

The pope, a knight and a bishop on the edge of Christendom: the politics of exclusion in thirteenth-century Ireland

JOHN MARSHALL*

Trinity College Dublin

ABSTRACT. *This article provides a re-appraisal of the land dispute between the lord of Leinster, William Marshal, and the bishop of Ferns, Ailbe Ó Máelmuaid, in the 1210s. In 1215, Ailbe petitioned the pope to solve the dispute, leading to the pronouncement of an interdict and excommunication against the Marshal. It is argued that after King John of England died and the Marshal became regent of England in 1216, the papal stance towards the land dispute changed and the Marshal enjoyed favour in Rome, thus shutting the roads to redress for the bishop of Ferns. Now the most powerful man in the Plantagenet dominions, William Marshal used his position as regent to begin the policy of English discrimination against Gaelic-born bishops for episcopal sees in Ireland. This article uses this dispute as a means of exploring Ireland's position within wider Latin Christendom against the background of the papacy's crusading agenda.*

At the Fourth Lateran Council, convened in Rome in 1215, Bishop Ailbe Ó Máelmuaid of Ferns informed Pope Innocent III of the injustices that he had suffered at the hands of the lord of Leinster and earl of Pembroke, William Marshal. By doing so, Ailbe elevated what had been a local land dispute to the heights of the papal court, getting the Marshal excommunicated in the process. The situation changed a year later with the deaths of the pope and the king of England. William Marshal's accession to the regency of England brought him the support of the new pope who was eager to secure Latin Christendom and mount a crusade, leaving Bishop Ailbe isolated on a papal periphery. Hence, this dispute provides a unique perspective on Ireland's place within wider Latin Christendom.

William Marshal was long portrayed as the epitome of chivalry, the moral and social knightly code that was developing at the turn of the thirteenth century.¹ The Marshal gained this accolade primarily because of his near-contemporary biography, *L'histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, a superb source for understanding medieval society and a eulogisation of the Marshal's career.² *L'histoire* ignores

* *Medieval History Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin, marshajo@tcd.ie*

¹ On chivalry as political morality, see John Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century: imperialism, national identity, and political values* (London, 2000), part three.

² A. J. Holden, S. Gregory and D. Crouch (eds), *History of William Marshal* (hereafter *HWM*) (3 vols, London, 2002).

incidents that demonstrate the Marshal's ruthlessness rather than his gallantry. The dispute with Bishop Ailbe is absent, though on his deathbed Marshal is claimed to have said, 'Li cleric sunt vers nos trop engrés, Trop nos vunt barbiant de pres' (Churchmen are too hard on us, shaving us too closely).³ This article provides a reappraisal of the dispute between the bishop and the Marshal, and analyses it within its international context.⁴

I

In 1189, William Marshal (†1219), the younger son of a Wiltshire baron, married Isabel, the daughter of Aife and Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, more commonly known as Strongbow (†1176). Through this marriage, the Marshal was elevated from a courtier to one of the most powerful lords in the Plantagenet dominions, inheriting the lordship of Leinster in Ireland, two lordships in Wales centred on Pembroke and Chepstow, some lands in Normandy, and demesne manors scattered throughout England. William's accession was not easy, particularly in Ireland where he had to battle opposition from John, king of England and lord of Ireland (r. 1199–1216), and the latter's bulldog justiciar, Meiler fitz Henry (†1220).⁵ Relations between John and the Marshal had not always been poor, for the Marshal had been instrumental in securing John's accession and was belted earl of Pembroke as a result.⁶ The relationship soured when the Marshal paid homage to the king of France, Philip Augustus (r. 1180–1223), to retain his lands in Normandy after the king of France had seized King John's Norman possessions in the period 1202–04.⁷ However, by the early 1210s the Marshal had proved himself to be a loyal servant to John as king. Hence, the Marshal was selected by John on his death bed in October 1216 to be part of the council of thirteen that would help the young Henry III recover his inheritance. The Marshal assumed the role

³ *HWM*, II. 18481–2.

⁴ Previous studies of this dispute include Goddard Henry Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans 1169–1333* (4 vols, Oxford, 1911–20; repr. Dublin, 2005), pp 295–6; Aubrey Gwynn, 'The coming of the Normans' in idem and Gerard O'Brien (eds), *The Irish church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries* (Dublin, 1992), pp 274–83; Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Ailbe Ua Máel Muaid, Uí Chennselaig and the *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*' in Seán Duffy (ed.), *Princes, prelates and poets in medieval Ireland: essays in honour of Katharine Simms* (Dublin, 2013), pp 309–38. For a discussion of the concept of core and periphery and Ireland, see Anngret Simms, 'Core and periphery in medieval Europe: the Irish experience in a wider context' in William J. Smyth and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Common ground: essays on the historical geography of Ireland* (Cork, 1988), pp 22–40.

⁵ The difficulty of the Marshal in gaining seisin is discussed by Marie Therese Flanagan, 'Defining lordships in Angevin Ireland: William Marshal and the king's justiciar' in Martin Aurell and Frédéric Boutouille (eds), *Les seigneuries dans l'espace Plantagenêt (c.1150–c.1250)* (Bordeaux, 2009), pp 41–57.

⁶ David Crouch, *William Marshal* (Oxford, 2016), p. 99.

⁷ By 1204 Philip Augustus had taken Normandy, Anjou and Touraine, leading to the collapse of Angevin power in north-western France: see Maurice Powicke, *The loss of Normandy, 1189–1204: studies in the history of the Angevin empire* (Manchester, 1961). For a discussion regarding the Marshal lands in France, see Daniel Power, 'The French interests of the Marshal earls of Striguil and Pembroke, 1189–1234' in John Gillingham (ed.), *Anglo-Norman studies XXV: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2002* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp 199–225.

of regent of the Plantagenet dominions, which at the time were engulfed in turmoil, with many barons in revolt as a result of King John's territorial losses to Philip Augustus and his backtracking on Magna Carta.⁸

The Marshal's first task was to quell the baronial revolt that was being supported by Louis (later King Louis VIII, r. 1223–6), son of Philip Augustus, who had accepted the crown of England from the disgruntled barons and was now on English soil. In the ensuing war, the Marshal's role in raising the siege of Lincoln Castle in May 1217 was crucial, alongside the naval defeat of the French off Sandwich in August. These victories led to an agreement between Louis and the Marshal stipulating that Louis was to leave England in exchange for a general amnesty and an indemnity of 10,000 marks. The Marshal thus reinstated the constitutional stability of England and continued to advise the young Henry III until his own death in May 1219.

Ailbe Ó Máelmuaid (†1223) probably hailed from Fir Chell, a territory in the west of present-day County Offaly, and his career has been relatively well documented.⁹ By 1180, he had become the Cistercian abbot of Baltinglass, and six years later he secured the bishopric of Ferns. Ailbe seems to have enjoyed warmer relations with John, both as lord of Ireland and later as king of England, than most contemporary Irishmen. John's actions, from his first visit to Ireland in 1185, had made it clear that he did not intend to act as an unprejudiced lord of English settler and Gaelic Irishman alike, but rather to support the interests of the English lords. Meanwhile, since the assertion of English power in Ireland, Irish clerics like Ailbe had viewed the kings of England as champions of the reform they wished to progress.¹⁰

Ailbe was one of three Irish prelates who attended the coronation of King Richard I (r. 1189–99) at Westminster Abbey on 3 September 1189.¹¹ He was in England again three years later when he witnessed a grant by the archbishop of Dublin, John Cumin (†1212), to Geoffrey de Marisco (†1245).¹² When John ascended the throne in 1199, the bishop of Ferns reaped the rewards. In 1201, Ailbe was invited to act as suffragan bishop in the favoured royal diocese of Winchester, and later in the year he dedicated a chapel in the Cistercian abbey of Waverley, Surrey, before returning home. In April 1206, John sent letters seeking to secure the election of Ailbe to the vacant archbishopric of Cashel. The royal intervention ultimately failed due to Irish preference for a local candidate, but it nonetheless demonstrates the esteemed position that the bishop of Ferns enjoyed with King John.

In 1208, when John was under papal interdict — for resisting the will of the papacy, in place from 1208 to 1214 — Ailbe was chosen alongside Meiler fitz Henry and Philip of Worcester as an ambassador to inform Gaelic Irish rulers of their obligations to the king.¹³ The bishop of Ferns was again in England in 1214 acting as

⁸ David Carpenter, *The minority of Henry III* (Berkeley, 1990), chapters 1–3.

⁹ Mac Shamhráin, 'Ailbe Ua Máel Muaid', p. 310. See also Marie Therese Flanagan, 'Ó Máelmuaid, Ailbe [Albinus O' Molloy] (d. 1223), abbot of Baltinglass and bishop of Ferns', *O.D.N.B.*, xli, 789–90.

¹⁰ Seán Duffy, 'John and Ireland: the origins of England's Irish problem' in Stephen D. Church (ed.), *King John, new interpretations* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp 221–45, p. 232.

¹¹ *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis*, ed. William Stubbs (2 vols, London, 1867), ii, p. 79.

¹² *The Red Book of Ormond*, ed. Newport B. White (Dublin, 1932), pp 86–7.

¹³ *Rotuli litterarum patentium in Turri Londinensi asservati*, ed. Thomas D. Hardy (London, 1835), p. 84b. For a discussion of the interdict and aftermath, see Christopher Harper-Bill, 'John and the church of Rome' in Church (ed.), *King John, new interpretations*, pp 304–11.

vicar of the bishop of Lincoln.¹⁴ A year later Ailbe accompanied the new archbishop of Dublin, Henry of London (†1228), to the Fourth Lateran Council in Rome along with the only other Gaelic bishop in the province of Dublin, the bishop of Kildare, Conn Mac Fáeláin.¹⁵

The Fourth Lateran Council sought to tackle the two persistent church issues of the High Middle Ages: reform and crusade. More generally, Lateran councils provided a platform for the reinforcement of ties between the papacy and the isolated peripheries of the church, in which Ireland dwelled in seeming perpetuity. Consequently, for geographically marginalised bishops, Lateran councils were a highly advantageous opportunity to obtain a direct audience with the pope to voice their concerns. This is precisely what Bishop Ailbe Ó Máelmuaid did in 1215, when he informed Innocent III (pope from 1198 to 1216) of the injustices that he had suffered at the hands of William Marshal. It is at this moment that the bad blood between William Marshal and the bishop of Ferns first surfaced.

The cause of the conflict is obscure, and the careers of both Ailbe Ó Máelmuaid and William Marshal make their dispute all the more perplexing, although the latter would not be the first, or last, English lord to be accused of illegally seizing church property in Ireland. The issue concerned the argument that earlier land grants by Irish kings — such as by the king of Leinster, Diarmait Mac Murchada — were disregarded by grants made as part of the English sub-infeudation of Ireland, and, as such, a block of land could find itself the subject of two claimants.¹⁶

The historiography of the contention between Ailbe and the Marshal has diverged both on its origins and its chronology. Aubrey Gwynn suggested that the dispute began in July 1214, when Ailbe was in England dedicating five altars in the abbey of Waverley, due to Innocent III's statement that the interdict was passed during Ailbe's presence in England, but it is argued here that the conflict originated two years earlier.¹⁷ The cause of the conflict has been equally disputed. Ailbe Shamhráin has argued that the root cause of the dispute lies with the expansion of the Marshal's port town of New Ross, County Wexford, whereas Aubrey Gwynn has seen the conflict as a product of the Marshal's exploitation of his demesne manors. David Crouch has put forward a different suggestion, in that ethnic discrimination on the Marshal's behalf was to blame, though the fact that Ailbe appears as the first name in the witness list for the Marshal's foundation charter of the abbey of Duiske, County Kilkenny, at some stage between February and October 1207 would suggest otherwise.¹⁸ Yet, a closer inspection reveals the issue to have instead been a personal one. As noted above, there were moments in the early years of King John's reign when the Irish-born bishop of Ferns enjoyed better relations with the king than did William Marshal. More significantly, we know that the bishop had a connection to Meiler fitz Henry, the justiciar of Ireland, whom Ailbe had accompanied on a diplomatic mission in June 1208 by

¹⁴ *Annales monastici*, ed. Henry R. Luard (5 vols, London, 1864–9), ii, p. 253.

¹⁵ P. J. Dunning, 'Irish representatives at the Fourth Lateran Council' in John Watt, John B. Morrall and Francis X. Martin (eds), *Medieval studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.* (Dublin, 1961), pp 90–113.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁷ Gwynn, 'The coming of the Normans', p. 280.

¹⁸ Crouch, *William Marshal*, p. 235. Ailbe appears as 'domino Albino episcopo F(eren) nensi' in the charter to Duiske: *The acts and letters of the Marshal family: marshals of England and earls of Pembroke, 1145–1248* (hereafter *Acts and letters*), ed. David Crouch (Cambridge, 2015), no. 32.

the king's directive. Four months previously, during a complex baronial wrangle for power in Ireland, Meiler had laid siege to Kilkenny Castle, when the Marshal's wife, Isabel, was in residence. The Marshal's knights were victorious in repelling the siege, capturing Meiler — whom William Marshal's biography composed in the 1220s dubbed the 'root of all the evil done' — in the process.¹⁹ Hence, this connection between Meiler and Bishop Ailbe perhaps began to strain relations between the latter and the Marshal.

The bishop had also clashed with the Knights Hospitaller in Ireland. On his deathbed, William Marshal would become a member of the Knights Templar, but his sympathies for crusading orders had been evident much earlier. This was especially apparent in his grants of land to both the Templars and Hospitallers, who had profited greatly within the Leinster lordship. The Marshal particularly supported the Knights Hospitaller, and during his second stay in Ireland from 1207 until 1213 he confirmed the Hospitallers in their possessions in Leinster, in addition to making further grants of lands to the order, including the hospital of St John in Wexford. David Crouch is probably correct in suggesting that we can most likely attribute this grant to 1207–08, before Leinster was re-granted to the Marshal with fewer rights, since in this charter the earl is demonstrating the near-regalian authority he would subsequently relinquish.²⁰

Not long after the grant, the Marshal quitted to the Hospitallers the churches of St Patrick, St Brigid and St Mary Magdalene in Wexford instead of their hospital church of St John of Wexford as a result of a plea 'adiudicate fuerunt per iudices delegatas' between the hospitallers and the bishop of Ferns.²¹ Unfortunately, we have no further information regarding this court plea, but it is evident that the bishop of Ferns, Ailbe Ó Máelmuaid, had successfully disputed William Marshal's grant to the Knights Hospitaller of the hospital of St John in Wexford. Crouch has estimated that this grant by the Marshal in response to the bishop's suit took place between 1200 and 1219, but it is possible to narrow this chronology to before 26 June 1212, because on this date, Pope Innocent III confirmed the possessions of the Hospitallers in Ireland and took them under the protection of the Apostolic See.²² This confirmation excludes the hospital church of St John in Wexford town, against which the bishop of Ferns had brought suit, but includes the churches in Wexford that Marshal had granted to the order following the bishop's suit. Hence, Ailbe's plea, which must antedate June 1212 and which points to a personal animosity between earl and bishop from that point onwards. This, it seems, was the instigation of the dispute between them, during the course of which the Marshal began encroaching on the bishop's manors.

In May 1216, some six months after the Fourth Lateran Council, the otherwise local dispute between William Marshal and the bishop of Ferns took on a European dimension, through a letter from Pope Innocent III to the archbishops of Tuam and

¹⁹ *HWM*, I, 14094.

²⁰ *Acts and letters*, no. 51. For a helpful overview of the Hospitallers and Ireland, see Helen J. Nicholson, 'A long way from Jerusalem: the Templars and Hospitallers in Ireland, c.1172–1348' in Martin Browne and Colmán Ó Clabaigh OSB (eds), *Soldiers of Christ: the Knights Hospitaller and the Knights Templar in medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 2016), pp 1–22.

²¹ *Acts and letters*, no. 52. In this plea, Ailbe was accompanied by 'M. clericum et R. et fratrem O. de hospitalea et alios ex vna parte. et predictos fratres hospitalis Jer(osa)le(m) ex alia'.

²² *Pontificia Hibernica: medieval papal chancery documents concerning Ireland, 640–1261* (hereafter *Pontificia*), ed. Maurice Sheehy (2 vols, Dublin, 1962), i, no. 72.

Dublin, commanding them to write to the Marshal and require him to return the possessions of the bishopric of Ferns on threat of excommunication, his land being placed under interdict in the meantime.²³ This was followed by a letter to William Marshal from the archbishops of Tuam and Dublin relaying the pope's command.²⁴ In September 1216, King John endeavoured to mend relations between the Marshal and the bishop by pushing for a transfer for Ailbe from Ferns to the vacant bishopric of Killaloe, but local Irish influence in Killaloe once again emerged the victor and a local candidate was chosen.

By the middle of 1216, William Marshal had a significant problem on his hands. His lands in Ireland had been placed under interdict and an excommunication had been pronounced, although the Marshal continued to disregard it all.²⁵ Given that King John's attempt to relocate Ailbe had failed, there seemed to be little option for the Marshal except capitulation. Luck was on his side, however. Before 1216 was out, Innocent III had died and was replaced by Honorius III (pope from 1216 to 1227), a pope who, much like his predecessors, devoted his time to spiritual reform and crusade.²⁶ More importantly, in October 1216 King John also died, leaving his nine-year-old son, Henry III (r. 1216–72), to pick up the pieces of his unstable realm. Following the death of John, the Marshal assumed the role of regent, giving him almost royal power. Kings were far from untouchable — a pertinent example being the interdict of John's lands in England from 1208 to 1214 — but their positions of earthly power frequently guaranteed them the spiritual favour of the papacy. The Marshal's new status within a precarious kingdom meant that, for the newly anointed pope, he was someone to keep on side.

The instability of the English realm owed much to King John's factionalist policies during his kingship and, as already noted, his losses in France and the French king's support to the disgruntled nobles during the First Barons' War.²⁷ Papal

²³ The letter was sent from Perugia on 30 May 1216: P. J. Dunning, 'Letters of Pope Innocent III to Ireland: a calendar supplementary to that of Calendar of Papal Registers I, edited by W. H. Bliss' in *Archivum Hibernicum*, xiii (1947), pp 27–44, on pp 43–4. The lands in question most likely can be equated with the lands which Philip de Prendergast granted to the bishopric of Ferns in 1227 in the neighbourhood of Templeshanbo and Ferns in County Wexford. The original deed does not survive, but a version enrolled in the chancery for 1595 by Sir Henry Wallop states that Gerard de Prendergast, son of Philip, gave to the bishopric 'sixteen carucates of land at Seneboth and Kyllaethan, and twelve carucates of land at Cion, near Ferns and Lishothe, a carucate of land near the church of Kylanegy, and a carucate of land near the church of Crospatrick, are secured to the Bishop for ever, in exchange for 6 carucates of land of Inscordy': *Calendar of the patent and close rolls of Chancery in Ireland, from the 18th to the 45th of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. James Morrin (Dublin, 1862), p. 329; Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, pp 295–6.

²⁴ The letter was preserved among material from Reading Abbey, Berkshire, and has been printed in *The Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, v, no. 1 (1864), pp 137–9.

²⁵ The potency of excommunication as a spiritual and political weapon has recently received an excellent discussion in Felicity Hill, *Excommunication in thirteenth-century England: communities, politics, and publicity* (Oxford, 2022).

²⁶ On this, see, for example, Thomas W. Smith, *Curia and crusade: Pope Honorius III and the recovery of the Holy Land, 1216–1227* (Turnhout, 2017).

²⁷ The Anonymous of Béthune said, '[John's] preference was never to say the truth. He always wanted his barons at odds with each other and was never happier than when he saw enmity among them': *L'Histoire des ducs de Normandie et des rois d'Angleterre*, ed. Francisque Michel (Paris, 1840), p. 105. See James Clarke Holt, *The Northerners: a*

concern at the instability in England following John's death in October 1216 was such that on 3 December 1216, William Marshal received a mandate from the pope requesting him to remain loyal to the young Henry.²⁸ By February 1217, the tone was far more urgent, the Marshal receiving a letter from the pope 'of monition and exhortation ... urging him to defend the king and realm and follow the counsels of the cardinal legate, to whom plenary powers have been given'.²⁹ The legate to whom the pope was referring was Guala Bicchieri (†1227), legate from 1216–18, who as we will see worked closely with the Marshal during this period. The Marshal followed the pope's instructions, and by the end of 1217 the baronial revolt had been quelled and the Plantagenet realm saved through political guile, effective military leadership, and papal support.

William Marshal had not been regent for long before he began to use his power to further the interests of English officials in the Irish church. On 14 January 1217, the Marshal issued a remarkable command to the justiciar of Ireland that he should 'not allow any Irishman to be elected or promoted in any cathedral church in our land of Ireland, as disturbance might thereby, God forbid, ensue'.³⁰ This command was repeated three days later, with the added clause that the king's 'clerics and other honest Englishmen useful to us and our kingdom be elected and promoted to sees and dignities when vacant'.³¹ The Marshal was certainly the driving force behind these mandates, although the archbishop of Dublin, Henry of London, was also instrumental, the latter mandate being said to have been made with 'the counsel of our venerable father Henry'.³²

In addition to issuing this discriminatory mandate, the Marshal now took the opportunity to target Ailbe Ó Máelmuaid directly and cut off the constitutional roads to redress for the bishop of Ferns. On 18 April 1218, the king — but the Marshal in reality — prohibited the archbishops of Dublin and Tuam, and the bishop of Clogher, from holding the plea of the bishop of Ferns regarding the land dispute with the Marshal, while Ailbe also received a letter forbidding him from prosecuting his plea.³³ The king decreed that if this plea was pursued, the bishop of Ferns and the delegates who heard the plea would be dragged to the king's court to answer as to why they did so.

At the end of June 1218, Honorius III, who had been in office since July 1216, issued instructions to the archbishop of Dublin, William Marshal and the bishop of

study in the reign of King John (Oxford, 1961; repr. 1992). For Ireland, see Peter Crooks, "'Divide and rule": factionalism as royal policy in the lordship of Ireland, 1171–1265' in *Peritia*, xix (2005), pp 263–307; Colin Veach, 'King John and royal control in Ireland: why William de Briouze had to be destroyed' in *E.H.R.*, cxxix, 540 (2014), pp 1051–78.

²⁸ *Calendar of entries in the Papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal letters, 1198–1304* (hereafter *Papal reg.*), ed. W. H. Bliss (London, 1893), p. 42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁰ 'Mandamus vobis quod in fide qua nobis tenemini non permittatis quod aliquis Hiberniensis eligatur vel preficiatur in aliqua ecclesia cathedrali in terra nostra Hibemie, quum ex hoc posset terra nostra, quod absit, perturba': *Patent Rolls of the reign of Henry III, 1216–25* (hereafter *PR*) (London, 1901), p. 22.

³¹ 'modis omnibus procuretis quod clerici nostri et alii Anglici viri honesti, nobis et regno nostro necessarij, eligantur et promoveantur in episcopatibus et dignitatibus cum vacaverint': *ibid.*, p. 23.

³² 'De consilio vero venerabilis patris nostri, domini H. Dublinensis archiepiscopi': *ibid.*

³³ 'traxit eum in cam corum': *ibid.*, pp 148–9.

Ferns for an agreement to be made, and seemed to think that the dispute was then *sub judice*.³⁴ This is clear from another of his letters, dated 7 July, in which Honorius requested that the Marshal and the bishop come to an agreement in the case that was before the judges, and requested that the judges do what they could to facilitate this agreement.³⁵ Since the hearing of the case had been forbidden by the king, and as there is no record of the judges being hauled up in front of the king's officials, which, we must presume, would have happened if the case was heard, it seems unlikely that the case was being tried, and that the pope's mandates reveal a misunderstanding in the information that was filtering back to Rome. Needless to say, a settlement between the Marshal and Ailbe does not appear to have been reached.

Nearly a year later, on 9 May 1219, the Marshal received a papal mandate that he was, 'at the king's request, as a recognition of his services, not to be held responsible to anyone else so long as he is willing to do justice to complaints before the lord of the fee about things held in fee by him, the king's right being in all cases intact.'³⁶ This mandate is suitably vague, but it does suggest that the Marshal had become largely untouchable, and hence the dispute between the Marshal and the bishop of Ferns withered into obscurity. The Marshal had emerged as the victor, but his remarkable career came to an end when he died on 14 May 1219.

II

William Marshal's decree on 17 January 1217 prohibiting Irishmen from taking senior ecclesiastical offices was extraordinary and it clearly exposed his plans for the Irish church. Naturally, this directive was not issued in isolation: three days earlier the king had approved the election of an Englishman, Robert Travers, to the see of Killaloe, and on 22 January the custody of the archbishopric of Armagh went to the king's chancellor, Richard de Marisco, before going to another Englishman, Luke de Netterville, in August 1217.³⁷ The January 1217 decree did not come solely from the Marshal, and needed the approval of individuals such as the papal legate to England, Pandulf Verraccio (†1226), the bishop elect of Norwich who replaced Guala as legate in September 1218 and became exceedingly influential at the English court, and also the archbishop of Dublin, Henry of London, who had to ensure on-the-ground implementation. Aubrey Gwynn has suggested that the latter was 'the driving force' behind this ethnic discrimination policy, whereas Margaret Murphy has emphasised Henry's conflicted loyalties between his secular and spiritual responsibilities: in attempting to 'wear two hats he involved himself in endless compromises'.³⁸

³⁴ *Pontificia*, i, nos. 14 and 15.

³⁵ *Papal reg.*, p. 56.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁷ *PR*, p. 22.

³⁸ Aubrey Gwynn, 'Henry of London, Archbishop of Dublin: a study in Anglo-Norman statecraft' in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, xxxviii, no. 151 (1949), p. 302; Margaret Murphy, 'Balancing the concerns of church and state: the archbishops of Dublin, 1181–1228' in Terry Barry, Robin Frame and Katharine Simms (eds), *Colony and frontier in medieval Ireland: essays presented to J. F. Lydon* (London, 1995), p. 55; Margaret Murphy, 'Archbishops and Anglicisation: Dublin, 1181–1271' in James Kelly and Daire Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic diocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 2000), pp 72–91.

It is perhaps better to see Henry as part of a triumvirate of William Marshal, Henry of London, and the justiciar of Ireland, Geoffrey de Marisco, all of whom depended on each other's support. Since his appointment as justiciar in July 1215, de Marisco had used his position to further the promotion of English-born officials to Irish church offices, including his nephew, Robert Travers, who, as we have seen, became bishop of Killaloe. Geoffrey's support of the Anglicisation policy certainly benefitted himself and his family, but it is relevant that he also was a consistent ally of the Marshals, assisting William Marshal in his conflict with Meiler fitz Henry in 1208, serving William Marshal the younger to quell the revolt of Hugh de Lacy in 1224, and supporting Richard Marshal in his rebellion in 1234.³⁹ Each of the three individuals undoubtedly looked after their own interests, but together they augmented each other's power and influence. Hence it was that the good service of Henry of London to both the Marshal and the pontiff earned him the papal legateship by 3 May 1217, making him the pope's representative in Ireland.⁴⁰

The reasoning behind this policy of promoting English control of the Irish church has many dimensions. In general, English officials were not only more malleable, but their monopoly of office confined wealth and influence among the English elite. It would be incorrect to say that English-born bishops always enjoyed good relations with the king of England and his representatives, or that Irish-born bishops always found themselves at odds with English lords. Nevertheless, there certainly was a contemporary perception that English interests in Ireland were best pursued by means of an English-dominated Irish church. Competition over ecclesiastical office was not confined to Ireland, but it was inevitable where, in the words of Robert Bartlett, 'Christian peoples of different law and language intermingled', both sides contending for the profitability and power that accompanied church office.⁴¹

Ailbe was not the only one to feel the squeeze of the acceleration of the Anglicisation process, as the Gaelic Irish archbishop of Cashel, Donnchad Ó Longargáin, had also suffered. Donnchad had been disseised of some temporalities by de Marisco as justiciar, apparently under the king's orders.⁴² Interestingly, it was not until Archbishop Ó Longargáin threatened to go to Rome towards the end of 1219 that the archbishop of Dublin and papal legate, Henry of London, began to write to the king urging him to return the properties.⁴³ Nonetheless, the archbishop of Cashel made his way to Rome in early 1220 and informed the pontiff of the

³⁹ On de Marisco's career, see Eric St. John Brooks, 'The family of Marisco' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 7th series, ii, no. 1 (1931–2), pp 50–74; Brendan Smith, 'de Marisco, Geoffrey (b. before 1171, †1245), justiciar of Ireland', *O.D.N.B.*, xxxvi, 677–8.

⁴⁰ Gwynn, 'Henry of London, archbishop of Dublin: a study in Anglo-Norman statecraft', p. 303.

⁴¹ Robert Bartlett, *The making of Europe, conquest, colonization and cultural change, 950–1350* (London, 1993), p. 221.

⁴² Aubrey Gwynn, 'Henry of London, Archbishop of Dublin' in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, xxxviii, 152 (1949), pp 390–91.

⁴³ *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland, preserved in her Majesty's Public Record Office* (hereafter *CDI*), ed. H. S. Sweetman (5 vols, London, 1875–86), i, no. 1624. This document has been incorrectly dated to 1228 by Sweetman: Gwynn, 'Henry of London, Archbishop of Dublin', p. 392, n. 1.

injustices occurring in Ireland, which, given the pope's reaction, appears to have been news to Rome.

Honorius III's response was swift. Henry of London lost his position as papal legate and a papal chaplain, Master James, arrived in August as his replacement with one key mandate: to put an end to discrimination against the Irish. Foremost on the agenda was the removal of William Marshal's statute forbidding Irishmen holding ecclesiastical offices, but the new legate also targeted the prejudice experienced by secular Irish people in the heartlands of English Ireland, such as the 'corrupt custom' of denying right of compurgation to the Irish in court affairs and unjust alienations of their property.⁴⁴ Victory looked to be on the horizon for the archbishop of Cashel, yet the king of England's agents soon arrived in Rome and argued persuasively that the king had courts in Ireland where these issues could be brought to suit, and that he had the right, for instance, to seize land to fortify it for defensive purposes.⁴⁵ The king emerged triumphant, and, as a reward for his loyalty, Henry of London became the justiciar of Ireland on 3 July 1221.⁴⁶ Archbishop Ó Longargáin continued his struggle, but had resigned his see and retired to a monastery by August 1223.⁴⁷

Ultimately, Honorius III began to support Gaelic Irish candidates to vacant sees, first evident in 1224 with Cashel and in 1225 with Ardfert. The papacy continued to accept the king's right of licence and assent for election, so that while the pope could put forward an individual of his choosing, the king had the definitive say as to whether the individual was elected or not.⁴⁸ This did not lead to English monopolisation of the Irish church, and as recent work by Stephen Hewer has shown, Gaelic Irish bishops continued to occupy sees, and also used the courts in Ireland to pursue disputes over land.⁴⁹ That this remained the case reflects the inconsistent nature of English power throughout Ireland, the dominant influence remaining the local one. The point has been emphasised by John Watt, that 'some dioceses were invariably ruled by English bishops, others invariably by Irish bishops and others again sometimes by bishops of one nationality, sometimes of the other'.⁵⁰ In the end, however, the king came out the victor, as while the cogs of the electoral process for vacant sees turned ever so slowly, it was the king who accrued the vast sums from the vacant temporalities in the meantime.

The ability of English secular and religious leaders to promote English men to Irish church offices was facilitated by Ireland's place on the papal periphery. This had not always been the case, but a shift had occurred before the twelfth century during which the European perception of Ireland changed from the positive early medieval image of the *insula sanctorum et doctorum* to one of barbarity and nonconformity. This high-medieval European impression of Ireland was

⁴⁴ *Papal reg.*, p. 75.

⁴⁵ *Vetera monumenta Hibernorum et Scotorum historiam illustrantia, quae ordine chronologico disposuit, ab Honorio PP. III. usque ad Paulum PP. III., 1216–1547*, ed. Augustinus Theiner (Rome, 1864), p. 18; Gwynn, 'Henry of London, Archbishop of Dublin', p. 396.

⁴⁶ *PR*, pp 295–6.

⁴⁷ See Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Ua Longargáin, Donnchad (Dionisius) (d. 1216), archbishop of Cashel', *D.I.B.*, ix, 592–3.

⁴⁸ Gwynn, 'Henry of London, Archbishop of Dublin', p. 402.

⁴⁹ Stephen Hewer, *Beyond exclusion in medieval Ireland: intersections of ethnicity, sex, and society under English law* (Turnhout, 2021).

⁵⁰ John Watt, *The church and the two nations in medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 80.

aply put by Bernard of Clairvaux, to whom the king of Leinster, Diarmait Mac Murchada (†1171), was ‘a king at the end of the earth, ruling over a barbarous people’.⁵¹ In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, attempts had been made to bring Ireland more into Rome’s orbit, but the English conquests of the late twelfth century further accentuated Ireland’s marginal position. Of course, this narrative of barbarity was not just applied to Ireland, but was part of a wider ethnographic historiography that was laying the foundation for conquest across twelfth-century Europe.⁵²

Ireland’s detachment from the centre of the Latin church was naturally facilitated by the comparatively large distance between Ireland and Rome. Written correspondence was a slow method of communication, especially for a bishop in Ireland writing to the pope. The expense of writing to a pope, and ensuring that an emissary delivered the message, was considerable. Equally important was ensuring that the petitioner had a network of allies at the curia who could further one’s case behind closed doors. The method of guiding papal perception and obtaining favour at the curia was an art, as outlined in a 1281 English document that stresses visits to each cardinal, who to bribe and how much, and the importance of the frequent visits from envoys to ensure communication.⁵³ This, of course, was a far easier task for the Marshal as regent than for an Irish bishop.⁵⁴

The experience of Gaelic Irish bishops was certainly not unique in Latin Christendom. For example, English bishops had adopted the same policy in Wales a century earlier. Much as was the case in Ireland, discrimination against Welsh-born candidates was not purely about ethnicity but, rather, power. In the words of Rees Davies, ‘Control of the church was a natural corollary of political conquest, exploitation of its wealth but another aspect of domination and settlement of the country’.⁵⁵ Welsh-born bishops accepted English primacy more willingly than their counterparts in Ireland — thus avoiding many of the problems that Gaelic Irish bishops were to face — but if we are to believe the letter purportedly brought by Gerald of Wales to Rome in the early 1200s, the princes of Wales complained that the ‘archbishops of Canterbury have customarily preferred English bishops in Wales who are ignorant of the customs and language

⁵¹ G. G. Meersseman, ‘Two unknown confraternity letters of St Bernard’ in *Citeau in de Nederlanden, Achel et Westmalle*, vi (1955), pp 173–8; *Epistola DXLVI: Epistola confraternitatis ad dyermetium Hiberniae regem*, in *Epistolae: II. Corpus epistolarum 181–310; II. Epistolarum extra corpus 311–547*, ed. C. Leclercq and H. Rochais (Rome, 1977), viii, 513–4, in *Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot and H. Rochais (8 vols, Rome, 1957–77).

⁵² Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982), chapter 6.

⁵³ *Registrum Thome de Cantilupo, episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. MCCLXXV–MCCLXXXII*, ed. R. G. Griffiths and W. W. Capes (London, 1897), pp 273–6.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Sophia Menache, *The vox Dei, communication in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1990), pp 51–77; *Registrum Thome de Cantilupo*, pp 273–6.

⁵⁵ Rees R. Davies, *The age of conquest: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1987), pp 172–210, quote on p. 179. See also John R. Davis, ‘Aspects of church reform in Wales, c.1093–1223’ in Christopher P. Lewis (ed.), *Anglo-Norman studies XX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp 85–99. Also see Huw Pryce, ‘Church and society in Wales, 1150–1250: an Irish perspective’ in Rees R. Davies (ed.), *The British Isles, 1100–1500: comparisons, contrasts and connections* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp 27–47; Brendan Smith, ‘The frontiers of church reform in the British Isles, 1170–1230’ in David Abulafia and Nora Berend (eds), *Medieval frontiers: concepts and practices* (Burlington, 2002), pp 239–53.

of the Welsh'.⁵⁶ Although the authenticity of this letter has been doubted, such concerns were valid.

Similar patterns of politicisation of church reform were also occurring in other peripheries further afield, including, for instance, the Baltic region. Around the same time that he was writing to the Irish 'king at the end of the earth', Diarmait Mac Murchada, Bernard of Clairvaux was in Frankfurt preaching the crusade in aid of the Holy Land. Bernard's message changed after he was persuaded by some German magnates to allow them to serve the church in the Baltic instead of the Holy Land, leading to the proclamation of a crusade against the pagan Slavs by Pope Eugenius III in 1147.⁵⁷ Crusading in the Baltic region not only began at the initiative of lay rulers, but it continued to be led by secular power. In the 1220s, for example, Henry of Livonia wrote the *Chronicon Livoniae* for the papal legate to justify the Baltic crusade and help bring the region into the spotlight of papal authority.⁵⁸ The same was the case with the papacy's efforts to battle heresy, relying on the French crown in the Albigensian crusade and the kings of Hungary in their kingdom.⁵⁹

In 1213, when King John submitted to the papacy, he granted England and Ireland to the pope in order to receive them back as papal fiefs. Despite the protection this brought, the price was high, and Henry III found himself faced with an annual bill of 1,000 marks, 300 marks of which was to come from Ireland.⁶⁰ Although Ireland and England both had the same status in the eyes of the papacy as papal fiefs, they had the same lay ruler: the king of England. More importantly, with an English-born archbishop of Dublin, Henry of London, as papal legate in Ireland, the narrative that filtered back to Rome remained Anglo-centric.

⁵⁶ *The acts of Welsh rulers, 1120–1283*, ed. Huw Pryce (Cardiff, 2005), no. 220. For a discussion of the authenticity of the document, see *ibid.*, pp 368–71; Michael Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis, the growth of the Welsh nation* (Aberystwyth, 1976), pp 122–3.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, *The popes and the Baltic crusades, 1147–1254* (Leiden, 2007); Sven Ekdahl, 'Crusades and colonisation in the Baltic: a historiographic analysis' in A. V. Murray (ed.), *The north-eastern frontiers of medieval Europe, the expansion of Latin Europe 1000–1500* (Farnham 2014), pp 1–42; Marek Tamm, 'The Livonian crusade in Cistercian stories of the early thirteenth century' in Torben K. Nielsen and Iben Fonnesberger-Schmidt (eds), *Crusading on the edge: ideas and practice of crusading in Iberia and the Baltic region, 1100–1500* (Turnhout, 2016), pp 365–89.

⁵⁸ James A. Brundage, 'Introduction: Henry of Livonia, the writer and his chronicle' in Marek Tamm, Linda Kaljundi and Carsten S. Jensen (eds), *Crusading and chronicle writing on the medieval Baltic frontier: a companion to the chronicle of Henry of Livonia* (Farnham, 2011), p. 7.

⁵⁹ Thomas W. Smith, 'The interface between papal authority and heresy: the legates of Honorius III in Languedoc, 1216–1227' in *idem* (ed.), *Authority and power in the medieval church, c.1000–1500* (Turnhout, 2020), pp 135–44; Gábor Barabás, 'Papal legates in thirteenth-century Hungary: authority, power, reality' in *Smith* (ed.), *Authority and power*, pp 145–58; Nicholas Vincent, 'England and the Albigensian Crusade' in Björn K. U. Weiler with I. W. Rowlands (eds), *England and Europe in the reign of Henry III (1216–1272)* (Farnham, 2002), pp 67–97; Gregory E. M. Lippiatt, 'Worse than all the Infidels: the Albigensian Crusade and the continuing call of the East' in *idem* and Jessalynn Bird (eds), *Crusading Europe: essays in honour of Christopher Tyerman* (Turnhout: 2019), pp 119–44.

⁶⁰ For England's status as a papal fief, see Jane E. Sayers, *Papal government and England during the pontificate of Honorius III, 1216–1227* (Cambridge, 1984), pp 162–71, and on Ireland, see Watt, *The church and the two nations*, p. 84.

Direct intervention from Rome might temporarily touch the periphery, as seen at the Fourth Lateran Council, and likewise when the archbishop of Cashel went to Rome in 1220. Such opportunities were when Irish-born clergymen could have their grievances heard directly by the pope. But it was not an easy thing to secure the time and financial resources to undertake the arduous journey to Rome, though it was somewhat less difficult for an archbishop — whose only superior was the pope — than for one of his subordinate bishops. Hence, it was the case that Ailbe, bishop of Ferns, was left to languish in obscurity, while the mere rumours of the archbishop of Cashel going to Rome in 1220 saw the archbishop of Dublin plead with Henry III to return his diocesan lands.

The experience of Ailbe emphasises the reactive nature of the papacy that has been highlighted in past scholarship, in that papal intervention relied on effective petitioning. This, and Ailbe's limited resources in comparison to English influence, made his efforts futile. The reactive nature of the papacy and Ireland's marginalised position facilitated the intensification of the Anglicisation of the Irish church. Crucial to the effective implementation of this policy shift was the support of the papal representative within Ireland, the legate. As legate, Henry of London became one of the masterminds behind the process, giving English representatives a free hand in Ireland without fear of papal intrusion, the only requisite being to ensure that those with the means to travel to Rome did not do so. This strategy temporarily faltered in 1220, when the archbishop of Cashel petitioned the pontiff in person, but once the king of England's representatives arrived in Rome it was still one man's word against another's, and his greater influence meant the king would most likely emerge the victor. In short, Gaelic Irish bishops seeking to combat an English policy designed to discriminate against them were fighting a losing battle.

Despite Ailbe's patronage by Pope Innocent III and King John, his favourable position was lost in 1216 when both the pope and the king died. A nine-year-old heir to the throne of England seeking to mend the broken fences of his father's reign caused great disquiet for the papacy, evident in the three mandates that William Marshal received between 3 December 1216 and 8 July 1217. The concern of the papacy is also abundantly clear from the range of powers given to the papal legate to England, Guala Bicchieri, on 16 February 1217.⁶¹ He was licensed to interdict, excommunicate and degrade 'prelates and others whose rebellion deserves punishment', while also divvying up vacant sees amongst those loyal 'to the king and the Roman Church'. Guala was also authorised to grant dispensations to those who took the cross, highlighting the importance of the backdrop of crusade.⁶² On the same day, Henry of London, the archbishop of Dublin, received a letter tasking him to ensure the fealty of Henry III's subjects in Ireland. He received another letter on 3 May 1217 that he was to 'fulfil his office faithfully and prudently in bringing about a peace between the Irish and the king'.⁶³ What provoked the pope's mandate cannot be known for certain, as there is no evidence that suggests any threat to Henry's authority from Ireland. The concerns of the pope perhaps reflect the narrative that was filtering back to Rome and an English attempt to continue to justify conquest and church reform. The fealty that the pope ordered the archbishop of Dublin to secure was also a *de facto* fealty to the Marshal, and so

⁶¹ On English bishops as peacemakers, see Sophie Thérèse Ambler, *Bishops in the political community of England, 1213–1272* (Oxford, 2017), pp 61–81.

⁶² See *Papal reg.*, p. 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp 44, 47. See also Duffy, 'John and Ireland', pp 244–5.

the grievances of one of the archbishop's five subordinate bishops mattered little in the greater scheme of things.

The Marshal enjoyed esteem not only in Rome, but also with its representatives within the Plantagenet dominions. The papal legate, Guala, had built up a strong relationship with the Marshal during the rebellion, and he continued to communicate with him regarding matters of state right up until the end of his legation in September 1218.⁶⁴ The pope had pushed Guala in Henry III's direction as a counsellor of great value, making his good relations with the Marshal a papal directive in all but ink.⁶⁵ Similarly, as has been discussed above, the archbishop of Dublin, Henry of London, also enjoyed fruitful relations with the Marshal. Cooperation with the Marshal as regent became part of the job description for the leading clergymen in both England and Ireland, consequently reducing support for the bishop of Ferns.

Meanwhile, in the minds of medieval popes, the problems of the west had to compete with the *graves orientalis terre*, 'the troubled land of the East'.⁶⁶ The consecutive wars for the Holy Land that became known as the crusades largely pre-occupied the attention of the papacy throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was the prerogative of the pontiff to appeal to the kings and nobles of Europe to take the cross and serve their church. Taking the cross was extremely beneficial for a king, even if he did not intend on going on crusade.⁶⁷ It is what King John did in 1215 as the situation continued to deteriorate in England, and hence after Pope Innocent III read Magna Carta he was reputed to have exclaimed, 'Are the barons of England endeavouring to drive from the throne of his kingdom a king who has taken the cross, and who is under the protection of the apostolic see, and to transfer to another the dominion of the Roman Church? By St Peter, we cannot pass over this insult without punishing it!'⁶⁸ In a letter dated 7 July 1215, Innocent aptly summed up his concerns: 'those men [the rebel barons] are undoubtedly worse than Saracens, for they are trying to depose a king who, it was particularly hoped, would succour the Holy Land.'⁶⁹ After the death of John, Henry took the cross himself at his coronation, undoubtedly influenced by the Marshal and the papal legate. The importance of this was reflected both in England and in Rome, the former eager to maintain papal support for Henry III's regency, and the latter

⁶⁴ The acts and letters of Guala for the duration of his legateship (1216–18) aid in contextualising Guala's importance during the period and his close relationship with the Marshal. *The letters and charters of Cardinal Guala Bicchieri, Papal Legate of England, 1216–1218*, ed. N. Vincent, (Woodbridge, 1996).

⁶⁵ For instance, Henry III had no great seal, and so the seals of William Marshal and Guala were attached to the 1217 reissue of Magna Carta.

⁶⁶ This phrase was used by Innocent III in December 1199: *Pontificia*, I, no. 42. The influence of the crusades on Ireland has not received much attention. For some exceptions, see Kathryn Hurlock, *Britain, Ireland and the crusades, c.1000–1300* (Basingstoke, 2013); and most recently, Edward Coleman, Paul Duffy and Tadhg O'Keefe (eds), *Ireland and the crusades* (Dublin, 2022).

⁶⁷ Paul Webster, *King John and religion* (Woodbridge, 2015), pp 169–70. See also, Christopher Tyerman, *England and the crusades 1095–1588* (Chicago, 1988).

⁶⁸ *Rogeri de Wendover liber qui dicitur Flores Historiarum ab anno domini MCLIV annoque Henrici Anglorum Regis Secundi Primo*, ed. Henry G. Hewlett (3 vols, London, 1886–9), ii, p. 139.

⁶⁹ *Selected letters of Innocent III concerning England (1198–1216)*, eds Christopher R. Cheney and William H. Semple (London, 1953), no. 80.

concerned with ensuring stability in Latin Christendom and hoping that Henry III would fulfil his vow and embark on crusade in the future.⁷⁰

Recruiting individuals to embark on crusade was only half the battle, and since the Holy Land was far away the popes first had to plead for vast sums of money to finance such undertakings. Papal appeals for crusading funds were issued to England in 1199, 1200, 1213–14 and 1221.⁷¹ These appeals relied on diligent executors for the collection, such as, for example, the archbishop of Dublin, Henry of London, and the abbot of Mellifont in 1213–14. These mandates were compounded by the levying of taxes on ecclesiastical revenues by papal officials, such as those issued in February 1217 for three years.⁷² Above all else, the collection of funds and the levying of taxes required stability, and placing the lands of an impertinent king or his regent under interdict over a local land dispute would have been counterproductive. In some cases, the good of the many, or at least the perceived good of a righteous crusade to the east, outweighed the good of the few, in this case, one Irish bishop.

Thus, caught between the disunity of Latin Christendom and the precarity of Christian power in the east, Ailbe was left isolated on the papal periphery. After he had exhausted the legal and papal roads to redress, Ailbe's desperation was such that he resorted to producing hagiographical tracts as a means of validating the antiquity of episcopal claims to the disputed temporalities. Ailbe's attempt is most evident in the life of St Abban, which it appears Ailbe either worked on or commissioned between 1214–18, in which there is mention of a grant to the saint of 'Seanboith Ard', undoubtedly the disputed manor of Templeshanbo.⁷³ The fact that the bishop resorted to such tactics to try and regain his manors is testament not only to the power and influence of William Marshal, but also to the difficulty for a Gaelic Irish bishop trying to communicate directly with Rome.

If we are to believe the St Albans chronicler, Matthew Paris, writing in the mid-thirteenth century, the frustration of the bishop of Ferns was such that he travelled to Temple Church in London to curse William Marshal's tomb, where he demanded that his manors be returned by William Marshal's five sons. The Marshal's sons refused, prompting Ailbe to decree that 'in one generation his [Marshal's] name shall be destroyed ... and some of them [his sons] will die by a lamentable death, and their inheritance will be scattered'.⁷⁴ This did, in fact, happen, when William Marshal's last son Anselm died in December 1245, neither he nor his

⁷⁰ Alan Forey, 'The crusading vows of the English King Henry III' in *Durham University Journal*, lxx (1972/73), reprinted in idem, *Military orders and crusades* (Aldershot, 1994), pp 229–47.

⁷¹ *Pontificia*, i, nos. 42, 43, 44, 75, 76, 149.

⁷² *Ibid.*, no. 107. Another mandate in July 1217 directed the levy to be one-twentieth of the revenue of churches and monasteries: *ibid.*, no. 116.

⁷³ Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish saints' lives: an introduction to Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1991), pp 350–52.

⁷⁴ 'In generatione una, delebitur nomen ejus ... morienturque eorum aliqui morte lamentabili, et haereditas eorum dissipabitur': *Matthaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani Chronica majora* (hereafter *Chronica majora*), ed. Henry R. Luard (7 vols, London, 1872–83), iv, pp 492–5. On Paris himself, see Simon Lloyd and Rebecca Reader, 'Paris, Matthew (c. 1200–1259), historian, Benedictine monk, and polymath', *O.D.N.B.*, xlii, 620–28; Björn K. U. Weiler 'The historical writing in medieval Britain: the case of Matthew Paris' in Jennifer Jahner, Emily Steiner and Elizabeth M. Tyler (eds), *Medieval historical writing: Britain and Ireland, 500–1500* (Cambridge, 2019), pp 319–38.

four older brothers having produced any legitimate heirs.⁷⁵ The fact that it is the thirteenth-century chronicler, Matthew Paris, who chronicled this sequel to the dispute between William Marshal and Ailbe Ó Máelmuaid is interesting in itself. As Felicity Hill has highlighted, the narrative presented by Matthew Paris shows his support for the bishop's actions.⁷⁶ Hence, it is probably the case that the Marshal's treatment of Ailbe may also have influenced Paris's assessment that the former 'was a harmful conqueror to the Irish; honour and glory to the English; a businessman to the Normans, for he procured many things; a warlike and invincible soldier to the French'.⁷⁷

III

At the Fourth Lateran Council, manors in County Wexford momentarily came to international attention and led to the imposition of an interdict and excommunication on the puissant William Marshal. By the end of 1216, the deaths of Pope Innocent III and King John radically altered the fortunes of Bishop Ailbe of Ferns, as his opponent was catapulted into the role of regent of the young Henry III. The Marshal's new power left the bishop isolated on the periphery far from the apostolic see, the papacy engrossed in its efforts to ensure the stability of Latin Christendom in order to mount a crusade and reclaim the east. Control of the narrative was key, since the presentation of information to the popes had the power to shape events and perceptions in a light favourable to the narrator. With almost 1,500 miles separating Rome and Ferns, sound communication and the presence of energetic representatives were essentials in the business of influencing papal opinion. This was true not merely of Ireland: whether one was an English lord in Ireland or a magnate in the Baltic region, a tactical manipulation of the language of periphery and barbarity under the guise of church reform might facilitate the advancement of one's political agenda.

As the Gaelic Irish clergy were becoming increasingly marginalised, the pontiff remained largely oblivious. That situation changed when the archbishop of Cashel managed to make his way in person to Rome and reveal the truth of what was happening. Pope Honorius III reacted strongly at first, although his concern for the Irish quickly dissipated with the arrival of English envoys in Rome. The pope continued to support Irish candidates for Irish ecclesiastical offices, but he did not overturn the king's insistence that his permission be required, or his ability to collect the rich temporalities of sees during vacancies. Whatever the popes' views, English suspicions of Gaelic Irish clergymen persisted. In 1284, a commission established by King Edward I (r. 1272–1307) recorded that, 'it would be expedient to the K. that no Irishman should ever be an archbishop or bishop, because they always preach against the K., and always provide their churches with Irishmen'.⁷⁸ Although two-thirds of a century had passed between this commission's findings

⁷⁵ They were predeceased by William the younger (†1231), Richard (†1234), Gilbert (†1241) and Walter (†1245), and, hence, the Marshal inheritance was partitioned amongst the heirs of William Marshal's five daughters.

⁷⁶ Hill, *Excommunication in thirteenth-century England*, p. 43.

⁷⁷ *Fuit enim Hibernicis nocivus edomitor, Anglis honor et gloria, Normannis negotiator, quia in ea multa comparavit, Gallicis bellicosus et miles invincibilis*: *Chronica majora*, iii, p. 43.

⁷⁸ *CDI*, iii, p. 10. See Watt, *The church and the two nations*, pp 160–72.

and William Marshal's decree of January 1217, it is clear that when it came to positions of power and influence in thirteenth-century Ireland, ethnic mistrust was never far below the surface.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ An early version of this paper was given at the 'Papacy and Periphery, c.1050–c.1300' conference at the University of St Andrews in October 2021 and it much benefitted from the discussion that followed. My thanks to Professor Seán Duffy and the anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful comments on drafts of this article.