‘a rod watching’, the Septuagint translated ‘a rod of almond’. Therefore we must exert ourselves briefly so that the Latin reader may understand the Hebrew etymology. *Saced* [in Hebrew] means ‘almond’. Now, ‘vigil’ or ‘vigilant’ or ‘to keep vigil / to be watchful’ is *Soced* ... From this, therefore, ‘almond’ [*nux*] is said; because of the similarity of the word to ‘vigils’, the term is a play upon the meaning.

While the Vulgate rendering of this verse retains the sense of watchfulness in the word *uigilans*, the principle of watchfulness is more forcefully expressed in the Vetus Latina *nuceus* or *amigdalinus* (‘almond’) as it combines both the symbolism of the almond tree and Hebrew for ‘watching’. In this subtle way, Columbanus reminds the pope of the responsibilities of his pastoral office: the staff is a symbol of his authority, but that authority devolves from the performance of his duty of vigilance. This authority and duty are combined in the reference to the almond staff. Even for Columbanus, this is a particularly dense passage as he leads from the theme of watchfulness symbolised by the bishop’s staff to the other duty that the staff represents. Once the bishop has fulfilled his responsibility of vigilance, he is expected to administer whatever curative measures are necessary as the staff represents his task of chastising the wayward. After Jeremiah answers the question ‘What do you see?’ (Jer 1:11), the Lord responds enigmatically: ‘You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it’ (*Bene uidisti, quia uigilabo ego super uerbo meo ut faciam illud*, Jer 1:12). This is generally taken to mean that the Lord watches to see that his people respond correctly to the prophet’s warnings. Jerome leads from his interpretation of the ‘almond staff’, ‘rod of watching’ to consider how the almond staff can represent both vigilance and the need to take action after keeping watch by giving warning or inflicting punishment. He continues in his comment on Jer 1:11:

ham (ed. & tr.) *Pliny, Natural history* (London 1968), iv 454–55.

104. ‘Quomodo igitur in Ieremiae principio, uerbum soced, si uarietur accentus, et nucem significat et uigilias. Et dicitur ad eum: *Quid tu uides, Ieremia?* Et respondit: *Nucem*. Et ait Dominus ad eum: *Bene uidisti, quia uigilabo ego super uerbum meum, ut faciam illud* Sciendum quoque, quod ubi nunc septuaginta interpretes posuerunt amygdalum, ipsum uerbum sit soced, quod in Ieremiae principio est; sed ibi in nucem uersum est, hic in *amygdalum*’ (CCSL 72, 355–56).

105. CCSL 74, 7–8.

*Vigilat autem uirga cuncta populi peccata considerans, ut percutiat et corripiat delinquentes. Vnde et apostolus scribit peccantibus: quid vultis? In uirga ueniam ad uos, an in caritate et spiritu mansuetudinis (1Cor. 4:23)? Ista est uirga uel baculus, de qua et Dauid loquitur: uirga tua et baculus tuus, ipsa me consolata sunt (Ps 22:5). Pulchreque posuit ‘consolata sunt’, ad hoc enim Dominus corripit, ut emendet. Et quomodo nux siue amygdalum amarissimam habet corticem et testa durissima cingitur, ut detractis austerioribus et duris fructus dulcissimus reperiatur, sic omnis correptio et labor continentiae amara quidem uidetur ad praesens, sed fructus parit dulcissimos.*¹⁰⁶ The rod [*uirga*] keeps vigil [*uigilat*], watching closely over all the sins of the people, in order to smite and rebuke the wrongdoers. So the Apostle [Paul] also writes to the sinners: ‘What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod [*uirga*], or in love and the spirit of gentleness?’ [1 Cor 4:23]. This is the rod or staff of which David also speaks: ‘thy rod [*uirga*] and thy staff [*baculus*], they comfort me’ [Ps 23:4]. And he put ‘They comfort [me]’ beautifully. Here the Lord chides so that he may correct. And just as the nut or almond has a very bitter casing and is covered by a very hard shell—so that the hard and severe things having been removed, the sweetest fruit is found—so too all chiding and the toil of moderation seem bitter at the time, but bring forth the sweetest fruit.

The staff represents the bishop’s duty to correct, but the almond staff more particularly represents the benefits of a timely chastisement, a concept not conveyed by the Vulgate *vigram uigilantem*.¹⁰⁷ Jerome’s ideas are presented in abbreviated form in later sources including the ‘Irish’ Reference Bible,¹⁰⁸ an extensive biblical commentary compiled in the eighth century, and his words on the almond signifying a timely correction are incorporated under the heading *De correptione* in Sedulius Scottus’s florilegium, *Collectaneum miscellaneum*.¹⁰⁹ The theme is continued in the next biblical allusion in this remarkable passage of Letter 5. Columbanus writes that, if he keeps watch ‘day and night’, Boniface should deserve to see the almond staff as a

106. CCSL 74, 8.

107. Gregory, *Reg. past.* 2, 6, interprets the rod and staff of Ps 23:4 as, respectively, the bishop’s duty to smite and to support; ‘Virga enim percutimur, baculo sustentamur’ (PL 77, 38).

108. Paris, BN, lat. 11561, f 91^r: ‘Dixit dominus ad me, Quid uidis Hieremia? Et dixi, uirgam uigilantem ego uideo. Et dominus dixit ad me, Bene uidisti quia ego uigilabo super uerbum meum. Pro uirgam uigilantem LXX dicunt baculum nucum. SECED in ebreo nux dicitur. Vigilia uel uigilare in ebreo SECED dicitur. Igitur ab eo quod dicitur nux propter uerbi similitudinem ad uigiles [*sic*] intellegentiam nomen adluxit [*sic*].’

109. ‘Hieronimus: Quomodo amygdalum amarissimam habet corticem et testa durissima accingitur, ut, detractis austerioribus et duris, fructus dulcissimus reperiatur, sic omnis correptio et labor et continentia amara quidem uidetur ad presens, sed fructum parit dulcissimum’ (CCCM 67, 33). The source was noticed in F. Dolbeau’s supplement to CCCM 67 (Turnhout 1990) 19 and 49 with reference to *Coll. misc.* VIII.v.7. Cf. also *Coll. misc.* XIII.xi.23: ‘Omnis correptio proficit in salutem: quae ad presens uidetur esse tristiciae, postea fructus adfert pacificos’ (CCCM 67, 77); CCCM 67 (supp) 24 and 49 names Jerome’s *Comm. in Hier.* VI, 20, 2 as the source.

‘hook at the time of the gathering of true fruits’ (*uncinum ... tempore fructus colligendi veros*). According to Grundlach, the biblical text alluded to is Amos 8:1–2: ‘These things the Lord showed to me: and, behold, a hook for the fruit (*uncinum pomorum*).¹¹⁰ And he said: What do you see, Amos? And I said: A hook for the fruit’. The hook (*uncinum*) must be seen as another allusion to the bishop’s staff; Walker translated it as ‘crook’. Like Jer 1:11, this verse is in reply to God’s testing of his prophet by asking what he sees; it is a continuation of the central theme of vigilance or watchfulness. Furthermore, in the verses that follow in the biblical text, it is apparent that the words concern the role of the prophet in warning the people of Israel of the punishments that await them for their sins. In linking these two biblical quotations, Columbanus was again following a precedent set by Jerome. Columbanus may have read Jerome’s commentary on Amos, either in Ireland (where evidence suggests that it was known at an early date) or on the Continent.¹¹¹ It is reasonable to surmise that Columbanus’s—and, indeed, Cummian’s—declared reverence for Jerome came from some familiarity with his works. In his comment on Amos 8:2, Jerome begins by linking the verse to Jeremiah 1:11 and interprets both verses as the prophet’s duty to be vigilant:

*Quod Hieremias sub uirga cernit uigiliarum, sive nucis eo quod uigilauerit super peccata populi sui, ne quasi clausis et conuiuentibus oculis eorum delicta non uiderit; hoc nunc Amos aduersus Iudam et Israel pariter intuetur sub specie uncini Et est sensus: Sicut uncino rami arborum detrahuntur ad poma carpenda, ita ego proximum captiuitatis tempus attraxi. Et ut sciamus hoc esse quod dicimus, ipse interpretatur Deus, quid significet uisio, quam prophetae ostenderit. ‘Venit finis super populum meum Israel’. Quodque sequitur: ‘Non adiciam ultra ut pertranseam eum’, hoc significat, quod iniquitates populi sui ultra non transeat, nec neglegat, neque impunita scelera transire permittat.*¹¹² What Jeremiah perceived in the rod of watchfulness—or in the rod of almond—(because he watched over the sins of his people, lest he should not see their sins because of shut or drooping eyes), that Amos now in

110. Walker’s cites Jer 1:11 *in apparatu*, but translates *quem uncinum postea videre merearis tempore fructus colligendi veros* as ‘which [sc. the almond rod] afterwards you may deserve to see in the shape of a crook at the time of gathering the true fruits’.

111. *De diuisionibus temporum* (PL 90, 659) explains the origins of the word *menses* and cites Jerome. According to F. Wallis, *Bede: The reckoning of time*, Translated Texts for Historians 29 (Liverpool 1999) 42n, the source is Jerome’s *Comm. in Amos* (CCSL 76, 275), although Jerome gives this explanation elsewhere. *De diuisionibus temporum* is part of the Sirmond collection of computistical tracts and, according to C. W. Jones (‘The “lost” Sirmond manuscript of Bede’s computus’, *Engl Hist Rev* 51 (1937) 204–19: 209) is part of the early Irish material in the collection. D. Ó Cróinín defends his dating of this material to before AD 658 in ‘The date, provenance, and earliest use of the works of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus’, G. Bernt, F. Rädle & G. Silagi (ed), *Tradition und Wertung: Festschrift für Franz Brunhölzl zum 65 Geburtstag* (Sigmaringen 1989) 13–22.

112. CCSL 76, 326.

like manner examines closely of Juda and Israel in the shape of a hook This is what it means: 'As the branches of the trees are pulled down by the hook so that the fruits can be picked, so I have drawn on the coming time of captivity'. And that we might know that what we say is so, God himself explains what the vision means, which he revealed to the prophet: 'The end will come for my people Israel' (Am 8: 2). And so what follows: 'I will not pass by them again' (Am 8: 2), this means that he will not pass by the sins of his people, nor will he ignore them, nor allow the crimes to go unpunished.

Jerome, before Columbanus, had associated Jer 1:11 with Am 8:2, identified these verses with the staff-bearer's duty of watchfulness and showed how that duty is fulfilled by giving timely warning and rebuking the offenders. In his subtle reference, then, to the 'rod of almond', Columbanus indicates, on several levels, the proper conduct of the ecclesiastical leader: vigilance, followed by warning and, if necessary, punishment. This sequence of responsibilities we have seen in the patristic sources and in the early Irish adaptations. This sets the scene for what follows when Columbanus calls upon the pope to take action by giving testimony of his own belief and by calling a synod (*Ep.* 5, 4), to engage the enemies of truth in battle (*Ep.* 5, 7–8), and to condemn and excommunicate the heretics (*Ep.* 5, 9) for 'your watchfulness (*vigilantia*) will be the salvation of many, just as on the other side your carelessness will be the destruction of many' (*Ep.* 5, 5). By securing the faith and taking action against the wayward, the pope will live up to his duty as watchman. If he does not, the head fails to perform the task of watching and the pope ceases to be respected as head of the church. This is how Columbanus describes Vigilius. In failing to be vigilant, Vigilius is not *caput ecclesiae* ('head of the church'), but *caput scandali* ('stumbling block', *Ep.* 5, 5). In a daring passage, he tells Boniface that if he does not cleanse the chair of Peter from the taint of Vigilius's error, 'justly your subordinates oppose you' (*merito vestri iuniores vobis resistunt*, *Ep.* 5, 10). Roles are reversed and the body of the church is inverted. Now the subordinates, in defending the true faith, 'are changed into the head' (*fili ... in caput conversi sunt*). Columbanus uses rather trenchant language to warn of the dangerous consequences for the pope for if sons become the head, the pope will become the 'tail' (*cauda*).¹¹³ (Since the argument is made by analogy with the human body, 'tail' seems a polite translation of *cauda*.) Here we see what some writers have referred to as the contradictory nature of Letter 5. Columbanus opens his letters to the popes with terms of great reverence, but this is combined with forthright language demanding reciprocal action in the form of good leadership. He begins Letter 5 by acknowledging the pope as 'most reverend watchman/bishop'. But this title, as the *Hibernensis* says, is one of duty (*oneris*), not status or honour (*honoris*).¹¹⁴ The title *speculator* applied particularly to the church at

113. The reference is to Dt 28:44.

114. CH 1, 1 (b), 'Isidorus: Episcopatus autem, ut quidam prudentium ait, nomen oneris non honoris', quoting Isid., *De ecc. off.* 2.5.8.

Rome which had a duty to keep watch over other churches.¹¹⁵ The authority of the bishop of Rome as watchman (*speculator*), according to Tillard, rests not on the right to impose decisions, but on the *duty* to keep watch and to question churches in their adherence to the faith. These churches, in turn, have a ‘spiritual requirement’ to repay that duty by heeding warnings and accepting any advice and reprimands from the watchman. In exceptional circumstances the pope can intervene as a right to protect the faith. Leo acted decisively and imposed his authority at the time of the council of Chalcedon and Columbanus expresses himself in Letter 5 in terms that recall Leo’s *Tome* and the Creed of Chalcedon.¹¹⁶ This admonitory tone pervades Letter 5 to the extent that Columbanus’s compliments to the pope are reminders of the duties of leadership and are at one with the warnings where he spells out the consequences should Boniface fail to live up to the responsibilities that his titles impose on him. Nevertheless, Columbanus is careful to show that he is aware of his inferior status when addressing the head of the church. Arguing from theological principles, he presents this humility the basis of his authority.

Columbanus constantly declares his humility in Letter 5. He writes as the humblest (*humillimus*, *Ep.* 5, 1) to the highest. Sorrow and necessity (*necessitas*) rather than pride or vainglory (*elatio*, *Ep.* 5, 2; *cenodoxia*, *Ep.* 5, 16; cf. *Epp.* 1, 2; 2, 6) compel him to write. This is more than the convention of authorial humility; it is the theological basis on which Columbanus stakes his right to speak out. In his letter to the Gaulish bishops meeting in council, he builds an elaborate but concise argument on the need for humility; this will result in unity and the discernment of truth. He advises that ‘the humble cannot strive’ (*Ep.* 2, 5) or seek to do their own will. The humble do God’s will and if all who have gathered for the council are motivated by humility, they are united in a single will. Therefore, the unanimous result of their deliberations must be respected for it is the discernment of God’s will (*Ep.* 2, 5). Christ’s words in Jn 6:38 that he comes ‘not to do my will but the will of him that sent me’, exemplify humility, but they also show, according to Augustine, that ‘pride does its own will, humility does the will of God’.¹¹⁷ Columbanus quotes this verse in *Sermo* 10, 3 writing ‘that none should seek his own’ (... *ut nullus quod suum est quaerat*). The humble are the discerners of truth and when they have discerned truth, writes Gregory in his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, they also have an obligation to speak out.¹¹⁸ The superior must speak out with a humble authority, the inferior with a free humility. This order of speaking can be confused for the superior may speak from a swelling of pride (*per tumorem elationis*). Columbanus advises the Gaulish bishops

115. This, and what follows on the bishop of Rome as *speculator*, from Tillard, *The bishop of Rome*, 90–92.

116. So says Walker (p lxxi) of *Ep.* 5, 13.

117. ‘Superbia quippe facit voluntatem suam; humilitas facit voluntatem Dei’ (Augustine, *Trac. in Ioh.* 25, 16; PL 35, 1694).

118. This and what follows is from *Hom. in Ez.* I, 11, 12–14; CCSL 142, 128–31; Gray, *Homilies*, 98–99.

that, having set aside this ‘swelling of pride’ (*tumore superbiae deposito*, *Ep.* 2, 5), they should proceed to reach a unanimous decision in humility. Gregory warns that, on the other side, a foolish fear (*stultum timorem*) may prevent the inferior from speaking out and ‘he fears to speak the good things which he perceives and overlooks how much he offends against charity by his silence’ (*timet dicere bona quae sentit et ignorat quantum caritati reus efficitur tacendo*). Those in authority who speak out with pride forget what they owe to God, while the inferior who remains in silence forgets what he owes to his neighbour. This failure to speak Gregory calls a false humility. Columbanus, unconstrained by humility (false or otherwise), presumes to tell the pope what to do. Indeed, for Gregory, the pope was obliged to listen for ‘the hallmark of selfishness and pride is the concentration on one’s own *bonum* to the exclusion of that of others’.¹¹⁹ The image of the church as a body whose members are held together in the bond of charity is a major one for Gregory, and, indeed, for Columbanus.¹²⁰ In this body, the eyes of the head show the foot where to walk, but the feet allow the entire body to proceed.¹²¹ Columbanus’s humility allows him to discern truth, places an obligation on him to speak out and compels his superiors to listen. Therefore, he writes that ‘we must rather overcome modesty than submit to cowardice, when need (*necessitas*) compels’ (*Ep.* 5, 14).

COLUMBANUS AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE

Images of watching recur in Letter 5 as do its opposites, sleep or dozing, though less frequently. Having implored Boniface to keep watch (*Vigila itaque, papa, vigila, et iterum dico, vigila*, *Ep.* 5, 5) and warned of the consequences of negligence (*Ep.* 5, 6), Columbanus quotes Lk 21:34–35: ‘Take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life; and that day come upon you suddenly. For as a snare shall it come upon all that sit upon the face of the whole earth’ (*Ep.* 5, 6). In the Gospel, the warning continues by urging the faithful to keep watch (*vigilate*) for the end and judgement are approaching: ‘Watch, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come and to stand before the Son of Man’ (Lk 21:36). In what follows, Columbanus adapts this warning to the object of his letter. The imperative plural (*vigilate*) of the Gospel is here in the singular and applied directly to the pope who will have to stand judgement before God: ‘Watch, pope (*papa vigila*), it is time to arise from sleep (*de somno surgere*), the Lord approaches, and already we stand almost at the end in the midst of perilous times’ (*Ep.* 5, 7). The

119. Meyvaert, ‘Diversity within unity’, 149.

120. He quotes 1 Cor 12:26 to Boniface: ‘If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it’ (*Ep.* 5, 11), and says those responsible for the schism within the Italian church are trying ‘to divide the body of Christ and separate his members’ (*Ep.* 5, 12).

121. Meyvaert, ‘Diversity within unity’, 152 with reference to *Mor.*, 29, 44 (PL 76, 126), *Mor.* 28, 24 (PL 76, 462).

other biblical text alluded to here is Rm 13:11, ‘it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep (*de somno surgere*), for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed’.¹²² Gregory saw the sleep of Rm 13:11 as the idleness of sloth in the *Moralia*¹²³ but, in the *Pastoral rule*, this verse is the voice of the preacher calling out in the darkness.¹²⁴ Before addressing the pope directly, Columbanus says: ‘You see the terror by which the Lord awakens our sleep and deadly sloth to watchfulness, lest we be found unready’ (*Ep.* 5, 7). Gregory had warned ecclesiastical leaders of the need to avoid both sleep and slumber in his *Pastoral rule* 3, 4. He quotes Prov 6:4, ‘Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor let thine eyelids slumber’, and interprets slumber as the negligence of the prelate who sees the deeds of the wayward, but says nothing. Sleep is the complete failure of the prelate both to detect and correct wrongs.¹²⁵ Columbanus was familiar with this interpretation of Prov 6:4 for he had read the *Pastoral rule* and complimented its author (*Ep.* 1, 9). Gregory quotes this verse in the context of his instruction in how to give warning to the ecclesiastical superior and Columbanus follows his advice. In calling on the pope to take action, to avoid sleep and slumber and even advising him what course of action to take, Columbanus realises that he is overstepping his station. But this call to action is based on a subtle reading of biblical texts that has patristic sanction. Not all interpretations of the sleep of ecclesiastics are negative, however.

As a monastic leader who had been influenced by the work of Gregory the Great, contemplation is a major theme in the writings of Columbanus. He spends much of Letter 2 (to the Gaulish bishops and priests) considering the difference between priest and monk.¹²⁶ The bishops were meeting in synod to discuss the question of Easter, but for Columbanus the synod is concerned with a much more fundamental subject. This is ‘the truth of faith and good works’ and the ‘discernment (*discretio*) of good and evil’ (*Ep.* 2, 2). The subject of faith and works is, of course, central in christian literature and in what Columbanus writes. His question in Letter 2 is which group is better suited to discerning truth: his party or the Gaulish clergy whom he portrays here, and in Letter 1, as worldly? Columbanus and his monks, ‘once renouncing the world ... consider that they may more easily fulfil the Lord’s word in nakedness than wealth’ (*Ep.* 2, 8). Here he introduces a major theme of the monastic ideal that is closely associated with the central preoccupation of seeing and watching

122. Jerome, *Comm. in Hier.* 1, 17, set a precedent for Columbanus in coupling Rm 13:11 with *vigilare* and in associating these with the responsibility of announcing God’s warning to his people: ‘Cumque accinxerit lumbos, audiat illud quod scriptum est: surge, qui dormis, et eleuare, et illuminabit te Christus (Eph 5:14), ut semper uigilans et de somno consurgens (Rm 13:11) loquatur, quae sibi praeceperit deus’ (CCSL 74, 10).

123. *Mor.* 5. 31. 54 (CCSL 143, 256).

124. *Reg. past.* 3. 39 (PL 77, 124).

125. ‘Somnum quippe oculis dare, est intensione cessante, subditorum curam omnino negligere ... Plene enim dormire, est commissorum acta nec scire, nec corrigere’ (PL 77, 55).

126. On this subject in early christian literature, see H. Chadwick, ‘Bishops and monks’, E. A. Livingstone (ed), *Studia Patristica* 24 (1993) 45–61.

found especially in Letter 5. Purged of worldly distractions and desires, the monk turns to contemplate God with a purified vision.¹²⁷ Having renounced the world and set about reforming his character in conformity to the ideal, the monk seeks to regain the vision of God that had been lost to humankind since the Fall. Sight is the principal sense perception used figuratively in the literature of contemplation. This complex literature, while emphasising the coherence of the practice of mysticism, may allow what seems like contradictory images to be used to illustrate its ideas. The sense of vision conveys the principle of spiritual perception, but sleep is sometimes taken to symbolise the silence and the withdrawal from the mundane that were seen as the prerequisites of contemplation. Commenting on Job 4:13 in the *Moralia*, ‘When deep sleep is wont to hold men’, Gregory says:

Whoever desires to be about the things of this world is like one who is awake. But whoever seeks that inward quiet and flees from the noise of this world is like one who sleeps. But first one must know that sleep, as presented figuratively in sacred scripture, is taken in three ways. Sometimes the death of the flesh is expressed by sleep, sometimes the torpor of neglect, and sometimes, when earthly desires have been spurned, it means the quietness of life (*quies uita*).¹²⁸

To show how sleep can be taken as a reference to sloth, Gregory quotes Rm 13:11, ‘it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep’, as he had done in the *Pastoral rule* and as Columbanus does in Letter 5. Gregory reconciles the apparent contradiction in having sleep and watchfulness as metaphors for central ideals of the contemplative life by arguing that in withdrawing from the clamour of external worldly affairs, the contemplative keeps a closer watch on the inner life of the spirit ‘as is said in the voice of the bride in the Song of Songs: “I sleep and my heart keeps watch (*uigilat*)”’.¹²⁹ To rest on the journey as Jacob had (Gn 28:11) is ‘to close the eyes of the

127. The literature on spiritual contemplation is considerable. Of the main texts, one can cite *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 2, 1643–948; C. Butler, *Western mysticism: the teaching of SS Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on contemplation and the contemplative life* (London 1922); B. McGinn, *The growth of mysticism, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* 2 (New York 1999). Of the extensive literature on subject of contemplation in the writings of Gregory, see especially C. Dagens, *Saint Grégoire le Grand: culture et expérience chrétiennes*, Études Augustiniennes (Paris 1977); also A. Ménager, ‘Les maîtres et les modèles: la contemplation d’après Saint Grégoire le Grand’, *Le vie spirituelle* 9 (1923) 242–82. The opening chapters of Markus, *Gregory*, also examine Gregory’s understanding of contemplation.

128. ‘Quisquis ea quae mundi sunt agere appetit quasi uigilat; quisquis uero internam quietem quaerens, huius mundi strepitum fugit, uelut obdormiscit. Sed prius sciendum est quia in scriptura sacra figurate positus tribus modis somnus accipitur. Aliquando enim somno mors carnis, aliquando torpor neglegentiae, aliquando uero exprimitur, calcatis terrenis desideriis, quies uitae’ (*Mor.* 5, 31, lines 1–8; CCSL 143, 255).

129. ‘... sicut sponsae uoce in canticorum Cantico dicitur: *Ego dormio et cor meum uigilat*’ (CCSL 143, 256).

mind to the desire to see worldly things'. It is impossible to serve two masters, writes Gregory, and so 'the Lord warns, saying through the prophet, "Keep still, and see that I am God" (Ps 45:11)'.¹³⁰ Gregory emphasises that sleep represents the contemplative's rejection of the world in the search for the transcendent. The sleep of reflection is necessary to regain the sight of God. He sees Ps 45:11 as a call for stillness and a rejection of the mundane in this attempt to 'see'. In his letter to the Gaulish clerics, Columbanus contrasts his monastic way of life with the worldliness of the bishops. He sets out the qualities of the monastic (*Ep.* 2, 8), and then writes,

And these, as I have said, will be better maintained by one who *is still and sees that God himself is Lord* (Ps 45:11), than by one who sees and hears all manner of things. Let none disparage the benefits of silence; for unless they grow lax, the secluded live better lives than the social, except for that still stricter life which has the greater reward ...¹³¹

Columbanus defends his followers by saying that their contemplative life and rejection of the world make them better discerners of the true path. His characterisation of the contemplative life here is essentially Gregorian as is his reading of Ps 45:11 as a summary of that life. In Letter 5, Columbanus draws on such ideals of pastoral responsibility as he shows that even at its most reflective, clerical life entails wider social responsibilities. The cleric who engages in the sleep of contemplation must fulfil the active duty of watchfulness. If he detects dangers, he must give warning. The pastor fulfils this obligation to the wider community of the faithful in preaching. In his letters to the popes, preaching is understood in the wider sense of guidance of the Church. The central theories of spiritual leadership are used by Columbanus in Letter 5 to emphasise the importance of preaching. More particularly, he uses them to support his call to the supreme pastor to fulfil his duties of vigilance and guidance.

In his call to Boniface to exercise his authority and duty to preach, Columbanus shows that he understands another central tenet of Gregory's theory of pastoral responsibility: that the pastor should combine both the active and contemplative lives. For Gregory, the duty to contemplate God and to preach to neighbours is essential for it is the fulfilment of the greatest of the commandments—the double commandment (*gemino praecepto*) to love God and neighbour (Mt 22:37–40).¹³² This is also how the Reference Bible presents the joining of the active and contemplative

130. 'Hinc per prophetam Dominus admonet dicens: *Vacate et uidete, quoniam ego sum Deus*' (CCSL 143, 257).

131. 'Quae sicut dixi melius servabit *vacans et videns quod Deus ipse sit dominus*, quam universa videns et audiens. Nullus detrahat silentii bonis; nisi enim tepescant, secreti melius vivunt quam publici, excepta austeriore adhuc vita quae maiorem habet mercedem ...' (Walker, 20–21).

132. P. Catry, 'L'amour du prochain chez saint Grégoire le Grand', *Studia Monastica* 20 (1978) 287–344; V. Paronetto, 'Il *pastor* nell'epistolario de Gregorio Magno', E. A. Livingstone (ed), *Studia Patristica* 18 (1990) 178–83. For discussion of Gregory's counsel 'proximum in Deo et Deum in proximo diligere', see Catry, 295 and Paronetto, 179.

lives.¹³³ Both the active and contemplative and the command to love God and neighbour converge in the act of preaching.¹³⁴ Having ascended to the heights of contemplation, the pastor should descend to preach the wisdom he has attained. He must also exemplify that knowledge in how he conducts his life as the guarantee of his ministry. Thus, the pastor is engaged in a cycle of responsibilities: withdrawing to the contemplative life to attain knowledge of the virtues, imparting that knowledge through preaching in the active life and exemplifying his preaching in the manner of his life.¹³⁵ To take the last responsibility first, Gregory adapts to his teaching on the role of the preacher the classical principle that all effective instruction begins with real experience (*experientia*) and is then followed by instruction in the theoretical principles. The pastor instructs in the virtues by the example of his virtuous life. The carnal man experiences the virtue and is drawn to the faith; the pastor can then begin instruction in the abstract.¹³⁶ This duty to lead by example is one of the first of the pastoral duties Gregory discusses in the *Pastoral rule*.¹³⁷ Pastors are compared to the eyes, ‘placed on the very face of the highest honour, [who] have taken up the duty of

133. Paris, BN, lat. 11561, f 6^v: ‘Sexta diuisio est inter hactualem et teoricam uitam, id est in greco practica. Teorica uero grece interpretatur contemplatiua. Ubi duo in uno testimonio inueniuntur, in hoc quod dixit: “Dominum deum tuum diliges ex toto corde tuo”, rel, “et proximum tuum sicut te ipsum” [cf. Mt 22:37–39]. Dilectio enim dei teorica est; dilectio proximi, hactualis’.

134. Gregory’s says that Christ’s command to his disciples to preach in pairs (Lk 10:1) symbolises the ideal combination of the active and contemplative in preaching (*Hom. in euang.* 1, 17, 1; CCSL 141, 116–17) and that preaching is the fulfilment of the double command to love God and neighbour. ‘Si ipse Dominus ascendit et descendit; manifestum est quia et praedicatores ipsius ascendunt imitatione, descendunt praedicatione’ (Augustine, *Trac. in Ioh.* 7, 23; PL 35, 1450).

135. See Dagens, *Grégoire le Grand*, 137–39 for a review of Gregory’s correspondence from the beginning of his pontificate where he mourns the loss of his contemplative life and the obligations his ministry forces on him.

136. Gregory’s treatises, *Moralia in Iob*, *Homiliae in Hiezechihelam* and *Homiliae in euangelia*, are profound reflections on the christian virtues, but the *Dialogues* exemplify these virtues in the stories of the saints’ lives. On Gregory’s treatment of *experientia*, see C. Leyser, ‘Expertise and authority in Gregory the Great: the social function of *peritia*’, J. C. Cavadini (ed), *Gregory the Great: a symposium* (Notre Dame IN 1995) 41–46. On the responsibility of the pastor to teach by word and example, see R. A. Markus, ‘Gregory the Great’s *rector* and his genesis’, J. Fontaine et al. (ed), *Grégoire le Grand* (Paris 1986) 137–46. Studies of the Insular reception of Gregory’s pastoral ideas include A. Thacker, ‘Bede’s ideal of reform’, P. Wormald, D. Bullough & R. Collins (ed), *Ideal and reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford 1983) 131–34; S. J. Coates, ‘The bishop as pastor and solitary: Bede and the spiritual authority of the monk-bishop’, *J Ecclesiast Hist* 47 (1996) 601–19; S. DeGregorio, ‘The Venerable Bede on prayer and contemplation’, *Traditio* (1999) 1–39; M. Clayton, ‘Hermits and the contemplative life in Anglo-Saxon England’, P. E. Szarmach, *Holy men and holy women: Old English prose saints’ Lives and their contexts* (Albany NY 1996) 147–75. Of the many examples of Insular literature to quote Gregory on the active and contemplative in the life of the preacher, one may cite the Reference Bible, Paris, BN, lat. 11561, f 101^r which quotes *Hom. in Ez.* 1, 3, 9 (CCSL 142, 37).

137. *Reg. past.* 1, 2 (PL 77, 15).

foreseeing the way ahead'.¹³⁸ One of the earliest Hiberno-Latin expressions of similar ideas is found in *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*. The first of the twelve grades is 'The learned preacher without good works' (*Doctus praedicator sine bonis operibus*). The preacher or teacher is compared to the eye of the body. Its role is essential for if it fail in its duty of seeing, that service cannot be provided by any other part. The preacher should therefore take care not to suffer a severer punishment by causing the ruin of others through his bad example.¹³⁹

The first grade of scandal is if he is a wise man without good works and a preacher who neglects to fulfil in deeds what he teaches by word. When they see that the deeds of the preacher are at odds with the words that are preached, the hearers easily condemn the words of the teaching. For the authority of the proposer is never effectual unless it clings firmly to the heart of the hearer by the performance of deed.¹⁴⁰

According to *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*, this duty to lead by example also applies to the bishop.¹⁴¹ Similar arguments are used by Columbanus in his defence against the Gaulish clergy. He quotes Jn 10 and the parable of the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11), unlike the hireling who abandons his flock at the first sign of danger. In suffering death, Christ exemplified this teaching in his actions. The sheep recognise the voice of this true shepherd (Jn 10:4) who puts his words into action (*Ep.* 2, 4). The master, continues Columbanus, cannot convey 'as

138. 'Oculi quippe sunt, qui in ipsa honoris summi facie positi, providendi itineris officium susceperunt', *Reg. past.* 1, 1 (PL 77, 15); in *Reg. past.* 2, 7 (PL 77, 39–40), Gregory again compares the leader (*rector*) to the eye directing the body. In the *Homilies on Ezekiel*, he compares preachers to the creature of Ezekiel's vision (Ez 1:5–14) with wings that are 'full of eyes all round and within' (Rev 4:8). The eyes search out the sins of the people, but also look inward to guard against the sins of the pastor (CCSL 142, 84). Gregory advises that the pastor should lead by word and example in *Reg. past.* 1, 3 (PL 77, 28–30).

139. 'Si namque oculus a videndi officio desiverit, quis a manu aut pede vel reliquo corpore illud ministerium exigit? Quapropter doctores cogitent, ne ampliori vindictae subiaceant, si plurimorum perditionis occasionem habundantius praestent' (Hellmann, *De XII*, 33). Similar advice is given in the *Hibernensis*, 38, 4, 'De eo, quod doctores debent implere quod docent'. CH 37, 21: 'De eo, quod cavendum est omni principi, ne male regat ecclesiam suam', in a quotation attributed to Jerome, concerns, in part, the duty of the leader to guard the manner of his life: '... non solum in victu et vestimento, sed etiam in statu bene vivendi ...'.

140. 'Primus abusionis gradus est si sine operibus bonis sapiens et praedicator fuerit, qui quod sermone docet, actibus explere negligit. Auditores enim doctrinae dicta facile contemnunt, cum praedicatoris opera a praedicationis verbis discrepare conspiciunt; numquam enim fit efficax auctoritas instituentis, nisi eam effectu operis cordi afflixerit audientis ...' (Hellmann, *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*, 32–33).

141. *Abusio* X: '... ut per haec ipse prius ostendat in opere quod alios docet in sermone doctrinae' (Hellmann, *De XII*, 56). In the case of the pastor who lives badly, the faithful are advised to follow his teaching, not his example: cf. CH 38.5, 'De eo, quod sequenda sit doctoris mali doctrina non opera'.

an example (*exemplum*) of obedience' what he imparts 'with bare speech' (*nudo verbo*, *Ep.* 2, 4). Although these Irish examples concern the pastor's duty to practise what he preaches, they convey the sense that teaching must begin with actions and provide the intended audience with real experience before progressing to theoretical instruction. Columbanus says that this experience of actions comes before (*prior*) speech.¹⁴² He returns to the *pastor bonus* in Letter 5. His appeal to Boniface to use 'the call and known voice of the true shepherd' (Jn 10:4) is a demand that the pope confront the dangers threatening the Italian church. That church is troubled by Arian heresy and the Tricapitoline schism. But if the pope fails to take action, the church faces another danger: that of leader who neglects to fulfil the duty of his office to lead by example. He should take care, Columbanus writes, lest the 'chief of shepherds' (*princeps pastorum*) find him negligent (*cave ne te neglegentem inveniatis*) and 'striking your fellow servants with the blows of a bad example' (*Ep.* 5, 4). Columbanus's most profound thoughts on the role of the church leader, more particularly the duties of the bishop of Rome, are found in this part of Letter 5. His train of thought is difficult to follow here as he condenses some key principles of the theories of ecclesiastical leadership. And here he appears at his most 'Gregorian' for Gregory's ideas not only help to explain what Columbanus says, but there are striking parallels with Gregory's writings.

The dynamic of faith and good works is central in what Gregory says about the role of the preacher.¹⁴³ In that role, both faith and works play equal parts in directing the task of the preacher and in guiding the progress of the faithful. The preacher has a duty to lead by example when attracting others to the faith. This continues to be the preacher's responsibility for his teaching (*doctrina*) is undermined before the established community of the faithful when he fails to exemplify it in actions. Good works must therefore always accompany faith as the guarantee of his ministry. 'The Lord', wrote Columbanus to the Gaulish bishops, 'replies to fools who rely on faith alone, "That I have not known you"' (Mt 7:23; *Ep.* 2, 3). The most important work of the pastor is preaching for 'he who shuns the toil of chastising and opposing sinful men is a hireling' (*Ep.* 2, 4; cf. Jn 10:13). Columbanus introduces the subject of preaching at this point in Letter 5 because through it, the preacher both manifests his faith and exemplifies it in the activity of preaching. For Gregory, when faith is matched by action, both are mutually sustaining and the complex relationship between them is illustrated when he describes the experience of the one coming to the faith. 'For we do not come via virtues to faith but we arrive at the virtues through faith', he wrote of Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10). The preacher begins with works and leads to faith, but in the experience of the convert the order is reversed; he begins with faith and moves to good works. 'Thus by faith he [Cornelius] came to works but by works

142. '... quod prior actibus contempsit magister, nudo non potest tradere verbo ad conservandi exemplum' (*Ep.* 2, 4).

143. In what follows, the subject of faith and works is examined in the literature concerning the practical work of preaching rather than the theological dimension.

he was confirmed in the faith'.¹⁴⁴ The preacher begins instructing through the example of his good works, but that order is again reversed in the supervision of his flock. His first concern should be with the faith and, once secured, he must oversee its growth in good works.

Gregory considers the duty of the bishop (*speculator*) to guard both faith and works in the *Homilies on Ezekiel* 1, 11. The relevant verse is Ez 3:19: 'But if you give warning to the wicked, and he be not converted from his wickedness (*ab impietate sua*) and from his evil way (*a via sua impia*), he indeed shall die in his iniquity but you have delivered your soul'. Gregory relates this verse to the duties of the pastor to begin with supervision of the faith and then of works: 'For wickedness (*impietas*) pertains to unbelief (*ad infidelitatem*) and the evil way to depraved action'. Sin relates to lack of faith (*infidelitas*) as evil to perverse deed. Ez 3:19 is therefore a summary of the duties of the watchman to begin by caring for the faith and then to see its advancement in good works. Gregory continues: 'And every watchman must have this of zeal, that he first attract to righteousness of faith and then to the righteous way, that is, to good action'. He then turns to the manner of the watchman's preaching because all these responsibilities converge here. Through preaching, the watchman manifests his faith, exemplifies it in the work of preaching, guards the faith of his flock and exhorts them to perform the good works of faith. Preaching requires all the skill, discretion, and expertise of the preacher for if he is to be effective he must hone his speech to the nature of his audience. Gregory quotes Paul's words: 'Let our speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt' (Col 4:6), because these relate to the skilled preacher's ability to modify his words and manner of speech to best effect before his listeners.¹⁴⁵

Columbanus comes very close to Gregory in his description of the duty of the pastor in Letter 5. He paraphrases the verses from the Book of Ezekiel that Gregory quoted in his *Homilies* when advising the watchman to keep guard first for the faith and then for deeds (*Ep.* 5, 5). According to Gregory and Columbanus, these verses caution the watchman to watch for the flock and give warning so that none dies in ignorance of his sin. Columbanus includes pastors (*pastores*) and masters (*magistri*) in the ranks of the watchmen. Like Gregory, Columbanus sees preaching as a function of this watchfulness. The pope is told that a careful watch must be kept (*vigilandum est diligenter*), 'that is, the word of the Lord must often be preached'.¹⁴⁶

144. *Hom. Ez.* 2, 7, 9, 'Non enim uirtutibus uenitur ad fidem, sed per fidem pertingitur ad uirtutes ... non operibus uenit [Cornelius] ad fidem, sed fide uenit ad opera' (CCSL 142, 322; Grey, *The homilies*, 235–36).

145. Examples of Gregory's advice to preachers include *Mor.* 20, 2, lines 26–47 (CCSL 243A, 1004); *Mor.* 30, 3, lines 74–217 (CCSL 143B, 1498–1502).

146. 'Inde quia iuxta minas Domini sanguis tantorum de manibus requirendus erit pastorum [cf. Ez 3:18; 33:6], *vigilandum est diligenter*, id est, praedicandum est frequenter uerbum Domini, a pastoribus scilicet, ecclesiae speculatoribus et magistris, ut nullus pereat per ignorantiam; si enim per socordiam perierit, suus sanguis in suum caput reputabitur' [cf. Ez 33:4] (*Ep.* 5, 5).

This watchfulness, as Gregory had said before him in preaching on these verses from Ezekiel, must take the order first of care for the faith and then of urging good works and avoiding wrongful acts; Columbanus writes, ‘Watch first for the faith, then for bidding works of faith and for spurning vices ...’. Later, Columbanus quotes Col 4:6, as Gregory had, when insisting that the pope fulfil his duty and take appropriate action (or, perhaps, by way of excusing his direct manner of speaking).¹⁴⁷ In the midst of this call to action, for which he may have taken Gregory’s *Homilies on Ezekiel* as his model, Columbanus says:

May Isaiah send you to the mountain, ‘who publish good tidings to Zion’ (Is 40:9), rather may God through Isaiah place you on the watchtower of true contemplation, according to the meaning of your name, and there, as it were placed above all mortals and made near to the heavenlies, may you lift up your voice like a trumpet and proclaim their sins to the people of your Lord, committed to you by Him, and to the house of Jacob their iniquities (Is 58:1).¹⁴⁸

Here Columbanus brings another function of the pastor to bear on his right to call on the pope to take action. The importance of reflection as the basis of effective action can be found in classical writers and was brought into the literature of the early church. Gregory is recognised as the greatest exponent of the importance of combining the active and contemplative for rulers,¹⁴⁹ a combination that leads to preaching.¹⁵⁰ In the ‘ascent’ to contemplation the contemplative rises above the world, leaves behind earthly concerns and, from his height, sees further than those below. When he sees the dangers that lie ahead, he must descend by responding with timely warning and good advice.¹⁵¹ A virtuous life and lack of earthly entanglements allow the pastor to fulfil these duties. Worldly clerics cannot contemplate God in detach-

147. *Ep.* 5, 6.

148. ‘Mittat te Isaias in montem, qui evangelizas Zion, immo per Isaiam Deus iuxta tui nominis interpretationem in speculam verae contemplationis ponat, in qua quasi cunctis mortalibus altior positus vicinusque caelestium effectus, exaltans quasi tuba vocem tuam annunties populo domini tui, tibi ab eo commisso, peccata eorum et domui Iacob iniquitates eorum’ (*Ep.* 5, 5).

149. *Mor.* 6, 37, line 45–215 (CCSL 143, 326–31); *Mor.*, 19, 25, lines 70–89. On the relevance of Gregory’s pastoral instructions for all leaders, secular and ecclesiastical, see N. G. Discenza, ‘The influence of Gregory the Great on the Alfredian social imagery’, R. H. Bremmer, K. Dekker & D. F. Johnson (ed), *Rome and the North: the early reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe* (Paris 2001).

150. On the importance Gregory placed on preaching, see *Hom. in Ez.* 1. 3. 2–9; 1. 9. 4; 1. 11 (on which, see below); *Mor.* 6, 37, lines 15–17: ‘Neque enim perfectus praedicator est, qui uel propter contemplationis studium operanda neglegit, uel propter operationis instantiam contemplanda postponit’ (CCSL 143, 325); see DeGregorio, ‘The Venerable Bede’, 27–28, on how preaching combines both the active and contemplative lives.

151. On this requirement for the contemplative, see C. Stewart, ‘Scripture and contemplation in the monastic spiritual theology of John Cassian’, E. A. Livingstone (ed), *Studia Patristica* 25 (Louvain 1993) 457–61.

ment from the mundane, nor can they warn or reprimand, especially if the offender is powerful, for they are vulnerable to any threat to their wealth and reputation.¹⁵² Their ministry is defective for they fail to speak out or preach in the active life. In his letter to Gregory, Columbanus uses suitably exalted terms to address the great proponent of the contemplative ideal. The letter is sent to ‘the illustrious watchman (*speculator*) who has mastered the contemplation (*theoria*) of divine eloquence’ (*egregio speculatori, theoria utpote diuina castulitatis potito*).¹⁵³ *Theoria* is the *vita contemplativa* that should be the basis for all decisions and actions taken by leaders and preachers.¹⁵⁴ In his study of Columbanus’s style, J. Smit sees in this address a reference to the pastor’s ideal combination of the active and contemplative lives. In Letter 5, the reference to that ideal is more explicit. Ascent on a mountain or to a height is taken figuratively as the ascent to contemplation.¹⁵⁵ In the tradition of representing the ecclesiastical leader as watchman (*speculator*), he is shown to ascend a watchtower (*specula*) where he contemplates and keeps vigil. From his vantage on the watchtower, the watchman comprehends all knowledge of the world around him and sees approaching dangers. This image, found in many classical and patristic sources,¹⁵⁶ is another reconciliation of the reflective nature of contemplation and the active role of the vigilant preacher. Among the early Irish sources, *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi* says that the bishop must diligently ‘watch for the sins of all over whom he is placed

152. The practical concerns relating to church property and the private property of its rulers in the *Hibernensis* can be interpreted in the context of this spiritual ideal. CH 38, 1, a–b, quotes Gregory’s *Hom. in euang.* 1, 17, 7 (CCSL 141, 121), on the preacher’s (*doctor*) right to take what material rewards he needs to sustain his pastoral activities. CH 37, 12–13 sets out the property a bishop (*princeps*) may hold and how the property of the church he governs is to be administered by a minister. CH 37.39 says that the bishop or ecclesiastical leader should not think property given to him in his capacity as *princeps* belongs to him; it is the church’s (*De eo, quod non debent princeps putare proprium, quod sibi donatur, sed ecclesiae*).

153. The reading and the translation are problematic. The translation here is by Stanton, ‘Columbanus, Letter 1’, 152 (who translates *speculator* as ‘bishop’) and 156 (comm.).

154. On the word *theoria*, see O. Pedersen, ‘*Theorica*: a study in language and civilization’, *Classica et Mediaevalia* 22 (1961) 151–71. For discussion of the use of the word in early documents (including Irish), see L. Gougaud, ‘Le *theoria* dans la spiritualité médiévale’, *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 3 (1922) 381–94. The equation of *theoria* with contemplation is standard in Hiberno-Latin sources. Reference Bible (Paris, BN, lat. 11561, f 6’): ‘Sexta diuisio est inter hactualem et teorica uitam, id est in greco practica. Teorica uero grece interpretatur contemplatiua’.

155. Ps-Jerome, *Expositio quatuor euangeliorum*: ‘Quando ascendebat in montem significabat theorica, id est, contemplatiua: quando descendit, docet practica, id est, actuale’ (PL 30, 544). For discussion of this theme in Cassian, see M. S. Laird, ‘Cassian’s Conferences nine and ten: some observations regarding contemplation and hermeneutics’, *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 62 (1995) 145–56: 152.

156. P. Courcelle, ‘La vision cosmique de saint Benoît’, *Revue des études augustiniennes* 13 (1976) 97–117, discusses the classical and christian examples before the time of Gregory and, 100–06, examines the theme of the watchman’s ascent of the watchtower.

on the watchtower (*specula*)'.¹⁵⁷ In the quotation from Columbanus, he cites Is 40:9: 'Get thee up upon a high mountain, thou that bringest good tidings to Sion'. He glosses this verse with the wish that God will place Boniface 'on the watchtower (*in speculam*) of true contemplation, according to the meaning of your name', that is, *speculator*. Contemplation is inherent in the name watchman and his reference to Sion, the mount of contemplation, can be explained by received etymology of the word 'Sion'; according to Jerome, Sion means 'watchtower' (... *Sion quod interpretatur 'specula'*).¹⁵⁸ In his many subtle references to the role of the watchman as contemplative, Columbanus sees contemplation as the role of the leader to discern approaching dangers. When he has fulfilled his duty of watching, the watchman must give warning through preaching. He quotes Is 58:1 and asks Boniface to 'lift up your voice like a trumpet and proclaim their sins to the people'. Leo the Great had used the image of the trumpet sounding to represent the voice of the bishop giving warning.¹⁵⁹ In his letter to the lapsed monk Venantius, Gregory presents himself as the watchman in the Ezekiel mould (Ez 3:17). He excuses his intervention by appealing to Is 58:1 saying that he is compelled to do so by his office.¹⁶⁰ It has been shown that this particularly dense part of Letter 5 corresponds on a number of points to Gregory's *Homilies on Ezekiel* 1, 11. In this homily, Gregory preaches on Ez 3:17, 'Son of man, I have given thee as a watchman to the house of Israel'.

It is to be noted that the Lord declares that he whom He sends to preach is a watchman. For he to whom an alien charge is committed is called a watchman, so that he may sit in altitude of mind and derive the appellation of the name from the virtue of the action But a watchman always stands on a height so that he can perceive from a far whatever is to come ... Hence another Prophet admonishes a watchman saying: 'Get thee up upon a high mountain, thou that bringest good tidings to Sion' (Is 40: 9).¹⁶¹

157. 'Decet ergo episcopum omnium quibus in specula positus est peccata diligenter attendere ...' (Hellmann, *De XII*, 54).

158. Jerome, *Comm. in Hezech.* 14, 45 (CCSL 75, 688). Gregory, *Mor.* 33, 26, lines 6–9: 'Sion quippe speculatio interpretatur, et non immerito praedicatores sanctos portas Sion dicimus, quia per eorum uitam atque doctrinam abscondita supernae contemplationis intramus' (CCSL 143B, 1713). For examples in Augustine and Eastern sources, see C. Morel, *Grégoire le Grand. Homélie sur Ézékiel* i, SC 327 (Paris 1986) 452n. Of the Irish examples, one can cite Ps-Jerome, *Expositio quatuor evangeliorum*, '... ad Sion, id est, specula' (PL 30, 556).

159. Leo, *Ep.* 9, to Dioscorus of Alexandria, compares the trumpet blast to the preaching of the Gospel to all nations (PL 54, 626); *Ep.* 10, to the bishops of Vienne, repeats the theme. To convey the universality of christianity, he compares the spreading of the faith to the sound of the trumpet whose 'sound has gone out into every land and their words to the ends of the earth' (Ps 18:4) (PL 54, 629). Gregory quotes Is 58: 1 in *Reg. past.* 2, 4 (PL 77, 31) to denote the pastor's duty to give warning.

160. *Reg.* 1, 33; MGH, *Epp.* 1, 45–46.

161. 'Notandum quod eum quem Dominus ad praedicandum mittit speculatorem esse denuntiat. Cui enim cura aliena committitur, ut in mentis altitudine sedeat atque uocabulum nominis ex uirtute

Gregory and Columbanus say that vigilance is the duty of the watchman—it is inherent in the name—and must be followed by preaching. That duty is supported by their interpretation of Is 40:9. The similarities may indicate that Columbanus had read Gregory's *Homilies on Ezekiel* or, at least homily 1, 11 on the watchman. Columbanus had requested the pope to send him a copy of that work (*Ep.* 1, 9). However, it is equally possible that both writers drew on a stock of images and biblical quotations that applied to the watchman and his duty of vigilance and preaching. Leo the Great had done so in his letter to bishop Anastasius of Thessalonica where he wrote of the vigilance required of the bishop who, being placed on a watchtower, must both indicate his approval when matters concur with his teaching and, when they do not, to compel a resolution.¹⁶² Columbanus's intention is to impress on Boniface the church's need for guidance and leadership, and the pope's duty to provide it. Through his office, Boniface has been 'placed above all mortals and made near the heavenlies' (*Ep.* 5, 5). Rome's association with Peter and Paul has made it the 'head of churches' and put Boniface 'near to the heavenlies' (*Ep.* 5, 11). Having ascended to the heights, Boniface must descend to give clear guidance through preaching in the wider sense of guiding the church in troubled times. Columbanus draws on a wide range of arguments and images of leadership in Letter 5 to support his demand for action. His respectful terms are, in the first instance, recognitions of Rome's primacy. However, as Letter 5 progresses, these same terms recur as part of a forceful call to the pope to take action. The bishop of Rome has a special responsibility in the supervision of the faith, but that responsibility is not fulfilled until doctrine has been proclaimed to the faithful through preaching and the wayward recalled to orthodoxy. The pope is pastor of the universal church and called upon to fulfil that *officium pastorale* (*Ep.* 5, 4). This term is an acknowledgement of the pope's role, but also a warning of the consequences of failure in that office since *pastor* is, literally, 'one who feeds' (*pascere*, 'to feed'). The careless pastor feeds himself rather than his sheep (Ez 34: 8),¹⁶³ so the pope should take care lest the 'prince of pastors' find him 'eating and drinking with the drunken' (Mt 24:49; *Ep.* 5, 4).

CONCLUSION

Columbanus attributes Rome's status as the principal see to its association with both Peter and Paul, 'whose dear relics have made you [sc. the popes] blessed' (*Ep.* 5, 11). He finishes his letter with the plea to Boniface and his brethren 'to pray for me ... beside the holy places and the ashes of the saints, and especially beside Peter and Paul, men equally great captains of the great King, and also most brave warriors on a

actionis trahat Speculator quippe semper in altitudine stat, ut quicquid uenturum est long prospiciat Hinc propheta alius speculatorem admonet, dicens: *Super montem excelsum ascende tu, qui euangelizas Sion*' (CCSL 142, 170–71; Gray, *Homilies*, 130).

162. Letter 6 (PL 54, 617).

163. Cyprian quotes Ez 34 when calling attention to the duties of the *speculator* (*Ep.* 66).

favoured field, following by their death the crucified Lord'.¹⁶⁴ This equal attention to both Peter and Paul, especially in the context of their martyrdom, is significant. One of the earliest recognitions of the special position of the church of Rome is found in a much discussed section of Irenaeus of Lyons's *Adversus haereses*, 3, 3, 2. The church of Rome is the 'greatest, most ancient and known by all' because it was founded and organised by 'the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul'. Their faith is passed on 'by the succession of the bishops'. To name the bishops of every church in succession, says Irenaeus, would be too great a task. He, therefore, resorts to the list of the bishops of Rome in acknowledgement of that church's status: it is the defender of the faith against heresy. Every church, therefore, must agree with this church because of its *potentior principalitas*.¹⁶⁵ For some, the phrase means that Rome has the pre-eminent authority because it takes its origin (*principalitas*) from the *principes apostolorum*, Peter and Paul.¹⁶⁶ Irenaeus calls Peter and Paul *gloriosissimi*. When examined in the context of his understanding of martyrdom and his use of the word elsewhere, *gloriosissimus* applies to the apostles' martyrdom.¹⁶⁷ Their witness to the faith through martyrdom gave the church at Rome its 'definitive character' as the leading church. Although other sees were founded by Peter and Paul, Irenaeus's position is that only Rome was founded and established by the apostles jointly and, through their martyrdom and the presence of their tombs in the city, it alone continues to be sustained by both.¹⁶⁸ These ideas were repeated and developed in the literature of the early medieval church and explain Columbanus's intentions when he refers to Peter and Paul's martyrdom and burial at Rome. He acknowledges and accepts the doctrine that their martyrdom and the presence of their *tropaei* are the foundations of Rome's primacy. His thorough grasp of this theory is evident when he says that Peter and Paul are equal; they are 'men equally (*similiter*)

164. '... orate pro me ... iuxta loca sancta et sanctorum cineres et praecipue iuxta Petrum et Paulum, viros similiter et magnos magni regis duces ac fortissimos campi felicissimi bellatores dominum crucifixum cum cruore sequentes ...' (*Ep.* 5, 17).

165. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3, 3, 2: 'Sed quoniam valde longum est in hoc tali volumine omnium ecclesiarum enumerare successiones, maxime et antiquissimae et omnibus cognitae, a gloriosissimis duobus apostolis Petro et Paulo Romae fundatae et constitutae ecclesiae, eam quam habet ab apostolis traditionem et adnuntiatem hominibus fidem per successiones episcoporum pervenientem usque ad nos indicantes ... ad hanc enim ecclesiam, propter potentiores principalitatem necesse est omnem convenire ecclesiam ...', from A. Rousseau & L. Doutreleau (ed), *Irénée de Lyon. Contre les hérésies*, SC 210, quoted in E. Lanne, 'L'église de Rome, a gloriosissimis duobus apostolis Petro et Paulo Romae fundatae et constitutae ecclesiae' (*Adv. Haer.* III, 3, 2), *Irénikon* 49 (1976) 275–322: 275.

166. For discussion, see Maccarrone, 'Apostolicità', 49–56; Twomey, 'Apostolikos thronos', 65–66.

167. Lanne, 'L'église de Rome', 285, discussing Irenaeus's use of the word *gloriosissimis*, says, 'Il est l'épithète distinctive du martyr du sang, de ceux que l'Église envoie vers le Père. Si tous les apôtres sont parfaits dans la doctrine qu'ils ont annoncée, il n'y en a que deux, Pierre et Paul, qui soient glorieux (ou: très glorieux) et cela ne peut se référer qu'à leur martyr à Rome'.

168. Lanne, 'L'église de Rome', 297.

great captains of the great King'. Columbanus refers to this 'equality' in the context of their martyrdom. Eusebius and Gelasius I defended the principle that both Peter and Paul were executed at the same time in Rome.¹⁶⁹ This insistence on their simultaneous martyrdom was intended to show that the church at Rome represented the faith of all the apostles. Rome is the head church, but also represents the universal faith. This idea had a special prominence in the writings of Leo I, especially in *Sermo* 82. Leo locates Peter's mission in Rome in response to his providential calling and Paul is referred to as the 'special teacher of the gentiles'. His point is that the combination of the two at Rome guaranteed the primacy of its church and the universal extent of its responsibility. It is in this context that we can understand his insistence in the sermon that Peter and Paul are equal in their merits; and it is perhaps in this context that we should interpret Columbanus's reference to the 'equal greatness' of the *principes apostolorum*. Much of Columbanus's understanding of Roman primacy is Leonine in character.

Acknowledgement of the primacy of Rome establishes a nexus of subordination and obligation. The recurring themes that convey the double duty of watchfulness and warning give coherence to Letter 5. They are at once an acknowledgement of Rome's headship of the church and, as Columbanus interprets them, a forceful reminder of the duties that headship imposes. Columbanus is tied by duties of respect to the see of Rome, but Rome is obliged to respond to that respect by giving effective leadership. Columbanus's duty and right is to speak out when that leadership is not evident. In key passages of Letter 5 Columbanus refers to his Irish nationality, but caution is needed in discerning what, if any, of his views can be taken as representative of the views of the Irish church in general. As Thomas Charles-Edwards has said, an Irish identity provides a useful cover of neutrality for one entangled in the Three Chapters controversy.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Columbanus's acknowledgement of the Roman origins of the Irish church must be seen in the context of Roman claims to primacy based on its role as the foundational church from which all others were established. His claims that the Irish are 'bound to St Peter's chair' (*Ep.* 5, 11) and none has been heretic, Judaizer or schismatic (*Ep.* 5, 4) are also literary devices that allow Columbanus to portray himself as part of the Roman church, a part that has remained in communion with Rome since its foundation. As a constant member of

169. Eusebius, HE ii 25, 8; Lake, *Eusebius. The ecclesiastical history*, 182–83; references in Lanne, 'L'église de Rome', 312; Twomey, 'Apostolikos thronos', 65. Gelasius writes: '... uno eodemque die gloriosa morte cum Petro in urbe Roma sub Caesare Nerone agonizans, coronatus est: et pariter supradictam sanctam Romanam ecclesiam Christo Domino consecrarunt, aliisque omnibus urbibus in universo mundo sua praesentia atque venerando triumpho praetulerunt' (Thiel, *Epistolae romanorum pontificum ... a S. Hilario usque ad Pelagium II*, i 455). The Irish Reference Bible (Paris, BN, lat. 11561, f 186^v) records that Peter was entombed on the Vatican hill *iuxta viam triumphalem* and, on that same day, Paul was beheaded and buried on the Via Ostiensis; the source is Jerome's *De uiris illustribus* (PL 23, 609, 617).

170. Charles-Edwards, *Early christian Ireland*, 375.

the one body (*Ep.* 5, 11) Columbanus has a right to speak out.¹⁷¹ The mark of doctrinal orthodoxy is the preservation of the faith as it was originally instituted. The orthodoxy of the Irish church is assured since it has maintained the faith in which it was established. Rome has the greater obligation to care for this faith for Boniface's 'honour is greater in proportion to the dignity of your see, so great care is needful for you, lest you lose your dignity through some mistake' (*Ep.* 5, 11). The higher the office, the greater are the honour and authority; but so too the responsibilities are greater and neglect of those responsibilities is more serious. For this reason, Columbanus writes, 'power will be in your hands just so long as your principles (*ratio*) remain sound' (*Ep.* 5, 11). The key word here is *ratio*, for on it the authority of the bishop of Rome depends. The word recurs in this part of the letter. It is difficult to know what it means in this context, but it seems to have the force of right judgement, of the ability to reach a right decision. Heretics, those who are suspect (*suspecti*) and their supporters are against *ratio* (*contra rationem*, *Ep.* 5, 10). Speaking as an Irishman, Columbanus says, 'amongst us it is not a man's station but his principles (*ratio*) that matter' (*Non enim apud nos persona, sed ratio valet*, *Ep.* 5, 12). This is a direct statement that the authority that commands respect is not only inherent in the office itself, but depends on the effectiveness of the office-holders. This understanding of the nature of authority, especially the authority of the see of Rome, has important consequences for Columbanus's perception of Roman primacy. The pope who fails to reciprocate that offering of respect with good leadership compromises his own authority, but also the authority of his office. Boniface labours under the failures of Vigilius and must clear the Roman see of any accusation of heresy (*Ep.* 5, 9). But in exercising his authority he must not, on account of Peter's eminence as the holder of the keys, claim for himself 'before all others some proud measure of greater authority' (*Ep.* 5, 12). (Columbanus's argument recalls Gregory's strong rejection of bishop John of Constantinople's assumption of the title 'Ecumenical patriarch'. In claiming a greater authority for his own see, John impaired the authority of the institution of the episcopacy itself. Gregory advised John to adhere to humility as a good leader should and to avoid the pride that he saw in the title 'ecumenical'.)¹⁷² The discernment of truth is open to all, not just to the leader. Everyone must therefore be given the freedom to speak the truth and 'it should be lawful even for your subordinates to entreat you' (*Ep.* 5, 12). The forcefulness of Columbanus's speech has caused the subtlety of his argument and the depth of his knowledge of the theology of ecclesiastical authority to be overlooked. But in many ways, Columbanus's argument in favour of the type of authority advocated in Letter 5 was already lost. Rome had sig-

171. On Columbanus's perceived rights as a member of the church, see J. O'Reilly, 'Exegesis and the Book of Kells: the Lucan genealogy', F. O'Mahoney (ed), *The Book of Kells: proceedings of a conference at Trinity College Dublin 1992* (Dublin 1994) 345–97: 349–50.

172. Gregory's condemns in very forceful terms what he sees as John's pride in his letter, *Reg.* 5, 44, MGH, *Epp.* 1, 338–43. On the controversy, see Markus, *Gregory*, 11; Meyvaert, 'Diversity within unity', 155; G. Barraclough, *The medieval papacy* (Norwich 1968) 29.

nalled its understanding of the nature of its primacy in how it dealt with the Easter question as early as the second century. In the decades after Columbanus's death, that view was to prevail, even in the islands of 'the Western regions of the earth's farther strand'. Although he received no response from Rome to his letter (or, at least none survives) it is likely that he gained an interested readership. That Columbanus recognised the primacy of Rome is beyond doubt. It is clear that that recognition was based on an understanding of many of the central arguments in defence of primacy. However, it is also clear that Columbanus believed his acceptance of the headship of Rome should be reciprocated by effective leadership. When the church is threatened by schism and heresy, he, as a member of the body of the church, has a right to call on the head to take action, to exercise his authority and to fulfil his duty.