

Maeve Callan

# Sacred Sisters

Gender, Sanctity, and Power  
in Medieval Ireland

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Sacred Sisters

# Hagiography beyond Tradition

The study of sanctity in medieval Europe is starting to elicit cutting-edge, innovative and genuinely interdisciplinary scholarship that destabilizes what people have conventionally considered to be hagiography. This is demonstrated in the topic range of panels sponsored by the Hagiography Society at recent landmark medievalist conferences. While hagiography has traditionally been understood only in religious terms, recent scholarship moves beyond such frameworks to consider alternate ways of identifying and representing exemplary people. So doing, such research emphasises modern cultural analogies and resonances with medieval figures.

It is not enough, however, to approach saints' lives with a "sexy" modern framework. The best scholarship is rooted in analytical rigour, close attention to context(s), and a keen awareness of the potential pitfalls of anachronism, all the while accepting that anachronism can often be productive. This series provides a home for the kind of work that negotiates that border between the traditional and the contemporary and encourages scholarship enhanced by interventions drawn from celebrity studies, trans studies, crip theory, animal and monster studies, the history of senses and the emotions, media studies, and beyond. Rather than considering hagiography as a single genre, the series is open to expanding the ways in which we imagine how people come to be offered for veneration, as well as the media and genres in which they are fashioned, represented, and celebrated.

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# Sacred Sisters

*Gender, Sanctity, and Power in Medieval Ireland*

*Maeve Brigid Callan*

Amsterdam University Press

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE  
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cover illustration: Manisternagalliaghduff (Photo: M. Callan)

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 150 9

E-ISBN 978 90 4854 299 4

DOI 10.5117/9789463721509

NUR 684

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For all my sisters, everywhere and always

And especially Lorna Healy,  
taken from us far too soon

“Our heritage is our power; we can know ourselves and our capacities by seeing that other women have been strong. To reclaim our past and insist that it become a part of human history is the task that lies before us, for the future requires that women, as well as men, shape the world’s destiny.”  
Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*

“History isn’t just what happens in the past. It is what later generations choose to make of it.”  
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*

“I raise up my voice—not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard [...] We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.”  
Malala Yousafzai to the United Nations

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## Preface

Over twenty years ago, during my first days at Northwestern University, Richard Kieckhefer suggested I research the Latin Lives of Ireland's female saints for my master's thesis. I was intrigued; I had already chosen the topic for my doctoral dissertation—the Guglielmites, a thirteenth-century Italian heretical sect who believed Christ had come again but this time as a woman, Guglielma of Milan—and had chosen Northwestern especially because of the brilliant work by Richard's wife, Barbara Newman, in this area. Due to Barbara's sabbatical for part of my first year, I worked with Richard for my Master's research—a twist of fate with career-changing implications. I had recently returned from Ireland, where I had earned my Master's in Women's Studies at Trinity College Dublin but with little formal discussion of Irish saints. The books I had read about medieval Ireland had led me to conclude that its denizens were among the worst misogynists of the lot—and given the degree of medieval misogyny in English and Continental sources with which I was all too familiar, that is saying something. But with Richard's encouragement and support I tried to bracket my assumptions and read the original sources on their own terms as much as possible.

Exploring medieval Ireland through the primary lens of these women's Lives, I discovered different gender dynamics than I'd come to expect both in Continental and English medieval sources and from dominant studies of medieval Ireland, and indeed from living in 1990s Ireland. Sexist attitudes occasionally surfaced, but these medieval authors more commonly depicted partnership and cooperation between the sexes and regularly celebrated women for their characters and accomplishments—not *in spite of* their sex, but sometimes *because* of it. Reading these sources was like finding a supply of fresh air in a room in which I had been slowly suffocating without realizing it. Just for the suggestion alone I would be eternally grateful to Richard. But he followed his suggestion with meeting with me virtually every day to work through the Latin, discuss my findings, help me piece together the chaotic and often confusing context, and challenge my conclusions; after I submitted the final draft of my thesis, he offered me the highest praise of all, recommending that I publish it. In the decades since, Richard's advice and assistance have remained constant; he has become not just an esteemed mentor but a treasured friend, as has Barbara. I owe countless debts of gratitude for this book, as for my first, *The Templars, the Witch, and the Wild Irish*; the greatest for both belongs to Richard, without whom neither book would have been written.

As the research periods for this book and my first (which began as my doctoral dissertation) overlap, the thanks and praise I give at the start of *Templars* generally apply here as well. Rather than repeat myself, I'll single out a few who truly went above and beyond in relation to this book specifically, starting with some of my colleagues at Simpson College: Kristen Graham for her legendary interlibrary loan skills, Jodi Eubank for her accounting prowess and patience, and Daryl Sasser for his unparalleled collegiality; thanks also to Simpson's Faculty Development Committee for helping fund my research trips to Europe. Among the many scholars whose work has informed my own and who so graciously and generously share their wisdom, I especially thank Dorothy Africa, Diane Auslander, Dorothy Bray, and the late and much lamented Donnchadh Ó Corráin. Our research depends upon librarians and archivists at places like Belgium's Royal Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België/Bibliothèque royale de Belgique) in Brussels, the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, and Trinity College Library and Archbishop Marsh's Library in Dublin; many thanks to them for helping to preserve our past.

I could not have envisioned a more ideal forum for *Sacred Sisters* than Amsterdam University Press's "Hagiography Beyond Tradition" series. My profound gratitude to the series editor, Alicia Spencer-Hall, the editorial board, and the commissioning editors Shannon Cunningham and Erin Dailey for their excellent work with this series, and to everyone whose feedback and assistance helped improve my manuscript, including the anonymous reviewers and especially Jennifer Edwards.

*Sacred Sisters* builds upon several of my previous publications, and I appreciate those publishers' permission to draw on them as necessary. I have presented much of this material in various forms at multiple conferences, including the medieval congresses in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and Leeds, England; the Celtic Studies Association of North America conference at the University of California, Berkeley; the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, held at Hofstra University; and the Southeastern Medieval Association annual conference in Charleston. My thanks to all who attended and especially those who asked questions and gave me valuable food for thought.

I am deeply grateful to the guardians of these historic sites as well as to those who helped us find the more obscure ones, especially Mr. Frawley, who spent several minutes trying to make sense of my descriptions of Manisternagalliaghduff, also known as Kilcatherine, after my husband and I had followed him and his tractor home (farmers generally have an excellent sense of the land and we had repeatedly met only with blank stares in this search). When he realized I was talking about what he knew as "the Old Abbey," he insisted on hopping in his car and leading us to the site, which

we reached several winding kilometers later, as he was doubtful we would find it on our own (and was likely right). At Manisternagalliaghduff, nature fuses with the remnants of medieval faith into a glorious, hallowed ruin that recalls Tolkien's Númenor, and Mr. Frawley's generosity made our visit even more meaningful. Thanks also to those at "the Old Abbey" who gave us permission to explore and photograph the site.

To my litany of beloved friends and family,<sup>1</sup> I add a few more: Jill, Dave, Jennie, Lora, Colleen, Mara, Michael, Joel, Louise, Mike, Barb, Todd, Eric, Meghan, and my O-family throughout the world, especially Val, Tracy, and Dan. You make the mundane that much more marvelous. Michael Larsen again did outstanding and deeply appreciated work processing my photographs of medieval Ireland's magnificence. Profound thanks and praise to my seven sisters who read drafts and warned me when academic discourse overwhelmed my writing: Nathalie Foy, Michelle Bolton King, Christine Donnelly, Danya Good, Eileen Gallagher Loranger, Michelle Coyle, and especially Barbara Kearney, who also repeatedly and most graciously hosted me, her home a short walk from Belgium's Royal Library, the current location of the *Codex Salmanticensis*. No words could possibly convey the depths of my gratitude for or debts to my parents, Clair and Sean, who among so many other things gave me a home in both Ireland and the United States and raised me to appreciate the power of saints and stories (Mom and Dad, respectively).

To my husband, Seth, my partner in all things, who has read draft after draft and traveled this ground almost as much as I have, and to our sons, one named for an Irish saint and the other for an American story-teller: you are my glory and my joy, and I give thanks for you each day, even those when I retreat into the Middle Ages.

Last but never least, I give thanks to and for my students, including MacKenzie Bills, Maddy Kersten, Nick Laning, Jacob McLain, Molly Monk, Tatianna Riesenbergl, Brett Roes, Jailyn Seabrooks, and Jasmine Ward. Your strength of character and commitment to creating a more compassionate, inclusive, just, and sustainable world fill me with hope for the future and constantly renew my passion for this profession. I chose the path of a professor when I was fifteen because of my love for learning; it wasn't until ten years later that, thanks to Mary Condren's *Institute for Feminism and Religion* in Dublin, I discovered that I also relished teaching, my first experience in that role and one that relates to this book's basic aims and inspiration. The trepidation that filled me at the start—especially since the class had about a hundred students, including

<sup>1</sup> Maeve Callan, *The Templars, the Witch, and the Wild Irish: Vengeance and Heresy in Medieval Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), xii.

several nuns—gradually gave way to ease and then enthusiasm as I shared the histories and writings of medieval religious women, our discussion of the students' questions and our various perspectives on the material the most enjoyable part of all. Afterwards, the nuns came up to thank me for teaching them, all older than my parents at the time. The fierceness of one as she held my hand and my gaze stays with me still. "Why didn't they ever teach us this?" she asked with a mixture of sorrow and indignation. "This is *our* history!"

The nun's words have strengthened me in the years since, as I have sought to recover women's religious history, and offered invaluable counter-perspective to a contemptuous dismissal of Ireland by an internationally respected medievalist I heard a few years later. During a discussion of the transformative impact the rise of vernacular literature had on twelfth-century Europe, I mentioned that the Irish had been writing in the vernacular for over half a millennium by that point, to which this venerated authority peremptorily replied, "Ireland is a marginal country with little to no historical significance." At first I heard this dismissal only as prejudice and ignorance fueled by pride—he didn't know much about Ireland or its early use of the vernacular, thus it could not be important. I soon realized, however, that his words reflected the reality of how European history is taught in the U.S. and in mainstream medieval studies. Repeatedly after I teach an aspect of Irish history, my students echo the words of the nun in my first class, asking, "Why didn't we ever learn this before?" Over ten percent of the U.S. population claims Irish ethnicity, "the nation's second-most frequently reported European ancestry," but Americans generally learn little about Ireland in their schools.<sup>2</sup> The countless books I read about medieval Europe as I pursued my graduate degrees rarely mentioned Ireland unless they specifically focused on it. At my first major medievalist conference, the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, my paper was one of a handful about Ireland, amid several thousand (a ratio that fortunately no longer holds, especially since scholars from Ireland increasingly attend the conference). The words of the nun and the world-renowned medievalist both rang in my ears, inspiring me to switch my academic focus to where my heart already belonged, from Italy to Ireland, helping me recover more of *my* history.

For that gifted yet still quite ignorant medievalist, for the nun and all she represents, and for everyone who seeks to discover more about Irish and/or women's history, no matter how marginal or insignificant others' ignorance and bias may deem it, I am forever grateful. This book is for you.

2 United States Census Bureau, Press Release February 21, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2017/cb17-ff05.html> (accessed July 10, 2017).

# Introduction

As Canair the Pious, a holy virgin of the Benntraighe, prayed in the dark of night, she saw a pillar of fire erupt from the roof of every church in Ireland, one blazing brighter and higher than all the rest.

“Inis Cathaig,” Canair murmured, recognizing it as the place of her resurrection. She arose at once and followed the fiery beacon, visible even in the day. For three days and nights she walked toward it without rest, until at last she crossed the waters surrounding Inis Cathaig, or Scattery Island, as it is now known. Senán, the head of a community on Inis Cathaig, came to the shore to deny her entry, stranding her on the waves.

“Women are not allowed on this island. Go stay with the woman who lives on the isle to the east,” he declared.

“I have come for no isle but this one,” Canair replied.

“Women are not welcome here,” said Senán.

“How can you say that?” asked Canair. “You’re not better than Christ. Christ came to redeem women just as much as men. No less did Christ suffer for the sake of women than for the sake of men. Women served with and ministered unto Christ and his apostles. No less than men do women enter the heavenly kingdom. Why, then, should you not admit women to this island?”

“You sure are stubborn,” Senán said, then moved aside.

Stepping off the waves onto the shore, Canair’s heart leapt with joy as she at last felt the promised land of her resurrection beneath her feet.<sup>1</sup>

This tale, found in the Irish Life (biography) of Senán in the fifteenth-century Book of Lismore, seems remarkably contemporary in its defense of women’s equality in Christianity. I’d like to say that after Senán allowed Canair entry he recognized the incompatibility of sexism and Christian faith, that together they created a truly egalitarian community, one in which people of all sexes, ages, classes, temperaments, ethnicities, et cetera, were welcome

<sup>1</sup> Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), 219-20.



to worship and serve God equally. And perhaps they did. But that's not what the sources say.

According to Senán's Irish Life (Canair has no Life of her own, at least not one that survives), Canair had little time to continue discussing the matter with Senán or anyone else, let alone to help build a model Christian community. Immediately after setting foot upon Inis Cathaig, she received the eucharist and promptly died. Since her journey began with the goal of reaching her resurrection site (a common calling in medieval Irish sources, signifying the place one will be buried and hence arise again to heaven), this fate is not surprising, but it is disappointing, given the potential inherent in Canair's words. More discouraging still is Senán's Latin Life in the *Codex Salmanticensis*, which tells the same tale but renders Canair anonymous and drastically weakens her argument. Instead of proclaiming Christ's egalitarianism and reminding Senán of women's assistance to Christ and the apostles, the now nameless woman simply asserts that Senán should not reject her in the flesh if he grants, as he does, that her spirit can receive Christ. Senán retorts that though she may be chaste in heart, she still has sex in her female body. The woman's only reply is to avow her faith that Christ will release her spirit from her flesh rather than make her leave the island. So he does, and so she dies, leaving her scorned, sexed body in an anonymous grave by the Scattery shore.<sup>2</sup>

Despite being so muted in the Latin Life and deprived an extant (surviving) Life of her own, Canair calls to us still, reminding us of women's full participation in critical aspects of Christian history. Yet in this history women often seem marginal at best, occasionally pushed so far to the fringes as to be virtually invisible. Canair is quite literally on the island's margins, remaining only as relics "on the brink of the waves," her life reduced to her death. This book, however, places such margins at the center. Instead of relying on fragments like the one above, in texts written by, for, and about men, men ostensibly dedicated to chaste celibacy who might regard females as a threat to that celibacy and their relationship with the divine and thus portray women accordingly, I focus on the experience of medieval Irishwomen in the sources in which women play the starring role, the Lives of Ireland's female saints, and contextualize these portraits with evidence from related sources, especially other religious texts as well as annals and archaeology.

Many caveats need to be considered, including that most if not all of these texts were written by religious men with their own perspectives

2 W. W. Heist, ed., *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, Subsidia Hagiographica 28 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1965) (hereafter HVSH), 317.

and agendas, and those texts have passed through centuries of revision, again possibly entirely at men's hands, more often than not in historically ambiguous contexts. The above exchange between Senán and Canair, for example, supposedly occurred in the sixth century, but the earliest extant account dates from nearly a thousand years later; who knows how many times it changed in the telling before it made it to a page that survived. Moreover, the saints celebrated in these texts are unknown degrees removed from the historical people they once were, recast as pinnacles of human perfection. Patrick offers a warning for those who seek the person behind the saint, although he is infinitely more inspiring and compelling in his own words than as the character created by his biographers. The saints' idealized images cannot be taken as accurate accounts of their own lived experiences, let alone the experiences of the untold and uncountable men and women who shared their time and place. Yet, for all the emphasis on the miraculous aspects of hagiography, or biography of saints, it also reveals to us what is possible. Not in the sense of hanging a cloak on a sunbeam or restoring the dead to life, but regarding how women were perceived and portrayed, how men and women interacted with each other, what social expectations they had to navigate and in what ways might they do so, and much more.

History, it must be remembered, is not the past. It is our understanding of the past based on interpretations of available evidence. That evidence is sparse, complex, and contradictory. It is also inherently biased, reflecting the interests, attachments, aspirations, fears, and resentments of those who created it, if we can even interpret their perspectives accurately. The Indian tale of the blind men and the elephant illustrates the point: each man touched part of the elephant and thought he had the whole; the one with the tusk thought he had a plow, the one at the tail a rope, the one by the leg a pillar, and so on. Our subjective realities shape our perceptions, and we too rarely recognize their limitations, succumbing to what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls "the danger of a single story."<sup>3</sup> In addition, historians are several degrees removed from the blind men; we are outside observers, trying to interpret what those individuals believed based on whatever outward clues have survived the centuries. This is not to suggest we should give up on history in relativist resignation—it is too essential to our understanding of ourselves, our present, and our possibilities, and at least part of the elephant, the past, is ultimately knowable. It is rather a reminder that while our

3 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," TED talk, July 2009, [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story) (accessed March 17, 2017).

understanding of history is incomplete and what remains has been written largely by the dominant, we can still detect diverse voices and perspectives. We need to cultivate a deeper understanding of that diversity to gain a more meaningful sense of the past.

People often insist “you can’t change history,” but historians change it all the time, based on new evidence, broadening perspectives, and expanding understanding of what was already known. Our perceptions of the past depend on what has survived, and the vast majority of extant early medieval Irish evidence is assumed or known to have been produced by men. Thus, even before social class or any other factor is considered, half of the population can be seen only in whatever shadows the dominant male elite allowed them to occupy, and for centuries that skewed view has determined history. In an effort to restore more balance and help break free of a sexist version of history that denies women access to an empowering heritage, it is tempting to heed novelist Monique Wittig’s call, “remember [women’s powerful past]. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.”<sup>4</sup> But historians cannot rely on memories of a culture that has been lost for most of a millennium or more, and inventing evidence defeats the purpose of history, useful as it may be in fiction. Yet we can take extant evidence and shift our perspectives. Instead of restricting women to the margins, confined to the role of the shunned, distrusted, feared, inherently inferior Other, in this book they stand at the center. With women at the center rather than the margins of their own history, a more complete and meaningful picture of the past and its relevance for the future can emerge. Given the current state of surviving evidence, we can offer little more than tentative steps in that direction; this book aims to help us find our footing.

For too long, perspectives like that attributed to Senán have dominated discussions of medieval Ireland, barring women from explicit consideration or defining them as defective, deficient, subordinate, servile, traitorous sexual temptresses who had to deny their own sex and strive to become honorary males if they had any hope of personal progress.<sup>5</sup> Scholars who paint such portraits have multiple sources for coloring their brush, yet tremendous diversity still survives within the historical record. Moreover, study after

4 Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. David Le Vay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 89.

5 Among the most informed and sensitive treatments are Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), and Elva Johnston, “The ‘Pagan’ and ‘Christian’ Identities of the Irish Female Saint,” in *Celts and Christians: New Approaches to the Religious Traditions of Britain and Ireland*, ed. Mark Atherton (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), 60–78. Helen Oxenham’s *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016) offers some important correctives to their arguments.

study shows that even when people witness the same event, they frequently see it quite differently, directly contradicting each others' accounts.<sup>6</sup> "What actually happened" remains elusive, determined by whatever attorney or other authority makes the most compelling case, with or without a reasonable doubt. Similarly, people regularly misunderstand each other, even when speaking for themselves with those who know them and share their culture, and they often misrepresent each other, unintentional though it may be. Contrasting medieval women's own writing with even the most positively inclined and informed male accounts of their experiences reveals glaring discrepancies that demonstrate gender ideology's impact on those portrayals. For example, men emphasized women's bodily and mystical triumphs and cast them as Christ's brides, whereas women themselves downplayed their bodies and sought to imitate Christ rather than simply wed him, encouraging others to strive to do the same.<sup>7</sup> Women knew and rejected male expectations; their words "suggest studied resistance to the forms of female religiosity and subjectivity prescribed for them within male-authored texts," though the sheer volume of male portraits of female sanctity continues to mute women's voices.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, such comparisons cannot be made for medieval Ireland, as no text has been proven to have been written by a woman, although female authorship seems likely in several cases, including the celebrated poems "The Lament of the Old Woman of Beara," Líadain's "Lament for Cuirithir," and St Íte's "Ísucán."

All testimony should be recognized as inherently limited and potentially unreliable, especially if it cannot be contextualized or substantiated. And when we contextualize Senán, even by just reading the rest of his Life, we see that sex segregation was by no means a primary principle. For example, he supposedly spent his own last days visiting with some of his female disciples, the daughters of Ner. Similarly, Molua is reputed to have refused a possible location for his monastery, because it apparently included a field frequented by sheep and, he declared, "where there are sheep, there are women; where there are women, there is sin; where there is sin, there is the devil, and where there is the devil, there is hell."<sup>9</sup> Yet

6 E.g., Gary Wells, Amina Memon, and Steven D. Pemrod, "Eyewitness Evidence: Improving Its Probative Value," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 7 (2006): 45-75.

7 *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), especially 1-15, 52-98, 136-67.

8 Amy Hollywood, "Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and Her Hagiographer," in *Gendered Voices*, 78-98, at 79.

9 *Ubi enim fuerit ovis, ibi erit mulier, et ubi fuerit mulier, ibi peccatum; ubi vero peccatum, ibi erit dyabolus, et ubi dyabolus, ibi infernus erit* [HVSH, 137 (quotations from HVSH are my translation)]. The women presumably would be shepherdesses.

he too had significant relationships with females, including his mute sixteen-year-old cousin, Cainer, who gained the power of speech after sucking the breath from his mouth; she eventually became a saint and the founder of the unidentified Cluan Clarith, “where she had many holy females under her rule.”<sup>10</sup> He also restored to life Buoan, Queen of Ossory, and her infant son, both of whom had died during childbirth and who subsequently gave themselves to his service.<sup>11</sup> Such apparent contradictions well represent attitudes towards women in Irish hagiography, which is not unique to Ireland. As Barbara Newman has commented regarding medieval Christendom generally,

The strength of misogynist taboos and patriarchal strictures should never be underestimated; their power to constrict human lives and psyches could be enormous. But [...] [their] endless iteration [...] quickly fades into a kind of ground bass—always present, sometimes annoyingly loud, but easy to tune out if one is intent on the more interesting harmonies and discords that are woven above and around it.<sup>12</sup>

While acknowledging that misogyny certainly exists in the record, this study focuses on “the more interesting harmonies and discords” that too easily can fade into the background, especially when so many others hear only bass.

### A Golden Age of Gender Relations?

Intriguingly, one text suggests that the “ground bass” of sexism and misogyny is a reflection of how far the holy have fallen. The *Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae*, or Catalogue of the Saints of Ireland, outlines Irish Christianity’s successive stages in terms of its male saints: “the first order was the holiest, the second beneath them in holiness, but above the third. The first blazes like the sun, enflamed with the fervor of love, the second glows like the moon, and the third shines like the dawn.” Claims of decreasing sanctity after a religion’s first founding are not uncommon, but one

10 HVSH, 133; Rev. John O’Hanlon, *Lives of the Irish Saints with Special Festivals, and the Commemorations of Holy Persons, Compiled from Calendars, Martyrologies, and Various Sources, Relating to the Ancient Church History of Ireland*, 12 vols (Dublin: Duffy and Sons, 1875), 8.45.

11 HVSH, 387.

12 Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 2.

characteristic distinguishes this fellowship not only between its orders, but within Christianity generally—partnership between the sexes as one of two indications of exceptional holiness, the other being uniformity. Members of the first order were all bishops who followed Patrick, celebrated the same Easter, and wore one tonsure (clerical hairstyle). Mass services were identical throughout Ireland, and what one church excommunicated was excommunicated by all. This idyllic community of saints “did not refuse the assistance (*administrationem*) of women,<sup>13</sup> and they did not refuse their companionship (*consortia*), because, founded upon the rock which is Christ, they did not fear the wind of temptation.”

Without Patrick’s centralizing authority, diversity entered with the second order, who had various rites of mass and rules of life, though they still celebrated Easter at the same time and wore the same tonsure. They, however, “fled the companionship and assistance of women, and they shut women out from their monasteries.” Though the first order outnumbered the second, the most celebrated male saints, with the exception of Patrick, belong to this second order.<sup>14</sup> The list could serve as a roster for Ireland’s most respected school, that of Finnian of Clonard, including the teacher and his most celebrated supposed students—ColmCille, Brendan, Ciarán, Enda, and Kevin, among others—yet their own Lives attest that several of them lived with women or included women in their communities, and Clonard itself was “co-educational.”<sup>15</sup> The third order makes no reference to women. These were Ireland’s great hermits, who “despised all earthly things.”<sup>16</sup> They lacked any sort of overall organization, with different tonsures, Easters, rules, and celebrations of mass. So, according to this pseudo-historical sketch, women begin as partners, then become shunned as Other, and finally disappear in silence, depending on the virtues or deficiencies of their male compatriots. As evocative as such a portrait may be, however, abundant evidence attests to continued cooperation between religious men and women in medieval Ireland far beyond these three ages, which the document dates roughly to 432-543 for the first, 544-599 for the second, and 600-664 for the third.

Clearly a work of Patrician propaganda, the *Catalogus* nevertheless raises a tantalizing question: why is women’s companionship found among the

13 *Administrationem* could also mean ministry, among other things.

14 According to the text, the first order consisted of 350 saints, the second order 300, while the third had 100 hermits.

15 Callan, “St Darcera and Her Sister Scholars: Women and Education in Medieval Ireland,” *Gender & History* 15 (2003): 32-49, at 40-41.

16 HVSH, 81-82; Appendix B.

holiest order, while isolation from women marks the middle? The text itself doesn't answer the question. Does it celebrate the sexual equality of an almost forgotten past as the highest path of virtue which has lamentably fallen away? Or does it suggest that this was a trial which only the holiest of men could pass, and lesser saints wisely recognized that to engage in such intimate association with women would cause their downfall? Were the holiest saints impervious to temptation, or was such temptation part of their asceticism? Such questions cannot be definitively answered, but scholars generally agree that the *Catalogus* here refers to syneisaktism, or profound partnerships between unrelated religious men and women whose mutual commitments to each other and Christ required them to sacrifice or at least sublimate their sexuality. While syneisaktism, which Chapter One explores further, is fairly common in medieval Irish sources, the *Catalogus* could also be extolling a more general ideal of gender relations in which men and women respected each other as colleagues in the Christian faith without being blinded by sexual difference.

The *Catalogus* cannot be confused with reliable history, but it does offer insight into at least one author's views about gender and sanctity during the ninth or tenth century. The evidence doesn't support its claims of a gender golden age at any point in medieval Ireland, nor can its claims of uniformity be upheld. Yet scholarly analyses often project the second order's perspective onto the whole of medieval Irish history, the only diversity allowed being the degree and kind of negativity directed at women. Ample evidence exists for a far more positive portrayal than scholars have often allowed, however. Attitudes like those attributed to Senán at the shore coexisted with those attributed to the *Catalogus's* first order. Gender and male-female relationships are frequently complicated and fraught with widely divergent perspectives and meanings. The Bible itself reflects a range of attitudes, including the inclusivity shown by Christ and celebrated by Canair, Galatians' call to transcend gender (and ethnic and socioeconomic) differences to find oneness in Christ, and pseudo-Pauline demands that women keep silent in churches and submit to their husbands, as discussed below. For too long those who would keep women silent and submissive, if they did not exclude them entirely or allow them admission only if they sacrificed their sex, have dominated the discussion; they have claimed such a perspective as a divine command, as determined by nature, as the only option and our only history, and too often historians have acquiesced. Fortunately a range of sources still survives, inviting us to make an effort to remember by reading them with less of a sexist lens.

## A Responsible Usable Past

“Who controls the past controls the future:  
who controls the present controls the past.”<sup>17</sup>

George Orwell's words from the dystopian novel *1984* apply to history generally. As Gerda Lerner has argued, men's ability to enforce their claim to a natural, biological, divinely-ordained superiority has been essential to patriarchy's perpetuation and its oppression of women and any who do not conform to patriarchal ideals.<sup>18</sup> Despite tremendous progress on various liberation fronts over the past fifty years especially, patriarchy remains so pervasive and insidious that some women continue to internalize its ideology, seeing their natural place as subordinate and submissive, regarding themselves as inherently inferior, viewing their biology—meaning, among other things, their ability to become pregnant—as their destiny.<sup>19</sup> “Is it oppression if the oppressed do not see it as such?” is a standard question in women's and gender studies courses; in proper multicultural fashion, there isn't a single right answer but a plethora of perspectives to help us better understand the nature of oppression, freedom, culture, and personal agency. Yet Stephen Biko's incisive observation, “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” must be considered; the oppressed internalize their oppressors' perspectives of them and self-police their own oppression, colonized from within.<sup>20</sup> Rebecca West's early twentieth-century remark also applies: “I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat.”<sup>21</sup> Merely claiming a degree of autonomy, the right to make basic decisions for yourself, can be seen as a radical act. The restrictions placed disproportionately on women might not be felt as oppressive by certain individuals, particularly if they

17 George Orwell, *1984* (1949; reprint, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1961), 32, 204.

18 Gerda Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), and *Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

19 Angela Saini offers a compelling critique of supposedly scientific arguments for women's alleged intellectual and biological inferiority in *Inferior: How Science Got Women Wrong—and the New Research That's Rewriting the Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017).

20 Stephen Biko, “White Racism and Black Consciousness,” in *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings* (1978, reprint; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 61–72, at 68.

21 Rebecca West, “Mr. Chesterton in Hysterics: A Study in Prejudice,” *The Clarion*, November 14, 1913; reprint in *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West, 1911–1917*, ed. Jane Marcus (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1918), 218–22, at 219.



have been conditioned to view such limitations as natural or divinely-mandated, but systematically applied to a group as a whole, such blanket discrimination offers a textbook example of oppression. The countless ways in which cultures perpetuate that oppression—including income inequality, restricted rights over one’s own body, limited leadership roles, rampant sexual violence which is frequently condoned on the basis of the victim’s clothes, location, sexual history, et cetera—contribute to this attempt to control women and colonize their minds, so that they accept patriarchal claims about their inherently inferior status and accept the patriarchal gaze as their own. But it can also fuel a feminist fire within, prompting the woman to shake “the man” from her eyeballs, see more clearly for herself, and work to create a more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate society.

Religion plays a disproportionate role in patriarchal oppression. In itself, religion is neither inherently empowering nor oppressive; rather, it magnifies humanity in all our rich complexity, to our glory, and our shame. As Desmond Tutu, the archbishop of Cape Town, once remarked, “Religion is like a knife. When you use a knife for cutting up bread to prepare sandwiches, a knife is good. If you use the same knife to stick into somebody’s guts, religion is bad.”<sup>22</sup> Patriarchy has impacted all of the major world religions; consequently, religion frequently has been used to “keep women in their place,” as these declarations in the Christian New Testament indicate: “I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent” (1 Timothy 2.12), and “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands” (Ephesians 5.22-24). Both passages come from texts that biblical scholars believe were written by someone purporting to be the apostle Paul, a later author trying to appropriate Paul’s authority to promote his own views. By the time the Bible was codified into a canon, after Christianity had been co-opted by a state that had previously persecuted the fledgling faith, pseudo-Paul’s views were conducive to those who then controlled the increasingly institutionalized church as well as the canon it created.<sup>23</sup> These scriptural statements have served as the first lines of defense against allowing women back into ministry. People who

22 Arlene Getz, “Religion is Morally Neutral,” *Newsweek*, December 30, 2004, <https://www.newsweek.com/religion-morally-neutral-123575> (accessed April 13, 2019).

23 For accessible overviews of this history, see the work of Bart Ehrman, including *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011) and *The Triumph of Christianity: How a Forbidden Religion Swept the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

have transcended gender barriers in their own churches often regard such scripture as bound to its historical context, as true for that time and place but no longer binding upon Christians as a whole—as opposed to passages that reveal eternal wisdom, like Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all are one in Christ Jesus.”

As much as biblical adherents, including those who claim to follow a literal reading, inevitably emphasize certain parts over others, however, the Bible does not distinguish between what should be understood as the limited products of historical context and what is eternally binding. Some Christian women continue to proclaim their willingness to submit to their husbands and some Christian men continue to insist upon it, claiming God (through some anonymous author posing as Paul) has ordained it, while much of western society, heavily influenced by Christianity, supports and perpetuates female subordination. Yet, substituting the other distinctions that Paul identifies in Galatians 3:28 as being transcended in oneness in Christ—ethnicity and socioeconomic class—makes the oppressive aspects immediately evident. In the chapter following the demand that wives submit to their husbands, the author of Ephesians commands, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ” (6.5). Nineteenth-century European-American Christians repeatedly used the Bible to argue that African slaves were ethnically ordained to serve whites.<sup>24</sup> The mere suggestion that African-Americans should submit to European-Americans is repugnant, no less than it would be to suggest that the Irish should submit to the English as their masters. Any African-American, or any Irish person, who endorsed such submission today would be pitied at best, suspected of the deepest self-loathing, referenced as an example of how racism warps the mind so badly that the oppressive persecution is internalized, crippling the self. Any member of another ethnicity who called for such submission would be condemned as a virulent racist. Yet countless Christians, African-Americans and Irish among them, continue to endorse such a system and its biblical justifications on the basis of sex.

Over forty years ago, Eleanor McLaughlin articulated the need to reclaim a responsible, usable Christian past:

Women who seek a just voice and role in the traditionally male dominated, hierarchically organized Christian community have found in the history

<sup>24</sup> Larry R. Morrison, “The Religious Defense of American Slavery Before 1830,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 81 (1980): 16-29.

of the church a depressing litany of theological justifications for the oppressive customs of patriarchal societies, of misogyny and neglect intensified by theological images, and ecclesiastical structures and practices that reflected and reinforced the androcentric character of theological and secular definitions of human nature. The tradition seems to have been created by and interpreted by men [who speak overwhelmingly of themselves]. [...] When women find their way into the narrative, it is as queen or temptress; the daughter of Eve; the fascinatingly dramatic witch; or Mary, ever virgin and her saintly imitators whose merits seem so destructive to the twentieth-century woman. The deeply antihistorical bias of many Christian women who seek wholeness within the church is fully understandable if one spends any time with the traditional and even the most recent studies of church history.

Instead, McLaughlin advocates an “approach to the Christian past [that] seeks to set forth a history that is at once *responsible*—that is, grounded in the historicist rubric of dealing with the past on its own terms—and *usable*. [...] an examination of Christian history with a new set of questions that arise out of commitments to wholeness for women and for all humanity.”<sup>25</sup>

McLaughlin’s words apply no less today, including in studies of medieval Ireland, and can be extended to include a commitment to the fullness of the tradition as well as humanity. As Judith Plaskow has argued regarding Judaism, “[t]he need for feminist Judaism begins with hearing silence,” as so much of scripture, history, and tradition speaks only of men, muting women as if they are invisible or less than fully human. Yet “there *is no Judaism*—there is only male Judaism—without the insights of both.”<sup>26</sup> Along with Plaskow, I heed Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s clarion call to develop a “hermeneutics of remembrance” to avoid “the enslavement of a people [that] becomes total when their history is destroyed and solidarity with the dead is made impossible.”<sup>27</sup> This hermeneutics, or interpretive lens, requires reading surviving sources with the understanding that they were shaped by a society dominated by patriarchy and sexism, drawing on a broad range of contextualizing information, and challenging their claims. “Read with new

25 Eleanor L. McLaughlin, “The Christian Past: Does it Hold a Future for Women?”, *Anglican Theological Review* 57 (1975): 36-56, at 37-38, emphasis in original.

26 Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 1, 12, emphasis in original.

27 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 19.

questions and critical freedom, traditional sources can yield ‘subversive memories’ of past struggles for liberation within and against patriarchy, memories that link contemporary women to a transformative history.”<sup>28</sup> Feminist historians of all sexes stand in solidarity with our sisters of the past, present, and future, recognizing that patriarchal oppression distorts not only humanity, but also the historical record, so much so that even the most perspicacious historians have assumed its universality. “Misogyny comes to taste like air, feel like gravity [...] so entrenched it’s hard to conceive of a world without it.”<sup>29</sup> This book turns up the volume on medieval Irish sources that reflect alternative, empowering “subversive memories” as it turns down the “bass” of patriarchal strictures that perpetuate sexism and misogyny.

## Book Overview

*Sacred Sisters* focuses on five saints in particular, starting with Patrick. It is admittedly ironic to begin a feminist reclamation of medieval Irish religious history with a man, but Patrick serves as a solitary voice illuminating Ireland’s earliest Christianity. While the traditional image of Patrick arriving in a pagan land and striking it with his staff, banishing the snakes and converting the whole island to the Christian faith, has little to do with the historical record, he offers no less of a compelling narrative in his own words: abducted from Britain and enslaved in Ireland, he eventually escaped from slavery only to return to help spread the faith among the Irish. His writings are the only extant records from an early Irish missionary; their survival led to him later being cast as Ireland’s conquering Christian hero. The following four chapters each feature a female saint with a surviving medieval Latin Life, or *vita* (plural *vitae*): Darerca (d. c. 517), Brigid (d. c. 524), Íte (d. c. 570), and Samthann (d. 739). All of their names have variations, not unlike today’s Catharine/Katherine/Kathryn, and Darerca became better known by her nickname, Moninne, which itself has multiple variations. When I quote from sources I leave the spelling used in the source, but know that Ita means Íte and Brigit Brigid—unless it’s one of many other saints of the same name, which should be clear from the context—or at least as clear as the sources are themselves!

<sup>28</sup> Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Alexandra Brodsky and Rachel Kauder Nalebuff, ed., *The Feminist Utopia Project: Fifty-Seven Visions of a Wildly Better Future* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2015), 5.

Darerca presents the life of an early Irish female missionary for monastic community. Her Life reflects the range of lifestyles open to women, including as a solitary recluse, in partnerships with men, and in various configurations with women of all kinds—wives and mothers as well as widows and virgins. Brigid, Ireland's only female patron saint, reveals relationships between Ireland's indigenous traditions and its adopted Christianity as well as the power and authority available to at least some women up until the twelfth century, a time of seismic change for the island. Multiple medieval sources insist she was ordained as a bishop, a status that her successors as abbess of Kildare shared until Ireland's ecclesiastical hierarchy was drastically revised in 1152. Several sources also show her performing a miraculous abortion for a grateful nun, a miracle several other Irish saints, all male, are recorded as performing as well, challenging conventional assumptions about Catholic sexual morality. Íte exemplifies the inclusive community created by these Christian holy women as she advocates for her faithful, whom she serves as a spiritual mother. No matter how significant their sins, she stands by their side, helping them take responsibility for their actions, find forgiveness, and be welcomed back into their community. Samthann, who lived two centuries after the first three, shows the stern but wise and merciful abbess who built on her older sisters' work. She could unleash an enormous eel on male threats to her sisters and beat greedy landowners in their dreams until they saw the error of their ways and freely donated whatever her community needed. Such strength of leadership could be the difference between a community's survival and its disappearance.

The final chapter explores several prominent fifth- through seventh-century female saints who do not have surviving medieval *vitae* but who help broaden our understanding of the complexity and empowering aspects of female religious experience in medieval Ireland. Three have early modern adaptations of medieval Lives or legends. Lasair was so renowned for her wisdom that Finnian of Clonard's own Life claims her as his student. She also shows that women could unleash some seriously righteous wrath, while also being a source of comfort and healing. Attracta (Athracht, Adroacht), said to be a contemporary and associate of Patrick, was particularly active in County Sligo, where she is well-remembered in several churches and wells. Her legend celebrates her ability to slay dragons and resurrect the dead. Cranat (Cránaid, Cranit, Craebhnat) celebrates connections with the earth, as her eyes are said to have become trees. One was devoured piece by piece by the desperate hopes of Ireland's emigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, as it was said to protect the bearer from drowning; another survived

and indeed thrived into the last century. Cranat sacrificed her eyes to retain control over her body and fate, to remain a nun rather than become a wife. Gobnait (Gobnad, Gobnit) inspired many legends attesting to her great holiness and harmony with animals and nature, but none survive from the medieval period. Medieval litanies and calendars invoked her protection and honored her memory, but her preservation is primarily a credit to the importance that her monastic site, Ballyvourney, retained through the centuries as well as to oral traditions and cultural customs that accompanied her cult. The chapter finishes with Dígde, the probable poet behind one of Ireland's most celebrated poems, *Aithbe damsá bés mara*, or "The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare." Her poem may preserve an authentic echo of a medieval Irishwoman's perspective, its haunting, complex, and evocative beauty and frank sexuality challenging assumptions about gender and sanctity and providing striking contrast to claims made by hagiographers (biographers of saints).

Five appendices conclude the book. The first two provide the reader with primary source material, photographs of the saints' sites and translations of their Lives. Both sites and sources provide a profound sense of connection with the saints and the faithful who shaped their cult over the centuries. For example, as I drove over the Cork and Kerry mountains on a grey day of near-constant rain, the sun pierced through the clouds, illuminating one select spot like the glories of heaven and calling to mind Canair's recognition of Inis Cathaig as her resurrection place due to its dazzling brilliance; strengthening my sense of solidarity with this particular saint, I too was kept from Scatterry's shores, prevented by storms rather than sexism. My photographs of the sites are followed by my translations of the women's *vitae*, along with the *Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae*. Appendices C through E offer a calendar of female Irish saints' feast days (generally their day of death, believed to mark their soul's entrance into heaven), a glossary of Latin and Irish terms that are most essential to this study, and a pronunciation guide (with the caveat that much disagreement exists about proper pronunciation).

*Sacred Sisters'* rough historical parameters span from the fifth through the mid-twelfth centuries; medieval texts, especially saints' Lives, provide its primary basis, although the strength of continued devotion to Life-less saints like Gobnait, which rivals the faith placed even in a powerful patron like Brigid, cautions against overreliance on the written word. Three great collections of Latin Lives of Irish saints survive, called the *vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, the Lives of the saints of Ireland. If they included only female saints' Lives, they would be *vitae sanctarum Hiberniae*, and periodically

throughout this study I use that phrasing (*vitae sanctarum Hiberniae*) to refer specifically to the Lives of Ireland's female saints. Each collection contains a Life that is translated in Appendix B; for reasons detailed there as well as in the respective chapters, I think it likely that the original sources for these Lives were written in the seventh through ninth centuries, but the three collections date from after Ireland's invasion by the English, also known as the Anglo-Normans, in the late twelfth. These collections indicate a degree of co-operation between the native Irish and English colonists who settled there, who eventually became known as the Anglo-Irish, and their celebration of Ireland's Christian past offers important contrast to its alleged condemnation in 1155 by Adrian IV, the only English pope, who purportedly proclaimed in a text known as *Laudabiliter* that its invasion would "expand the boundaries of the church, declare the truth of the Christian faith to an ignorant and barbarian people, and weed out the new growth of vices from the field of the Lord."<sup>30</sup>

Contrary to this papal bull, ample evidence attests to the power and depth of twelfth-century Irish Catholicism, not least Irish submission to the papacy regarding their own country's invasion. Yet certain peculiarities did exist in Ireland, fostered by its remote location on the western edge of Europe and its independence from the Roman Empire, which provided a framework for the church on the Continent and its outposts. These Irish idiosyncracies were fulminated against since the start of the twelfth century by indigenous reformers like Saint Malachy (Máel-máedóc Ó Morgair) who sought to bring Ireland into closer conformity with the Continent, part of the Gregorian Reform then spreading across Western Christendom. Most relevant for this study, Kildare's atypical gender arrangements came under fire at the Synod of Kells-Mellifont in 1152, which reorganized Ireland's ecclesiastical structure into the diocesan system it retained until the Reformation and which, at the insistence of the Italian papal legate (official representative of the pope), stripped Brigid's successor as abbess of

30 Giraldus Cambrensis, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. and trans. A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), 144. The authenticity of *Laudabiliter* has been debated, but it was regarded as genuine by multiple factions in medieval Ireland, and Pope Alexander III's 1172 letters share many of its sentiments. For doubts about its authenticity, see M. P. Sheehy, "The Bull *Laudabiliter*: A Problem in Medieval Diplomatie and History," *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 29 (1960-61): 45-70; Anne Duggan, "*Totius christianitatis caput*: The Pope and the Princes," in *Adrian IV, the English Pope (1154-59): Studies and Texts*, ed. Brenda Bolton and Duggan (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2003), 138-55, and Duggan, "The Power of Documents: The Curious Case of *Laudabiliter*," in *Aspects of Power and Authority in the Middle Ages*, ed. Brenda Bolton and Christine Meek (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 251-75.

Kildare of her episcopal status.<sup>31</sup> The last episcopal abbess, Sadb, came to power amid an even greater outrage inflicted upon Kildare's abbess. In 1132 Diarmaid MacMurrugh initiated his reign as king of Leinster with the abduction and rape of Mór, the abbess of Kildare, replacing her with Sadb, his niece.<sup>32</sup> Roughly twenty years after Sadb's demotion and forty years following Mór's rape, Diarmaid's alliances with Anglo-Normans, and especially Richard de Clare, Lord of Strigoil, better known as Strongbow, initiated Ireland's invasion and subsequent colonization at their hands, leaving Ireland irreparably altered. Despite the seven-plus centuries of Christianity thriving in Ireland, a history celebrated in the *vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, and despite the sincere and sustained efforts of Irish ecclesiastical leaders to enforce greater conformity to Continental norms, twelfth-century papal propaganda proclaimed the Irish fallen from the faith and sanctioned this invasion by their neighbors to the east, a second stage in the conquest of the British Isles by the Norse-cum-Normans of Normandy, France.<sup>33</sup>

Like the Anglo-Norman invaders, Patrick too came from Britain. His words, dating presumably to the fifth century, mark the start not only of this study, but of all known portraits of Christianity recorded within Ireland. Patrick makes manifest his deep admiration for and gratitude to the many Irish holy women who became his partners in building the Irish church. Male dominance surfaces in the records of the men who claimed to be his heirs centuries later, but even they attest to a wide range of options available to women, including as missionaries, church founders, and leaders, as well as to their ability to retain rights over both their property and themselves. The *vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* greatly enrich this sense of female agency and authority, the strength of bonds between religious men and women and especially among sisters, and the power of female saints' patronage, ensuring their faithful's well-being, even if they had to overcome death to do so. By the twelfth century, however, as Mór's rape and Sadb's demotion powerfully symbolize, female religious authority came under relentless attack, and Ireland would not see another female bishop until 2013. Fittingly, this bishop, Patricia Storey, a married mother of two, is Brigid's heir, Bishop of Meath and Kildare.

31 F.J. Byrne, "The Trembling Sod: Ireland in 1169," in Art Cosgrove, ed., *A New History of Ireland*, Vol II: Medieval Ireland, 1169-1534 (1987, reprint; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-42, at 42; Marie Thérèse Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), 72-73.

32 Byrne, "The Trembling Sod: Ireland in 1169," 22.

33 See Callan, *The Templars, the Witch, and the Wild Irish: Vengeance and Heresy in Medieval Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 1-17; see also the Conclusion.



## Memories of the Future

Bishop Storey is of course Protestant, the first female bishop in the Anglican Communion in the entire British Isles, followed by Libby Lane, Bishop of Stockport (and, like Storey, a priest's wife), in 2015. As of this writing, the Church of England has had twenty-two female bishops; the Church in Wales two, Joanna Penberty, Bishop of St. David's, and June Osborne, Bishop of Llandalf; and the Episcopal Scottish Church one, Anne Dyer, Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney.<sup>34</sup> The Church of Ireland holds at its one—one more than the Roman Catholic Church is likely to ever officially recognize. As discussed in Chapter Three, ordination has been a strictly guarded male preserve since at least the twelfth century. No records prove that women ever held priestly office within orthodox Catholicism, but prior to the Gregorian Reform women were ordained to various offices, including as abbesses, deaconesses, and nuns, and some were hailed as *presbytera* and *episcopa*, the female forms of priest and bishop. What such titles specifically signified cannot be determined, but the Brigidine sources are comparatively clear. In the words of Gary Macy, the leading historian of medieval Catholic female ordination, Brigid was “actually ordained to the episcopacy. She was referred to as a bishop not out of courtesy or metaphorically. She was really ordained.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the medieval accounts that proclaim Brigid's right to episcopal status extended it to all abbesses of Kildare, ultimately ending with Sadb, as other sources attest.

Despite all that has changed between the medieval period and the modern day, women in the Catholic hierarchy remain essentially where the twelfth century left them. The 1950s, the decade before Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*, or modernizing, are humorously called the last decade of the Catholic Middle Ages, but for Catholic women, whom the council admitted only as auditors, or observers, the same status given to non-Catholic attendees, medieval restrictions largely remain. In late 2016 Pope Francis pronounced the door to the priesthood perpetually shut to women, citing John Paul II.<sup>36</sup> John Paul's *Mulieris Dignitatem*, meaning “On the Dignity of Woman,” issued on the Feast of Mary's Assumption (August 15) in the Marian Year of 1988, builds upon Paul VI's 1976 *Inter Insigniores*, proclaiming that priests must be

34 [https://www.forwardinfaith.com/List\\_of\\_Women\\_Bishops.php](https://www.forwardinfaith.com/List_of_Women_Bishops.php) (accessed July 31, 2019). Two more consecrations are scheduled for November 19, 2019.

35 Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 54.

36 Philip Pulella, “Pope Says He Believes Ban on Female Priests is Forever,” *Reuters* November 1, 2016; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-women-idUSKBN12W4L7> (accessed April 16, 2017).

male to perform the sacrament, for only a man could seem to be in Christ's image and act in his person:<sup>37</sup> "For Christ himself was and remains a man."<sup>38</sup> *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, issued by John Paul on Pentecost in 1994, insists that "the Church has no authority to confer priestly ordination on women," a view he says must be "definitively held by all the Church's faithful." He declares this stained-glass ceiling to be "in accordance with God's eternal plan, [...] preserved by the constant and universal Tradition of the Church and firmly taught by the Magisterium in its more recent documents."<sup>39</sup> No matter how much the Magisterium may recently insist, however, Tradition is far from constant and universal, including on this issue, as Brigid and others in medieval Ireland and elsewhere indicate.

Some progressives felt betrayed by this pronouncement by Francis, who has been hailed as "the people's pope," as *Time* proclaimed him when it named him person of the year in 2013, the year he ascended the papal throne—or rather the plain chair with which he replaced said throne.<sup>40</sup> The first Latin American pontiff (from Argentina, though of Italian parents) and the only one who has ever had a woman as a boss, Francis exemplifies humble simplicity, forsaking lavish papal apartments and preferring a 2008 Ford Focus to Benedict XVI's Mercedes Popemobile.<sup>41</sup> Compassion and concern especially for the poor and vulnerable permeate his words and actions, heeding Christ's exhortations to care for those in need. On his first Maundy Thursday as pope he washed the feet of twelve juvenile delinquents, two female and two Muslim, as he ceremonially re-enacted Christ washing the apostles' feet.<sup>42</sup> He amplified the message in 2016

37 [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19880815\\_mulieris-dignitatem.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html) (accessed December 19, 2016).

38 [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19761015\\_inter-insigniores\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html) (accessed December 19, 2016). *Inter Insigniores* was issued on the Feast of Teresa of Avila (October 15). John Paul further affirmed this view in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, an apostolic exhortation issued on the Feast of Annunciation (March 25), when Mary first learned she would conceive Christ, 1992 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031992\\_pastores-dabo-vobis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html) (accessed December 19, 2016).

39 [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html) (accessed December 19, 2016).

40 Howard Chua-Eoan and Elizabeth Dias, "Pope Francis, the People's Pope," *Time*, December 11, 2013 <http://poy.time.com/2013/12/11/person-of-the-year-pope-francis-the-peoples-pope/> (accessed December 19, 2017).

41 John L. Allen, Jr., *The Francis Miracle: Inside the Transformation of the Pope and the Church* (New York: Time Books, 2015), 120.

42 Carol Glatz, "Pope washes young offenders' feet at Holy Thursday Mass," *Catholic Herald UK*, March 28, 2013 <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2013/03/28/pope-washes-young-offenders-feet-at-holy-thursday-mass/> (accessed December 19, 2016).

when, amid increasingly intense anti-Muslim and anti-refugee sentiment throughout the western world, he washed the feet of eleven refugees and one Italian Catholic, eight male and four female, “three Eritrean Coptic Christians; four Catholics from Nigeria; three Muslims from Mali, Syria and Pakistan; and a Hindu man from India,” posting a picture of himself kissing a refugee’s brown foot to his new Instagram account.<sup>43</sup> He famously remarked, “who am I to judge?” regarding homosexuality in 2013,<sup>44</sup> and in June 2016 implied that the church ought to be the one judged for its treatment of homosexuals, saying it should apologize to them “as well as to the women who have been exploited.”<sup>45</sup>

Francis’s reference to exploited women aroused hopes that he might eventually redress women’s exclusion from the priesthood, especially since his remarks to women religious during the triennial meeting of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) the previous month had caused speculation that he might reopen the diaconate to women. The diaconate, the third and lowest holy order after the episcopate and the presbyterate (i.e., priesthood), is the only one of the three that was indisputably open to Catholic women for centuries.<sup>46</sup> According to the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, which advocates women’s ordination, “[a]n estimated 50,000 women deacons ministered in parishes throughout the eastern part of the Catholic Church during the first millennium,” with more than a hundred known by name.<sup>47</sup> In August 2016, Francis named six men and six women with diverse views on women’s role in the church to a commission to research the history of women deacons, which began meeting three months later.<sup>48</sup>

43 Elahe Izadi, “Pope Francis Washes the Feet of Muslim Migrants, Says We Are ‘Children of the Same God,’” *Washington Post*, March 25, 2016 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/03/25/children-of-the-same-god-pope-francis-washes-the-feet-of-muslim-migrants/?utm\\_term=.9875ab8917aa](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/03/25/children-of-the-same-god-pope-francis-washes-the-feet-of-muslim-migrants/?utm_term=.9875ab8917aa) (accessed December 19, 2016).

44 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130728\\_gmg-conferenza-stampa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-conferenza-stampa.html) (accessed December 19, 2016).

45 Philip Pullella, “Pope Says Church Should Ask Forgiveness from Gays for Past Treatment,” *Reuters*, June 26, 2016 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-church-idUSKCN0ZC12E> (accessed December 19, 2016).

46 The Catechism of the Catholic Church, II.2.iii.6 [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a6.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a6.htm) (accessed December 19, 2016).

47 “Women Deacons/Deaconesses in the Catholic Church,” <http://www.womenpriests.org/deacons/> (accessed September 3, 2016).

48 Joshua J. McElwee, “Members of Francis’ Women Deacons Commission Express Diverse Views,” *National Catholic Reporter*, August 9, 2016; <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/members-francis-women-deacons-commission-express-diverse-views> (accessed December 19, 2017). Francis announced in May 2019 that the commission ended its work divided by their diverse views, with no resolution.

Some members of the Anglican Communion started ordaining women deacons in 1969, followed by the first female priests in 1976 and bishops in 1989, further strengthening the sense that this commission could be the first step towards shattering the Catholic stained-glass ceiling.<sup>49</sup> Such hopes began the moment he took office, with my advisor at and the former Vice Provost of Trinity College Dublin, Linda Hogan, being suggested as the likely first female *cardinal*, the papal-appointed “Princes of the Church” who select the pope when vacancy occurs, showing just how high such hopes could reach.<sup>50</sup> As Jamie Manson cautioned in response to the enthusiasm erupting over his responses to UISG, however, Francis is no champion of women’s ordination.

Manson challenges “the myth of Francis’ revolutionary attitude toward women” and criticizes church teachings which have “an especially perilous impact on poor women.” She emphasizes his “unwavering belief in complementarity, the idea that, by creating male and female bodies differently, God shows us that God intends for men and women to have separate roles and purposes in the church and in the family.” She faults him for telling “women that their bodies determine their destiny in the church” and for following John Paul’s and Paul VI’s logic that priests need a penis to perform the sacrament: “Francis is delicately saying that because women do not have a phallus, they cannot ‘image’ the body of Christ. In what is surely a great cosmic irony, a woman’s God-given body prevents her from transforming bread into Christ’s body.”<sup>51</sup> Such exclusion would apply to Christ’s own mother, who grew, gave birth to, and suckled that body, eventually cradling it, broken, at the foot of the cross; and to Mary Magdalene, who bore witness to that body’s agonizing death after male apostles had fled in fear and shame, then went to the tomb to care for that body and instead became the first to witness the resurrected Christ and preach the Good News, an honor for which she has been hailed as *Apostola Apostolorum*, the apostle of the apostles. Yet her sex would preclude her

49 Eleven women were ordained to the priesthood in 1974 in the United States, and four more in 1975, but Episcopal authorities immediately denounced their ordinations, which were not approved until 1976. The Anglican Church of Canada also has ordained female priests since 1976.

50 “In theory she could become pope herself” [Justine McCarthy, “Lady in Red: Linda Hogan Tipped to Be Cardinal,” *The Sunday Times*, November 3, 2013; [http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk\\_news/National/article1335691.ece](http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/National/article1335691.ece) (accessed December 19, 2016)].

51 Jamie Manson, “It’s Time to Be Honest About Pope Francis and Women,” *National Catholic Reporter*, May 19, 2016 (<https://www.ncronline.org/print/blogs/grace-margins/its-time-be-honest-about-pope-francis-and-women>, accessed December 19, 2016).

from priesthood, as “the Magisterium in its more recent documents” insists.<sup>52</sup>

In his remarks to UISG, Francis warns against the “temptation” of feminism, which he says reduces women’s importance,<sup>53</sup> which chiefly arises from their ability to be wives and mothers but bars them from the priesthood.<sup>54</sup> As Manson argues,

Pope Francis believes that women cannot assume these leadership roles in the church because of our bodies. He believes [that] God simply cannot work through the female body in the way in which God works through the male body. He believes that, when it comes to consecrating the Eucharist, the female anatomy somehow renders God powerless[...]

Pope Francis’ unshakeable belief that the purpose of women is to be mothers, nurturers and “complements” to men does not only reinforce the ban on women’s decision-making and sacramental power in the church – these beliefs are also tied directly to the church’s teachings on sexual and reproductive health, especially contraception and abortion[...]

This same ideology keeps women, day after day, sacramentally powerless and banned from pulpits in Catholic churches, while the people of God long for ordained ministers who can offer meaningful baptisms and funerals, thoughtful homilies, and comforting last rites [...]

the beliefs about women that are espoused by Pope Francis are causing untold suffering to women, to families, and to the life of the church itself.

After years of pain and division caused by previous popes, there is little wonder that so much hope has been placed in Francis’ papacy. And there are some good, concrete reasons to have hope in him. But we must be honest

52 [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotialis.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotialis.html) (accessed December 19, 2016).

53 “Now there are two temptations here, against which we must guard. The first is feminism [...] We must not fall into feminism, because this would reduce a woman’s importance. I do not see, at this moment, a great danger of this among women religious. I do not see that. Perhaps in the past, but in general it is not present.”

54 Francis sees the nuns he was addressing as wives and mothers as well: “All women religious, all consecrated women should live mystically, because yours is a marriage: your [*sic*] is a vocation of maternity” [<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2016/05/13/0337/00782.html#TRAD>]; (accessed December 19, 2016).

about the limitations that Francis places [on] women's bodies and women's power, and we must not be afraid to let our prophetic voices rise up about it.

The lives of countless women and the future of the church itself depend on it.<sup>55</sup>

Manson's sense of urgency arises in part from Catholic prohibition of artificial contraception and Draconian attitudes toward abortion that especially impact "poor women, whose need to manage the size of their families is a matter of life and death." For his part, however, Francis has criticized an overemphasis in Catholic morality on contraception, abortion, and homosexuality.<sup>56</sup> During his Jubilee Year, Francis gave priests the authority reserved to bishops to absolve the sin of abortion, extending this authority indefinitely after this "Year of Mercy" came to an end in November 2016. In practice, however, many bishops "have delegated that power to priests under them already, making the pope's edict more symbolic than practical in many regions."<sup>57</sup> As liberal as Francis may seem to some, surveys have repeatedly shown that Catholics especially in western countries favor a far more progressive agenda than what the papacy has advanced. According to the Pew Research Center, "[f]ully 45% of Americans are connected to Catholicism in some way, including one-fifth who claim the faith as their current religion, one-tenth who were raised in the faith and have now fallen away, and a similar share who maintain a cultural connection to Catholicism."<sup>58</sup> Over three-fourths of those who still claim the faith believe the church should allow contraception, with a roughly even split on whether or not abortion should be legal.<sup>59</sup> "Roughly six-in-ten Catholics say the church should allow priests to get married (62%) and women to become priests (59%)." Those numbers are even higher among "cultural Catholics," with 83% approving of married priests and 77% women priests. Former Catholics also show more support on these two issues (79% to 62%

55 Manson, "It's Time to Be Honest."

56 [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html) (accessed December 19, 2016).

57 Weston Williams, "Has Pope Francis Softened the Catholic Stance on Abortion?", *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 21, 2016; <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2016/1121/Has-Pope-Francis-softened-the-Catholic-stance-on-abortion> (accessed December 19, 2016).

58 "U.S. Catholics Open to Non-Traditional Families," Pew Research Center, September 2, 2015; <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/09/Catholics-and-Family-Life-09-01-2015.pdf> (accessed December 19, 2016).

59 Michael Lipka, "Majority of U.S. Catholics' Opinions Run Counter to Church on Contraception, Homosexuality," Pew Research Center, September 19, 2013; <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/19/majority-of-u-s-catholics-opinions-run-counter-to-church-on-contraception-homosexuality/> (accessed December 19, 2016).

and 66% to 59%).<sup>60</sup> Nor are Americans radical outliers. A survey of more than 12,000 Catholics in twelve countries across five continents found that 78% supported the use of artificial contraception and 65% were in favor of legal abortion, with a fairly close divide on the issue of married (50% in favor, 47% opposed) and female (45% in favor, 51% opposed) priests.<sup>61</sup>

This survey did not include the Republic of Ireland, which according to its 2011 census is approximately 85% Catholic yet in 2015 became the first country to legalize same-sex marriage by a democratic vote (62.1% in favor, 37.9% opposed). A 2012 survey of Ireland's Catholics found overwhelming support for married (87%) and female (77%) priests.<sup>62</sup> On May 25, 2018, after a decades-long struggle, the Irish people resoundingly voted to repeal their Constitution's Eighth Amendment, which in effect outlawed abortion. Exit polls showed that voters of almost every stripe supported repeal's landslide victory, 65% of men as well as 70% of women, in "a fundamental rejection by the entire country of what has gone before; the final casting off of old mores."<sup>63</sup> Gail McElroy, professor of politics at Trinity College Dublin, pronounced the results "the final nail in the coffin for [the Roman Catholic hierarchy]."<sup>64</sup> About two months before the referendum, on the eve of International Women's Day, Mary McAleese, the former President of Ireland and a devout Catholic, declared the Catholic Church "an empire of misogyny" that has "kept Christ out and bigotry in" and denounced women's exclusion from the priesthood as "pure codology"; an Irish survey found that 78% of the 1,000+ people polled agreed with her sentiments.<sup>65</sup>

60 "U.S. Catholics Open to Non-Traditional Families," Pew Research Center, September 2, 2015; <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/09/02/chapter-4-expectations-of-the-church/> (accessed March 29, 2017).

61 Michelle Boorstein and Peyton M. Craighill, "Pope Francis Faces Church Divided over Doctrine, Global Poll of Catholics Finds," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2014 [[https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/pope-francis-faces-church-divided-over-doctrine-global-poll-of-catholics-finds/2014/02/08/e90ecef4-8f89-11e3-b227-12a45d109e03\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.2705cbd03d28](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/pope-francis-faces-church-divided-over-doctrine-global-poll-of-catholics-finds/2014/02/08/e90ecef4-8f89-11e3-b227-12a45d109e03_story.html?utm_term=.2705cbd03d28)]; (accessed March 29, 2016)].

62 Association of Catholic Priests, "Contemporary Catholic Perspectives," February 2012; <https://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Contemporary-Catholic-Perspectives.pdf> (accessed March 29, 2016).

63 Fiach Kelly, "Yes Vote Shows Overwhelming Desire for Change," *Irish Times*, May 25, 2018; <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/yes-vote-shows-overwhelming-desire-for-change-that-nobody-foresaw-1.3508879> (accessed May 25, 2018).

64 Quoted in Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, "Ireland Votes to End Abortion Ban, in Rebuke to Catholic Conservatism," *New York Times*, May 22, 2018; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/26/world/europe/ireland-abortion-yes.html> (accessed May 27, 2018).

65 Órla Ryan, "Vast Majority of People Agree that Catholic Church is 'Empire of Misogyny,'" *The Journal*, March 12, 2018 <http://www.thejournal.ie/empire-of-misogyny-mary-mcaleese-3900044-Mar2018/> (accessed March 25, 2018).

The Catholic church is no democracy, but these surveys and referendum results reveal a far more progressive Catholic populace than the Magisterium represents, with the vast majority supporting the use of scientifically sound contraception and a significant majority favoring access to legal and safe abortion. Support for female priests is markedly lower among Catholics globally than in the United States and Ireland, yet approval still stands at an impressive 45%, reaching as high as 83% in France and 78% in Spain, with Argentina, the pope's home country, at 60%.<sup>66</sup> In matters relating to sexual morality and gender roles, Catholics generally prefer a drastically different approach than what the all-male celibate hierarchy currently allows and some, like the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests, Women's Ordination Worldwide, and the Irish Association of Catholic Priests, co-founded by Rev. Tony Flannery, who ultimately ignored the Vatican's 2012 order silencing him for his teachings on women's ordination, contraception, and homosexuality, are not waiting for the Magisterium to catch up.<sup>67</sup> Yet, as the *vitae sanctarum Hiberniae* attest, such approaches are less a radical innovation than a return to medieval Catholic roots, at least as developed in certain places at certain times. Declaring that "[t]he lives of countless women and the future of the church itself depend on it," Manson calls on Catholics to use their "prophetic voices" to inspire the church to accept female ecclesiastical authority, to recognize women's range of abilities rather than restricting them to nurturing and submissive roles defined by anatomy, and to advocate an effective, responsible approach to family planning that concedes that sometimes abortion might be a more ethical choice. Monique Wittig's exhortation, "remember [...] or failing that invent," again applies, although we likely cannot remember, nor do we need to invent.<sup>68</sup> The *vitae sanctarum Hiberniae* preserve memories of the future that Manson and other progressive Christians seek, as they also affirm that Christian history is much more complex than dominant narratives would have any of us believe.<sup>69</sup>

66 "Voice of the People," [http://univision.data4.mx/resultados\\_catolicos/eng/ENG\\_catholic-survey.pdf](http://univision.data4.mx/resultados_catolicos/eng/ENG_catholic-survey.pdf) (accessed March 29, 2016).

67 Tony Flannery, *A Question of Conscience* (Dublin: Londubh Books, 2013).

68 Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, 89.

69 Feminist theologian Letty Russell refers to Jesus as "a *memory of the future* which God is bringing toward us," the promise of a socially just, compassionate, and loving community which God wants for all creation [*Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective—A Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 72, emphasis in original].