Itinerantes
Revista de Historia y Religión

Itinerantes. Revista de Historia y Religión 16 (ene-jun 2022) 223-240
On line ISSN 2525-2178

The Role of Divine Retribution in the Twelfth-Century Lives of Saint Winefride

El papel de la retribución divina en las *Vitae* del siglo doce de San Winifreda

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Abstract

We tend to think of the saints as miracle workers and credit them with offering useful services and assistance to the faithful - in particular healing the sick and even raising the dead (often associated with pilgrimage sites - churches, relics/reliquaries and holy wells), but many miracles involve punishments (often associated with disrespecting the saint, stealing church property or trespassing on the saint's burial ground or sanctuary). To a modern audience some of these miracles might appear harsh, but from the point of view of the hagiographer these punishments were fully justified and, of course, there were many biblical precedents. The following lines will try to elucidate the role that was given to Saint Winefride as a vessel for divine justice. For this purpose, the two twelfth-century *Vitae* dedicated to this Welsh saint will be analysed for parallels with the Sacred Scriptures and other hagiographical motifs. This information will be put into the historical context of this period without forgetting to highlight the deep-rooted tradition of the Celtic countries. It will also be determined to what extent the role and function of miracles illustrating divine retribution may be linked with the ecclesiastical interests of the time.

Keywords: Saint Winefride, divine retribution, hagiography, twelfth century.

Resumen

Tendemos a pensar en los santos como hacedores de milagros y les otorgamos todo el crédito en lo que concierne al ofrecimiento de servicios útiles y asistencia a los fieles -en particular en lo que concierne a curar a los enfermos e incluso resucitar a los muertos (a menudo vinculados con lugares de peregrinación -iglesias, reliquias/relicarios y pozos sagrados), pero muchos de estos milagros implican castigos (frecuentemente relacionados con faltar el respeto al santo, robar propiedad de la iglesia o allanar su camposanto o su santuario. Desde una perspectiva moderna algunos de estos milagros pueden parecer duros, pero desde el punto de vista del hagiógrafo estos castigos estaban plenamente justificados y, por supuesto, se apoyaban en no pocos precedentes bíblicos. Las siguientes líneas intentarán dilucidar el papel que le fue dado a San Winifreda como vehículo de la justicia divina. Para este propósito, las dos *Vitae* del siglo doce dedicadas a esta santa galesa serán analizadas en busca de paralelismos con precedentes en las Sagradas Escrituras y otros patrones hagiográficos. Esta información será puesta en el contexto histórico del periodo sin olvidar poner de manifiesto la enraizada tradición existente en los países celtas. También se determinará hasta qué punto el papel y la función de los milagros que ilustran la retribución divina puede ser asociada con los intereses eclesiásticos de la época.

Palabras clave: Santa Winifreda, retribución divina, hagiografía, siglo doce.

Fecha de envío: 28 de mayo de 2021
Fecha de aceptación: 1 de agosto de 2021

Introduction: Divine Retribution as a Historical, Religious and Legal Concept

Divine retribution is a well-known concept in the classical world of the ancient Greeks and Romans. In ancient Greece it takes the form of the goddess of punishment and revenge (King, and M. DeForest, 1993: 251) in a religious context where divine justice offered meaning and an explanation for personal misfortunes (Fox, 2013: 86). In the Roman Republic, the fear of a supernatural justice was encouraged by the elite as an effective tool to keep the majority of the population from breaking the law (Long, 1864: 50). The changing parameters on which Roman rule was based are the context for the most influential legacy of antiquity: Christianity. Its roots were Jewish. In fact, at the death of Jesus, only about 120 people believed His message. They were all Jews and distinguished themselves from their countrymen only because they believed that the Messiah had come with Jesus. Over time a portion of this group spread to various Greek-speaking localities and began to be called 'Christians' in honour of Χριστός 'the anointed one', 'the Messiah'.[1]

Christianity and Judaism share common roots and origins; consequently, the importance that these two religions give to the concept of divine retribution is not surprising. The God of the Old Testament is not a God of the individual, but of the tribe and the nation. His punishments and rewards are limited to earthly life and not to the hereafter (Montefiore; Odgers; Schechter, 1890: 2-3). As the God of the people of Israel, Yahweh would seek in the punishment a strong stimulus for the fulfilment of His law (Eichrodt, 1975: 434-435). This concept does not differ much from the Law of Talion, so common in the Code of Hammurabi and the legal compilations of ancient Asia. In this way, and according to the Book of Genesis 9:6: 'Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind' and 'If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands'. It seems that retribution was a dominant element in the understanding of the law of the Hebrews. Of course, the death penalty, being terminal, was not intended for rehabilitation. While this served as a deterrent, the direct relationship between what was done to the victim and what was done to the offender was clear. This fact explains to some extent that the term נ ק ם (naw-kam') appears around 80 times in the Old Testament. This word is often translated as 'avenge, vengeance, or take revenge'. However, a better translation, as an act of God, would be that of 'retribution'. Since God is not a private entity, but a public entity which administers the law, His concern is none other than the maintenance of justice. Therefore, in relation to God's punishment for sins, 'retribution' is a better translation than 'revenge' (Smith, 1953: 47-51).

[1] For a better understanding of this process: Bickerman (1949: 109-124).

With the advent of Christianity, at least in its origins, divine justice is portrayed in a way beyond retribution. From a strictly theological point of view, punishment may be argued to play an important role in the representation of divine justice in the New Testament. But it is no less true that its ultimate purpose is reparative or redemptive, and its deliberate intention is that sinners be *reformed* by repentance and the purpose of amendment.[2] Even for some authors the divine retribution in Saint Paul does not affect all those who live their existence in Christ, by the grace of God.[3] The wrath of God is only the consequence of sin and not of a personal retribution devised as punishment by a close and emotional God.[4]

Divine Retribution for Early Medieval Christendom

The idea of divine retribution at the end of days and in the afterlife, that is, the eschatological concept of Christianity, dates back to the writings of the Evangelists. On this matter it is interesting to point out Mathew 24: 29–31, and 25: 31–46; Mark 13: 24–37; Luke 21: 25–38; and above all John 5: 25–29, 12: 48, and 20: 11–15. The Patristic mentions the reward of the righteous and the punishment of sinners on the day of final judgement both in the works of Saint Ambrose and Saint Jerome (Rondet, 1966: 61, 216-218).

Meanwhile, worship and devotion to the saints started in the 4th century, when the massive persecutions of Christians ceased and martyrdom became something exceptional. It was at this point that the cult of confessors and virgins began to take place.[5] The ascetic and monastic life would soon be considered as a maximum reference of devotion to God and will eventually be assimilated to the martyrdom of past ages. Therefore, those who faithfully pursue this sacred type of life will be regarded as saints as well (Farmer, 2011: x).

The term *communio sanctorum* appeared for the first time in the canons of the Council of Nimes (394 AD), and from this moment the prayers for the saints to intercede on behalf of the living were very common. So much so that Saint Faustus of Riez in the middle of the 5th century, while defending the cult of martyrs, also limited it to fear and love of God and never to His divinity; trying, in this way, to maintain and control this worship within reasonable margins (Kelly, 1980: 462). The origin of such a devotion must be found in the belief that there was a permanent communion of the saints of earth and heaven (Colzani, 1986: 18-19). It must be understood this communion as the company of holy people of all times, born and unborn, including angels and other heavenly powers that meet in a single body whose head is Christ and which constitutes the Church (Kelly, 1980: 461).

[2] For a detailed defence of this argument through the analysis of the gospels: Marshall (2001: 145-199).
[3] Hypothesis defended by L. Anne Jervis in her article: "Divine Retribution in Romans" (2015: 323–337).
[4] Central thesis of the work of Stephen Travis (2009).
[5] To know more about this subject: (Rodrigues da Silva, and Lopes Frazão da Silva, 2016).

In 410 AD the barbarian Alaric took Rome. The fall of the Eternal City was invoked by pagans as an argument against Christians. This event has been the consequence of a religion that preaches forgiveness and teaches gentleness. This is incompatible with the state. Furthermore, the destiny of Christians is not *in this world* and it is a mistake to transform men who only think about eternity into citizens (Paul, 2003: 118). It was time for the saints to have a much more mundane course of action to defend the interests of the Church. In the year 428 and, according to Hydatius of Chaves, the Vandal King Gunderic died as a result of the divine punishment imposed for desecrating the Basilica of Saint Vicent in Seville (Bronisch, 2006: 81).

Pope Gregory the Great, in the 6th century, wrote his *Dialogi* widely known for their hagiographic character. This work includes a collection of described miracles along with a compilation of lives of saints. The main objective of its fourth book is to convince sceptics of the reality of the invisible, of the saints' intercession, through which it is possible to believe in the afterlife (Boesch Gajano, 1979: 241-242). It is precisely thanks to the *sancti viri* that man can make the safe passage to the other world and, despite the fact that the saints are not capable of contradicting the will of God and altering history, they carry out the fundamental action of sustaining it (Leonardi, 1980: 475).

Thus, began a popular practice which was to transcend the Middle Ages. Addressing God was excellent, and it was preferable to persuade him, in prayer, to give satisfaction to men. Nevertheless, finding an intermediary whose efficiency was indisputable was a guarantee of success. It was this type of reasoning that justified the role of the saints in the occurrence of miracles. The stories of miraculous events began to spread, allowing us to discover privileged places where supernatural forces used to manifest themselves in a preferential manner. That is the most elementary definition of the sanctuary. Hundreds of the faithful began the pilgrimage to these sites to invoke the saint and ask for spiritual as well as material benefits. Physical presence in these places of holiness became even more important than prayer (Delaruelle, 1963: 201-224). And under the premise that a relic was not a thing but was the saint (Geary, 1978: 132), from early times a vast literary production arises focused on the remains in question and the thaumaturgical powers attributed to them.[6] After all, humanity had to guard itself against the evil one. The way of salvation consisted in touching the relics of the saints present in the churches consecrated to them. Moreover, martyrs and confessors could intercede directly before God, always reconciling his favour with appropriate alms. In very rudimentary forms at first, and later more spiritualized, the worship of the saints was one of the strongest constants of medieval religious practice

[6] As evidenced by the text composed at the end of the 3rd or beginning of the 4th century that tells how after his cremation in the Tarragona amphitheatre, Saint Fructuosus appeared to the brothers who had previously collected his ashes, urging them to return them. The text can be found in Fàbrega Grau (1953: 183-186).

(Bonnassie, 1999: 213). This ideal of proximity to God has not ceased to be associated with the ideology of the dominant power ever since (Pérez-Embid, 2018: 45).

Water, Devotion and Reward

The concept of the miracle worker was undoubtedly the most well-known facet of the saint. However, it should be borne in mind that this cult of the supernatural was rooted in collective minds well before the triumph of Christianity. It is therefore, understandable, that these pagan beliefs, including indigenous myths of Celtic descent, somehow survived during the Early Middle Ages in the form of the cult of saints and hagiographic literature.[7]

One ancient deeply-rooted Celtic tradition was that of placing bronze and iron objects as offerings in lakes, ponds and fountains. In fact, the Celts have always been fascinated by aquatic openings towards the other world. Numerous examples can be found—perhaps the best recognized being La Tène in Switzerland—in Scotland, Wales, England, France, Germany, and central Europe or northern Italy (Marco Simón, 1999: 159). This ancient cult involving water will somehow persist in the Early Middle Ages in the form of veneration of sacred wells. This was only possible due to the policy assumed by the Church of preserving old pagan traditions by making them its own. Line of thought that can be found in Pope Gregory's plan for the Christianization of Britain by which he urged to destroy the idols but also keep the temples to deposit the relics of the saints (Bede, 1985: 86).

Sacred wells have always been shrouded in mystery in Celtic countries; they are endowed with supernatural powers that have made it possible to cure diseases. As noted above, even before Christianization, primitive inhabitants believed in the magical power of springs and fountains. Next to some of these wells, inscriptions or even blood were found on stones that recorded the miracles that took place there and which inspired pilgrimages (Sainero Sánchez, 2002: 67). Most of them are connected with the figure of a saint who lived near the place. The number of these wells in Celtic countries is rather considerable, resulting in them being the object of study, both of an ethnographic and historical nature, since the middle of the 19th century.[8] An explanation for the proliferation of these places of worship may be found in the evangelising attempt to Christianize ancient pagan customs and usages. For this reason, legend has it that Saint Columba blessed 300 wells and springs throughout Scotland, both of pagan origins and of new Christian foundation, in an attempt to

[7] For the specific case of Ireland: Binchy (2010: 165-178).
[8] A short but representative sample of this literature can be found in Hardy (1840); Mackinlay (1893); and Quiller-Couch (1894).

Christianize these places where heathen rituals were still celebrated (Varner, 2009: 116).

So, it is not surprising that over time water acquired a new and different meaning associated with the idea of holiness. This important role of water in Christianity is manifested as the main means by which God performs his miracles through the mediation of the saints. The power of healing both physical and spiritual related to this element is inherent in its presence in the form of wells, fountains and springs in cult sites that were widely disseminated during early and central Middle Ages (Arnold, 2017: 209). A sacralization of water that has clear precedents in the life of Jesus Christ himself and that is also observed in many hagiographies of late antiquity and the Middle Ages (Classen, 2018: xiii).

Concerning medieval Wales, it could be said that apart from St Winefride's well, the most significant holy wells consecrated to female sanctity are those linked to the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, St Dwynwen, St Eluned, St Mabyn, and St Non.[9] The miracles attributed to St Winefride are many and varied but all have in common their healing and curative nature. These supernatural occurrences included resurrections; the return of sight to the blind and voice to the dumb; healing of lepers, the crippled, the deformed, the injured, the mentally handicapped, the insane; and those who were suffering from intestinal worms and fever in all its forms. The waters of the well also provided the cure of diseases as diverse as dropsy, epilepsy, cancer, paralysis, gout, melancholy, sciatica, tuberculosis, nephrolithiasis, urinary calculus, haemorrhoids, diarrhoea, sterility, and ultimately all illnesses that may affect people at some point.[10] Here it is necessary to remember that the cult sites dedicated to St Winefride were not limited to Holiwell but also extended to Gwytherin and Shrewsbury. The first of them as the place where she was abbess and she died and the second, where her relics rest after their *translatio* made by the then prior of Shrewsbury Robert Pennant. The relationship between these three distant sacred places was closely marked by the interest of spreading the cult and the influence of this figure of holiness throughout Wales (Pritchard, 2009: 29).

Sanctity and Punishment in the Times of Saint Winefride

The well of Saint Winefride was attributed these thaumaturgical powers capable of healing any type of disease and even raising the dead. The miraculous benefits of its waters were directed to the faithful who came to the holy place and showed great devotion. However, the miracles that embodied the concept of divine punishment were

[9] As reproduced by J. Cartwright in his book (2008: 9, 70, 71, 89, 103, and 141).
[10] A detailed list of these miracle cures can be found in Meyrick (2016: 54-55); Swift (2014: 76-83); Pepin, and Feiss (2011: 69-75; 107-112).

also not unusual. This was in line with a hagiographical tradition that began to be common in Western Europe in the second half of the 6th century and throughout the 7th century. Thus, the *Vita Iuliani* written between the years 581 and 587 (Hen, 1995: 111) by Gregory of Tours was characterized by the high percentage of miracles that involved punishment: no less than 28% of the total (Klaniczay, 2010: 241). It must be remembered that punishment was very present in the work of Saint Isidore of Seville (560-636) who came to argue that the Latin word *Deus* (God) etymologically derived from a Greek term associated with fear (Barney, 2006: 153-154).

Two *vitae* produced in the Visigothic Hispania in 613 and 680 respectively stood out from this period. The first one written by King Sisebuto focuses on the life of Desiderius, bishop of Vienne, in the Merovingian Burgundy. The second Life is that of Saint Fructuosus of Braga, traditionally attributed to Valerio del Bierzo.[11] The Lives of these saints shows us that according to the hagiographic discourse, God did not shy away from punishing anyone who stood in the way of those authorized to represent Him. In this light, all those who embarked on this path were quick to receive severe punishment and had to bear the burden of suffering at the hands of the divinity itself (Conceição de Sousa, and da Silveira de Oliveira, 2011: 101-102).

For example, five *vitae* were written in the 7th and early 8th centuries in Ireland. These historiographical texts collected the life and miracles of Saint Brigid, Saint Patrick, and Saint Columba. The punishment here adopts five expressions coined by Máire Johnson (2010:10-21): 'prayer vengeance', 'prayer and fasting with vigil', 'outright malediction', 'negative or maledictory prophecy', and 'passive retaliatory judgement'. As might be expected, in many cases these forms of retaliation are closely linked to customary and legal aspects existing in Ireland at the time. A clear example of this can be seen in the relationship between prayer and fasting with some civil legal proceedings as well as the causality between the custom of receiving hospitality and outright malediction (Johnson, 2010: 2, 14-15). However, the author establishes a clear dichotomy between retribution related to male saints and Saint Brigid. In the first case, Saint Patrick and Saint Columba are fully engaged in the punishments they invoke, the 'maledictory prophecy' being very present in the *Vitae* of both; Saint Brigid, on the other hand, was more inclined to exercise a 'passive retaliatory judgment', offering much more scope for forgiveness and atonement (Johnson, 2010: 23).

As with the history of the wells, it can be observed in these very early dates and, especially in Celtic countries, a survival of certain pagan practices forming part of the nature of divine punishments. In this way it was common in Wales for locals to use the holy well of Saint Elian to cast curses on criminals. Similarly, in Brittany, it was customary for those who had been aggrieved to appeal to Saint Yves to punish the wrongdoer. Thus, the man who considered himself wronged and did not have the means to recover what had been taken from him by force, went to the druid (in pagan

[11] Although it may also have been probable that it was written previously (Díaz y Díaz, 1974: 15-16).

times) and the saint (in Christian times) to ask them to 'ill-wish' the lawbreaker (Baring-Gould, and Fisher, 2012: 17).

Saint Winefride and the Divine Retribution

The rare presence of female saints from the year 600 is a verifiable fact. Between the 7th and 12th centuries only 10% of the written lives of Greek saints had a feminine protagonist, although in the West the proportion rises to 15 % (Pérez-Embid, 2018: 44). When it comes to Wales, it is clear that this trend is continuing. The great interest in writing the lives of male saints that included a detailed account of their activity contrasts with the limited role of female saints—who only aroused interest when their virginity was threatened, complying with the premise that argues that the only good virgin is the dead one (Cartwright, 2008: 86-87).

Saint Winefride or Gwenfrewy is the earliest Welsh-born female saint worthy of two *Vitae*. Although this saint lived in the 7th century, her *Vitae* were not written until the 12th century. These Latin versions were the work of Robert Pennant of Shrewsbury and an anonymous author (Richards, 2010, 70).

The anonymous Life of Saint Winefride is precisely the best source to analyse the miracles that involve divine retribution. Of the 20 miracles that the work describes, seven include some type of punishment for wrongdoing. In the *Vita* written by Robert Pennant the list of miracles is even more scarce: there are only five, and three of them involve clear retribution. The odd thing is that none of the miracles collected in the two *Vitae* match one another (Pepin, and Feiss, 2010: 15). In the nature of these miracles a certain evolution is observed regarding the concept of retribution from earlier medieval hagiographies. In the time of Saint Winefride, some pagan practices remained very popular. It has already been noted above how the formulation of curses against the enemy came to be embraced by Christian priests. The truth is that the Christianization of the British Isles was a slow and long-lasting process (Kearney, 2001: 79-83).

Based on the divine punishment reflected in the *Vitae* of Saint Patrick and Saint Cadog, the true Christian character of the Celtic Church has been questioned. The malevolent power that these saints exercised through their maledictions could lead to terrible punishments—from having men swallowed up by the earth to dashing them into pieces and burning them (Davies, 1992: 13).

However, in the 12th century hagiographies of Saint Winefride it seems evident that Celtic curses were giving way to forms of retaliation much more consistent with a seigneurial system. This process is already evoked by Gregory of Tours regarding Saint Remigius in Merovingian France. This saint was widely known for inflicting painful death without possibility of forgiveness to those who dared to encroach on farmland granted to the monastery (Bartlett, 2015: 404).

Concerning England, the relationship between a faithful and his saint could be considered as that between a dependent vassal and his lord. This explains why the term *patrocinium* appears in Latin texts referring to saints, in order to suggest the patronage that the superior was willing to offer to the inferior (Bartlett, 2013: 464). If we follow this parallel between saint and lord, it is not surprising to find that most of the punishments were the consequence of an attempt to attack the resources or possessions belonging to the saint. Hagiographies written in the 11th and 12th centuries bear witness to this. Most of these punitive miracles were performed posthumously (Sigal, 1985: 344). Thus, Saint Foy of Aquitaine did not hesitate to blind a knight who dared to usurp one of the manors belonging to the abbey (Klaniczay, 2010: 242). For his part, Saint Bavo of Ghent was well known for chastising those who dared not to pay the abbey's rents, or to usurp or damage both its property and its dependents (Bartlett, 2015: 404). Also, in England, Saint Dunstan took revenge on the layman Aelfwold by causing him to be eaten by a pack of foxes; his crime: withdrawing a donation for the monastery (Harrington, 2017: 57). Therefore, a clear relationship between divine punishment and the protection of the interests of the Church against the interference of secular claims becomes evident. It should not be forgotten that the transfer of Saint Winefride's body from Gwytherin to Shrewsbury was made over the resistance of a local assembly of laymen (Leigh, 1817: 80-81). Robert of Shrewsbury managed to do this by securing permission from local nobles and princes (Gregory, 2012: 63) in a context of anarchy in which King Stephen needed the full support of the Church to consolidate his reign (Davis, 1977: 19). The intention of the prior was none other than to strengthen and extend the influence of the monastic institution that he represented.

From our current perspective, these punishments may seem disproportionate. Nevertheless, in the High Middle Ages there were four features that could make these excesses more understandable. First, the consonance between the punitive miracles recorded by the hagiographers and the cruelty derived from the numerous biblical precedents must not be forgotten. Secondly, we must consider the extreme degree of physical violence that was so widespread in the 12th century; bloodshed was so ordinary that it was no wonder that the saintly punishment was in keeping with the brutality of the period. After all, when the immortal soul was preeminent, the torment of the mortal flesh was entirely indifferent (Ackroyd, 2012: 177-178). Thirdly, there was an attitude of latent, but at the same time obstinate, resistance of the dependents towards the authority of the lords (including the ecclesiastical) in the form of open disobedience, concealment of part of the rent, deliberate delays, small sabotages and even encroachment on seigneurial farmland (Freedman, 2000: 17-38; Hobbs, 1998: 90-91). Finally, the attempt by the local aristocracy to lay hands on the holdings that had been granted to monastic houses (Burton, 1994: 4). All these factors may somehow explain why the punitive miracles and threatening curses recorded in the hagiographies

served as a preventive measure designed to protect both clerics and their possessions (Harrington, 2017: 234).

Following this, Saint Winefride did not hesitate to protect the prerogatives and rights associated with her. In this way, on one occasion she made possible the escape of a deacon who was kidnapped with the intention of depriving him of the tithes of his church (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 105-106). Here divine intervention seems entirely necessary due to the great importance that these taxes had in the medieval West (Constable, 1964: 2). The presence of the water mill as a trigger for punitive miracles is also significant. We must not forget the important role that the mill played in medieval society—not only with regard to the rural economy, but also as the maximum exponent of jurisdictional rights and seigneurial prestige (Squatriti, 2000: 53). Thus, when thieves stole and tried to sell part of the machinery of the mill belonging to the church, the saint made sure that the mills of each and every one of those who bought the stolen material stopped working (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 74-75). Just like the Norman knight who was lame for the rest of his life trying to build a water mill near the saint's well: The warrior, in spite of his efforts, did not manage to move the rock of Saint Beuno from the middle of the river to his mill pond. Full of rage he kicked the stone and thus got a permanent limp. His wife also remained sterile for the rest of her life for having dared to bathe in the healing waters reserved for the sick (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 106-107). The message coming from this miracle, not very far from anti-Norman propaganda, leans on the psalms and seems to conflate the damage to private property with sacrilege.[12]

Also, the safeguarding of livestock was of great need in Wales due to its economic importance (Given, 1990: 94). This was surely considered by Saint Winefride when some rustlers stole a cow from the church grounds. Fearing that the animal would leave tracks, they headed over rocky terrain. However, they were stunned when they realized that the cow was leaving deep hoof prints in the rocks. Fearing discovery, they abandoned the cow which was later retrieved. When the thieves retraced their steps, they realized that the animal had not left any track on the way back. They considered this fact to be miraculous and made it public (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 71-73).
Saint Winefride also devoted herself to the maintenance of peace and order. This attitude is somewhat analogous to a major movement which spread through much of Western Europe at the end of the 10th century: the peace and truce of God. At first, the Church oriented its interests to the achievement of a double objective: to put a stop to the violence exercised by the warrior aristocracy and to protect their victims (Duby, 1973: 231-232). However, over time this protection was aimed more at curbing common

[12] 'It was fair that those who encroached on the inheritance of the martyr and unlawfully polluted her sanctuary would afterwards be for all those in the neighbourhood an object of mockery and scoffing, insult and disgrace' (Psalm 78:4) in Pepin, and Feiss (2011: 106).

crime, especially that exercised within the same churches' grounds by the heirs of the properties taken away in the form of donations (Barhélemy, 2005: 100).

In accordance with what has been argued, the presence of sacrilegious offenders in the accounts of the miracles of Saint Winefride is important. They all have in common a wish to defile, by their deeds, the holiness of the places destined for the worship of the saint. Two miracles are related in one way or another to the infringement of the right to take sanctuary. Violating this prerogative was considered a great sacrilege that could even lead to excommunication (McCall, 2006: 27).

One day a messenger chased by a gang of robbers took refuge in the church dedicated to the virgin. One of the thieves broke through the churchyard and stole the messenger's horse. In the face of such a flagrant violation of the churchyard, Saint Winefride punished the thief with an illness that brought unbearable suffering. In the end, the thief recovered his health by repenting and doing public penance (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 69-71). On another occasion, a jealous matron beat her maid savagely and unceasingly; the maid fled and tried to find sanctuary in the church. The doors were locked, though. The martyr took pity on her and gave her the strength to disfigure her aggressor who remained deformed until the day of her death (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 104).

Many of the punitive miracles gave special attention to crime, especially to the lovers of things belonging to others. Accordingly, some brigands received a horrible death shortly after plundering the virgin's lands and livestock (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 105). In the same way, two clerics incurred the wrath of the saint by committing the great sacrilege of stealing two books from the virgin's precincts. One of them was only whipped because 'a workman is worthy of his pay.' The other, after trying unsuccessfully to sell the missal, was hanged (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 112). It is proved that the theft of something from the saint's premises, however insignificant it may be, was dearly paid for. Thus, even death struck a sacrilegious woman for merely appropriating a pebble from the holy well (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 103).

Another type of sacrilege was that of perjury committed before the Holy Scriptures or in sacrosanct places. The importance of the oath as a necessary element to support probative credibility in a judicial process should not be forgotten. Evidence is found of this practice in Brittany, Ireland and Wales. For instance, in the Life of Cadog there is a refutation of a charge with the support of the oath of 60 men (Griffiths, and Schofield, 2011: 95-96). Thus, Saint Winefride did not hesitate to punish the perjury of a man who had denied, in front of her sacred well, that he had stolen and eaten a goat. Miraculously the animal began to bleat from the stomach of the perjurer, confirming his guilt (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 103-104).

Conclusion: Saint Winefride as a Vessel for Divine Retribution

In the anonymous Life of Saint Winefride, she is clearly designated as a vessel for divine justice through the following sentence: 'The Lord works wonders for his saints' (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 104).

Additional statements that support this conclusion are also documented. Thus, in the *Vita* written by Robert of Shrewsbury it is made quite clear the link between God and the merits of the saint.[13] The Anonymous Life does nothing but sustain this assertion. In this way, the will of God and that of the martyr is the same.[14] Similarly, the author relies on the psalms to equate Saint Winefride with an angel sent by God.[15]
Saint Winefride's Life, thus, becomes an embodied manifestation of divinity. It should be noted that the saint worked the miracles long after she died. That is why the miracles of the Anonymous Life are framed in various political periods after the death of the saint.[16] This factor agrees with Aelfric's homilies on the Catholic faith. This prolific author claimed that miracles were the product of the past. In the beginning, God worked miracles by Himself, later through the apostles and saints. However, around the year 1000 God worked miracles—not by means of a living saint—but through a dead one (Godden, 1985: 84-85). The location of these supernatural occurrences were the tombs or, more specifically in the case of the Celtic saints, the sacred wells (Jones, 1992: 34).

As for the intrinsic nature of the punitive miracles of Saint Winefride, a Celtic component is also perceived. Thus, for example, one cannot fail to compare the divine retribution of Saint Winefride with that of another Celtic female saint: Saint Brigid of Kildare. In most cases these acts of divine justice fit into what Máire Johnson calls 'passive retaliatory judgment'; that is to say, into the context in which the saint does not have to actually carry out an act, neither in word nor in deed, nor even make an appearance to invoke for a punitive miracle to happen (Johnson, 2010: 19-20). In fact, in the two Lives of Saint Winefride the word 'vengeance' only appears twice. In the first one she 'brings swift vengeance for the crime committed' (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 70), while in the second she 'immediately obtained vengeance from the Lord' (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 104). On both occasions, the direct contact of the saint with the person who deserves to be punished, is totally non-existent. Therefore, and unlike Saint Brigid, the Welsh saint leaves prayer and fasting, the outright malediction, and the maledictory prophecy out of her line of action (Johnson, 2010: 13, 15, 19).

[13] 'with God manifesting the merits of the maiden': (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 72).
[14] 'by God´s and the martyr's will': (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 105).
[15] 'The Lord certainly sends his angel in the midst of those who fear him and frees them (Psalm 33:8)': (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 106).
[16] 'when the Danes were subject to the Britons, the time of the French, a period of anarchic struggle between the French and the Welsh, and the time after the expulsion of the French': (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 15).

However, it is necessary to note certain parallels between the punishments inflicted and divine retribution in the Holy Scriptures. Thus, for example, in miracles 10, 13 and 28 recorded in the Anonymous Life, an obvious similarity can be seen with the punishment reflected in Psalm 54:16, that is: death will strike down the enemies (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 103, 105, 112). Miracle 10 can also be associated with the wasting disease prophesied in Leviticus 26:16 (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 103). Similarly, miracle 13 is also linked to the curse of a horrific death (2 Maccabees 9). The precedent of the sacrilegious and sinful hand, according to Matthew 5: 29–30, is clearly recognizable in the *Vita* of Robert of Shrewsbury (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 70). In the same way, the punishments of lameness and sterility for life in miracle 15 can also be related to Deuteronomy 28:35 and Psalm 108: 8–15 respectively (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 106). The deformity suffered in miracle 12 by the matron due to her sacrilegious violence on her maid may well be deduced from Isaiah 11: 4 and from Psalm 83: 15–17 as well (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 104). To conclude, the curse referred to not benefit from, in this case the pieces stolen from a mill according to the *Vita* of Robert of Shrewsbury, has a lot to do with Deuteronomy 28: 30–31, 38–41 (Pepin, and Feiss, 2011: 74).

The hagiography of Saint Winefride, like that of all the saints, includes the extraordinary account of the manifestation of the supernatural. It reveals the power of God and His daily presence in the lives of men and women. The confluence of both pagan tradition (sacred waters, passive retaliatory judgment) and features typical of the time they were written (protection of seigneurial domain, peace, and truce of God, right to take sanctuary) can also be seen in the texts. I believe that the results of this study meet the main objectives set from the outset. Those were none other than get the most accurate picture possible of Saint Winefride as an instrument of divine retribution. To this end, the information provided by the two twelfth-century *Vitae* has been examined, establishing a link between the punitive miracles that appear there with the punishments represented in the Holy Scriptures and other hagiographies. As a result, emphasis has been given to the parallels and differences among these literary sources by understanding them always within the historical context of the period. A context that is associated at first with traditions and rituals deeply rooted in Celtic culture where water played a leading role. A protagonism that, far from diminishing, expanded significantly during the early and central Middle Ages through sacred places located by wells, fountains and springs. Also related to the historical background, the use made by the hagiographic discourse of the concept of retribution in favour of ecclesiastical institutions should be stressed. It must be understood that in the 12th century, the protection and defence of the assets and properties of the church became prevailing since the threats against its independence and heritage coming from the secular world were very real. A particular juncture that leads to think about the moralizing, but also political and institutional objectives of the concept of retribution and divine justice.

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