Abstract

This paper traces the origins and the influences on Irish monastic *peregrinatio* beginning with Biblical exemplars, particularly Abraham, Moses, and the *peregrini* in Hebrews 11 who undertake travel as they seek a land promised to them by God. Despite being a physical land, the land they seek is more importantly a spiritual one promised as an eschatological reward to Christians.

The desert fathers and Patristic authors, following these Biblical exemplars and believing that the wilderness is a location more suitable for divine interaction, seek the desert in order to prepare themselves for their coming judgment. Their motivation, rooted in their eschatologically-focused mindset, urges them to think constantly about the end of their lives and the end of the world. These early Christians ascetics prove very influential to their Irish counterparts.

In the same way, the Irish *peregrini* of the early medieval period also renounce their homeland and possessions and travel abroad, never to return to their former lives in order to prepare for the coming Eschaton. Their desire is two-fold: to experience God’s presence and favor anticipatorily and to prepare for Judgment Day. Both aspirations center on their eschatological orientation. The communion they seek is one that is usually only offered to those in heaven, and Judgment Day is a future reality for the monks where their eternal destination is decided based upon their faith and works on earth. The Irish understanding of *peregrinatio* – a lifelong ascetic discipline for sanctification – remains distinct from punitive and penitential exiles which are temporary and propitiatory, a fact often overlooked when considering Irish *peregrinatio*. Both temporary exile and permanent *peregrinatio*, however, still find their origin in an eschatological outlook oriented towards preparing for the imminent End.
Pilgrims and Strangers – The Theological Motivation of Irish *Peregrinatio*

‘A thesis submitted to the
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
in fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of the Master of Arts’

2013
Master’s Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

Declaration Form

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Meredith D. Cutrer

Date: March 27, 2013

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MA Celtic Christianity

Signed: Meredith D. Cutrer

Date: March 27, 2013

3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

A bibliography is appended.

Signed candidate: Meredith D. Cutrer

Date: March 27, 2013

4. I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying, inter-library loan, and for deposit in the University’s digital repository

Signed (candidate): Meredith D. Cutrer

Date: March 27, 2013

Supervisor’s Declaration.

I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student’s own efforts.

Signed: .................................................................

Date: .................................................................
University of Wales: Trinity Saint David

E-Thesis Deposit Agreement

Details of the Work

I would like to deposit the following item in the digital repository maintained by the University, and/or in any other repository authorized for use by the University:

**Title** Pilgrims and Strangers – The Theological Motivation of Irish *Peregrinatio*

This item is a product of my own research endeavours and is covered by the agreement below in which the item is referred to as “the Work”. It is identical in content to that deposited in the Learning Resources Centre, subject to point 4 below.

I agree that the University of Wales: Trinity Saint David may electronically store, copy or translate the Work to any approved medium or format for the purpose of future preservation and accessibility. The University is not under any obligation to reproduce or display the Work in the same formats or resolutions in which it was originally deposited.

**UW: TSD Digital Repository**

I understand that work deposited in the digital repository will be accessible to a wide variety of people and institutions, including automated agents and search engines via the World Wide Web.

I understand that once the Work is deposited, the item and its metadata may be incorporated into public access catalogues or services, such as national databases of electronic theses.

I agree as follows:

1. That I am the author or have the authority of the author/s to make this agreement and do hereby give the University of Wales: Trinity Saint David the right to make available the Work in the way described above.
2. That the electronic copy of the Work deposited in the digital repository and covered by this agreement, is identical in content to the paper copy of the Work deposited in the Learning Resources Centre of the University, subject to point 4 below.
3. That I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the Work is original, and to the best of my knowledge, does not breach any laws including those relating to defamation, libel and copyright.
4. That I have, in instances where the intellectual property of other authors or copyright holders is included in the Work, gained explicit permission for the inclusion of that material in the Work, and in the electronic form of the Work as accessed through the open access digital repository, or that
I have identified and removed that material for which adequate permission has not been obtained and which will be inaccessible via the digital repository.

5. That University of Wales: Trinity Saint David does not hold any obligation to take legal action on behalf of the Depositor, or other rights holders, in the event of a breach of intellectual property rights, or any other right, in the material deposited.

6. That I undertake to indemnify the University of Wales: Trinity Saint David against all actions, suits, proceedings, claims, demands and costs occasioned by the University in consequence of any breach of this agreement.

Signature: Meredith D. Cutrer

Date: March 27, 2013
Table of Contents

Chapter One – Can a theological motivation of Irish *peregrinatio* be defined?

Chapter Two – Survey of Secondary Sources on Irish *peregrinatio*

Chapter Three – The Theological Motivation for the Desert Retreat

Chapter Four – The Insular Theological Motivation for *Peregrinatio*

Chapter Five - *Peregrinatio* in the Irish Penitentials and the Quest for Holiness

Conclusion

Appendix – Chart One detailing each mention of exile, banishment, and *peregrinatio* in the Irish Penitentials

Works Cited
Chapter 1: Can a theological motivation for *peregrinatio* be defined?

*Peregrinatio* as a form of religious expression has captured the attention of Christians since the Church’s early days. In the first few centuries after Christ, Christians often traveled for religious, political, and economic reasons. Despite the efforts of church councils and religious governing bodies to regulate unrestricted travel, religiously motivated travel enjoyed significant popularity from antiquity throughout the Middle Ages. This paper will focus on religious travel that drew people out of their homelands into permanent exile as an expression of religious beliefs. Today, this phenomenon has attracted much attention from those seeking to understand and define the impulse to use a journey, often called by its Latin name ‘*peregrinatio,*’ as a means of religious experience.

*Peregrinatio* has a complex array of meanings and may be employed in a variety of circumstances. In Latin, *peregrinatio* can mean traveling/staying/living abroad, sojourn abroad, travel, pilgrimage,¹ a being or living abroad, and traveling in foreign parts.² The person who undertakes such travel, a *peregrinus,* likewise has a range of meanings including ‘stranger, wanderer, pilgrim, traveler, or foreigner.’³ While some definitions mean one who is away from his or her native land, others imply a religious motivation or a person who is a social outsider, a definition which Christian authors will explore in their theological writings.

---

Among the earliest mentions of 'peregrinus' is in the Twelve Tables as an equivalent to hostis, a word with a definitively negative meaning. However, as Latin developed in the Classical era, a peregrinus became a person in the provinces who lacked the civil rights afforded to Roman citizens, or a person without a state. Traditionally the Romans allowed the provincial people to retain many of their laws, so people in the Roman provinces could keep their own customs. If a person decided to leave his or her province, however, he or she lost the protection granted by the person's own native laws and the individual's only rights were then those that the Romans believed all humanity possessed. In a legal context, the peregrinus had limited political and civil rights.

Roman authors used the words peregrinus and peregrinatio in a variety of contexts outside of a legal sense. Over time, peregrinatio became associated with the ‘state of being abroad’ or ‘the condition of being a stranger.’ By the time Jerome began his Latin translation of Scripture, the word had a number of possible meanings. Jerome translated two Greek words into the word peregrinus. In the Pentateuch Jerome translates προσήλυτος, used to differentiate the Israelites from the Gentiles, into peregrinus. Also in the Old Testament, peregrinus/peregrinor can also mean ‘journey’ as found in Deuteronomy and Kings, ‘pilgrimage’ as Jacob discusses his life with

---

5 P. Harbison, Pilgrimage in Ireland (London: Barrie and Jenkins Limited), p 33.
7 Claussen, ‘“Peregrinatio” and “Peregrini,”’ p 37; see also ‘Peregrinus’ in Lewis and Short’s Latin-English Lexicon.
8 Claussen, ‘“Peregrinatio” and “Peregrini” in Augustine’s City of God,’ pgs 40-1.
9 The Greek form of the Latin word ‘proselytus’ found often in Hiberno-Latin texts used as a synonym for ‘peregrinus.’
10 As in Lv 17:8. See also Lv 17:10, 12, 13, 25:6, 45; Nm 15:26.
11 Dt 26:5; 4 Kgs 8:1.
Pharaoh,12 ‘living as a foreigner’ as found in Genesis and Exodus,13 and ‘alien’ or ‘foreigner’ as found in Deuteronomy, Job, and the Psalms.14 In the New Testament, Jerome uses *peregrinus* for ΠΑΡΟΙΧΟΣ, a word meaning ‘a sojourner, one who dwells in a foreign country, a temporary dweller not having a settled habitation in the place where he currently resides.’15 Scholars, with this variety of usages in mind, attempt to understand its particular meaning within the religious, and particularly monastic, context of the Patristic and early medieval eras.

When attempting to define a theological motivation of *peregrinatio*, the matter of even defining *peregrinatio* itself becomes a concern. Some may note the tremendous difficulty in assigning a singular definition to the word or even defining a unified concept of *peregrinatio* among the ancient sources. Even Augustine’s understanding of *peregrinatio* appears to evolve over his life as reflected in his writings, particularly in his development of *peregrinatio* from De Doctrina Christiana written in 396 CE which conceives of Christians as *peregrini* metaphorically to his understanding of Christians as literal *peregrini* in De Civitas Dei written nearly twenty years later.16

The matter is further complicated because the Irish, remembered as among the most famous *peregrini*, appear to lack a standard practice or understanding of *peregrinatio* and did not devote much time to writing about their theological understanding of the subject. Despite the paucity of theological explanations, Irish writings contain innumerable examples of *peregrinatio* and many show a clear

---

12 Gn 47:9.
13 Gn 26:3; See also Gn 17:8, Gn 28:4, Ex 6:4, Ex 23:9.
14 Dt 10:19; Jb 19:15; Ps 38:13.
16 For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Claussen, "’Peregrinatio’ and ‘Peregrini,’" pgs 49-50; see also G. Clark, ‘Pilgrims and Foreigners: Augustine on Traveling Home,’ in Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity, Eds. L. Ellis and F. Kidner (San Francisco: Ashgate, 2004), pgs 149-56.
admiration for *peregrini.*

This zeal for *peregrinatio* is one feature cited by some scholars as being a distinctive characteristic of Irish monasticism – a claim that will be examined in chapters four and five. Nevertheless, these issues in defining a theology of *peregrinatio* could be seen as a challenging obstacle.

Another issue that hinders defining a theological motivation of *peregrinatio* is the individual nature of religious experience. Defining a specific, all-encompassing motive for *peregrinatio* is not only difficult because of the range of meanings in Latin, but also because in a religious context, *peregrinatio* was a highly personal matter – a response to what the individual believed was God’s call. As the uniqueness of individuals must be accounted for in any study of religious impulses, *peregrinatio* is no exception. The manifestations of a person’s spirituality and his or her understanding of a drastic form of asceticism such as *peregrinatio* will depend on a range of cultural, social, and personal experiences which will never be the same for anyone.

Nevertheless, an examination of Continental and insular monastic literature, ranging from the fourth to the ninth centuries, reveals definite, repeated patterns explaining the motivations for the *peregrini* which leads to defining a theological motivation for insular *peregrinatio*. Between the fifth and ninth centuries in Ireland, evidence for the diverse impetuses includes performing penance, perfecting the monastic life, seeking the ‘desert experience,’ and missionizing. Despite this variety of motivations, a unifying theme underlies all of these – a belief that the *peregrinus* was answering God's call to know him more. The *peregrini* were inspired to practice such arduous asceticism by their eschatological orientation. Eschatology, the study of 'last'

[17] See, for example, the laudatory portrayals of *peregrini* in the *Vita Samsonis, Vita Columbae, Vita Columbani, Navigatio Sancti Brendani,* and *Vita Brendani* to name a few.
things, includes both the 'post-mortem fate of individuals' and the events of the end of the world including Judgment Day, resurrection of the dead, condemnation to hell or acceptance into heaven. The peregrini - focused on their impending death and judgment - sought to purify themselves and experience a foretaste of the blessed afterlife promised to the faithful who had renounced all to follow Christ.

To determine a theological motivation for peregrinatio, an overview of scholarly work should first be considered. Chapter two will assess the current state of scholarship concerned specifically with Irish peregrinatio and its theological motivations. This chapter will focus on secondary literature that adds significantly to the theological understanding or explains the cultural context of Irish peregrinatio.

Chapter three will trace the theological understanding of peregrinatio/peregrinus in Biblical literature through the Patristic era in order to define a theology of the desert retreat. At the same time, chapter three will also observe how these cultures viewed the wilderness, an important motif in understanding monastic peregrinatio. Furthermore, chapter three will explore the teachings on the monastic goal and their concepts of prayer to show that both are rooted in the monks' eschatological outlook. Chapter three will finish with a discussion of Jerome and Augustine's understanding of peregrinatio and conclude that the theological motivation of the desert seekers was singular – wholly eschatological in focus, they focused on preparation for Judgment Day.

Chapter four will examine the most well-known Irish peregrini including Patrick, Columba, Columbanus, Brendan, and those mentioned in Bede, a scholar in Irish-influenced Northumbria. Chapter four will conclude with the argument that most

Irish *peregrini* were well within the broader Christian tradition of desert seekers. Chapter five will discuss *peregrinatio* and exile as found in the Irish Penitentials, showing that lifelong *peregrinatio* did not fit within the accepted understanding of penance, but rather was an ascetic discipline performed in conjunction with temporary penance. Both penitential discipline for propitiation and *peregrinatio* for sanctification arise out of an eschatological orientation and work together to ensure one’s security on Judgment Day.

The ascetic fervor that led to the retreat from home and society pervades early Christianity and is not bound to a particular culture, gender, or geographical location. The understanding that God could be experienced more easily in the wilderness places – whether a forest, desert, island, or ocean – inspired ascetics to renounce all and follow God into lands unknown. It does not merely arise out of practice of flight from the wilderness that later develops a theology to justify such retreats. Rather, as Jerome’s letter to Heliodorus clearly implies, the journey into the desert stems from one’s deep longing for holiness and an interior quest towards God.\(^{19}\) The *peregrini’s* physical journey was, in part, a reflection of their interior spiritual quest for holiness and communion with God. The resultant purity allowed a foretaste, albeit temporary and imperfect, of what their eschatological destiny was to be – an eternal contemplation and vision of God.

---

Chapter 2 – Survey of Secondary Sources on Irish Peregrinati

Researchers interested in explaining the impulse of the Irish peregrini to seek unknown lands as a religious expression have produced a significant corpus of scholarly literature. A brief survey of relevant sources within the past century that add significantly to the understanding of Irish peregrinatio and reveal pertinent and new information or insights on Irish peregrinatio will be considered.20

One of the most foundational ideas to modern Irish scholarship is the general belief that clerical voyages are widely known by Adomnán’s lifetime. William Thrall’s ‘Clerical Sea Pilgrimages and the Imrama’21 argues that the Irish peregrinatio motif is one Adomnán’s audience would find familiar because of this well-established tradition.22 Thrall argues that it is sometimes impossible to differentiate between the motivations inspiring the voyagers – whether they set out looking for a hermitage, fulfilling penance, or missionizing.23 His conclusions have largely gone unchallenged and this general uncertainty at pinpointing the motivations still prevails in modern scholarship as researchers including Richard Sharpe, Gilbert Márkus, T.O. Clancy, and Seamus Mac Mathúna still debate the motivations of the most prominent Irish peregrini.

Countering the nativist tradition that proposes punitive voyages stem from native Irish practice, Mary Byrne explains that the Irish use voyages punitively as a kinder form of punishment for females who would otherwise receive the death penalty under Old Irish law.24 Byrne argues that this is not a native Irish punishment, but rather one

20 When discussing larger sources, only the sections that offer a different approach to peregrinatio will be examined.
22 Thrall, ‘Clerical Sea Pilgrimages,’ p 18. It should be noted that Thrall does not explicitly say that the audience would find it familiar, but is implied when he states, ‘It is probably that Adamnan was drawing upon a tradition much richer in detail and amount than is reflected in the Vita, since he does not seem to be interested in sea voyages as such. The confusion involved in Adamnan’s reference to Cormac’s first voyage suggests that there was a well-established tradition of Cormac as a voyager…’ p 18.
23 Thrall, ‘Clerical Sea Pilgrimages,’ p 20.
24 M.E. Byrne, ‘On the Punishment of Sending Adrift’ in The Otherworld Voyage, pgs 22-4.
Byrne’s article highlights that the Irish use voyages punitively, expanding upon those motivations Thrall details. Byrne’s focus on the punitive (and penitential) aspects of \textit{peregrinatio} marks the beginning of a series of scholarship including the work of Gerhard Ladner, Colin Ireland, and Seamus Mac Mathúna that focuses on the penitential and punitive aspects of Irish \textit{peregrinatio}, with little emphasis on theologically justifying such voyages.

Scholarship soon focused on the change in perception of the Irish \textit{peregrini} on the Continent after the eighth century, suggesting that religious leaders expressed concern over \textit{peregrinatio}’s conflict with the stability advocated by clerics.\textsuperscript{26} Kathleen Hughes, in 1960, authored the article ‘The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage’ which maintained that the Irish sought the renunciation of \textit{peregrinatio} but were encouraged to do so within Ireland and as a result, the \textit{peregrini} became anchoritic. Her scholarship linked the \textit{peregrini}’s pursuit with that of the anchorites. Her research, taken to its logical end, implies parallels between anchoritic theology and \textit{peregrini} theology and can advance the theological understanding of Irish \textit{peregrinatio} substantially.\textsuperscript{27}

Examining the fervor for \textit{peregrinatio} found in pre-eighth century Ireland as noted in Hughes’ research, Gerhard B. Ladner, in a 1967 paper entitled ‘\textit{Homo Viator}: Medieval Ideas on Alienation and Order,’ contrasts clear admiration of \textit{peregrini} in hagiography of the sixth to eighth centuries with the preferred \textit{stabilitas} of the eighth century as argued in Hughes’ article.\textsuperscript{28} Ladner states that the Irish and Anglo-Saxons are quite extraordinary in their widespread use of \textit{peregrinatio} as both a penitential and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{25} Byrne, ‘On the Punishment of Sending Adrift,’ p 25.}


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{27} The connection between the anchorite’s and the \textit{peregrini}’s theology will be explored in this dissertation. To date, scholarship has not fully explored this connection.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{28} G. B. Ladner, ‘\textit{Homo Viator}: Medieval Ideas on Alienation and Order’ in \textit{Speculum} 42, No.2 (Apr. 1967).}
ascetic expression of Christianity,
noting a unique frequency of penitential peregrinatio in insular monasticism. Though he mentions ascetic peregrinatio, he does not develop this but rather focuses on the penitential aspect as has been done by most scholars before and after. Nevertheless, his argument that the widespread Irish use of peregrinatio for both asceticism and penance remains largely uncontested even in modern scholarship.

Examining the fervor of Irish peregrinatio noted in Hughes and Ladner’s research, Thomas Charles-Edwards contextualizes the eagerness for peregrinatio within Ireland – research that has never before been conducted until his article ‘The Social Background to Irish Peregrinatio.’ Charles-Edwards argues that one of the reasons for the Irish fervor for peregrinatio lies in the secular social organization of Ireland. With both the secular background of Irish law and social organization and the zealous British effort to Christianize Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries, the Irish fervor for peregrinatio becomes far clearer and explains key reasons found in secular Irish society that the Irish undertook such arduous ascetic practices.

Building on Byrne’s emphasis of punitive voyaging, Colin Ireland’s article entitled ‘Some Analogues of the Old English Seafarer’ argues that in early Ireland penance and peregrinatio were closely related. He further notes that often penalties for crime and penance ‘overlap’, showing that there was not always a clear distinction between punitive and penitential voyages. The distinction between types of voyages among even some of the most prominent peregrini still vexes scholars today.

---

29 Ladner, ‘Homo Viator,’ p 245.
31 Charles-Edwards, ‘The Social Background,’ p 106. One final observation is worth noting. Charles-Edwards final important note concerns the ‘deorad Dé,’ the seventh-century Irish law term for a peregrinus, who has legal standing equivalent to an Irish king. Charles-Edwards argues that this change in status, while lifting up a peregrinus’ secular power, nullified the religious significance of his renunciation as long as he remained in Ireland. Therefore, the elevated status of the deorad Dé in Ireland caused those seeking the ascetic renunciation of peregrinatio to leave Ireland and go elsewhere (p 103).
32 C. A. Ireland, ‘Some Analogues of the Old English Seafarer,’ in The Otherworld Voyage, p 144.
With prior research focusing largely on the penitential and punitive aspects of *peregrinatio*, scholars begin to focus on other reasons the Irish would peregrinate. Seamus Mac Mathúna's 1994 article, ‘Contributions to a Study of the Voyages of St. Brendan and St. Malo’ argues that missionary work does not figure into the writing or motivation of *peregrinatio* in the *imrrama* in any significant way, though later scholars discussed below will note mission work does figure into the *peregrinatio* of some prominent Irish saints. In the *Vitae* of Malo and Brendan, the saints seek a distant ‘promised land,’ but are unsuccessful which serves as the impetus driving the saints to Britain for his *peregrinatio*, acting as a ‘wandering missionary Irish *peregrinus*.’

Mac Mathúna observes that the authors use the term *peregrinatio* specifically for the ‘missionary pilgrimage,’ though importantly in the *Life of Brendan and Life of Malo*, the travels are truly anchoritic. He concludes that this results from the earliest understanding of Irish *peregrinatio* as anchoritic, with mission work as a by-product.

Building further upon Hughes’ research and the importance of eighth century monastic reforms, scholarship approaches the *Voyage of Saint Brendan* in a new light, seeing it as a tool for understanding the monastic journey as an interior, not physical, journey. Dorothy Bray, in her 1995 article ‘Allegory in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*,’ argues that Brendan’s voyage represents the eighth and ninth century preoccupations with monastic stability and faith. Bray interprets Brendan’s land of Promise as ‘the land all pilgrims seek in spirit.’ Therefore, this is not an actual physical land that a pilgrim must seek, but rather a spiritual voyage that can occur within the context of a monastery. This spiritualization of the monastic voyaging motif will be crucial to

---

33 S. Mac Mathúna, ‘Contributions to a Study of the Voyages of St Brendan and St Malo’ in *The Otherworld Voyage*, p 164.
34 Mac Mathúna, ‘Contributions to a Study of the Voyages of St Brendan and St Malo,’ p 174.
35 Mac Mathúna, ‘Contributions to a Study of the Voyages of St Brendan and St Malo,’ p 174.
36 Mac Mathúna, ‘Contributions to a Study of the Voyages of St Brendan and St Malo,’ p 174. This understanding validates the conclusions of Hughes and will be further substantiated in the work of Richard Sharpe, Thomas Owen Clancy, and Gilbert Márkus on Columba as noted below.
38 Bray, ‘Allegory in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*,’ p 182.
understanding the theological motivation of the Irish *peregrini*. Thomas O'Loughlin builds upon her allegorical understanding of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* in his 1999 article called ‘Living in the Ocean.’ He argues that monastic life is envisaged as a preview of heaven, and earthly monasteries should be so close in practice to heaven that they are situated on the gate of paradise – their sacred activities on earth are a reflection of heaven, indicating their sacramental understanding of reality.\(^{39}\) The monks, while on earth, are at the cusp of heaven in their lifestyle.\(^{40}\) The work of Bray and O'Loughlin is crucial in showing the spiritual and theological understanding of the monastic quest as an interior voyage towards their eschatological future.

Bray and O'Loughlin’s research demonstrating that *peregrinatio* arises from a monastic milieu that links one’s spiritual ascent towards God with a journey encourages scholars to reconsider the motivations of some of the most famous Irish *peregrini*. A definitive reason for Columba’s departure from Ireland remains elusive, but there is still enough evidence to support that he is an influence among the Picts, indicating Columba’s *peregrinatio* is, in part, evangelical. Nevertheless, Richard Sharpe concludes in his 1995 introduction to Adomnán’s *Life of Columba* that evangelism is not likely Columba’s original reason for *peregrinatio*.\(^{41}\) Furthering the research on Columba’s motivation, Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert MáRKus in their 1995 introduction to *Iona – The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* compare the views that Bede and Adomnán had of Columba’s life and mission. As in Richard Sharpe’s introduction, they argue that Bede views Columba as a missionary and pastor. However, they add that Adomnán focuses on his work as a monk and pastor, importantly de-emphasizing his

---


\(^{40}\) O'Loughlin, ‘Topography of Holiness,’ p 17.

role as a missionary among the Picts. This gives significant insights into what Adomnán conceives to be the proper lifestyle of a *peregrinus* – a life of ascetic pursuits, prayer, and caring for his community, but not missionizing.

Other Irish *peregrini* fit this paradigm as evidenced by Columbanus who, despite being presented as an active missionary in his *Vita*, enjoys few results, reflecting his own lack of interest in evangelism. Jonas, a Continental monk, seeks to emphasize Columbanus’ missionary work though the actual historical evidence concludes this was not the focus of his time in Gaul. Ian Wood’s monograph *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe 400-1050* gives further substantiation to Sharpe, Clancy, and Márkus’ conclusions as he believes the emphasis on Columbanus’ mission work comes from Columbanus’ abbatial successor, Eustasius, and Agilus, both monks in Columbanus’ monasteries and active missionaries, and also Jonas’ own interest in mission work, but not from Columbanus’ personal emphasis on evangelism. This correlates with the conclusions of Sharpe, Clancy, and Márkus who also note the lack of emphasis on mission work in the lives of Irish *peregrini* and furthers the emphasis towards ascetic voyages and away from penitential and punitive voyages as examined by Byrne, Mac Mathúna, and Ladner.

Scholars continue to examine motivations for *peregrinatio*, noting that though Irish pilgrims are not original in what prompted their journeys as they follow the examples of other European nations, the Irish still stress penitential *peregrinatio* more than some other cultures. Peter Harbison’s 1995 monograph entitled *Pilgrimage in Ireland* counters the prevailing belief of Irish *peregrinatio*’s uniqueness, arguing that the *peregrinatio* that is so closely linked with the early Irish church was a ‘purely

---

voluntary exile" rather than punitive exile. This re-focuses scholarly attention away from the punitive aspects of *peregrinatio* as stressed in Byrne and Ireland. However, in 2005, Maribel Dietz, under the direction of Peter Brown, explores religious travel in the Mediterranean in the late antique to early medieval period. Dietz argues that despite various motivations prompting religious travel, 'the life of movement' is rooted in the ascetical desire for detachment. Early Christian travel, she argues, is not focused on a place, but either a specific holy person or as a representation of their homelessness while on earth. Dietz claims that both banishment and itinerancy are components of pre-Christian Ireland and thus it is logical that the Irish would embrace those elements in their new faith. She asserts that the Irish are the inventors of penitential pilgrimages. Her argument for the originality of Irish *peregrinatio* counters Harbison’s beliefs that Irish pilgrimage is firmly established within a tradition of Christian religious travel. Dietz concludes with the statement that for all Christians who traveled in the late antique period, 'travel was a way of achieving separation, including family and home.' However, as will be discussed in the following chapters, separation is only the beginning of the ascetic journey and thus not at the heart of *peregrinatio*.

Shedding more light on the missional aspect of *peregrinatio*, researchers begin to examine the first recorded Irish *peregrinus*, Patrick, whose eschatological belief that mission work is linked with the end times motivates his *peregrinatio* in Ireland. In his book *Celtic Theology*, published in 2000, Thomas O’Loughlin explores the way in which Patrick sees himself within Ireland, ‘at the very ends of the earth,’ inspired by

---

46 Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*, p 34.
Patrick’s reading of the New Testament which states that God’s message will start in Jerusalem and make it to the farthest reaches of land.\textsuperscript{53} According to O’Loughlin, Patrick believes that when Christ’s message reaches the most distant shores, the End of the world will come, placing Patrick as an important component in bringing about the Eschaton.\textsuperscript{54} O’Loughlin’s research has important implications for the theological understanding of Irish mission work and its role in salvation history which elucidates Patrick's reason for his \textit{peregrinatio} as being eschatological.

Wanting to shift the scholarly understanding of the \textit{immrama} as explained by Mac Mathúna as a ‘crime-punishment-penitence’ followed by ‘reconciliation’ to an understanding of \textit{immrama} as tales in which the voyage provides the means for salvation,\textsuperscript{55} Thomas Owen Clancy’s article, ‘Subversion at Sea: Structure, Style, and Intent in the \textit{Immrama}’ argues that the ocean was envisaged as a ‘venue of repentance’ in both literature and reality.\textsuperscript{56} The \textit{immrama} are parables, according to Clancy, of repentance and baptism.\textsuperscript{57}

Scholars have produced a remarkable amount of research on Irish \textit{peregrinatio} and specific Irish \textit{peregrini}, as well as examinations of motifs, themes, and interpretations of symbolism in many early Irish works of literature. Nevertheless, no single answer is given to the theological motivation of the Irish \textit{peregrini} – what is the theological motivation, is it unique, and is there a difference in motivation between ascetic and penitential \textit{peregrinatio} within a well-established tradition of Christian retreat? What, exactly, are the early Irish \textit{peregrini} seeking in their ‘desert in the ocean’? Maribel Dietz’s book \textit{Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims} provides excellent evidence and thorough research on her topic, but her conclusion, like much of

\textsuperscript{54} O’Loughlin, \textit{Celtic Theology}, p 39.
\textsuperscript{56} Clancy, ‘\textit{Subversion at Sea: Structure, style, and Intent in the Immrama},’ pgs 201, 225.
\textsuperscript{57} Clancy, ‘\textit{Subversion at Sea: Structure, style, and Intent in the Immrama},’ p 225.
the scholarship on *peregrinatio*, fails to go beyond the act of detachment and explore the overarching theological reason a person would abandon all to follow Christ. Detachment is not the reason for *peregrinatio*; it is merely the first, albeit important, step in a theological orientation wholly eschatological in nature. Focused on the eternal, abandoning all that is temporal, it is a mentality that places the *peregrinus* between two worlds – corporally on earth but spiritually and mentally in heaven. The next few chapters will seek to examine this eschatological orientation and how it draws people into the deserts, forests, and oceans.
Chapter 3: The Theological Motivations of the Desert Retreat

The Biblical motifs of the wilderness as the most hospitable locus for divine interaction and Christians as ‘adveni et peregrini’ in the world give rise to the interpretation of *peregrinatio* in a Christian context, a theme developed through several centuries of Christian writing. To understand Irish *peregrinatio* in its fullest sense, it is important to trace the history of *peregrinatio* from the Bible through the Desert and Patristic fathers to observe how the theology of *peregrini* – one firmly eschatological in nature - finds precedent in the early Christian view of the wilderness.

Before a thorough discussion on *peregrinatio* can commence, it is important to note that many church leaders caution against monastic movement, citing the danger of instability and self-regulation. Interestingly, some undertake journeys themselves. Evagrius leaves Pontus for Constantinople and, frightened by a vision, goes to Jerusalem. After a time in Jerusalem, he departs for Egypt. Though he travels to Egypt in fulfillment of a vow, undoubtedly Evagrius understands Egypt to be a more conducive location for his spiritual goals. Evagrius himself travels widely, but writes of Melania the Elder:

I praise her intentions but I do not approve of her undertaking. I do not see what she will gain from such a long walk….prevent those [women] who have renounced the world from needlessly walking around over such roads.

To emphasize that she should cease her ‘needless’ travel, he writes to Melania exhorting her to ‘teach your sisters and your sons not to take a long journey or to travel through deserted lands without examining the matter seriously. For this is misguided and unbecoming to every soul that has retreated from the world.’

---

58 I Pt 2:11, ‘Carissimi, obsecro vos tamquam advenas et peregrinos abstinere vos a carnalibus desideriis, que militant adversus animam…’
60 Evagrius, quoted in Elm, *Virgins of God*, p 278.
‘roaming about meeting myriads of people.’ For Evagrius, the danger in her travel comes from meeting people who may detract from undistracted prayer. He encourages his disciples to examine ‘everything with an eye to stillness and keeping only such still things as contribute to it…’ Vagrant wandering may prove detrimental to Melania’s pursuit of holiness.

Though Cassian, Jerome, and Benedict all have desert retreats as part of their monastic vocation, they each discuss a despised group of monks called ‘sarabaites’ by Cassian and Benedict and ‘remoboth’ by Jerome. They live either singly or in small groups and publicly display their asceticism. Benedict identifies a fourth type of monk called the gyravagui who ‘spend their whole lives tramping from province to province…always on the move, with no stability.’ Augustine, too, has harsh words for ‘hypocrites under the garb of monks, strolling about the provinces, no where sent, no where fixed, no where standing, no where sitting…’ He says these wandering monks ‘blaspheme’ the good name of those who do seek the proper monastic life.

The main objection to these vagrant monks is not their travel, but that their lives lack submission to an abbot and the stability that comes with attachment to a monastery. Without guidance from experienced elders, travel could easily prove ruinous for the spiritually immature. The desert fathers teach the desert retreat is a gradual process, and Cassian believes one must first be perfected in a coenobium before retreating into the

---

61 Evagrius, quoted in Elm, Virgins of God, p 278.
62 Evagrius, Causes for Monastic Observances, § 5.
63 Coll. 18.7.
64 ‘Rule of Saint Benedict’ in Reading Saint Benedict, A. de Vogué, Trans. C. Friedlander (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991), Ch 1: This is echoed in the Regula Magistri, ‘The fourth kind of monks, who should not even be called that and about whom I would do better to keep silence than to say anything, are called gyrovagues. They spend their whole life as guests for 3 or 4 days at a time at various cells and monasteries of others in various provinces. Taking advantage of hospitality, they want to be received every day anew at different places.’ (Regula Magistri 1.1-1.15, quoted in Dietz, Wandering Monks, p 81.)
65 Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, 34.
66 Rule of Saint Benedict, Ch 1. This could be the monk Cassian does not name but says is a fourth type who appear as anchorites but have not trained in a coenobium and enter the wilderness where their vices remain because they lack a community to expose their faults. Coll. 18.8.
desert.\textsuperscript{68} Even then, however, the monk ought to have a system of accountability.\textsuperscript{69} For the desert monks and the monastic leaders of the fourth through sixth centuries, eremitic life is one that should only be pursued after proper training has been completed and with the blessing and, ideally, supervision of an abbot.\textsuperscript{70} However, one of the most important early church theologians argues that a physical journey is not even necessary and offers his understanding of the theology of \textit{peregrinatio} in his seminal work, \textit{De Civitate Dei}.

Augustine undertakes a significant physical journey he calls \textit{‘peregrinationem meam’}.\textsuperscript{71} Despite his own journeys, Augustine’s final understanding of \textit{peregrinatio} is not one of active, individual movement but rather the corporate movement of the Church until Judgment Day. Although his understanding of \textit{‘peregrinatio’} is one of the most fully developed in early Christian literature, the earliest Irish \textit{peregrini} believe \textit{peregrinatio} does necessitate an arduous physical journey.

For Augustine, all people belong to one of two cities: the city of the world represented by Babylon or the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. The \textit{civitas Dei} has two forms – one in heaven and one on earth, both journeying (\textit{peregrinari}) toward the same goal.\textsuperscript{72} For Augustine, \textit{peregrinatio} is a collective event of the Church,\textsuperscript{73} and the

\textsuperscript{68} See \textit{Coll.} 18.4; 19.10.1-19.12.1; 20.1.2.

\textsuperscript{69} Cassian expresses his disapproval for Sarabaites and an unnamed fourth type of monk, both of whom are without proper supervision, subject to their own will, and not mindful the traditions of the Elders. (See \textit{Coll.} 18.7-8.) Evidence throughout the \textit{Conferences} shows that there were regular assemblies and gatherings of the anchorites for spiritual edification (\textit{Coll.} 3.2.2; \textit{Inst.} 2.10).

\textsuperscript{70} Monastic travel became increasingly regulated, and by the fifth century \textit{stabilitas} was lauded as a more perfect form of monasticism. In the \textit{Regula Magistri}, the anchorites, true to Cassian’s model, had to first have a ‘long probation in the monastery’ before they were able to then progress to the ‘desert.’ Even after their departure, however, they had an obligation to remain bound to their original monastery. Lérins, where Eucharius of Lyon lived, showed that the anchorites were still considered a part of their monastic community and would meet on the weekends for prayers and conferences with the cenobites and their abbot (J.F. O’Sullivan, ‘Early Monasticism in Gaul,’ American Benedictine Review 16 [March 1965] p 44).

\textsuperscript{71} Augustine, \textit{Confessions}, 5.13 in <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/augustine/conf5.shtml>. Important to note: I will only be discussing his interpretation of \textit{peregrinatio} as found in his \textit{Civitates Dei} because that is his latest and most thorough discussion of the topic and has been shown by T. O’Loughlin to have been included in Iona’s library; See T. O’Loughlin, \textit{The Library of Iona in the Late Seventh Century: The Evidence from Adomnán’s \textit{De locis sanctis}}, Ériu 45 (1994), pgs 33-52.

earthly peregrinus' goal is to join the civitas Dei caelestis. Only on Judgment Day will these two join in perfect communion sanctorum.\textsuperscript{74} Importantly, Augustine's understanding of peregrinatio requires no physical movement,\textsuperscript{75} but is rather a spiritual journey toward the heavenly Jerusalem - the eschatological destiny which God has prepared for his peregrini. Augustine’s conception theologically fits into the tradition of the estranged pilgrim Christian who, focused on the End and eternity, forsakes the world and sets his or her sights above. For Augustine, just as those who seek the desert, the peregrini's theological motivation for their journey is strongly eschatological even if he discourages physical journeying.

While Benedict and Augustine prove influential to Irish monasticism in many ways, the Irish follow the tradition of the Egyptian desert fathers who model their own lives after key Biblical exemplars. Apostolic travel in the New Testament is usually evangelical; however, in the centuries following Christ, religious travel undertaken by Christians varies in intent and practice. From those traveling to holy people and sites to those who permanently depart from their homes, religious travel takes many new meanings. This essay will focus on the latter type of travel, eventually called 'peregrinatio,' which has its theological origins in the Bible. At peregrinatio's core is an ascetical desire for detachment – from family, friends, and the world – a freedom to be purified in order to experience God in a transcendent way. Detachment, purity from sin, and cultivation of virtue result in holiness, the necessary state for true communion with God. The peregrini, focusing on their eschatological future, hope to achieve greater rewards after death and experience a foretaste of their heavenly home so that while physically on earth, spiritually and mentally they already enjoy heaven.

\textsuperscript{73} Augustine, \textit{De Civitate Dei}, 19.5.  
\textsuperscript{74} Augustine, \textit{De Civitate Dei}, 15.1.  
\textsuperscript{75} Augustine, \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}, 1.4.
The desire to ‘renounce this life, so that you may be alive to God’ begins in the wilderness where many crucial figures in salvation history receive their spiritual encounters with God. Within Biblical literature, *locus* plays an important role in humanity's interaction with the divine. In Hosea 2:14 God says of Israel, ‘I will lead her into the wilderness and *there I will speak to her heart*.’ God’s use of the wilderness for revelations and demonstrations of sovereignty occurs early within the Biblical narrative. The Old Testament corpus features the wilderness as a location rife with divine interaction through trial, reliance and provision, revelation, and demonstrations of providential power.

In the New Testament, John the Baptist dwells in the wilderness. When asked his identity, John quotes Isaiah 40:3 that he is the prophesied, ‘...voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.”’ In this verse, the wilderness is no ordinary location – it is the chosen place where God wants his people to prepare for him. Continuing this theme, Jesus punctuates his public ministry with wilderness retreats for contemplative prayer. The Holy Spirit leads him into the desert for a time of temptation and subsequent communion with God. The wilderness is a particularly suitable location for divine interaction because the world offers constant distractions stifling a person's chance for

---

77 NIV, emphasis added.
78 It is important to note that ‘wilderness’ is defined for the purposes of this paper as a ‘wild and uncultivated region, as of forest or desert; a tract of wasteland, as of open sea.’ *wilderness*, Dictionary.com Unabridged, Random House, Inc. 30 Apr. 2012. <Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/wilderness> Therefore, the ‘wilderness’ includes the desert, sea, forest, or any expanse of land not typically inhabited by people.
79 Ex 20: 18-21; Dt 5.
80 Ex 15: 25; 20:10; Lv 10;Nm 11:4-34; Nm 16:46-50; Nm 25: 4-9.
81 Ex 14: 19-20; 15: 26; 16: 1-5; Lv 26:3-12; Nm 9:15-23; Nm 11:4-34; Nm 20:1-11.
82 Ex 16: 10; Nm 22; Dt 34:1-4.
84 Jn 1: 23b.
85 Is 40:3; Mk 1:3, emphasis added.
86 Mk 1: 35, 14: 32; Lk 5: 16, 6: 12.
87 Mt 4:1-11.
intimacy with God. *Peregrinatio*, concerned with renouncing the world to commune with God, draws heavily from Biblical exemplars who enjoy friendship with God.

Christians spiritualize the concept of *peregrinatio* drawing from a wealth of Biblical texts. In the Old Testament, Abraham epitomizes the *peregrinus* who, at God’s call, leaves his homeland to follow God into lands unknown. 88 His faith in God in his physical journey provides the later *peregrini* with the model of their own journeys. Later Christians also draw on other examples that add further spiritual dimensions to *peregrinatio*. The Israelites’ journey into the Promised Land, for example, forms an illustrative picture for Christian *peregrini* as will be discussed below. 89 Furthermore, in the New Testament, the apostles use the concept of *peregrinatio* to describe a Christian’s journey as a foreigner on earth away from the Lord. 90 Christian *peregrinatio* is both a physical and spiritual journey working together for a unified goal.

Hebrews 11 offers an excellent exposition on Christian *peregrinatio*. In recounting Old Testament exemplars of faith, Abraham, a self-identified *peregrinus*, 91 is the first figure given the command to move to a place that he does not know in advance where he is going. His faith journey promises great rewards, though, as Abraham has the assurance of rich blessings. The author of Hebrews explains that Abraham follows God’s command to relocate to the Promised Land (*terra repromissionis*), 92 where he lives in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, his descendents. He is on a journey and looking forward to a city that is built by God 93 – a point that Bede makes as underscoring that

---

88 Gn 12.
89 It is illustrative to note at this point that as many of the earliest Biblical examples of *peregrini* were not monks, that the terms ‘monk’ and ‘*peregrinus*’ are not interchangeable, those often medieval *peregrini* were in monastic orders.
90 2 Cor 5:8, ‘We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away (*peregrinati*) from the body and at home with the Lord.’ I Pt 2:11, ‘...I urge you, as aliens and strangers (*peregrini*) in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.’
91 Gn 23:4, ‘Advena sum et *peregrinus* apud vos...’
92 A Latin phrase significant in itself as it is unique to this particular chapter of the Bible and is cited by the *Voyage of Saint Brendan’s* author as being the land in which Brendan seeks. This will be explored further in chapter four.
93 Heb 11:10.
the Patriarchs, like all Christians, share the mindset of the *peregrini* as they are 
'strangers of this world and inhabitants, indeed citizens, of the other life, that is, of the 
heavenly fatherland.\textsuperscript{94} After citing more examples of faith, the Hebrews’ author 
concludes that section by stating:

All these people…did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers (*peregrini et hospites*) on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own…a heavenly one. Therefore God…has prepared a city for them.\textsuperscript{95}

The author of Hebrews lists Biblical examples of faith and describes their persecution.\textsuperscript{96} These *peregrini*,

…went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. They were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.\textsuperscript{97}

*peregrini*, alien to the world in which they live, make their home in the wilderness while focusing on what is to come. The Hebrews’ author explains that God ultimately plans a heavenly city – a city they will not reside in until death. Until that time, while they are away from the Lord,\textsuperscript{98} they are *‘peregrini’* on earth – foreigners longing for their true home. Focused on their eternal destination, the *peregrini* in Hebrews are eschatological in their theological orientation as they await their coming inheritance.

Likewise focusing on the End, a number of early Christians flee into the desert where a lively spirituality emerges, particularly in Egypt. The desert fathers display two closely related motivations for their desert retreat: the desire to purify themselves from sin and experience God intimately. While these ascetics share the same theological motivation to ‘peregrinate’ as the later Irish, they use words such as ‘withdrawal,’

\textsuperscript{95} Heb 11: 13-16, NIV.
\textsuperscript{96} Heb 11: 32-37.
\textsuperscript{97} Heb 11: 37b-39, NIV.
\textsuperscript{98} A condition Paul describes as *‘peregrinatio.’* See 2 Cor 5:8, ‘We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away (*peregrinari*) from the body and at home with the Lord.’
‘retreat,’ and ‘renunciation’ to describe their journeys; nevertheless, their understanding of renunciation, sin, holiness, and prayer show a similar theological motivation for their retreats, a fact that places ascetic Irish *peregrinatio* within an established tradition.

The fourth century *Life of Onnophrius* recounts that while in his monastery, Paphnutius hears the brethren extolling the power of Elijah and John the Baptist. Desiring to emulate them, he seeks the desert.99 Likewise, another desert father, Antony, wants to ‘model the way of life of the great Elijah and to use it as a mirror to organize his own life,’ so Antony moves to some nearby tombs.100 In similar fashion, Abba Piamun points to the original anchorites as Saints Paul and Antony and states that they imitate John the Baptist, Elijah, Elisha, and most importantly the Christians described in Hebrews 11: 37-38.101 Significantly, Abba Piamun links his contemporary desert anchorites with the eschatologically-focused *peregrini.*102 The impulse to imitate the *peregrini* and leave their homeland as they focus on eternity will be central to the early Irish interpretation of *peregrinatio* both as a spiritual and physical journey in preparation for the End. As with the desert fathers, the early Irish *peregrini* believe that faith necessitates action, and *peregrinatio* is the ultimate step of faith.

The literal movement into the desert signifies a drastic break with one’s former attachments. In one source, Abba Pseleusius has a vision in which an old man admonishes him, saying:

> Part with everything you own, take up your cross, follow your Lord…. ‘No one who puts his hands to the plow and then turns back is directed toward the

---


102 Heb 11:13. It does not seem to matter that the *peregrini* in Hebrews were forced into the wilderness to escape persecution. The fact that while they were there, living their life in faith of God’s promise of eternal rewards proved to the desert father’s that they shared the same goals in their journey.
kingdom of heaven[.]’ Now the phrase ‘look back’ represents the cares for this vain world and its earthly concerns which we do not recognize.\textsuperscript{103}

Antony, too, quotes this verse and interprets it similarly,\textsuperscript{104} but notes that this type of self-denial is not without its eschatological benefits. He states:

No one, once he has rejected the world, should think that he has left behind anything of importance.... Even if we renounce the whole world, we cannot give anything in exchange which is of similar value to the heavenly dwellings....\textsuperscript{105}

On the outskirts of society, monks are free for God’s teaching and refinement without the distractions of the world. If one wants heavenly citizenship, then one must renounce all earthly ties. Dual citizenship is not an option.

Once in the desert, many Christians seek atonement (penance) or freedom from their carnal nature for the sake of holiness (asceticism). Onnophrius tells Paphnutius, ‘I too am a man of the desert, like yourself. I live in this desert on account of my sins.’\textsuperscript{106} Abba Matoes admits coming to the desert ‘through weakness,’ not virtue.\textsuperscript{107} He seeks the desert to purify himself. Abba Matoes gives another sinful man the same advice he follows himself: ‘Flee into solitude. For this is a sickness.’\textsuperscript{108} The desert provides the ideal venue for confronting sin and this ascetic pursuit of purification inspires a number of Irish peregrini to seek the wilderness.

Many stories exist with similar notions of the desert’s role in purification, usually out of fear of Judgment Day. Abba Timothy becomes an anchorite fearing eternal punishment.\textsuperscript{109} Timothy’s preoccupation with his eschatological future,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{103} Mt 16:24; \textit{History of the Monks of Upper Egypt}, ch 5. This is a theme Bede also emphasizes in his allegorical exegesis of the story of Lot and his wife in Genesis. Lot’s wife, who disobeyed God and turned back toward the burning city, faced destruction for her wavering while Lot, in contrast, remains steadfast in his renunciation and survives. Bede, \textit{On Genesis}, Gn 19:26.
\textsuperscript{104} VA 20.
\textsuperscript{105} VA 17. Though not citing it directly, this statement is undoubtedly inspired at least in part by Mt 19:20, ‘And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.’
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Life of Onnophrius}, 10.
\textsuperscript{107} ‘Matoes 13’ in \textit{The Sayings of the Desert Fathers}.
\textsuperscript{108} ‘Matoes 13’ in \textit{The Sayings of the Desert Fathers}.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Life of Onnophrius}, 6.
\end{flushleft}
particularly Judgment Day and hell, produces sufficient fear to drive him into the desert. As with so many desert monks, his focus on the End dictates his actions in the present.

Antony encourages his disciples to think constantly about the End, highlighting the Biblical message of life’s brevity – a message later Irish peregrini emphasize. Just as Jesus’ disciples believe that they live in the ‘last days,’ the desert fathers also remain aware of both the end of the world and the end of their lives. Abba Sisoes recounts a story of three brothers who press him concerning future judgment. The first asks, ‘How shall I save myself from the river of fire?’ Another brother inquires, ‘Father, how can I be saved from the gnashing of teeth and the worm which does not die?’ The last brother pleads for help ‘…for the remembrance of the outer darkness is killing me.’ These questions show the constant awareness that desert seekers have of Judgment Day. Abba Arsenius reminds his listeners, ‘We will be judged before the terrible seat of judgment’ and affirms his fear of death by stating, ‘…the fear which is mine at this hour has been with me ever since I became a monk.’ Theophilus remarks that Abba Arsenius is blessed, ‘…because [he] has always had this hour in mind.’ Another elder exhorts, ‘We ought to live as having to give an account to God of our way of life every day.’ One ascetic suggests a monk enclose himself in a tomb ‘…so that at all times you will think that death is near.’ Evagrius encourages

---

110 VA 19.
111 For instance, ‘All men are like grass, and their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall….Surely the people are grass.’ Isaiah 40:7, quoted again in I Pt 1:24 and, ‘What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.’ Jas 4:14.
113 For instance, Acts 2:17.
114 Dn 7:10.
115 Mt 8:12; Is 66:24, Mk 9:48.
120 The location of an ascetic in tombs is reminiscent of Antony’s initial desert retreat in VA 8. ‘John Colobos 34’ footnote 8 in Burton-Christie, Word in the Desert, p 208.
monks to think constantly of death and eternal damnation. The desert fathers' eschatological preoccupation that urges their lifelong flights into the desert will find significant theological parallels in the Irish *peregrini*.

Constant awareness of imminent death and judgment facilitates focus on the immediate necessity of purification. If the concept of transcendent prayer is too abstract for novices, the fear of death and hope of reward provide suitable motivation. Evagrius states, ‘Always keep your death in mind and do not forget the eternal judgment; then there will be no fault in your soul.’ Evagrius links eschatological awareness with sinlessness, a relationship critical in the Irish understanding of *peregrinatio*. Abba Ammonas, too, believes keeping the End in mind encourages concern for actions. He states, ‘The monk ought to give himself up at all times to accusing his own soul, saying, “Alas for me! How shall I stand before the judgment seat of Christ?”’ With thoughts always on the End, the desert fathers' eschatology compels them to renounce all and follow God into the wilderness.

While many retreat to purify themselves for eternal salvation, others seek to anticipate their heavenly reward on earth. The highest prize for ascetics is the euphoria of pure prayer. Believing Jesus’ promise, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, *for they will see God,*’ means a vision on earth, monks toil in their ascetical exercises to purify themselves to attain a glimpse of God. Purity of heart, that is freedom from sin, requires confrontation with vice as God cannot tolerate impurity. Undefiled prayer

---

121 Fear does not mar all consideration of the End. Evagrius, like Antony, encourages, ‘Consider the good things in store for the righteous: confidence in the face of God the Father and His Son…the kingdom of heaven, and the gifts of that realm, joy and beatitude.’ (‘Evagrius 1’ translated in Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, p 184.) The one who remains faithful through life will reap many rewards at the End and escape the torment promised to those who ignore the Biblical warnings.


124 Mt 5:8 NIV, emphasis added.


126 The goal of a monk, according to Cassian (see Coll. 1-2).

127 Is 59: 1-2, ‘Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.’
takes many years of sacrifice to achieve.\textsuperscript{128} The reward for this dedication, however, is both eternal with the hope of salvation and earthly as the aspirant will ‘see God.’ The vision of God available through pure prayer offers a foretaste of heaven – a glimpse of their eschatological future\textsuperscript{129} - where the faithful will ceaselessly be united with and see God.

Pure prayer is central to monastic perfection as ‘…by its very nature the spirit is made to pray.’\textsuperscript{130} Evagrius places such great emphasis on undistracted prayer that he rewords Matthew 19:21 to say, ‘Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and take up your cross so that you can pray without distraction.’\textsuperscript{131} He cites the end result of renunciation as ‘praying without distraction.’ Evagrius is clear – pure prayer in which the monk experiences a foretaste of heaven is the reason for ascesis. This anticipation of their eschatological future inspires the ascetics towards their goal. Abba Moses explains,

For its [purity of heart] sake the hunger of fasting does not weary us, the exhaustion of keeping vigil delights us, and the continual reading and meditating on Scripture does not sate us…. for its sake…you…spurned the affection of relatives, despised your homeland and the delights of the world and have journeyed…in order to come to us….living harshly in the desert.\textsuperscript{132}

The desert promises a wearisome life, but the monk’s eschatological aspirations prove sufficiently inspirational.

While the greatest rewards come at death, monks strive to achieve a foretaste of their eschatological destiny while in the body. With purity of heart the ‘mind…may not

\textsuperscript{128} Palladius reports that as he neared death, Evagrius said, ‘This is the third year that I am not tormented by carnal desires’ – this after a life of such toil and labor and continual prayer!’ Palladius, \textit{Lausiac History}, Trans. R. Meyer (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1965), 38.13.

\textsuperscript{129} Rv 21:3; 22:4.


\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 17, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Coll.} 1.2.3. Abba Moses repeats this same type of explanation several times in the first conference, highlighting its importance to the monastic vocation. See \textit{Coll.} 1.5.3; 1.17.2.
taste earthly things but contemplate heavenly ones.” Abba Paphnutius explains that during the highest state of prayer the mind,

will have passed over…to those things which are invisible thanks to ceaseless meditation….it will be seized by such an ecstasy that it will not only not hear any voices corporeally or be busied with seeing the image of present things but will not even notice with the eyes of the flesh bulky items and looming objects that happen to be nearby.

The ascetic is only in this world bodily – the mind and spirit already experience heavenly delights. Transcendent prayer takes the renunciate mentally and spiritually out of the world. Divine contemplation attained after the purification of vices offers the closest one can be to God while still in corporal form, a preview of one's eschatological future.

In Egypt, Cassian and Germanus learn under anchorites who, according to Abba Piamun, imitate:

John the Baptist, who spent his whole life in the desert, and of Elijah and Elisha and the others whom the Apostle recalls thus: ‘They went about in sheepskin and goatskin, in distress, afflicted, needy, the world unworthy of them, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and caverns of the earth.’

Abba Piamun, placing contemporary desert ascetics in the same tradition as the Hebrews 11 *peregrini*, links Irish *peregrinatio* and the quest for the desert. Additionally, Cassian and Germanus state their travels are, ‘…for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.’ Abba Moses explains the kingdom of heaven is the ‘end of our profession’ but it is only attainable through ‘purity of heart’ which ‘has not undeservedly been called holiness.’ Cassian and Germanus seek Egypt to increase

133 *Coll.* 1.17.2.
134 *Coll.* 3.7.3.
135 This state, while humans are bound to their mortal flesh, will be impossible to maintain perfectly (*Coll.* 1.13.1). The flesh is susceptible to distractions and sin. The best a believer can hope to experience is an imperfect communion with the Lord until death, when the soul unites with the Lord in ‘Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem…’ (*Heb* 12:22-3; *Coll.* 14.8.9-10).
136 *Coll.* 18.6.2; *Heb* 11:37-8.
137 *Coll.* 1.3.
138 *Coll.* 1.4.3, 1.5.2.
their spiritual perfection to gain eschatological rewards.\textsuperscript{139} This is important in understanding the Irish impetus for \textit{peregrinatio}. Importantly, those whom Cassian and Germanus wish to emulate are men who withdraw to the desert to perfect holiness and seek encounters with God in anticipation of their future life.\textsuperscript{140} Their motivation in their own desert retreats is a renunciation of the world in pursuit of God – with whom they hope to be united eternally after death and in part while on earth.

In another conference, Paphnutius praises Cassian and Germanus’ journey ‘because [they] had left [their] homes, and had visited so many countries \textit{out of love for the Lord…’}\textsuperscript{141} Paphnutius himself lives a life similar to the Irish \textit{peregrini}. After overcoming his vices, Cassian states that Paphnutius:

\begin{quote}
\ldots strove to penetrate the remote parts of the desert. Thus, no longer held back by any human companionship, he would more easily be united with the Lord to whom…he longed to be inseparably joined…in his desire…for that ceaseless and divine \textit{theoria}…he penetrated still vaster and more inaccessible solitudes…There he was believed…to enjoy the daily companionship of angels.\textsuperscript{142}
\end{quote}

As Paphnutius progresses spiritually, marked by further withdrawal into the desert, his companionship changes from earthly to heavenly. Having purified himself, he enjoys the company of angels, an experience anticipating his companionship in heaven.

The ascetics’ liminality permeates desert literature.\textsuperscript{143} Athanasius describes Antony as ‘almost hidden in another world.’\textsuperscript{144} In similar fashion, Onnophrius claims that in the desert, ‘I became like those whose minds travel to another world.’\textsuperscript{145} He elaborates his liminal experience by explaining that after his arduous ascetic disciplines,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Coll.} 11.1.  \\
\textsuperscript{140} Cassian explains the saints Paul and Antony’s reasons for desert withdrawal come ‘from a desire for loftier heights of perfection and divine contemplation’ (\textit{Coll.} 18.6.).  \\
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Coll.} 3.2; emphasis added as the Irish \textit{peregrini} often cited this as their reason for \textit{peregrinatio}.  \\
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Coll.} 3.1.2.  \\
\textsuperscript{143} Victor Turner describes liminal figures, or ‘liminaries’ as being ‘betwixt-and – between established states of political-jural structure. They evade ordinary cognitive classification, too, for they are neither-this-nor-that... here-nor-there, one-thing-nor-the-other…’ (V. Turner, ‘Variations on a Theme of Liminality,’ in \textit{Secular Ritual}, eds. S.F. Moore and B. Meyerhof [Amsterdam: Assen, 1974], p 37.  \\
\textsuperscript{144} VA 93.  \\
\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Life of Onnophrius}, 13.
\end{flushright}
God ‘had his holy angels serve me.’ Ministered to by angels, he anticipates his eternal life and explains when desert dwellers seek company,

...they are taken up into the heavenly places where they see all the saints… afterward they return to their bodies….If they travel to another world through the joy which they have seen, they do not even remember that this world exists.

Antony experiences similar companionship as angels carry him to heaven bestowing upon him understanding not afforded to those on earth. In the desert he also speaks with Jesus, receives visions of spiritual truths, and is personally instructed by God in spiritual matters. Jerome writes that the desert-dwelling Paul of Thebes lives ‘in Paradise,’ a state that has little to do with the physical attractiveness of his residence. This paradise is an environment conducive to otherworldly spirituality where he enjoys frequent communion with God. Another desert father, Paternuthius, experiences a vision that transports him into the heavens where he witnesses the eschatological rewards awaiting ascetics. He then ascends to ‘paradise’ where a number of saints also dwell. There, he gathers a fig from the paradisal fruit to take back to his brethren.

Life in the wilderness is remote from men but far from lonely, for there monks converse with God and his angels and taste the fruits of paradise that will come at death, anticipating their eternal reward. Their liminality, including companionship with angels and bringing fruit from paradise, also features prominently in the lives of Irish peregrini, placing them in the same ascetic spirit as the desert dwellers. While their

---

147 _Life of Onnophrius_, 17.
148 _VA_ 10.
149 _VA_ 65, 66.
150 _VA_ 66.
151 ‘Life of Paul’ in _Early Christian Lives_, Ch 13. This will be henceforth abbreviated VP.
153 For angelic interaction, see for example _Vita Columbae_ Book 3; Muirchú; _Life of Patrick_, 1.7, 1.12; _Life of Brendan_ opening chapter; for bringing back fruit, see _Navigatio Sancti Brendani_, Ch 28.
bodies reside on earth, their minds are literally in ‘another world’ as they glimpse their eschatological rewards.\footnote{Life of Onnophrius, 13, 17; VA 93.}

Eucharius of Lyon, an associate of Cassian and known in Ireland, offers further insight into the theology of the peregrini.\footnote{Cassian dedicates Conférences 11-17 to Eucharius and Honoratus. That Eucharius was known in early medieval Ireland, see T. O’Loughlin, Journeys on the Edges: The Celtic Tradition (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd Ltd., 2005), p 40.} Calling the desert ‘the temple of our God without walls,’\footnote{Eucharius, ‘In Praise of the Desert’ in The Lives of the Jura Fathers, Trans. T. Vivian, K. Vivian, and J. Russell (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1999), Ch 3.} he believes the desert is the ideal place for interaction with God, writing,

Very often he [God] has let himself be seen there by his saints…Although God is present everywhere…his preferred place is the solitudes…of the desert.\footnote{Eucharius, In Praise of the Desert, 3.} Eucharius cites Jesus, who though perfectly innocent, seeks the desert and advises modern monks to do likewise.\footnote{Eucharius, In Praise of the Desert, 22.} He extols the desert's purifying benefit writing that the Israelites’ time in the desert is in part ‘to be liberated from Egypt and set free from sinful conduct.’ The reason to confront this sin is clear - ‘They fled into the solitary places and prepared to meet the God who had freed them from slavery.’\footnote{Eucharius, In Praise of the Desert, 7.} Here Eucharius connects overcoming sin with preparation to see God in the same way as the desert fathers. Freedom from sin is the essential first step for the highest earthly pursuit - seeing God. However, before one retreats to the desert, he or she ought to renounce the world.\footnote{This advice, of course, permeates the literature of the desert ascetics and Cassian.} Citing Moses and the burning bush, Evagrius teaches that the desert is holy ground and demands complete renunciation so that the monk can be free to follow God.\footnote{Eucharius, In Praise of the Desert, 8.}

Calling desert seekers the ‘true Israel,’ Eucharius compares the monks’ retreat from the world with the Israelites’ freedom from Egypt. This powerful image helps
explain the Irish practice of *peregrinatio*. Taken as a metaphor for the spiritual life, Egypt symbolizes wealth, power, and slavery. God delivers his people, but before they can enter the Promised Land, they first endure many trials as they discover God's character. Eucharius writes,

> Could the children of Israel not have come to the Promised Land without first living in the desert? …[From] the desert, the road lies always open to our true homeland….Let those who strive to become citizens of Heaven be guests first of the desert.\(^{162}\)

The location of the Israelites’ forty year refinement is the desert – out of Egypt but not quite the Promised Land – they await just on the threshold of their ‘true homeland,’ anticipating their land to come.\(^{163}\) Eucharius then interprets Christians as the 'new Israel' who undergo a similar liberation from their Egypt – the world - to journey into the desert places to await the Promised Land. Eucharius teaches:

> You are now the true Israel who gazes upon God in his heart, who has just been freed from the dark Egypt of this world, who has crossed the saving waters in which the enemy drowned, who follows the burning light of faith in the desert… Because you keep company with Israel in the desert, you will certainly enter the Promised Land with Jesus.\(^{164}\)

The desert’s location between heaven and earth permeates Eucharius’ work. Of desert dwellers, he notes John and Macarius and the many others ‘whose way of life was like that of heaven while they lived in the desert.’ Eucharius explains:

> They drew as close to God as divine law permits. They were admitted into the counsels of divine providence in the highest degree permitted to those clothed in mortal flesh. Their minds fixed on Heaven, they were introduced into its mysteries…. In their ideal, solitary environment, they eventually attained the stage of being already in heaven in spirit though their bodies were still on earth.\(^{165}\)

---

163 This has striking parallels with the Hebrews 11 *peregrini* who reside in the wilderness looking forward to their eschatological rewards.
He, too, believes these ascetics are in ‘another world.’ As the desert ascetics become ever more holy, their relationship with God becomes increasingly intimate until only their physical bodies are on earth – all else already enjoys heaven. This anticipation of heaven compels many peregrini to venture into lands unknown. Focused on their eschatological destiny, they rid themselves of vices to draw as near as possible to God until their death.

Jerome affirms Eucharius’ teaching and believes that greater holiness requires literal removal from the world. He recounts that he left his home ‘for the kingdom of heaven’s sake,’ part of a journey he calls ‘peregrinatio.’ As he progresses spiritually, he retreats to the desert where he lives in misery, but perseveres due to ‘my fear of hell.’ This same preoccupation no doubt inspired him to spend time in Rome’s catacombs, reminding him of the horrors of hell. The desert acts as his ‘house of correction’ where he cleanses himself of vices and looks towards heaven and declares he felt himself ‘among angelic hosts’ - a companionship anticipating his heavenly life. Jerome, urged by his eschatological outlook, endures the desert to prepare for eternity. His increasing holiness, like the desert fathers, allows him an intimate spiritual encounter.

As with the desert fathers before him and the Irish to come, the peregrinus Abraham also proves influential. After exhorting Eustochium, a prominent desert mother, to follow Abraham’s example, Jerome teaches her that the soul should ‘go out

---

167 ‘Letter to Rufinus’ in Epistulae Documenta Catholica Omnia <http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0347-0420_Hieronymus_Epistulae_LT.pdf> 3.1. It should be noted that Jerome does call other of his journeys ‘peregrinatio.’ For instance, see ‘Ad Niceam Hypodiacaum Aquileia’ – ‘inter delicias patriae et communis, quam habuimus, peregrinationis aliquando suspuria.’
168 Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, 7.
169 Jerome, In Ezechielem c 40 v 5; This mirrors the advice the desert ascetic John Colobo gave to his disciple to live among the tombs (see footnote 44), and Antony’s residence among the tombs (VA 8).
170 Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, 7.
171 Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, 7.
from its own land and from its kindred…and should dwell in the land of the living.’

When one heeds God’s call to Abraham to leave his or her homeland for the sake of God, he or she will, while still in the flesh, be able to see the holiness of the Lord. In this land ‘…you may walk always in Paradise.’ Jerome teaches that this paradise is a spiritual landscape - a liminal space between heaven and earth where the ascetic enjoys a paradise granted only to God’s holy ones. Jerome describes the ascetic Bonosus’ dwelling - a rocky island surrounded by wild seas – where he climbs ‘the ladder foreshown in Jacob’s dream,’ that is, a ladder ascending to heaven filled with angels, a sign of his liminal existence. Here, Bonosus enjoys the company of Christ when he ‘sees the glory of God, which even the apostles saw not save in the desert.’ Jerome connects Bonosus' desert location with a supernatural vision of God. There Bonosus spends his day in monastic pursuits with the ultimate intent of entering the kingdom of heaven but more immediately, that ‘while he lingers in the island, he sees some vision such as that once seen by John.’ Jerome understands Bonosus’ pursuit as eschatologically-focused on eternity while enjoying glimpses of heaven on earth.

Peregrinatio is no mere metaphor for the Christian journey, nor is it simply an act of detachment. The peregrini are on a spiritual journey towards their eternal destiny that often has physical movement as a component. Peregrini seek a location suitable for spiritual refinement and divine contemplation in preparation for and in anticipation of eternity. Early Christians do not give extensive details about the physical features of the desert. The desert as a geographical place is secondary to its function as a spiritual location of divine revelation, and in this way the desert can be transposed into an ocean, mountain, forest, or mystically, an interior state of detachment. It is with this

---

understanding of the desert as a spiritual landscape that allows the remote Irish monks to participate in this desert spirituality which they embrace with great vigor.

Renunciation is merely the first step of *peregrinatio*. After leaving the world, monks purify their souls in preparation for the imminent Judgment Day when they believe all will give an account of their sins. Fear of hell and hope of heaven remain fixed in their minds as they know death is ready to take them at any moment. The soul’s purification allows for an ever-increasing knowledge of God, unavailable to those hindered by sin. Contemplation of God comes in the form of transcendent, soul-illuminating prayers, visions, and a spiritual understanding of the Bible and matters of eternal significance only available to those who have cast off the shackles of their fleshly self. As ascetics progress further into the depths of God, their awareness of and interaction with the things of the earth decrease as they are mentally and spiritually already enjoying, as much as possible on earth, their eschatological destiny in heaven.
Chapter 4: The Insular Theological Motivation for Peregrinatio

The Irish, like the Biblical figures and desert fathers before them, viewed the wilderness as the ideal location for spiritual encounter and sought the ‘desert’ through *peregrinatio* with enthusiasm.\(^{178}\) Numerous *peregrini* appear in Irish sources, and undoubtedly more existed whose names went unrecorded as they sought islands, forests, and foreign countries. Seeking the ‘desert,’ however, forms only one of reasons for Irish *peregrinatio*. Generally speaking, Irish *peregrini* live as missionaries or ascetics (or some combination) as they prepare for future judgment and eternity. Several cases of noteworthy insular *peregrini* will be examined below to show the prevalence of the *peregrini’s* eschatological motivation. Patrick, will be considered first, along with examples in Bede's writings, followed by Columba, Columbanus, and Brendan, three of the most famous Irish *peregrini*. As the next two chapters will reveal, the motive inspiring *peregrinatio* is an eschatological orientation that focuses thoughts away from earth towards matters of the End times.

The Irish impulse to missionize derives from Jesus’ command to ‘go into all the world and preach the good news…’\(^{179}\) For many Christians, evangelism is intimately linked with eschatology. Missionaries, focused on the imminent Judgment Day, concern themselves with the eternal salvation of the unsaved. Furthermore, Christians since Jesus’ day believe that they are living in the End Times. Jesus explains that in the last days, ‘… this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world…and then the end will come.’\(^{180}\) The early Irish believe that before Jesus’ second coming, all nations will hear the gospel, directly connecting missionary activity with the Eschaton.


\(^{179}\) Mk 16:15.

\(^{180}\) Mt 24:14, emphasis added.
One of the most famous *peregrini* in Irish history is just such an eternally-focused missionary.

The first recorded instance of *peregrinatio* in Ireland is Patrick, who despite being a Roman Briton, lives most of his life on Irish soil. Patrick’s life among the Irish, which he describes as ‘*peregrinatio mea,*’ requires him ‘… to leave my country and parents’ to live in Ireland where he is ‘an alien among the barbarians and a wanderer from the love of God’ (*proselitus et profuga ob amorem Dei*). Patrick is a stranger (*proselitus*, equivalent to a *peregrinus*) and a wanderer (*profuga*) among a foreign people, in order to ‘baptize people, ordain clergy, or complete people….for [the Irish people’s] salvation.’ He admits his desire to return to Britain or go to Gaul but God did not permit his departure. To Patrick, it is the Lord’s will he evangelize the Irish until his death. Patrick’s *peregrinatio* is overseas, lifelong, and evangelical. Patrick’s purpose in Ireland is not a personal quest in the manner of the desert ascetics – that is expressly forbidden to him. He is there to convert the nations for he sees himself living ‘in the last days.’ Patrick’s concept of *peregrinatio* is strongly eschatological in orientation – he believes by evangelizing the ends of the earth he will hasten the second coming of Jesus. Surprisingly few Irish *peregrini* consider their journey one undertaken for the sole purpose of evangelism; rather, they sought the wilderness for the sake of preparing themselves for the End.

---

182 Patrick, *Confessio*, Ch 36.
186 Patrick, *Confessio*, Ch 51.
187 Patrick, *Confessio*, Ch 43.
188 Patrick, *Confessio*, Ch 43.
In Irish influenced Northumbria, Bede uses the term ‘peregrinus’ and ‘peregrinatio’ nineteen times, mostly to describe ascetic, overseas exile in preparation for heaven.\(^{190}\) Bede cites the influence of early Christian exemplars on the *peregrini*.\(^{191}\) Bede’s accounts of Egbert and Wictbert, Anglo-Saxon *peregrini* in Ireland, prove instructive.\(^{192}\) Egbert ‘lived the monastic life in Ireland…constantly occupied in prayer, fasting and meditation on Scriptures.’\(^{193}\) Wictbert ‘lived the life of a hermit in great perfection for many years as an exile (*peregrinus*) in Ireland.’\(^{194}\) Bede adds that Egbert works there ‘to attain his heavenly home.’\(^{195}\) His *peregrinatio* serves to increase his holiness for eschatological rewards. Egbert remains an ‘exile for God’s sake’ (*peregrinus pro Domino*) until the end of his life.\(^{196}\) Wictbert, too, remains in permanent, self-imposed exile. Both *peregrini* spend their *peregrinatio* perfecting their spiritual lives through asceticism,\(^{197}\) a desire rooted in their eschatological orientation as they prepare for Judgment Day.\(^{198}\)

Their accounts are exemplary in other respects as well. Both Egbert and Wictbert’s life show the relationship between the *peregrinus* and mission work typical of Irish *peregrini*. During Egbert’s *peregrinatio*, he decides to evangelize in Germany. Bede does not use ‘*peregrinatio*’ to describe this mission-inspired travel, opting instead for ‘*circumnavigata*.’ If Egbert’s mission work fails, he proposes to visit (*venire*) holy

\(^{190}\) Bede used ‘*peregrinatio*’ to describe Gregory’s preaching assignment to Augustine (*HE* 1.23, 1.25). This usage of *peregrini* for missionaries is unique within Bede for while his *HE* contains accounts of evangelism, he does not use the word ‘*peregrinatio*’ in any form to describe such travel. Their evangelism is still eschatological in motivation. Augustine, as encouraged by Pope Gregory, is working for rewards that will be realized in heaven after death. Twice in a short letter to Augustine’s brethren Gregory mentions that the result of their labor will be manifested in their ‘heavenly home’ (*HE* 1.23). It is the promise of what is to come in the End which should inspire them.

\(^{191}\) Bede, *HE*, 4.3.

\(^{192}\) Bede uses ‘*peregrinus*’ twice to describe Egbert and once for Wictbert’s time in Ireland.

\(^{193}\) Bede, *HE*, 4.3.

\(^{194}\) Bede, *HE*, 5.9.

\(^{195}\) Bede, *HE*, 5.9.

\(^{196}\) Bede, *HE*, 4.3.

\(^{197}\) An important idea that will be examined further in chapter five.

\(^{198}\) Like the desert fathers, Bede notes their anticipatory blessings which provide them with a foretaste of heaven on earth. During Egbert’s *peregrinatio*, he saw visions of angels carrying souls to heaven (Bede, *HE*, 4.3). Such visions, evidence of advanced holiness, gave him a supernatural understanding of the spiritual world normally only afforded after death. In the same way as the desert fathers before him, Egbert experiences glimpses of his eschatological future during his *peregrinatio*. 
sites in Rome.\textsuperscript{199} Again, Bede does not consider this travel \textit{peregrinatio} and doubts the necessity of such journeys. Wictbert, too, travels (\textit{perveniens}) to Frisia to evangelize but after experiencing failure ‘returned to his beloved land of exile (\textit{dilectae locum peregrinationis})\textsuperscript{200} where he resumes his eremitical life. Bede calls Wictbert’s time in Ireland ‘\textit{peregrinatio}’ twice, but not his missionary voyages. Bede's understanding of \textit{peregrinatio} is an ascetic detachment away from one’s homeland in order to live an ascetical life in preparation for the End.

Bede praises \textit{peregrini} who depart for the sake of holiness in anticipation of Judgment Day and eternal life – a response to their eschatological preoccupation. Bede identifies two holy women, Ethelberga and Saethryd, as \textit{'peregrina'} for their life spent overseas in Gaul focusing on their preparation for judgment and eternity.\textsuperscript{201} Bede also extols Abbess Hilda, ‘an exile for our Lord’s sake’ (\textit{peregrinam pro Domino}) in Gaul.\textsuperscript{202} Hilda despises her nobility, leaves her family, and travels to Gaul as a \textit{peregrina} so that ‘she might the more easily attain her eternal heavenly home.’\textsuperscript{203} Hilda’s renunciation of earthly ties and departure to foreign lands (\textit{peregrinandi}) free her to direct her attention to her eschatological future.

The eagerness to experience God in the wilderness finds a fervent acceptance in Ireland based upon the Biblical and post-apostolic precedent and native Irish social organization. That the Irish social and political structure is well-suited for this expression of asceticism is well-argued. Central to early Irish society is kinship which defends and cares for the members of its kin-group. To go outside of a kindred’s territory exposes a person to rivals. Within one’s own territory, a person is afforded rights and protection; to venture out of one’s territory equates to loss of legal rights and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{199} Bede, \textit{HE}, 5.9.  \\
\textsuperscript{200} Bede, \textit{HE}, 5.9.  \\
\textsuperscript{201} Bede, \textit{HE}, 3.8.  \\
\textsuperscript{202} Bede, \textit{HE}, 4.23.  \\
\textsuperscript{203} Bede, \textit{HE}, 4.23. 
\end{footnotesize}
social status. The *peregrinus* faces very real danger by seeking a life overseas or even within other territories in Ireland.

Aware of this danger, Columba, an Irish *‘peregrinus pro Christo’*, leaves Ireland for Britain in 563. As with all early Irish *peregrini*, Columba’s *peregrinatio* means a loss of status, protection, and rights – all that keeps him attached to the world. Prompting such a drastic act is a mindset focusing on the eschatological event of Judgment Day and its attendant rewards or punishments. Columba’s student Colmán mac Béognae explains that ‘fear with action…are contained in holiness.’ For the Irish, fear itself is of limited value – it must be accompanied by attendant deeds, and *peregrinatio* represents the most dramatic act. Columban monk Dallán explains that this type of fear, specifically ‘fear of Hell’ prompts Columba to make his *peregrinatio* to Britain. The early Irish interpret *peregrinatio* as a physical journey for the sake of their eschatological future.

Columba’s preoccupation with eschatology permeates the literature and artwork produced in Columban monasteries which contains many references to hell, heaven, Judgment Day, and God’s impending wrath. A poem long ascribed to Columba, the *Altus Prosator*, details thoughts he believes everyone ought to contemplate – ‘the day of the Lord…is at hand.’ The Lord's Second Coming is soon and it will be ‘a day of anger and vindication, of darkness and of cloud…. / a day also of distress, of sorrow and sadness…’ At this terrifying sight,

We shall stand trembling before the Lord’s judgment seat and we shall render an account of all our deeds…

---

204 *Vita Columbae*, second preface.
205 This is in contrast with Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* understanding of *peregrinatio* as being a journey all Christians are on as they await Judgment Day.
208 This recalls the preoccupation with death and judgment found in the desert fathers.
We will break out into most bitter weeping and sobbing, the possibility of repentance being taken away.\textsuperscript{212}

The awareness that imminent death, Judgment, and eternity has on Iona’s patron saint – the community’s exemplar of holy living – has a profound influence on Iona’s theological milieu. Columba presents an unnerving picture of what is to come, when even the most pious will stand before the throne of God, trembling at the weight of their guilt. The consequences for inaction are dire, and he vividly describes the horrors of hell.\textsuperscript{213} Not all is frightful, however, for he describes the joyful worship of heavenly creatures in front of God’s throne, the reward, as the poet states for those who are ‘despisers of this present world…’\textsuperscript{214} Loving the present world – represented in attachments to kin, wealth, and land – makes one unworthy of heaven. Only renouncing this life, most completely expressed through \textit{peregrinatio}, begins one on the path to heaven. But lest one get caught up in the joys of heaven, Columba reminds his audience in the last stanza, ‘The raging anger of fire will devour the adversaries [of God]…’\textsuperscript{215} Columba leaves a frightening image in his audience’s mind to rouse them to action for the sake of their eternal well-being. With the reality of the Eschaton on the mind, one needs to act now before it is too late.

The physical act of leaving one's homeland is just the first step; the \textit{peregrinus} lives a life of acetic discipline thereafter. Columba performs fasts and vigils tirelessly, filling him with the Holy Spirit who only comes to a ‘pure heart.’\textsuperscript{216} He maintains his holiness through ‘training in the Christian life’ where he wages an interior battle against flesh.\textsuperscript{217} Beccán writes: ‘He broke passions, brought to ruin secure prisons; / Colum

\textsuperscript{216} VC, 2\textsuperscript{nd} preface.
\textsuperscript{217} ‘Fo Réir Choluimb’ in \textit{Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery}, § 12-3.
Cille overcame them with bright actions.\textsuperscript{218} The bright actions of ascetical discipline allow Columba the holiness for him to go to heaven eternally but also experience a foretaste of heavenly life while on earth.

As with the desert fathers, \textit{peregrinatio} offers its eschatologically-focused \textit{peregrini} a glimpse of their future rewards. In the desert literature, supernatural knowledge of God and companionship of angels marks the liminal status of the ascetic – a person who in the flesh already enjoys, in part, their heavenly home. The Irish \textit{peregrini}, likewise, are able to experience heavenly blessings on earth. Adomnán says because of Columba’s ascetical lifestyle, ‘though placed on earth, [he was] fit for the life of heaven.’\textsuperscript{219} Dallán Forgaill praises Columba as having risen ‘to exalted companionship,’\textsuperscript{220} and because of his holiness, God blesses him with special divine revelation.\textsuperscript{221} Dallán extols Columba’s unique relationship with God that allows him access to divine understanding usually only accessible once one is in Heaven.

Adomnán confirms Columba's special relationship to God:

But from the house rays of brilliant light could be seen…. He was also heard singing spiritual chants of a kind never heard before. And...he was able to see openly revealed many secrets that had been hidden since the world began, while all that was most dark and difficult in the sacred Scriptures lay open, plain and clearer than light...\textsuperscript{222}

During Columba’s time of instruction, God revealed ‘...a great number of mysteries, both of ages past and future, unknown to other men, together with some interpretations

\textsuperscript{218} 'Tiugraind Beccáin' in \textit{Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery}, § 3.
\textsuperscript{219} VC, 2nd preface.
\textsuperscript{220} 'Amra Choluimb Chille,' \textit{Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery}, § II.1.
\textsuperscript{221} 'Amra Choluimb Chille,' \textit{Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery}, § IV.7-8, 10.
\textsuperscript{222} VC 3.18. Significantly, Adomnán includes that Columba’s ‘most pure heart’ received these teachings – the ‘purity of heart’ that Cassian links with seeing God after the purging of sin. Because of his renunciation and purification, Columba had the opportunity to experience the divine in an unprecedented way. After three days, the revelation ended, highlighting that this was a temporary, imperfect experience as Columba is still bound to the flesh but did offer a foretaste of his heavenly home.
of the sacred books.' Adomnán makes clear that this is a sign of Columba’s advanced holiness that allowed him this extraordinary, anticipatory relationship with God – one most can only hope for after death.

As found in desert literature, friendship with angels signals both the monk’s liminality and his or her earthly participation in future delights in the present age. In the Bible, angels appear infrequently to humans yet are innumerable in accounts describing heaven – the eschatological destination of the peregrini. Columba’s disciples attest to his frequent interaction with angels. Dallán recounts laconically that ‘he [Columba] spoke with an angel’ and Beccán states that he works ‘with angels’ will.’ Adomnán reserves the final book of the Vita Columbae, a vita organized around increasing demonstrations of Columba’s holiness, to feature the appearance of angels in Columba’s midst. Their appearance is not unusual for hagiography – the uniqueness comes from the frequency and intimacy Columba enjoys with the heavenly beings. They are not mere messengers or advisers, they appear as companions.

One evening, Columba gives strict orders that no one follow him out of the monastery. One disobedient monk recounts:

…holy angels, the citizens of the heavenly kingdom…began to gather around the holy man as he prayed. After they had conversed a little with St Columba, the heavenly crowd – as though they could feel that they were being spied on – quickly returned to the heights of heaven.

Importantly, that the monk can see the angels is due to God’s desire to spread Columba’s fame, not because the monk merits such a privilege. The angels leave Columba after perceiving that someone unworthy intrudes. Columba’s special ability to see heavenly beings is unique because he can see them ‘directly and fully’ but others

---

223 VC 3.18. Another important aspect of this type of spiritual experience that will be noted in the discussion on the Navigatio Sancti Brendani is that this is not an experience for everyone.
224 I Cor 13:12.
225 For instance: Mt 18:10; Rev 5:9-13.
228 VC 3.16.
saw them only indirectly and in part.’ Columba’s holiness allows him to commune with celestial company not usually granted until one enters heaven.

Adomnán implores his reader to note the frequency Columba interacts with angels. Their unique relationship highlights the liminal status of this peregrinus – he is in the world but not wholly of the world. Colmán mac Béognae writes such men as Columba have ‘one of his hands…towards Heaven, the other towards earth.’ He enjoys a foretaste of the blessed afterlife – the Promised Land of the New Jerusalem – where multitudes of angels spend eternity worshiping God. Columba's peregrinatio centers around his eschatological theology – Judgment Day is near and one must immediately prepare. Through this, the holiness he attains during his peregrinatio affords him anticipatory glimpses of his eschatological destiny.

Columbanus, a contemporary of Columba, likewise undertakes peregrinatio, desiring to journey overseas to obey the command given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1. At God’s prompting, Columbanus departs for Brittany with his companions. They soon travel to Gaul where Columbanus witness dramatic events demonstrating God's favor for Columbanus’ peregrinatio. At one point, Columbanus faces deportation back to Ireland, but God miraculously intercedes. God’s message is clear – Columbanus is to live his peregrinatio overseas for life, where he can focus on preparation for the End.

---

229 VC second preface to Book 3.
230 VC 3.16.
231 ‘Alphabet of Devotion’ in Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery, p 204.
232 Heb 1:6; Rev 7:11.
234 Peregrinatio being God-initiated is a constant theme in Irish literature.
235 Vita Columbani, Ch 11.
236 Vita Columbani, Ch 47.
Jonas provides evidence for the motivation of Columbanus’ *peregrinatio* that has little to do with the mission work in which he periodically engages.\textsuperscript{237} Noting that he follows Abraham’s precedent to depart, he seeks a higher state of *peregrinatio* than simply leaving his home after meeting with an unnamed holy woman in Ireland who herself wishes for a higher form of *peregrinatio* (*potioris peregrinationis locus*).\textsuperscript{238} She admonishes Columbanus for remaining in Ireland,\textsuperscript{239} urging him to think of his eternal future.\textsuperscript{240} Columbanus sets out on his *peregrinatio*, focusing his thoughts on Judgment and eternal damnation – his eschatological future.

Columbanus, like Columba, understands the physical journeying to be only the first step toward their eschatological goal. In the *Regula*, he explains the relationship between *peregrinatio* and asceticism, stating:

> Monks…[ought to take] leave of all earthly things….Thus nakedness and disdain of riches are the first perfection of the monk, but the second is the purging of vices, the third, the most perfect and perpetual delight in God and unceasing love for the things of God which follows on the forgetting of earthly things…\textsuperscript{241}

Columbanus reveals that earthly renunciation is only the first step in a monk’s quest – it must be followed by ascetic discipline in order to achieve the monastic goal explained in Cassian. These are steps towards holiness in order to achieve a contemplative vision of God which, as Columbanus teaches, God can be ‘at least in part be seen….he [may]
be partly seen by the pure heart.²⁴² Columbanus recognizes that this divine interaction is imperfect while one remains ‘stationed in this body of death.’²⁴³ Nevertheless the peregrinus can enjoy ‘the greatness of God’s depth…by foretaste.’²⁴⁴ This requires constant seeking; this foretaste is not available to the uncommitted. Columbanus believes the pursuit of God, inspired by one's eschatological orientation, is active. One will not happen upon God accidentally – he must be pursued. Columbanus writes:

He must be besought by us, often besought...that he would bestow even some ray of his light upon our darkness, which may shine on us in our dullness and ignorance on the dark roadway of this world, and that he would lead us to himself...

Columbanus teaches that peregrini need to seek God actively if they want to enjoy heaven by foretaste. Columbanus, like the early Church and desert fathers, sees a direct correlation between eradication of sins and the holiness necessary to enjoy God in heaven eternally and see him on earth in anticipation of the faithful's eschatological destiny. Interestingly, Columbanus explains that when he leaves Ireland ‘pro amore Christi’²⁴⁵ he means, just as Cassian explained, that this manifests itself as an active seeking to unite with God both on earth and in heaven. Anything else, Columbanus argues, will pervert God’s image, which results in ‘nothing except punishment.’²⁴⁶

Columbanus, in the same reasoning as the desert fathers, views the pursuit and perfecting of holiness as essential to Christianity, without which a Christian cannot see God.

Fortunately many of Columbanus’ own writings remain which create a more complete picture of Irish peregrinatio. Columbanus identifies himself as a ‘peregrinus’

²⁴² Columbanus, Ser. 2. This vision is ‘in proportion to the deserts of our purity.’ Columbanus, Ser. 8.
²⁴³ Columbanus, Ser. 11.
²⁴⁴ Columbanus, Ser 12.
²⁴⁵ Vita Columbani, 36.
²⁴⁶ Columbanus, Ser. 11.
twice, but he also understands that Christians are ‘peregrini’ anxious to arrive home in a manner reminiscent of Augustine’s *peregrinatio* in *De Doctrina Christiana*. Columbanus writes that human life ought ‘to be traversed and not inhabited…For a road is to be walked on and not lived in, so that they who walk upon it may dwell finally in the land that is their home.’ He encourages his monks to concern themselves with thoughts of their eschatological destinies ‘and just like pilgrims (peregrini) continuously sigh for and long for our homeland….And so, since we are travelers and pilgrims (peregrini) in this world, let us think upon the end of the road, that is our life, for the end of our way is our home.’ The *peregrini*, estranged from their heavenly homeland, concentrate their thoughts on their eschatological future so as not to miss the way.

As with the desert fathers, Columbanus encourages *peregrini* to occupy their minds with the End and to be aware of death. In quoting Scripture about the Eschaton, he admonishes, ‘Tremble, I beg you, at the gravity of the words and with your mind ever in crisis of fear and fright unceasingly meditate that terrible approach of the divine judgment…’ For Columbanus, constant thoughts of death and judgment in light of eternity put the transience of this physical world in its proper place. He instructs his audience, ‘let us know nothing more profitable…than to examine ourselves daily, every

---

249 ‘Suppose we were travelers (peregrini) who could live happily only in our homeland, and because our absence (*peregrinatio*) made us unhappy we wished to put an end to our misery and return there: we would need transport…which we could use to travel to our homeland, the object of our enjoyment. But if we were fascinated by the delights of the journey and the actual traveling, we would be perversely enjoying things we should be using; and we would be reluctant to finish our journey quickly, being ensnared in the wrong kind of pleasure and estranged from the homeland whose pleasures can make us happy. So, in this mortal life we are like travelers away from our Lord (*peregrinantes a domino*); if we wish to return to the homeland where we can be happy we must use this world, not enjoy it.’ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.4.4.
250 Columbanus, ‘Sermon 5’ in *Celtic Spirituality*.
251 Columbanus, ‘Sermon 8’ in *Celtic Spirituality*. Columbanus identifies this homeland as ‘where our Father is.’ Columbanus, Ser. 8.
252 Columbanus, Ser. 8. He reiterates this advice in another sermon. See: Columbanus, Ser. 3.
day of our life reviewing that dubious life…”²⁵³ Columbanus believes that with a mind ever focused on the End, one will be better prepared for Judgment Day.

One of the most celebrated Irish peregrini is St Brendan of Clonfert, an abbot renowned for his voyages in search of Paradise. One complexity in studying Brendan is the existence of five Latin lives and two Irish lives chronicling his voyages. For the purpose of this study, the Old Irish Betha Brénainn meic Fhinnlogha and the Navigatio Sancti Brendani (the most famous of the Brendan dossier) will be examined.²⁵⁴

In the Betha Brénainn, Brendan undergoes rigorous monastic training when he hears of the eschatological rewards for renunciation.²⁵⁵ Brendan renounces the world and seeks a land separate from men so as to focus his thoughts on eternity. The land Brendan seeks – a spiritual island as will be examined below – is attainable on earth only if the Lord allows it. But as in all the Irish literature surveyed, the peregrinus Brendan must first physically depart from his homeland in Abrahamic fashion to receive this blessing. Brendan’s theological motivation for peregrinatio is eschatological, coming from his belief in the promise of eternal reward.²⁵⁶ As in the case of Bede’s peregrini, Columba, and Columbanus, Brendan’s understanding of peregrinatio shows the highest Christian act of renunciation and greatest rewards belong to those who leave all behind and depart for a place of God’s choosing.

Before leaving Ireland, Brendan goes to Sliab Daidche where he sees an island with many angels. The author is alluding to Moses’ ascent on Mt. Nebo where he is able

²⁵³ Columbanus, Ser. 8.
²⁵⁴ The Betha Brénainn version is found in Whitley Stokes’ Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore which is likely the earlier of the two Irish lives and does not appear to be based on the Navigatio but probably closer to Brendan’s original Life, now presumably lost. For the sake of brevity, I will refer to the Voyage of Saint Brendan as the ‘Navigatio’ and the Irish Life of Brendan found in Stokes’ edition as the ‘Betha Brénainn.’ For more information on the various editions and manuscripts of the Brendan corpus, see J. Wooding, ‘The Medieval and Early Modern Cult of St Brendan,’ in Saints’ Cults in the Celtic World, Ed. S. Boardman (Boy dell 2009), pgs 182-3 especially.
²⁵⁶ In another version, he is inspired as Columbanus was by God’s summons to Abraham in Gn 12:1 and he desired to go on a pilgrimage (peregrere proficisci ardentì volebat desiderio). Both of these motivations show an interpretation of Scripture that seeks to imitate key acts of Biblical exemplars. ‘Vita Prima Sancti Brendani’ in Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae, Ed. C. Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), pgs 103-4.
to see the Promised Land. Importantly, Moses is unable to enter the Promised Land in the flesh because of his sin – the Promised Land he attains as explained in Hebrews 11 and 12 is a heavenly dwelling achievable after death. Moses can only experience the physical Promised Land in the body temporarily and imperfectly. For the Betha Brénainn author, the Land of Promise is attainable to Brendan, but like Moses, his encounter is temporary. Even though he can see the island from the mountain, it is not a place that he can reach on his own; he requires angelic assistance.

Brendan’s first voyage proves unsuccessful because he uses a boat made of ‘dead stained skins.’ Íta tells Brendan that the land he seeks is a ‘holy consecrated land, and men’s blood hath never been spilt therein.’257 She advises Brendan to build wooden boats and believes his second attempt will be successful. Interestingly, dead flesh is found unworthy of entrance into the Land of Promise for it has the taint of sin. Íta states that the land he wants to enter is holy ground. Several Biblical scenes shed light on this episode.

In Genesis 4, God makes garments of skin to replace Adam and Eve’s fig leaves. This represents the first earthly bloodshed as up until this time all animals, including Adam and Eve, were vegetarians.258 Killing animals for food does not begin until after the Fall, when death enters the world.259 Their new clothes God provides symbolizes the wages of mankind’s sin – death.260 After receiving their new garments of skin, God expels them from Paradise. In this Biblical narrative, the skin garments represent Adam and Eve’s mortality, given after they sin, and mark a drastic change in God’s relationship with mankind. Their sin, represented in their garments of flesh, denies them access to Paradise and God.261

---

257 Betha Brénainn, pgs 256-7.
258 Gn 1:29-30.
259 Gn 9: 1-3.
260 Rom 6:23.
261 Gen 3:24.
Interpreted as such, the theological parallels between Genesis 4 and Íta’s advice are clear. The boat of flesh, made from the shedding of blood, as with Adam and Eve’s fleshly garments, represents sin and death – a result of the Fall. When Íta states that the Land of Promise is a holy place, she connects it with the Paradise of Eden where sin is not present, blood is not shed, and men enjoy intimate communication with God. Therefore, Íta’s advice is straightforward – make a boat of wood, thus avoiding association with fleshly death. This scene suggests that to reach Paradise, the flesh, which in Biblical terms are the works of evil and sin, must be shed. The boat, made of dead flesh, is spiritualized as a representation of the fallen human condition. Several times in the New Testament Paul links flesh, sin, and spiritual death.\textsuperscript{262} For its Irish audience, the hide boat represents mortality, death, and bloodshed which are not allowed in Eden or the New Jerusalem – the eternal abode of a holy God.

One scene in Moses’ life that illuminates Íta’s advice links Brendan’s second voyage both with Moses and a greater eschatological reality. Moses’ ascent on Mt. Nebo at the end of his life allows him to see but not experience the Promised Land he labored to reach. After seeing the land, Moses dies. In Hebrews 11, the author states that Moses (among other Biblical heroes) do not receive ‘what had been promised. God had something better…’\textsuperscript{263} In revisiting this theme in Hebrews 12, the author refers to Moses and contrasts new covenant Christians with the Israelites when he says, ‘You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and is burning with fire…’\textsuperscript{264} This scene recalls Exodus 19 where God appears to Moses on Mt. Sinai. God’s presence makes this mountain so holy that even an animal that touches it has to be stoned.\textsuperscript{265} The Hebrews author encourages his audience to be holy because ‘without holiness no one

\textsuperscript{262} Rom 8:13, Col 2:13, Eph 2:5.
\textsuperscript{263} Heb 11:39-40.
\textsuperscript{264} Heb 12:18.
\textsuperscript{265} Heb 12:20, Ex 19:12-13.
will see the Lord.'  

He then draws the contrast to Christians saying, ‘But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.’  

The author describes this as a scene of joy, full of ‘thousands upon thousands of angels.’  

This recalls Brendan’s first time seeing the Land of Promise as he stands on a mountain where thousands of angels are congregating, and affirms the presence of angels in the ascetics’ journey as marking their liminal status. The Hebrews author makes clear that holiness is required for achieving this vision of God, which is why Brendan must remove his sin-ridden flesh represented by the hide boat. Otherwise, just like a trespassing animal on the mountain, he will profane God’s holy presence. The Hebrews author, in using the figure of Moses, speaks of an eschatological destiny attainable after death, but the Brendan author implies that this type of voyage and destination is achievable while on earth, though like Moses in imperfect form.

The *Navigatio*, an even more detailed portrayal of Brendan’s *peregrinatio*, is a multivalent portrayal of the monastic quest for perfection which leads to the Promised Land of Saints (*terra repromissionis sanctorum*).  

As noted throughout chapters three and four, Christians long associated particular places as sacred and the motif of the mountain permeates Irish hagiography. Irish authors connect mountains with contemplative prayer. This is significant because in the *Navigatio* monks on the Delightful Island live in an environment that represents a monastery as close to Paradise as possible. Any further progress requires God’s initiation and guidance. To reach the Delightful Island, however, Barinthus and Brendan require no particular assistance

---

266 Heb 12:14.  
267 Heb 12:22.  
268 Heb 12:22.  
269 *Betha Brénainn*, p 252.  
270 Note that the Latin used by the *Navigatio* author parallels that which is used only one time in the Bible – Hebrews 11:9.  
271 The author of the *Vita Prima Sancti Brendani* calls Brendan ‘another Moses placed on the mountain of contemplation, [who] lifted his pure hands in prayer against the Amalekites.’ *Vita Prima Sancti Brendani*. English translation my own.  
272 For example: *VC* 3.27; *Vita Columbani* 16.
because this island is situated in time and space. The monks live there maintain a vegetarian diet; therefore, flesh is absent from their diet.\textsuperscript{273} The \textit{Navigatio} does use the unclean flesh motif, but weaves it into the narrative differently than the \textit{Betha Brénainn} author, as will be considered briefly below.

Mernoc and Barinthus set sail, but this journey exists outside the physical world because immediately thick clouds shroud their boat and an hour later, a bright light surrounds it. The island they approach is extraordinarily beautiful. Upon arrival, a messenger from the Lord appears and tells them that ‘the Lord has shown this land to you, which shall be given to his holy ones….Go back therefore to the place from which you have come.’\textsuperscript{274} Several interesting points emerge here. First, these men are on the island solely because the Lord deigns that they have that privilege, since they are now in a spiritual landscape. This is not a place stumbled upon, but revealed providentially. The author is stating that the Promised Land of Saints may only be reached when God wills it, a theme in all \textit{peregrinatio} literature. Secondly, this island is not meant to be possessed now, but at some future time by his holy ones (\textit{quam daturus est suis sanctis}). This vision and experience of Paradise is only to be enjoyed temporarily while in the flesh.

When Barinthus and Mernoc return, Barinthus reminds Mernoc’s monks that their monastery is located ‘at the gates of Paradise.’\textsuperscript{275} The monks’ response illustrates one of the main themes of the \textit{Navigatio}. They affirm that they know where Mernoc goes, but they ‘do not know where exactly it is.’\textsuperscript{276} They live at the ‘gates of Paradise’ yet are unable to locate the Promised Land of the Saints, confirming that this is an island beyond normal geographic boundaries and, importantly, not accessible to all. In

\textsuperscript{274} \textit{Navigatio}, p 156.
\textsuperscript{275} \textit{Navigatio}, p 157.
\textsuperscript{276} \textit{Navigatio}, p 157.
fact, the *Navigatio* suggests this land was only available to a few.\textsuperscript{277} The author repeatedly emphasizes that this land, a foretaste of heavenly paradise, is not meant for all, or even most. It is meant only for those divinely called to find and experience it.\textsuperscript{278}

This point is reiterated when Brendan finally reaches the Promised Land of Saints, a young man greets him who affirms that God prohibits Brendan’s immediate arrival, emphasizing that this land may be sought, but is only providentially attained. He instructs Brendan to return to his homeland bearing fruit. This connects Brendan with Joshua, who brings back one cluster of grapes that are so large that two men have to carry them back.\textsuperscript{279} Joshua uses the fruit to show the Israelites the promises of abundance if they remain faithful and obedient to God.\textsuperscript{280} Brendan is to take fruit – linking this with the Biblical Promised Land – but also precious stones, an indication that this is not the physical Promised Land, but the eschatological hope of the New Jerusalem, for the very foundation as described in Revelation is composed of precious stones.\textsuperscript{281} The object of Brendan’s voyage is a foretaste of every Christian’s eschatological destiny.\textsuperscript{282} When the man orders Brendan to return, the author shows that this land can only be enjoyed impermanently and imperfectly while on earth. This land,

---

\textsuperscript{277} The episode of the supernumeraries attempting to join Brendan’s voyage emphasizes this. They come to the shore, ‘determined to be wandering pilgrims (*peregrinari*) all the days of our lives’ (*Navigatio*, p 158). They threaten to fast until death if Brendan does not accept them on this voyage. Brendan consents, stating significantly ‘Your will be done, my sons…’ (*Navigatio*, p 158). This is in direct contrast to Brendan’s commitment to seek the island ‘if only it will be God’s will…’ (*Navigatio*, p 157). The monks respond that they stand behind Brendan and end with a major theme of Irish *peregrinatio*: ‘We seek one thing only: the will of God’ (*Navigatio*, p 158).

\textsuperscript{278} This point is found in other important Irish voyage literature as well. In *Vita Columbae* Cormac voyaged at least three times to find ‘a place of retreat’ in the ocean ‘yet found none’ (1.6) The first time his trip failed because ‘he has taken with him a monk…who is going away without his abbot’s consent…’ (1.6) He is mentioned two more times in the *Vita Columbae* but it does not appear his attempts at finding a ‘desert in the ocean’ were successful until the end (2.42, 3.17). In the *Voyage of the Húi Corra*, they must rid themselves of a last minute ‘buffoon,’ and three of the four *imrama* feature supernumeraries that must be lost before the voyage can succeed. For further discussion, see: Thrall, ‘Clerical Sea Pilgrimages and *Imrama*,’ pgs 16-7.

\textsuperscript{279} Nm 13:23.

\textsuperscript{280} *Navigatio* 27, 28; As a note of interest, the first mention of large grapes in the *Navigatio* came from the ‘Island of Strong Men,’ a parallel to the large stature of the people dwelling in the Biblical Promised Land before the Israelites. See Nm 13:33.

\textsuperscript{281} Rv 21:19.

\textsuperscript{282} Thomas O’Loughlin has explored the connection between the Promised Land of Saints and the New Jerusalem in his book *Celtic Theology*, pgs 193-6.
however, will be ‘revealed’ to Brendan’s successors during a time of persecution, again pointing to the eschatological nature of this land. In Hebrews 11, the author says twice that people living by faith ‘did not receive the things promised’ during their lives, and he explains by saying ‘...they only saw them and welcomed them [what they were promised] from a distance’. The author identifies these people as *peregrini* – encouraging his audience to follow their example – and concludes the chapter with an account of the persecution suffered by Christians for whom God is preparing a city – a ‘heavenly one’. What these *peregrini* are promised is not focused on their earthly lives, but their eternal ones. The fact that the *Navigatio* uses *terra repromissionis* to name Brendan’s desired destination is significant as that phrase is only used once in the Bible. It is used in Hebrews 11:9 to describe the land that is promised to Abraham after his journey of faith and obedience – a God-inspired and God-directed journey to an eschatological reward. Even though Abraham ‘lived in tents’ in the physical Promised Land, the Hebrews author makes clear that Abraham’s mind is focused on a greater eschatological destination. The author writes, ‘He was looking forward to a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.’ In the physical land, Abraham is looking ahead, ‘admitting that [he was] a foreigner (*peregrinus*) and stranger on earth.’ Brendan, as a *peregrinus* in the same eschatologically-oriented *peregrinatio* as Abraham, recognizes that he is not in a land situated within the confines of space and time. Nor is it a land in which he can remain while in the flesh (perhaps represented by his boat made of hide in which he voyaged to this land). He can temporarily experience the land, but he has to return like the Israelite Joshua – bearing fruit to inspire his

---

284 Heb 11:13.
285 Heb 11:16.
286 Importantly, Bede notes, tents were not permanent structures, but were used in wars and journeys. For insular exeges, the fact that Abraham lived in a tent signaled that though he was on earth, he was not at home. Bede, *On Genesis*, 9:27.
287 Heb 11:10.
community with the reports of the land God has promised them – not an earthly land, but an eternal paradise for the faithful once the soul is released from the flesh.

The Irish *peregrini* seek areas free from the encumbrances of a social life, but as with their Christian predecessors, the real desert that they seek is spiritual. Their communion with God on earth can be only temporary at best, but it offers the *peregrini* a foretaste of their eschatological destiny – constant, uninterrupted communion with God. The *peregrini’s* lifestyle is one of liminality – they are in this world, but not of this world, their bodies are on earth but their minds in heaven. The renunciation of the world and its trappings, manifesting itself in a physical separation, allows the *peregrini* a poignant expression of their faith in God to provide, sustain, and teach. The desert, the ocean, and the wilderness are all tangible, physical locations but to the ascetic, they are also a mystical, sacred landscape of purification, refinement, and divine experience. They are rife with a spirituality not found easily in the distractions of everyday life. The *peregrini* represent a rejection of earthly citizenship with its norms of comfort in favor of a citizenship they believe will be an eternal one. The *peregrinus’s* thoughts are oriented toward the End. With Judgment day ever on his or her mind, there is both an urgency and gravity in the renunciation, for this life is ever fleeting.
Chapter 5 – Peregrinatio in the Irish Penitentials and the Quest for Holiness

As evidenced, ascetic Irish *peregrinatio* fits within a well-established Christian tradition that uses flight from one’s homeland to experience God, showing a strong eschatological motivation as *peregrini* renounce the world in pursuit of holiness, culminating in a foretaste of heaven and eternal rewards. Some scholars note that Irish monasticism promotes *peregrinatio* as a form of penance.\(^{289}\) However, an examination reveals that assigned *peregrinatio* in the Irish Penitentials is almost always intended as a permanent state and thus does not fit in the model of Irish penance which is temporary. Additionally, instances of permanent *peregrinatio* often contain accompanying penance of a fixed duration such as fasting or restitution, suggesting that assigned *peregrinatio* serves some function other than penitential. When considering the role of penance, which is to propitiate sin, and the purpose of asceticism, which is sanctification, it is clear that many instances of ‘penitential’ *peregrinatio* are not penitential *per se* but rather a tool used in conjunction with penance when grievous sins require drastic action to separate a person from his or her wayward life to re-focus on God; *peregrinatio* helps maintain one’s forgiven state once penance completes its atoning task. This function fits soundly within the theological framework of the traditional Irish Christian practice of *peregrinatio* which consists of voyages of sanctification in a theologically eschatological quest.

Before a thorough examination of *peregrinatio* can commence, it is important to note the distinction in the Penitentials between *peregrinatio*, exile, and vagrancy, especially in light of the condemnation of the *gyrovagui* noted in chapter three. Columbanus, a *peregrinus* himself, considers one of the three ways to spiritual

mortification ‘not to go wherever we wish,’ 290 though his *peregrinatio* involves extensive travel. Columbanus’ *peregrinatio* is God-initiated and God-directed with the approval of his abbot for the sake of increasing holiness. Vagrancy implies a lack of submission and is usually a result of restlessness or dissatisfaction. A number of Penitentials which prescribe *peregrinatio* condemn vagrancy. 291 Columbanus assigns a murderer who does not complete satisfactory penance to a life as a ‘wanderer and fugitive (*vagus et profugus*) upon the earth’ 292 which is intended as a condemnation antithetical to holiness. The *Bigotian Penitential* dedicates an entire section to ‘wandering about’ (*de vagatione*) 293 in which the author considers such travel a disease to be ‘healed by permanent residence in one place…’ 294 The author quotes Saint Synclética admonishing monks and virgins to stay in one place, citing those who ‘wander from one place to another’ have turned ‘lukewarm and in the end dies (spiritually).’ 295 Irish monks see wandering as opposing spiritual progress and not as an admissible expression of religious piety.

Two main types of legitimate travel dominate the Irish Penitentials – exile and *peregrinatio*. This chapter will discuss the differences in the Penitentials between exile and *peregrinatio*, but it needs to be noted at the outset that both arise from an eschatologically-oriented mindset seeking to prepare a person for Judgment Day and beyond. Irish penance focuses on atoning for sin and curing vices in preparation for the Eschaton, particularly Judgment Day. The *Bigotian Penitential* urges penitents ‘to fear the Day of Judgment, to be in horror of hell, to desire eternal life…to have death vividly before one’s eye every day…’ 296 The author advises constant focus of End times events

291 For example: *Bigotianum* VI.3; *Paenitentiale Cummeani* VI.2.
292 *Paenitentiale S. Columbani* [B:] 1.
293 *Bigotianum* VI.3.
294 *Bigotianum* VI.3.1.
295 *Bigotianum* VI.3.5.
296 *Bigotianum* 64.
to express the urgency needed in confronting sin. The Bigotion author states one should seek penance out of fear of God’s future judgments... or out of contemplation of future blessings in heaven... Penance's primary motivation focuses on restoration between God and man for the sake of one’s eschatological future. It is with this focus on a future reckoning of one’s present actions that the Irish craft their Penitentials with advice for remedies that will restore the sinner into right relations with God and man. As discussed in chapters three and four, a foretaste of heaven can be enjoyed on earth, but first one must ‘seek pardon from God and make satisfaction and so be whole.’

The Irish Penitentials guide penitents to atonement and derive inspiration from Cassian who believes that untreated sin results in dire consequences. Sin is no trivial matter, and Cassian advises:

> For the sake of [a clean heart], then, everything is to be done... we must undertake fasts, vigils, labors, bodily deprivation, readings, so that by them we may be able to acquire and keep a heart untouched by any harmful passion…

Of note is that the same exercises (fasts, labors, etc.) are used for both the acquisition and retention of a pure heart. Acquiring a pure heart means that a person wants a heart unsullied by sin, but the sins must first be confronted, atoned for, and overcome through discipline before a person can keep a pure heart.

Importantly, Cassian understands atonement and repentance as having an end. He writes of the 'end of repentance' which encourages the believer 'to mount the heights of the aforementioned perfection. Penance, a temporary state, then allows the monk to pursue lifelong asceticism for perfecting his or her spiritual life. Cassian writes that

---

297 Bigotionum 70-4. This tension between where one is and where one desperately longs to be is characteristic of the literature of the peregrini as they focus on their eschatological future.
298 Penitentials Vinniani 1.
299 Including a loss of spiritual fruits (8.22, 9.11), a lack of discretion, contemplative vision, and focused prayer (8.13, 9.11), spiritual dullness, inability to be indwelled by the Holy Spirit (8.22, 9.3), and ‘to attain to a life of immortality’ (8.1.1-2; 9.1). All citations from John Cassian: The Institutes, Trans. and Ed. B. Ramsey, O.P. (Mahwah: The Newman Press, 2000).
300 Cassian, Coll., 1.14.
301 The penance for ‘grave sins...has an end.’ Cassian, Coll., 20.13.1.
302 Cassian, Coll., 20.3.2.
all worldly attachments are to be ‘disdained – so that perpetual purity of heart may be kept. With this goal always set before us, therefore, our actions and thoughts are ordered to attaining it...’ Cassian understands the maintenance of purity of heart is an ongoing process of asceticism. He compares those who give up asceticism for the world to the Israelites who crave their Egyptian bondage. Cassian’s writings affirm the temporary nature of penance for propitiation and the permanent state of asceticism for sanctification – both working together but in different capacities in preparation for the end of life and Judgment Day.

The Irish Penitential authors, likewise concerned for the penitents’ futures, warn of sin’s eschatological consequences that ‘sever the human race from the Kingdom of God’ and that ‘those who [sin] shall not obtain [it]’ leading to damnation on Judgment Day. Furthermore, sin separates the individual from the body of believers.

The Irish craft their Penitentials with the desire to atone for sins and repair damaged relationships – to ‘restore the human race to the kingdom of the heavens.’ The Penitential of Finnian exemplifies this when he assigns a fornicator six years of penance at the end of which a sinner may be ‘joined to the altar, and then we say her crown can be restored and she may don a white robe and be pronounced a virgin.’ Clerics who complete their penance after fornication may be called ‘just’ and ‘receive their rank’ once again. Columbanus allows murderers restoration to their native land after completing penance. In these examples, penitents are forgiven and fully...

303 Cassian, Coll., 1.5.3.
304 Cassian, Coll., 3.7.
305 ‘...humanum genus separant a regno Dei.’ Bigotianum 37. See also: Penitentiale Cummeani, IV.1; Penitentialis Vinniani 22; Paenitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum IV.4. Unless otherwise noted, all penitential quotations are taken from The Irish Penitentials, Scriptores Latin Hiberniae Vol. V, Ed. L. Bieler [Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1975]).
306 ‘...qui talia agunt regnum Dei non consequentur.’ Bigotianum 37. See also Bigotianum 38.
307 Bigotianum 36.
308 Bigotianum 48.
309 Penitentialis Vinniani 21.
310 Penitentialis Vinniani 27.
311 Paenitentiale S. Columbani [B:] 1.
restored to their previous social and spiritual condition and are again welcome members of Christ's body.

With restoration as the primary Penitential objective, abbots view penance as a temporary state until the sin is atoned for and overcome. Gildas writes 'as long a time as a person remains in sin so long is he to do penance.'\textsuperscript{312} Penance is not permanent but lasts until the sin is expelled. Furthermore, abbots assign penance because one has already fallen. Penance, by nature, is reserved for specific occasions in order to achieve atonement and restoration and thus temporary so that one can eventually function normally in society. If a penitential assignment were permanent, no such restoration could occur. The Penitentials confirm the temporary nature of penance. The \textit{Second Synod of St Patrick} states 'short and strict are the seasons of penance…lest the faithful soul perish by abstaining from the medicine [i.e. participation in Communion] for so long a time.'\textsuperscript{313} The \textit{Penitential of Cummean} directs that penance continue ‘for whatever time anyone remains in his sins,’ implying that when one ceases to sin, so too can penance cease.\textsuperscript{314} Likewise, Finnian instructs penance should continue ‘so long as these things dwell in our hearts,’\textsuperscript{315} again suggesting a possible end to penance. Penance is not intended to be lifelong – it is for a set amount of time after which one can be restored to proper standing in the Church and society. If penitential discipline were lifelong, then it would contradict the abbot’s obvious concern for a soul perishing without the benefit of the Eucharist or community of believers. The Penitentials are clear that a penitent may not participate in regular church functions ‘until one’s penance has been completed.’\textsuperscript{316} Columbanus cautions penitents to wait until penance is complete before approaching God ‘…for it is better to wait until the heart is

\textsuperscript{312} \textit{Praefatio Gildae de Poenitentia} 14.
\textsuperscript{313} \textit{Synodus II S. Patricii} 22.
\textsuperscript{314} \textit{Paenitentiale Cummeani} 9.4.
\textsuperscript{315} \textit{Penitentials Vinniani} 29.
\textsuperscript{316} \textit{Penitentials Vinniani} 53. Columbanus also forbids restoration of normal social relations until the conclusion of penance. See \textit{Paenitentiale S. Columbani} 18.
healed…than rashly to approach the judgment of the throne.’\textsuperscript{317} The implication in his statement is two-fold: that penance has an end (the heart will be healed) and that penance restores a person’s relationship with God. The \textit{Bigotian Penitential} similarly dictates that ‘no one ought to receive the sacrifice unless he is clean and perfect and nothing mortal is found in him.’\textsuperscript{318} Again, the author understands that sin disrupts the penitent’s relationship to God but after penance, he or she will be rendered ‘clean’ and able to approach God. What these Penitentials suggest is that their penitential discipline – aimed at making a sinner whole\textsuperscript{319} and restoring ‘what is weak to a complete state of health’\textsuperscript{320} – is temporary so that a sinner may be ‘reconciled to God and his neighbor’\textsuperscript{321} and participate fully in society once again. When considering the temporary nature of penitential assignment with the prescription of lifelong \textit{peregrinatio}, there emerges an obvious inconsistency. The case studies presented in chapters three and four and most instances in the Penitentials show the overwhelming majority of Irish \textit{peregrini} understand or at least desire their \textit{peregrinatio} to be lifelong, differentiating it from a prescribed penance with a fixed duration. This suggests temporary exile may serve as part of a penitential program but not \textit{peregrinatio}, which is permanent and thus must have a different function than restoration, especially since a person is not to return to his or her homeland. The purpose of \textit{peregrinatio} in the Irish Penitentials is ascetic in function and practice.

Irish sources show the method employed to confront sin includes both penance and asceticism. The purpose of discipline is two-fold: to atone for sins thereby obtaining a restored heart and then maintain it. Penance and asceticism work together for just such a purpose. Penance employs fasting, vigils, scriptural recitation, exile, etc.

\textsuperscript{317} \textit{Paenitentiale S. Columbani} 30.
\textsuperscript{318} \textit{Bigotianum} IV.7.
\textsuperscript{319} \textit{Penitentialis Vinniani} 1.
\textsuperscript{320} \textit{Paenitentiale S. Columbani} [B:] prologue.
\textsuperscript{321} \textit{Penitentialis Vinniani} 5.
and is prescribed as a result of a specific sin having been committed.\textsuperscript{322} Penance seeks to right a wrong so that a person may be ‘restored to the altar,’ ‘receive the kiss of peace,’\textsuperscript{323} and once again be called ‘just’\textsuperscript{324} - that is, so one may be in right relations with God and man with the goal of eternal, salvific rewards. Once restored, the monk can then pursue the path to holiness through asceticism. Asceticism involves perpetual self-imposed renunciation to combat one’s inherently flawed human nature and to cultivate virtue, with the ultimate goal of increasing holiness that permits earthly intimacy with God – a foretaste of heaven - and eternal, eschatological rewards. The \textit{Cambrai Homily} revealingly differentiates between penance and asceticism and considers them both a form of martyrdom. The author teaches, ‘The blue martyrdom is when through fasting and hard work they control their desires [i.e. asceticism] or struggle in penance and repentance.’\textsuperscript{325} Both use the same techniques and are motivated by a theologically eschatological mindset but their function differs. Like Cassian, the Irish recognized the relationship between asceticism to control the flesh and penance for when a person succumbs to sin. They work together so that a person may be ‘alive to God.’\textsuperscript{326}

Cassian believes that the goal of a monk is to - ‘to obtain that divine prize in its entirety of which it is said “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”’\textsuperscript{327} The monastic goal is a transcendent communion with God realized only through the Holy Spirit’s indwelling.\textsuperscript{328} Before that can happen, though, both Cassian and the Irish

\textsuperscript{322} As opposed to a tempering of one’s sin nature in general which asceticism attempts.
\textsuperscript{323} St Cyril of Jerusalem notes, ‘it is the sign that our souls are united and that we banish all remembrance of injury.’ H. Thurston, "Kiss,“ The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), 20 Apr. 2009 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08663a.htm>; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, \textit{Cat. Myst.}, v. 3.
\textsuperscript{324} \textit{Penitentialis Vinniani} 21.
\textsuperscript{325} ‘Cambrai Homily,’ in \textit{Celtic Spirituality}, p 370.
\textsuperscript{326} St. Antony as quoted in Vivian, ‘St. Antony the Great and the Monastery,’ p 7.
\textsuperscript{327} Cassian, \textit{Inst.}, 8.20.1, emphasis added to highlight the ultimate monastic goal.
\textsuperscript{328} Cassian, \textit{Inst.}, 8.22.
Peregrini agree that one must be pure in heart, a holiness sought, not passively attained, through the combination of ‘fleshly toil’ and a ‘contrite spirit’. Cassian explains that the rewards for the laborious effort prove motivational:

A monk who desires knowledge of Scripture should direct the full effort of his mind and attentiveness of his heart toward the cleansing of his fleshly vices. As soon as these have been driven out the eyes of his heart will naturally contemplate the mysteries of Scripture… they [are] made unknown by our vices.

Cassian connects purity of heart with a supernatural knowledge of God, and Columbanus also confirms the relationship and teaches that holiness necessitates vigorous human effort. Columbanus’ Penitential demonstrates that sinners must propitiate sin prior to communion with God through penance, but once cleansed, Christians must work tirelessly through ascesis to maintain their purity to know God more fully. It is with this understanding that the Irish form their Penitentials and why a number of their most prominent peregrini engage in both penitential and ascetic discipline as they keep Judgment Day in the forefront of their minds.

Ascesis, as noted previously, is a lifelong, continual process of maintaining and increasing holiness, exemplified by the permanent nature of Irish peregrinatio. In nearly all the Penitentials, peregrinatio is modified by ’iugis’ or ’perennis’ and thus denotes a lifelong journey, whereas exile is designated for a predetermined time. The two notable exceptions to lifelong peregrinatio are found in the Penitential of Cummean

---

329 Cassian, Inst., 5.21.5; Columbanus, ‘Rule of Columbanus 6.’
331 Cassian, Inst., 5.34.
332 Columbanus, Ser. 8.; Also: ‘Will a man by talk alone cleanse his house from some disfigurement, or move the dusty piles of squalid rubble by mere speech? Or can anyone without sweat accomplish even what appertains to daily life? Therefore, while we cleanse the house of the inner man, we need patience and application and toil and unwearied zeal that we may show…application in religion, toil in business, zeal in progress….For the law does not make holy by hearing, but doubtless by performance; each should honor the Lord, not simply by words and bodily toil, but by ripeness of character and purity of heart’ (Columbanus, Ser. 2). Columbanus interprets the pursuit of perfection as one of active toil. He cites Mt 11:12 and exhorts, ‘…we live in foreign lands, while even our life is not our own, and we ought not to live to ourselves, and it requires great violence to seek by toil and to maintain by enthusiasm what a corrupted nature has not kept’ (Columbanus, Ser. 10).
333 Both words mean ‘perpetual’ or ‘continual.’
334 Chart one provides a survey of each instance of peregrinatio and exile in the Irish Penitentials.
(which is duplicated in the Bigotian Penitential) and the Three Irish Canons. In the Penitential of Cummean, he assigns permanent exile (iugi exilio) for stealing food. This may be explainable, however, by the fact that the penitent is to be permanently placed under another abbot instead of journeying abroad out of a monastery and thus is not proper peregrinatio. This seems especially likely because all other uses of peregrinatio in the Penitential of Cummean follow the traditional model of peregrinatio as lifelong and exile as temporary. The Three Irish Canons, interestingly, reverse the norm and the author uses ‘peregrinatio’ to describe journeys of a predetermined length and ‘exul’ to describe permanent journeys. Nevertheless, this still shows that even this author differentiates between peregrinatio and exile – one being lifelong and the other temporary - indicating a distinction in the Irish authors’ minds between an ascetical and penitential journey.

The Irish see penance and asceticism as working together towards sanctification and do advise permanent peregrinatio as accompanying a predetermined penance within the Penitentials. This implies that peregrinatio itself is not penitential, but rather sanctifying. The Synod of the Grove of Victory suggests that defiling one’s mother be assigned ‘three years (penance) with perpetual pilgrimage (cum peregrinatione perenni). The synod does not specify what this penance is, though other Penitentials indicate it is a controlled diet of bread and water. The Old Irish Penitential, citing the precedent of the Penitential of Cummean, assigns four years of penance with perpetual peregrinatio (cum peregrinatione perenni) for incest. These exemplify the standard prescription of penance and peregrinatio – temporary penance (fasting) is accompanied by lifelong asceticism (peregrinatio). This can be contrasted with exile that is used for

---

335 See also Sinodus Aquilonalis Britaniae 4.
336 Sinodus Luci Victorie 6.
337 Praefatio Gildae de Poenitentia 1, 2; Excerpta Quedam de Libro Davidis 7; Penitentialis Vinniani 1, 3, 4, 5, 23; Paenitentiale S. Columbani [B:] 1; et al.
338 Old Irish Penitential § 21.
the sake of penance. Finnian prescribes fasting, weeping, deprivation of clerical office, and exile (*ex torris existat de sua patria*) for seven years to the man who commits fornication then kills his child.\(^339\) After seven years, though, 'he shall be restored to his office.'\(^340\) The author uses a different word to describe this banishment as it is temporary and part of his penitential discipline – allowing a prolonged but not permanent break from the world to overcome sin. The goal is for complete restoration. If penitential exile were permanent, no such restoration would be possible.

The question arises as to *peregrinatio*’s role in the penitential process. *Peregrinatio* is not usually considered an appropriate punishment itself, but rather accompanies a lengthy period of fasting or other penance. The temporary fasting or other penitential discipline restores the sinner to a state of grace which is the first step. However, when the most disastrous sins are committed, more drastic action ensures further lapses into sin do not occur and that an individual’s ties with his or her former life are severed. Lifelong *peregrinatio* as an ascetic discipline turns the penitent completely from his or her former life and, wholly in God's hands, focuses daily and even hourly attention on one’s relationship with God as the *peregrinus* cuts all connections with wealth, earthly security, and legal protection, helping one focus on the urgent necessity for right living as at any moment the *peregrinus*’ life might end.

Columbanus, a celebrated Irish *peregrinus*, captures this urgency when he exhorts Christians to consider constantly the end of their ‘dubious life’ which he describes as ‘fleeting,’ ‘a shadow and mirage,’ ‘brief,’ and ‘transitory and feeble.’\(^341\) He remains ever aware on his *peregrinatio* that at any moment he may face the judgment seat of Christ.\(^342\) Columbanus' life epitomizes the Irish understanding of penance, *peregrinatio*, and eschatology. Upon entering Gaul, the first real stage of his

\(^{339}\) *Penitentialis Vinniani* 12.
\(^{340}\) *Penitentialis Vinniani* 12.
\(^{341}\) Columbanus, *Ser* 9.
\(^{342}\) Columbanus, *Ser* 9.
overseas peregrinatio, he immediately undergoes penance to restore his relationship with Christ and maintain the purity of his religion.\textsuperscript{343} Before he can reap the benefits of his ascetic peregrinatio, he must first ‘propitiate Christ’ – restoring his relationship to Christ by righting his wrongs – before he can proceed toward the real aim of his peregrinatio which is an anticipatory union with God. Through his penitential exercises ‘every lust of the flesh was expelled.’\textsuperscript{344} Columbanus’ peregrinatio begins with penance to atone for his sins and is followed by permanent peregrinatio to maintain his purified state.\textsuperscript{345} Columbanus’ penance is temporary though his asceticism, including peregrinatio, are lifelong and ongoing.\textsuperscript{346} For Columbanus, penance forms an essential but brief part of his peregrinatio, but importantly his peregrinatio is not penitential. Both temporary penance and permanent peregrinatio work together for the same goal: perfecting holiness to see God both on earth in anticipation of heaven, their eschatological destination.

Columbanus’ example offers critical insight into the Irish relationship between peregrinatio and penance. Columbanus’ peregrinatio is not penitential, but ascetic, motivated by his focus on his impending Judgment.\textsuperscript{347} However, before he begins his lifelong ascetic regimen, he undergoes rigorous penance. Columbanus goes from fallen to restored through penance, then from restored to sanctified through ascesis. Columbanus’ peregrinatio embodies the Cambrai Homily’s understanding of martyrdom. In addition to the blue martyrdom mentioned earlier, white martyrdom, according to the author, is when a person ‘for the sake of God departs from everything that they love…’\textsuperscript{348} and the ultimate form of martyrdom, red martyrdom, is when a

\textsuperscript{343} Vita Columbani 14.
\textsuperscript{344} Vita Columbani 14.
\textsuperscript{345} Vita Columbani 16, 20, 30, 45.
\textsuperscript{346} The perpetual nature of Columbanus’ ascetical discipline is dramatically exemplified when he attempts to return to Ireland but is thwarted when God raises up a wave that puts the ship with his men and belongings back on the shores of Gaul. Vita Columbani 47.
\textsuperscript{347} See Ser 9.
\textsuperscript{348} ‘Cambrai Homily’ in Celtic Spirituality, p 370.
person endures ‘a cross or destruction for Christ’s sake.’\footnote{`Cambrai Homily’ in Celtic Spirituality, p 370.} The author teaches that one type of cross is an affliction of abstinence on the body.\footnote{`Cambrai Homily’ in Celtic Spirituality, p 369.} The author explains that the three kinds of martyrdom (blue, white, and red) ‘take place in those people who repent well, who control their desires, and who shed their blood in fasting and in labor for Christ’s sake.’\footnote{`Cambrai Homily’ in Celtic Spirituality, p 370.} Clearly martyrdom is being used to describe not a physical death but a spiritual death – a death to self – epitomized in the \textit{peregrini}. Columbanus is just such a martyr and his example is consistent with the Irish Penitentials and reveals two key points: that the Irish distinguish between exile which is temporary and \textit{peregrinatio} which is permanent and that they normally accompany other forms of penance as part of an overall process towards sanctification implying that \textit{peregrinatio} is not penitential, but ascetic.

Distinctions between vagrancy, exile, and \textit{peregrinatio} are important in the discussion of \textit{peregrinatio} in the Penitentials and in establishing a consistent theological motivation for Irish \textit{peregrinatio}. Vagrancy is never acceptable, but is rather a condemnation after failing to complete one’s required penance; exile and \textit{peregrinatio}, on the other hand, are both under abbatial authority. Exile is assigned as a temporary banishment from one’s territory after which the penitent can expect full restoration to both society and Church. \textit{Peregrinatio}, however, is a lifelong departure from one’s homeland. Its function as penance must be questioned carefully in light of the Irish understanding and practice of penance as restorative and temporary. \textit{Peregrinatio} is neither. \textit{Peregrinatio}, in conjunction with penance, is part of a process towards holiness and is used with the most grievous sins of flesh and spirit where the penitent has fallen the most severely from God’s standard of holiness. \textit{Peregrinatio} is most routinely used for either clergy or monks rather than the laity. For the man who commits homicide on
account of hatred, Cummean assigns relinquishing his arms until death ‘and dead unto the world, shall live unto God.’ However, for the same crime committed by a monk, ‘he shall die unto the world with perpetual exile’ (cum peregrinatione perenni). Monks and clerics – those who have given up secular vocations to follow God – are called to a higher standard knowing their rewards will be greater in the coming age. However, their temporal life has greater demands and thus greater consequences for sin.

Permanent peregrinatio as a penance is not in the spirit of the Irish Penitentials which seek to bring fallen sinners back as restored members of the Church through temporary discipline. Permanent peregrinatio is an ascetic discipline, even when prescribed in the Penitentials, as it signals a drastic and permanent renunciation of the world. When a person of God falls into grievous sin, propitiation is always possible, but the sin highlights a very real inner struggle of a soul still susceptible to carnality. For the most drastic or blasphemous sins, penance accompanied by peregrinatio helps the Christian propitiate sin and die unto self with a permanent renunciation of all that ties the person to the world. Only then may he or she be 'alive to God' on earth and prepare for their Judgment Day.

---

352 Paenitentiale Cummeani IV. 5.
353 It should be noted that bread and water are assigned for murderers who hate their brother 'so long as he has not overcome his hatred, and he shall be joined to him whom he hates...' at the opening of this section, highlighting again the impermanence of penitential discipline, its restorative and healing intention, and that again peregrinatio by itself is not appropriate. Paenitentiale Cummeani IV. 6.
354 Paenitentiale Cummeani, Epilogue 3.
Conclusion

Returning to the monastic goal Cassian clearly delineates, the monks’ striving on earth through the rigors of asceticism is oriented towards their participation in the heavenly kingdom – to prepare for and anticipate its benefits while still on earth. Being found unworthy on Judgment Day, when early monks believe they will have to render an account of their lives before a holy God, means condemnation to the eternal horrors of hell. The Patristic and Irish monastic sources show the ardent exhortation to keep this event constantly fixed before one's eyes in order to encourage right behavior. The fear of hell proved so strong that sin – the separation of a soul from God – is a most grievous condition that demands one's full, concentrated effort to eradicate.

Keeping the fear of hell and the delight of heaven ever before their eyes, many early Christians depart from their homeland to seek that which they believe cannot be taken from them. But this departure – a renunciation of their earthly attachments – is only the first step on a journey towards God. As with Abraham and Moses, God calls them out of the comfort of their secular lives in an incredible physical and spiritual journey of faith, leading them to a promised land attainable only if they choose to obey God and follow him. For both Moses and Abraham, their physical journey reflects a more important spiritual journey as God prepares them through their peregrinations to inhabit the land he promises – a rich picture for the early Christians.

The theological perspective of the Irish *peregrini* who undertake such journeys of faith remains firmly eschatological – focusing always on the life of the coming age, ushered in by the End Times and decided on Judgment Day – life is viewed as preparation for an eternity based on decisions made during one's fleeting earthly existence. This is why the rigors of asceticism and the horrors of journeying into the unknown do not stop the *peregrini* from their mission which is grounded in their
eschatology, and the reason authors so often write of the Otherworldly nature and events surrounding the peregrini – 'while [they were] in the body, [they] lived as though out of it.'\textsuperscript{355} The Irish monks believe that death may seize a soul or Jesus may return again at any moment – life was 'dubious,' a 'fleeting and deceptive shadow and mirage'\textsuperscript{356} which pales in the light of eternity. The peregrini set out on peregrinatio - lifelong journeys into the depths of God – out of an ever-present and all-consuming eschatological preoccupation of what is to come.

\textsuperscript{355} Jerome, \textit{Letter to Demetrias}, 10.
\textsuperscript{356} Columbanus, \textit{Ser.} 9.
Appendix: Chart One

Instances of exile, banishment, and *peregrinatio* in the Irish Penitentials

I have underlined any accompanying penance suggested for each of the offenses to highlight that most cases of *peregrinatio* have penitential discipline assigned in addition to *peregrinatio* or exile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Penitential</th>
<th>Latin Term</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Offense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synod, Grove of Victory</td>
<td><em>peregrinatio</em></td>
<td>lifelong</td>
<td>unspecified</td>
<td>defiling mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

>'He who defiles his mother, *three years* (*penance*) with perpetual pilgrimage.’  p 69.

Penitential of Finnian  *extorris*  7 years  out of country  fornication & homicide

>'But if one of the clerical order falls...and begets a son and kills him…. *He shall do penance three years with an allowance of bread and water*,..and he shall abstain for three more years from wine and meat...and for the forty-day periods in the last three years he shall fast with bread and water; and (he shall) be an exile from his own country, until a period of seven years is completed…’  p 79.

Penitential of Finnian  *exterrem*  10 years  from his country  murder

>'If any cleric commits murder and strikes down his neighbour and he is dead, he must become an exile from his country for ten years and do penance seven years in another city, *three years of this time on an allowance of bread and water and salt, and for four years he shall abstain from wine and meat, and fast during the forty-day periods on <an allowance of> bread and water and salt…’'  pgs 81-3.

Penitential of Finnian  *non in sua patria*  3 years  from his country  murder

>'But if he kills him suddenly and not from hatred... *he shall do penance for three years on an allowance of bread and water, and for three more years he shall abstain from wine and meat, and not stay in his own country.’’  p 83.

Penitential of Finnian  *exterminabitur de patria sua*  until converted  from his country  destruction of monasteries

>'But if he does not repent...he shall be driven from the bounds of his country and beaten with rods until he is converted…’’  p 85.

Penitential of Columbanus  *exul*  10 years  away from native land  murder

>‘...let him [a murderer] do penance for ten years in exile; after these, let him be restored to his native land, *if he has performed his penance well on bread and water*…’  p 99.

>*But if he does not make satisfaction to his [the slain person’s] relatives, let him never be restored to his native land, but like Cain let him be a wanderer and fugitive (vagus et profugus) upon the earth.’’  p 99.

Penitential of Columbanus  *peregrinus*  7 years  unspecified  fornication

>'Let him [fornicator] do penance as an exile for seven years on bread and water; then only, at the discretion of the priest, let him be restored to the altar.’’  p 99.

Penitential of Columbanus  *exul*  3 years  away from native land  murder

>'Let him [murderer] do penance three years on bread and water as an unarmed exile, and after three years let him return to his own [country]...’’  p 103.

Penitential of Columbanus  *exul*  3 years  unspecified  perjury

>'Let him [a perjurer] do penance for three years on bread and water as an unarmed exile...’’  p 105.
Penitential Latin Term  Duration  Location  Offense

Penitential of Cummean  exilio  permanent  with another abbot  stealing food

'[One who steals food] a fourth time shall do penance (detailed earlier as a diet of bread and water – see I.1 pgs 111-3) in permanent exile under another abbot.' p 113.

Penitential of Cummean  in districto proposito exalii  1.5 years  unspecified  fornication

'He [presbyter or deacon without a monastic vow who has fornicated but wants to become a monk after the offense] shall do penance in the strict form of exile for a year and a half...’ p 115.

Penitential of Cummean  peregrinatio  permanent  unspecified  incest with mother

'He who defiles his mother shall do penance for three years, with perpetual exile,' p 115. [This penance is detailed in II.2, p 113 when Cummean describes the specifications of fasting and compunction appropriate for penitential fasts for the sin of fornication.]

Penitential of Cummean  exul  7 years  unspecified  fornication

'A cleric who commits fornication...if he begets a son he shall do penance for seven years an exile; so also a virgin.' p 115.

Penitential of Cummean  peregrinatio  permanent  unspecified  murder due to hatred

'That murderer who hates his brother shall go on bread and water as long as he has not overcome his hatred, and he shall be joined to him whom he hates in sincere charity....He [murderer who has made vows of perfection] shall die unto the world with perpetual exile.’ pgs 119-21.

Three Irish Canons  peregrinatio  5 years  abroad – out of country  stealing sacred objects

'[A thief, robber, of injurer of others] ’...shall make seven-fold restitution and remain through five years in hard penance in exile abroad.’ p 183.

Three Irish Canons  aexilio  permanent  abroad – out of his country  ibid.

'[If the above mentioned criminals complete commendable penance] ’...let him come to his own country; but if not, let him remain permanently in exile.’ p 183. [This indicates that the permanent exile is not penitential, but rather punitive.]

Three Irish Canons  peregrinatio  7 years  unspecified  robbery or unlawful entry into place with a Gospel book

’...he [a robber] shall make a sevenfold restitution... but he shall also remain through seven years in hard penance in exile.’ p 183.

Three Irish Canons  peregrinatio  10 years  unspecified  tyrant arresting anyone attached to a bishop

’...he [the tyrant] shall release him [who was arrested] safe and sound and make restitution, and he shall render to the bishop three other men of equal worth with all their substance, and he himself shall remain in the penance of hard exile alone for a period of ten years...’ p 183.

Three Irish Canons  peregrinatio  20 years  unspecified  see above and wounding the prisoner

’...he [the tyrant] shall render to the bishop seven men with all their substance, and he himself shall remain alone in exile for the space of twenty years...’ p 183.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Penitential</th>
<th>Latin Term</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Offense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Irish Canons</td>
<td>peregrinatio</td>
<td>perpetual/thirty</td>
<td>unspecified</td>
<td>see above and killing the prisoner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘…he [the tyrant] shall render to God all his inheritance and all his substance with the inheritances and substance of his associates, and he himself shall go into perpetual exile, or more mildly, into exile for 30 years...’ p 183.

Bigotian Penitential  
 | exilio | permanent | under another abbot | stealing food |

‘One who steals food, forty days [fast]...a fourth time, he shall do penance in permanent exile under another abbot. [Here it appears that his penance is to be done while he is in exile, again differentiating between penance and peregrinatio.] p 215; see also p 260 where the habitual food thief is assigned 'exile under the yoke of a strange abbot...'? [Presumably penitential discipline can be continued under this new abbot where the prior abbot's discipline proved ineffective.]

Bigotian Penitential  
 | peregrinatio | permanent | unspecified | premeditated murder |

‘...If anyone kills another from premeditation out of hatred, and after vows of perfection, he shall die unto the world with perpetual exile (peregrinatione perenni).’ p 229.

Old Irish Penitential  
 | peregrinatio | permanent | unspecified | incest |

‘He who fornicates with his mother or daughter or sister...According to Cummean the Long...[he shall do] four years of penance with perpetual peregrinatio (cum pereg rinatione perenni)...’ p 264. [Latin translation my own. Again this shows that penance is separate and to be performed in conjunction with peregrinatio.]

The Old Irish Penitential has several more instances of exile, but the original language is Old Irish so making direct correlations with peregrinatio is more difficult than for Latin texts. However, I have provided the English of these instances below:

(for killing of bishop or priest)’…for the power to fix their penance rests with the king…and with the bishop, whether it be exile for life, or penance for life.’ p 271.

(someone stealing food a third time receives) ‘exile under the yoke of a strange abbot the fourth time.’ p 260.

‘Seven years of penance are assigned for all other homicides; excepting persons in orders such as a bishop or priest, for the power to fix their penance rests with the king who is over the laity, and with the bishop, whether it be exile for life, or penance for life. If the offender can pay fines, his penance is less in proportion.’ p 271.

‘Anyone who, after taking a vow of renunciation, kills his fellow in anger and with premeditation and intent, the penance for him is a life of exile in destitution, unless pious confessors grant him remission.’ p 272.

Works Cited


Wooding, Jonathan M. ‘The Medieval and Early Modern Cult of St Brendan’ in *Saints’ Cults in the Celtic World*. Ed. S. Boardman (Boydell 2009).