

## THE FUNCTION OF BISHOPS IN THE EARLY ICELANDIC CHURCH

The aim of this paper is to examine the rôle of bishops in the Icelandic church until c. 1200. The literature used includes *Íslendingabók* (ÍB.), *Hungrvaka* (H.), *Þorláks saga byskups* (ÞS.), *Páls saga byskups* (ÞS.), *Jóns saga helga* (JSH.) and *Oddaverja þáttur* (OÞ.)<sup>1</sup> The bishops dealt with are those whose biographies appear in the above sources: of Skálholt, in chronological order (1) Ísleifur Gizurarson (1056-1080); (2) Gizurr Ísleifsson (1082-1118); (3) Þorlákr Runólfsson (1118-1133); (4) Magnús Einarsson (1134-1148); (5) Klængur Þorsteinsson (1152-1176); (6) Þorlákr Þórhalsson inn helgi (1178-1193); (7) Páll Jónsson (1195-1211). Only one bishop of Hólar in the period before 1200 has a saga, Jón Ógmundarson inn helgi (1106-1121).

### INCULTURATION

From the Christian church's first mission to both Jews and Gentiles, there was an awareness of some of the cultural problems in inherent in missionary strategy. In later times this has been articulated as the "baptising of pagan culture". The hagiographer, Bruno of Querfurt, writing about Adalbert's mission to the Hungarians, commented: "Adalbert also visited them personally and, when they had forsaken some of their errors, he raised over them the *shadow of the Christian symbol*" (italics mine).<sup>2</sup>

To understand better the introduction of Christianity in Iceland, I find the missiological concept of *inculturation* very helpful.<sup>3</sup> There are three ways of communication of the message of a new external religion and inserting its structures in a receptor culture: *imposition, translation and inculturation*. However, besides being three models of mission strategy, they can be three stages of a linear development.

1. *Imposition* is a negative term which implies the entering of a culture by an outsider and the forcing of religious ideas, structures or behavioural patterns without any respect towards or regard for the indigenous patterns or traditions. There are examples of the technique of imposition from the days of the apostles until present times. Tertullian summed up the hard-line attitude to the ancient pagan religion when he exclaimed "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"<sup>4</sup> In the Germanic world, the Emperor Charlemagne in 772 ordered the destruction of *Irminsúl*, the great wooden column sacred to the Saxons which was said to support both heaven and earth. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries abound in similar instances.

The cultural as well theological problem with this process of evangelisation is that its proponents regard their form of religion as being a culture-free "finished product" which can be easily transferred to any other inferior culture. For the missionaries the technique of imposition is safe and uncomplicated because it reinforces their belief in the superiority of their own values and cultural heritage, and as a result

<sup>1</sup> The references to these sources in this paper are according to the classification in Vigfusson, Gudbrand and Powell, F. York, *Origines Islandicae*, vol. 1, Oxford, 1905 (abbreviated here as VP). It is a clear and handy classification and readily available in one volume. The *Jóns saga helga* in VP is the version called *yngr gærð* in vol. 2 of the edition Haukadalshöfðinginn of the *Byskupa sögur* by Guðni Jónsson, 1953. VP omitted the miracles and prints the first 22 chapters of version in Guðni Jónsson's edition.

<sup>2</sup> This statement is quoted in Dvornik, F. *The Making of Central and Eastern Europe*. London, 1949, pp.133-4, 152; it is also the title of a paper by Baker, G. D. "The Shadow of the Christian Symbol", in Cuming, G.J. (ed.), *The Mission of the Church and the Propagation of the Faith: Studies in Church History*, Vol.6, Cambridge, 1970, pp.17-28.

<sup>3</sup> *Inculturation* is a term which has been frequently used in Roman Catholic circles since the late 1970s. The same concept was being earlier discussed in circles connected with the World Council of Churches under the term of *contextualisation*. Other words such as *adaptation, incarnation and indigenisation* have been used as the concept has been developed since the 1950s in Orthodox and Protestant circles.

<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, *Prescriptions against Heretics*, Greenstade, S. .L. (ed.), *Early Latin Theology, The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. V, Philadelphia, 1956, p. 36

they can easily control the situation having created a one-way street.

2. *Translation* is a term used to describe the first step towards accommodation with the culture of those who are the target of the missionary outreach. It is the beginning of a communication between the donor and the recipient with the assumption that there are some valid elements in the receptor culture. This model has its roots in Apostolic times when the Apostle Paul, upon meeting some of the Athenian intellectuals on the Areopagus, presented the Gospel within the framework of Greek religious experience and literature.<sup>5</sup> In 596 Pope Gregory's message to Augustine of Canterbury was not to destroy the heathen temples, if they had been well-built, but to convert them "from the worship of devils to the service of the true God".<sup>6</sup> On the superficial level liturgies, Bibles, prayers and catechisms are translated. In the third century the church in Rome made a language-switch from Greek to Latin, a little later parts of the Holy Scriptures were translated by Ulfilas into Gothic for the mission of the Arian Church, after the conversion of Russia in 988 the Byzantine tradition was presented in a Slavic dress. Indeed, the field of modern linguistics owes much to the modern missionary outreach for its development. Although "translation" often begins on the verbal level, it also can operate on the symbolic level. Nevertheless, it is only a step beyond "imposition". It is still a one-way street, in which the pastoral agent is the manipulator of the situation.

3. *Inculturation* is a process by which the Christian message and the structures of the church are inserted into a particular culture at a given time. It is both a theological and a cultural anthropological term. A handy definition is:

Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about "a new creation".<sup>7</sup>

Inculturation is seen as an act of incarnation. It is the planting of the Christian seed in a specific culture within time and space. The seed germinates, the plant grows and ultimately bears fruit. This process of growth and maturing is itself generative and transformative in nature. A new cultural entity arises which combines the old and the new in an enriched and enriching symbiosis.<sup>8</sup>

The *inculturational* or *contextual* model not only is the third approach to evangelisation, it also stands in a linear progression of development in missionary strategy. After the initial culture-contact and a subsequent process of accommodation, there may develop a contextualisation-process by which the local community integrates the Gospel message within its own perception of its own culture. In the process of inculturation, the primary agent is the local church community within the local society. Its goal is to plant the Gospel in community and to integrate it into a symbolic code of belief, values and behaviour within the local culture. Inculturation takes place on the functional and psychological levels of culture. The proponents of the theory of inculturation claim that the process of the implanting of the Gospel within a culture generates a cultural flourishing. From the dialectic of Gospel versus culture there arises a *tertium quid*, which is a new cultural entity.

## THE EARLY DAYS OF ICELANDIC CHRISTIANITY

There is no space here for a discussion of the conversion of Iceland to Christianity in the year 1000.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles* 17: 16-34.

<sup>6</sup> Bede, *History of the English Church and People*, Book 1, ch XXX, Colgrave and Mynors, (eds), Oxford, 1969, pp.106-7.

<sup>7</sup> Arrupe, Pedro, "Letter to the Whole Society", in *Studies in the International Apostolate of Jesuits*, vol. 7, June 1978, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Although the understanding of this process has been developing since the 1950s, inculturation is not new. It found expression in the cultural and liturgical experiments of two Jesuits, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China at the end of the 16th century and Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) in India at the beginning of the 17th century. Both attempts were condemned by the Roman ecclesiastical authorities.

<sup>9</sup> A good summary and analysis of the events in the Christianisation of Iceland can be read in Hastrup, Kirsten, *Island of Anthropology*, Odense, 1990, pp.203-214; and Foots, Peter, "On the Conversion of the Icelanders", *Arv*,

According to the perception in *Njáls saga* and *Laxdæla saga*, the transition was peaceful, swift and painless. However, view which we gain from the *Byskups sögur*, sometimes reading behind the lines, is that the process of Christianisation was slow and laborious. Here the concept of inculturation can be of value. By 1000 the first stage of imposition was finished, and the stages of translation and inculturation were operative until the collapse of the Icelandic Commonwealth between 1262 and 1264.

There were certain salient features of Icelandic Christianity which were different from the norm which existed elsewhere throughout Christendom. These were mainly structural and organisational. The church was incorporated into society within the first five decades in which it was under the control of the group which wielded power. Hence many of the early clergy came from this class or from their dependents. Moreover, the possession of the churches and of the properties appertaining to them was in the hands of the power élite.<sup>10</sup>

Whereas there is evidence of a particularly Icelandic devotional tradition, especially in the quickly-developed cult of two native saints, but as well in the kind of spirituality that grew up, there is no evidence of a home-grown doctrinal development similar to that which has frequently occurred on the Christian mission-fields in the 19th and 20th centuries.

### THE RÔLE OF THE BISHOPS

A vast transformation had taken place in the millennium between the setting up of the first *episkopoi* or "overseers" in the primitive Christian communities by the apostles - indeed the "overseers" appear to have been at first synonymous with the *presbyteroi* or "elders" -- and the mediæval "lords spiritual" at the time of the establishment of the see of Skálholt in 1056, by which time the function of a bishop in the Latin church was clearly defined. The Latin bishop had a threefold rôle - firstly, that of performing certain rites peculiar to his office such as ordination of clerics of the minor and major orders including the consecration of other bishops, confirmation, the consecration of churches, exorcism, the blessing of certain substances, such as holy oils and objects, such as bells; secondly that of teaching and of maintaining doctrinal purity and, finally, that of ruling, administering and organising his diocese.

Thus for the 11th-century church and for those people who accept bishops to be an essential part of Christian order, it is necessary to have the services of bishops for the establishment and the maintenance of the church. Hence in England, the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia the missionaries were often bishops themselves with the power and authority of their office. In a way the bishop seemed to incorporate a divine presence. This was evident in 1004 when Gizurr Ísleifsson had been in his see 20 years, men from the northern quarter approached him with the request that they have their own diocese there. They said that the land would then never be *bishopless*. Gizurr agreed and Jón Ógmundarson was chosen bishop by "God and good men" to be consecrated and to set up his see at Hólar (H. 2.9). OP. indicates that Þorlákr Þórhallsson inn heigi (1178-1193) was under divine protection and hence could calmly face all difficulties and dangers (see below)

The case of Gizurr Ísleifsson appears to have been special. The saga-writer made the strange comment that "he was both king and bishop (*kunungr ok byskup*) over the land as long as he lived." (H. 2.6). Then at the end of the little biography the comment is made they would "never get his peer" and that it was "the opinion of all wise men that he had been by God's grace and by his own achievements the noblest men who has ever been in Iceland, whether of clerks or laymen." (H. 2.15). Moreover, after his death the vital force ebbed from the natural order and various natural calamities occurred (H. 2.15). It is hard to interpret the meaning of the expression "king". It appears that it is merely a pious exaggeration to describe a man of unusually fine character who did great deeds for the church by putting it on a firm financial foundation and causing the second diocese to be established.

*Hungrvaka* reports that the lack of bishops before 1056 was compensated for by "visiting" bishops who came to perform certain basic episcopal functions (H. 1.11). We are informed that these touring bishops came "in the days of Bishop Ísleifr", presumably not during his episcopate but during his

XXXV, 1979, p.155-9.

<sup>10</sup> An interesting comparison is the incorporation of Christianity into Irish society five centuries earlier, even if the conditions prevailing, processes involved and results achieved were totally different. See Mytum, Harold, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, London and New York, 1992, pp. 60-62, 74.

lifetime before he was consecrated to episcopal dignity. (H. 1.11)

Seven of these bishops were authorised by the relevant ecclesiastical authorities and others were what were later called *episcopi vagantes* or "wandering bishops" who were not in communion with the Church of Rome but rather free-lancers who are said to have given easier moral options to the faithful. (B. names five of these bishops, three of whom were Armenians (B. 8.2). One of the seven authorised visiting bishop, Barnharðr inn saxneski, spent 20 winters in Iceland, where he was remembered for his blessing of churches, bells and topographical features which formerly had a heathen connection. (H. 1.11). Moreover, we hear that the archbishop of Bremen was concerned about the *episcopi vagantes* who visited Iceland from other countries without his permission and who gave an easier option that Bishop Ísleifr and Konráðr ordered that any who made use of their services would be excommunicated. (H. 1.5)

In Iceland the bishops played a social-sacral as well as a spiritual rôle. In 1135 Magnús Einarsson waited at Sarpsborg during the winter after his consecration the previous October. (H. 4.3) and then arrived back in Iceland at time of the Althing. The excitement of his arrival stopped a legal case and and all gathered around while he narrated about his travels (H. 4.4). The interruption in the due processes of law was, perhaps, not merely caused by curiosity or excitement. Behind the thingmen's behaviour there lay belief in the magical presence of a man especially set apart by God.

Jón of Hólar gathered his clergy at great festivals at the cathedral for worship, conferring and conviviality. At the end, when they had been "strengthened by his episcopal blessing" they would return home "with joy" (JSH. 12.2).

## THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE BISHOPS

From the establishment of the first diocese at Skálholt the bishops were chosen from the group that wielded power in Iceland. Not only were many of them from the class of chieftains, but some were descended from those the chieftains who played a major role in the introduction of Christianity to Iceland. Ísleifr, the first bishop of Skálholt, was the son of Gizurr Teitsson hinn hvítli (H. 1.1), and his son, Gizurr, followed him, in calf-like succession (H. 2.1). Magnús Einarsson, the fourth bishop, was the great-great-grandson of Hallr af Síðu (H. 4.1). Klængur Þorsteinsson, the fifth bishop, is called a great *höfðingi* (H. 5.8). The seventh bishop, Páll Jónsson, fulfilled all qualifications and had an impeccable background. His father was Jón Loftsson and his great-grandfather was Sæmundr hinn fróði; his mother Ragnheiðr Þórhallsdóttir, sister of Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson the saint (PS. 1.1). We are told that he was a *goði* and gave great support to his thingamen. (PS. 1.7) and that "all men held him in great esteem, as was to be looked for, and his kinsmen were all the most noble men in the whole country." (PS. 3.6) Jón Ögmundarson, the first bishop of Hólar, was a great-grandson of Hallr á Síðu, first chieftain in the Eastfirthers' quarter to take the true faith and baptism (JSH1.1).

Nevertheless, on the other hand, it was also possible for a bishop to come from the lower classes. For example Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson is not given a genealogy, but only his parents are mentioned (PS. 2.1).

## THE THEOLOGICAL TRAINING OF THE BISHOPS

The severe problem facing the Icelandic church was the training of clergy. The early bishops received their training abroad. A pattern was set by Ísleifr Gizurarson who as a lad was taken abroad by father and handed over to be pupil of the abbess in Herlufða. When he returned to Iceland, already a priest, he was well trained (H. 1.2). After his election to the episcopate at the Althing in 1055, he went to Pope Leo who gave him a writ for Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen and the latter consecrated him at Pentecost in 1056 (H. 1.3). It can be surmised that his consecrator gave him instructions in his specific duties as a bishop. His son, Gizurr, also went abroad in his youth for his early education in Saxland (H. 2.1). On election in 1081, he went to Pope Gregory VII who sent Gizurr to Harðvíg, archbishop of Magdeburg in Saxland. H. reports that his consecrator gave him all that he required for his present needs, which would, no doubt, include advice on his future episcopal duties (H. 2.4). To strengthen the formation of clerics Ísleifr

Gizurarson set up a school at Skálholt and many men handed over their sons for education, some of whom became good clerics, and two bishops Kolr in Vík and Jón of Hólar (H. 1.7). By this means the function and duties of the order of priests and of bishops were strengthened in Iceland.

By the time the third bishop, Þorlákr Runólfsson, was consecrated in 1118, the rôle of bishop in Iceland had been defined. Indeed Þorlákr was consecrated while Gizurr, his ailing predecessor, was still alive and chose him at the age of 32 (H. 3.1). Þorlákr Þórhallsson went abroad after ordination when he had accumulated enough funds, first to Paris, where he got what he could gain, and then Lincoln, where he acquired great knowledge (PS. 4.2). The saga-writer comments that, whereas others return home in fine apparel and with fine weapons, Þorlákr came home with fruits of learning and lowliness (PS. 4.6).

Þorláks nephew, Páll Jónsson, also made a "grand tour" abroad. A year after marriage went away to Earl Haraldr of Orkneys and then to school in England. He later returned with greater knowledge than any contemporaries in Iceland. "And so when he came back to Iceland, he surpassed all other men in his courtliness and his learning, and in making of [Latin] verse, and in scholarship [bókaleisfr]" (PS. 1.4)

Jón of Hólar was put as a lad to school at Skálholt with Bishop Ísleifr, where he got "holy learning and good manners" (JSH. 3.1). Then, when nearly a fully grown, he and he went as a deacon abroad to see the ways of good men in Norway, Denmark, Rome and increase his learning for his own and others' advantage (JSH. 4.1).

## EPISCOPAL MARRIAGE

Celibacy was a thorny problem in the Latin Church and the Greek Church wisely limited the unmarried state to monks and bishops. The persistence of married was a matter of great concern in Rome and even if the first moves for the enforcement of clerical celibacy date back to the fourth century, little programme had been made by the 11th century. It was in 1139 that compulsory celibacy was ultimately prescribed in the Latin Church for all clerical orders from sub-deacon above.<sup>11</sup> The main sources for this paper, H., PS., and ÞS. were presumably written by the one hand and composed from a clerical mind-set.

The first two bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarson (1056) and Gizurr Ísleifsson (1082), were married and there is no reference in the text of H. about the next three, Þorlákr Runólfsson (1118), Magnús Einarson (1134) and Klængr Þorsteinsson (1152).

The monkish author of the three sagas under consideration was able to use the case of Þorlákr Þórhallsson inn helgi (1178) to confirm his acceptance of the growing attitude towards clerical celibacy. He narrates that Þorlákr's family urged him to marry and he went to court a widow but in a dream a nobly clad man told him not to proceed because "there is another bride much higher in store for you." (PS. 4.7). Instead of marrying Þorlákr Þórhallsson went to live a life of exemplary spirituality with Bjardheðinn at Kirkjubær in Siða (PS. 5.1), and subsequently helped establish the monastery called Ver which became a spiritual power-house and attracted secular and regular clergy from Iceland and abroad (PS. 6.6). All this fits in with the clerical ideology of the saga-writer who comments: "But God's Christendom had long grown strong and mighty, and the discipline of clerks had increased by reason of restrictions, although it was not at that time greatly censured by his superiors if a priest took a widow to wife, though it is now forbidden." (PS. 4.7)

Then the last of the seven bishops of Skálholt under consideration, Páll Jónsson (1195) married Herdís Ketilladóttir when young (PS. 1.3) and had four children Loftr, Ketill, Halla and Þóra (PS. 1.8).

Jón of Hólar (1058) was married twice, his first wife only for a short time and there were no children that survived out of childhood (JSH. 4.5). It is significant that, after his election in 1105, he went to Rome, to meet Pope Pascal II to discuss his marital state (JSH. 7.5). One cannot help wondering whether the journey to Rome for papal permission was an invention of the author who was perhaps troubled by the fact of a married bishop who became a saint.

<sup>11</sup> ..Gallén, Jarl, "Celibat", *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid*, København, 1957. vpl. 2, column 545-546.

## ELECTION

The first bishop of Skálholt, Ísleifr Gizurarson, was elected for his many qualities but not his wealth. *Hungrvaka* relates that he was chosen by *slipýðe* or "commonweal" (H. 1.3). Before his death he started a tradition of a bishop recommending his successor. He chose a priest called Guttormr (H. 1.8). His son, Gizurr Ísleifsson, was not in the country when his father died in May 1056. Returning home, he came to the Althing when they had chosen Guttormr as bishop. However, Guttormr said that they should choose Gizurr. The popular opinion was in favour. He tried to avoid the office but accepted when all the chieftains promised to obey all of God's commandments (i.e. canon law) which Gizurr should order. (2.3).

When Gizurr was ill and kept to his bed, he sent word to the chieftains at the Althing that they should choose Þorlákr Runólfsson and send him to Archbishop Özurr in Lund for consecration (H. 2.11). There is no reference that Magnús Einarsson was suggested by his predecessor. The comment that he was chosen "summer after Þorlákr died", suggests that it was at the Althing. Klængr Þorsteinsson was chosen on the advice, not of his predecessor, but of Bishop Björn of Hólar (H. 5.1).

Then when Klængr contracted a disease in old age, he asked Archbishop Eysteinn to consecrate someone to take over. He agreed but wanted Klængr to continue performing the hours and preaching (5.10). At the Althing they gave him the choice and he chose Þorlákr Þórhallsson (H. 5.11).

Páll Jónsson had no verbal message but his uncle and predecessor, Þorlákr Þórhallsson, before his death, gave him his consecrated ring. This act was taken as a symbolically prophetic recommendation (PS. 12.4). He was elected at the Althing in 1194 after a long debate, and after an initial refusal finally accepted (PS. 2.1, 2.2).

Jón of Hólar was suggested by Bishop Gizurr at request of the Althing (H. 2.9) and "with the consent of all clerks and laymen in the Northlanders' Quarter". He at first refused and then accepted (JSH. 8.3).

## ROYAL AND/OR PAPAL APPROBATION

Bishops elect were forced to go abroad for consecration. It was the tradition that a bishop be consecrated by three other bishops, but only Jón of Hólar is mentioned as having three consecrators. That does not mean that the others had only one consecrator. The texts are silent on this point. It is significant that some of the bishops are reported as going on visits abroad before consecration in what might be an attempt to obtain external ratification for their office. One cannot help wondering whether these visits were sometimes either invented or exaggerated by the clerical authors as part of the ecclesiastical polemics. Popular destinations of bishops elect were Saxony to see the emperor, Norway to see the king and Rome to see the pope. The first bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarson, went first to Emperor Henry Konráðsson in Saxony with gift of white bear from Greenland and then on the Rome to Pope Leo who gave him a writ for Archbishop Adalbertus of Bremen (H. 1.3). His son and successor, Gizurr Ísleifsson, followed his father's pattern. Having discovered that Bishop Liemar was had been deposed, he went to Pope Gregory VII. The latter sent Gizurr to Harðvigr, archbishop of Magdeburg in Saxland, for consecration (H. 2.4).

By 1134 the scene had changed. When Magnús Einarsson went abroad for consecration, he discovered that King Harald gilli had fled south, to Denmark after the Battle of Fyrlifeif. Consequently Magnús sailed to Denmark and gave Harald gifts and there sprang up a friendship between them (H. 4.3).

Páll Jónsson travelled widely for royal approval. He went abroad in the summer of 1194 to a market town in Niðarós and stayed there for the winter, but Archbishop Eiríkr Ivarsson was away in Denmark on a visit to Archbishop Absalon. Then he went to see King Sverrir Magnús in Vík, where he was very well-received. He stayed with king till he went to consecration in Denmark and returned afterwards to the king in Vík and accompanied him to Bergen, where he stayed until he went out to Iceland (H. 3.2).

Þorlákr Runólfsson, Klængr Þorsteinsson and Þorlákr Þórhallsson inn helgi are not recorded as having sought approbation of foreign monarchs or the pope.

As mentioned above Jón of Hólar went to Rome before his consecration to meet Pope Pascal II to discuss his marital state (JSH. 7.5)

## MANAGEMENT OF DIOCESE

(1) The financial management of the diocese. The diocese of Skálholt was set up in the summer of 1056 by Bishop Ísleifr Gizurarson on his part of the patrimonial estate, according to H. but not ÍB (ÍB. 10.4; ÍI. 1.4 - see below). The church was already there but the household and estate had to be adapted for the new purposes. His wife Steinunn kept house (H. 2.8). He was forced to run a very stringent economy because the calls on his finances were many but his income small. As yet no system set up (H. 1.6).

Gizurr Ísefsson was able to expand the estate. While alive his mother kept some of the estate at Skálholt. He gave it to the church when she died. He built and endowed the church with further lands and money (H. 2.8). His wife Dattla kept the house (H. 2.8). Gizurr managed to have a few of obligatory tithes accepted at the Althing and ensured the financial stability of diocese because a quarter of the proceeds went to the bishop (H. 2.7; ÍB. 10.3).

Magnús Einarsson undertook a building programme (H. 4.6), and increased much-needed endowments. He expanded the property holdings of the diocese with the purchase of Árnæs and Sandártuga and nearly all the Vestmannaeyjar. He planned a monastery on the latter but died before it could be set up (H. 4.7).

Klaengr Þorsteinsson undertook a lavish building programme, and at first there was widespread concern of possible mismanagement. It was feared that the building programme would take up all the income from tithes and other sources and that the household expenses with intensive hospitality and other calls on the episcopal purse would need all the income. In addition, there were worries the the well-attended feasts and lavish gifts to many of the guests would need endless money. Nevertheless, Klaengr managed to cope and the saga-writer piously commented that the Lord provided (H. 5.5).

The reason was that Klaengr on election, asked Þorlákr Þórhallsson to take over the management of the estates at Skálholt. He begged to go back to monastery first, but had to give in (ÞS. 7.2). When Klaengr, towards the end, was unable to go on visitations and thus generate an income, the condition of the estate was poor and the expenses were still high, so Þorlákr's managerial help was sought. Before Easter 1175 Þorlákr used the skills of Gizurr Hallsson and Jón Loftsson and others to get things in order (ÞS. 7.2).

On his return to his diocese as bishop three years later, Þorlákr Þórhallsson immediately took over quiet, firm rule (ÞS. 9.1). He himself was well-acquainted with the finances of the diocese and had managed to maintain good financial administration despite his predecessor's lavish expenditure. He ran the household on a type of monastic model as much as possible (ÞS. 9.1) and set able men as stewards over the episcopal estates and handed over the responsibility to them. There is the comment that he managed his income wisely (ÞS. 9.3) and that during his time as bishop the estates became easier to manage and revenue increased (ÞS. 12.3).

After election Páll went to Skálholt with his father and Gizurr Hallsson "the greatest ornament to the see and the greatest furtherance to the estate of them that were there." (ÞS. 2.3). Herdís stayed at Skarð for a year and ran the farm and household (ÞS. 2.3). Then she took over management indoors and proved herself to be a skilled housekeeper. It was recorded that there were 100 people on the estate and of these 70 to 80 were servants (ÞS. 4.5). Páll Jónason made a census of churches and priests in the three quarters in the diocese for the better collection of tithes: counting by tens there were 220 churches and 290 priests.

When Jón of Hólar was appointed to the newly-created diocese of Hólar, he set up a household after the model of that at Skálholt which he knew well because he had been fostered by Bishop Ísleifr and gone to the school at Skálholt. His second wife Valdis ran the house (JSH. 12.1). Jón of Hólar appointed men to supervise the estate so that he could have more time to keep the hours and ordinances and run the see (JSH. 12.1). Three administrators were appointed to procure all that was needed, to organise the labouring tasks, to serve the poor, to receive guests. Jón laid down that every man who could should visit the bishopstead at least once a year. There could be 120 or 240 there and more than 480 on at Eastertide. Some brought provisions, but more depended on the bishop's generosity "and strengthened by his episcopal blessing they used to go away with joy to their own homes." (JSH. 12.2). Not all returned home.

Some pious men, impressed by their bishop's spirituality, moved to live at the bishopstead at Hólar, keeping to themselves. They paid for their keep and some built houses around the churchyard. The idea was to attend the hours and hear the bishop's teachings (JSH. 12.3).

(2) Personnel management of the diocese. Þorlákr Runólfsson employed the same chaplain, Tjórví Bðvarsson, as did his predecessor (H. 3.8). Until the time of Páll Jónsson the six successive bishops at Skálholt had appointed only one chaplain during the term of their episcopate, but Páll Jónsson kept changing and had five (PS. 11.2). His aim was to spread the honour. Páll also made a census of churches and priests in the three quarters in the diocese (see above). Jón of Hólar was said to have "governed well". In 1107 at the Althing he discussed with Bishop Gizurr many things that were profitable and together they drew up rules for those under their care (JSH. 8.2).

(3) Spiritual direction of the clergy. The formation of clergy was one of the most important feature of the episcopal tasks from the beginning. The aspect of education is dealt with later. But the on-going spiritual direction was also very important because the Icelanders did not have any rôle-models besides that of the bishop. By inculturating the clergy and forming a Christian profile, the bishops could then foster a viable form of indigenous Christianity. Þorlákr Þórhallsson ordered the keeping of new saint's days (Ambrose, Cecilia and Agnes), the vigils of apostles' days and the feast of St Nicholas. Moreover, he enforced a stricter observance of the Friday fast with only one meal permitted, except during Easter week. Nevertheless, he was lenient in the case of illness and he himself gave an example when he was ill (PS. 10.4).

Þorlákr Þórhallsson fostered young priests conscientious in keeping church law, good living and encouragement, and sternly rebuked any others who were slack (PS. 9.2). He made a form of confession for clergy and ordered all people to confess at least once a year. He ordered clergy who had committed a capital sin to confess before they performed any service of worship. In addition, he held conferences of the clergy who gathered on great feasts and instructed them on their moral and liturgical duties. He himself set an outstanding example (PS 9.6). He was often reading elevating devotional literature and encouraged his clerks to do so (PS. 9.12).

Þorlákr treated all days the same, high or low, except Althing days and Ember days. The reason for the latter was that on those days men came from long distances for ordination and they were often unfit for ordination because of their poor learning and "other conditions not to his liking" he did not have the heart to refuse but he would take them aside individually and instruct them on "what duty appertained to each order and handed over the responsibility in the matter to themselves and them that had sent them to be ordained." (PS. 11.1). When Þorlákr died Ámundi Árnason wrote in a poem that he was "inn snorti greiðir iaga sðlar" or "the wise interpreter of God's law" (VP interpret this as " canon law") (PS. 15.1).

When Jón set up his new operation at Hólar, he had the 50 years' experience of two bishops at Skálholt to guide him. He decided to enforce simple forms of private devotion to help foster a Christian profile amongst his flock. He commanded that men go to the hours on feast days, that the priests often repeat the basic Christian beliefs, that daily private prayer be said either in a church or before a cross, that a cross be placed in each house and that the faithful rehearse the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the Hail Mary on arising. The result was a flourishing of spiritual life in the Northlanders' Quarter as never before or since (JSH. 11.2). The good Jón of Hólar forbade the reading of immoral books amongst the faithful. One day he caught his student, Klængur Þorsteinsson, reading Ovid's *De Arte Amatoria*, and rebuked him sternly for such levity (JSH. 11.5).

4. The possession of church property After the conversion the chieftains and other men of substance had churches erected on their properties and the title-deeds of the building were in the hands of those who built them. In the 12th century there was growing concern in Rome that in many parts of Western Christendom churches and church-property were in the hands of lay people. Archbishop Eysteinn sent



letters patent to Bishop Þorlákr, ordering him to transfer all church lands to episcopal control. In 1179, when Þorlákr had been in his see for a while, he went on a visitation to the Eastern Fjords and offered to consecrate a church built at Svínaféll by Sigurðr Ormsson only if the farmer handed over the ownership to the bishop. At first Sigurðr refused because "he would not surrender what he had previously freely held under the law of the land and ancient title." The bishop claimed that "the holy fathers of the church and the popes, the successors to the apostles, have commanded and ordained the same throughout all Christendom in the canon law" and reported the recent decree from the pope to Archbishop Eysteinn. Finally Sigurðr had to yield in order to have his church consecrated (OP. 1.1). Thereafter, the bishop had success in gaining control of church-property in the district (OP. 1.2-3). However, he was intransigently opposed by Jón Loftsson who refused to surrender the ownership of a church to be consecrated or to give up his mistress, Ragnheið, who was Þorlákr's sister (OP. 2.1-4). Þorlákr threatened excommunication, but this did not frighten Jón. Þorlákr finally gave in and consented unwillingly to consecrate the church (OP. 2.6). However, he refused to give way on the moral question, and after numerous confrontations recorded in OP. Jón put away his lover and the two sinners received episcopal absolution. (OP. 6.5).

As Kirsten Hastrup clearly indicates, this struggle is of far wider significance than a bishop merely gaining hold of the title-deeds of churches. It is the introduction of a totally new concept of ownership into Iceland.<sup>12</sup> The first settlers took up land in a *terra nullius* but later the tenure of the land became strongly influenced by concept of the *æft*. The land was not individually "possessed" by the land-owning farmer but was, in a sense, kept in trust by the farmer. When farmers endowed land to the church it was regarded as being under the private possession of the church. It was considered to be a chattel which could be disposed with in whatever manner and whenever the church wished. The new understanding of land-ownership was to contribute to the collapse of the Icelandic Commonwealth and the incorporation of Iceland into the Norwegian realm and into mediæval civilisation.

#### THE RÔLE OF THE CATHEDRAL

The cathedral played a very important rôle in the life of the early church in Iceland, not only as a centre of administration and worship, but also as a symbol of the diocese and Christian identity.

As Kirsten Hastrup so perceptively points out, the selection of a site for a cathedral highlighted the difference between the traditional concept of land-tenure and the new concept which came with Christianity and which brought Iceland into line with the rest of Scandinavia and Europe (see above N. 12).

At Skálholt Ísleifr gave his patrimony to constitute the basis of church already there, H. narrates that Bishop Ísleifr "came the same summer to Iceland and set up his bishop's see at Skálholt" (H. 1.4), but ÍB. reports that it was his son Gizurr who made it the cathedral and diocesan centre (ÍB. 10.4). When Ísleifr died, some land was inherited by his wife, Dala Þorvaldsdóttir. She had obviously objected to the loss of the patrimonial estates and refused to hand over the land which she had inherited to her son, Gizurr, the second bishop. He could only gain possession of them when his mother died (H. 2.6).

In the Northmen's Quarter it was difficult to find someone willing to donate land for the cathedral and diocesan centre. Jón Ögmundarson, the first bishop in the north, did not have land for the purpose. Finally, it was decided to situate cathedral at Hólar in Hljaltadalr because Hugi, the owner of the estate, was the only chieftain in the north willing to offer his patrimony for the purpose (JSH. 7.1).

Ísleifr Gizurarson was willing to use as his cathedral the church-building at Skálholt in the condition it stood because he wanted to concentrate all his efforts on the establishment of the new episcopal see. But his successor, Gizurr Ísleifsson, was very keen to create a significant centre for the diocese as symbolised in a new cathedral building. He rebuilt the church and made it 30 fathoms long, dedicating it to St Peter (H. 2.6) and donated a white cope to make the worship more spectacular (H. 2.6).

The fourth bishop, Magnús Einarsson, enlarged the church and fixed Seljannamessa as the dedication festival; had the church hung with tapestry he brought out to Iceland. Moreover, he brought to Iceland the brocade from which the cope called "Skarpmendingr" was made (H. 4.6). It is interesting that the liturgical vestment is given its own distinctive name like a hero's sword or shield.

<sup>12</sup> Hastrup, Kirsten, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*, Oxford, 1985, 189-193.

Under Klængr Þorsteinsson the cathedral became the most glorious building in Iceland (H. 5.3). Shortly after his installation, he started his ambitious building-programme (H. 5.5) and adorned the church with a new fine chalice and a book of hours (H. 5.8).

Páll Jónsson continued the work of his predecessors, calling the cathedral his "spiritual spouse", and on returning from his consecration he brought two glass-windows to adorn the building (PS. 4.2). The bells and beams which Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson had bought had not been hung (PS. 5.1), so Páll had a bell-tower built with a chapel on first floor which he dedicated to St Þorlákr, beautiful paintings on ceiling and hangings on walls. In addition he bought other bells from Kolr a Norwegian (PS. 5.2). He also had a crypt constructed and placed in it a stone coffin for himself after death (PS. 5.2). Margrét in haga (skillful) was appointed by Páll to carve a *tabula* (reredos) from Ivory-tusk for the altar at Skálholt, but Páll's untimely death caused the suspension of the planned reredos was suspended and another appointed to make a reredos (PS. 13.3). One successfully completed project was a wonderful shrine to St Þorlákr made when enough money had been collected (PS. 6.6).

When Jón began his diocese at Hólar, church which originally had been built by Oxi Hjaltason about 1030 and which was the biggest church under a shingle roof in Iceland, had burned down and another had been built. Jón had this one pulled down and built a "great and magnificent" church in its stead. He spared nought in his building programme (JSH. 9.1), but employed the best builder in the land (JSH. 9.2). Crowds came on feast days to the hours and the bishop's or Gísli Finnason's preaching (JSH. 10.2).

## LEGAL ROLE

From the beginning of the establishment of the see of Skálholt the bishops played an important legal rôle in Iceland. The presence of the church in the country posed a legal problem. The first legal change after the acceptance of Christianity was the law regarding tithes. Gizurr Íseifsson, together with Sæmundr, priest at Oddi and Markús Skeggjason, law-speaker presented a proposal to the chieftains that a law concerning tithes be introduced. (H. 2.7). The law could be imposed through the popularity and power of Bishop Gizurr (H. 2.7; ÍB. 10.3). Moreover, he caused a tally to be made of those eligible to go to thing from the four quarters on Iceland. (H. 2.10)

The next legal development was the Christian Law Section (*pátr*) which Þorlákr Runólfsson had written by the wisest men and on advice of Archbishop Özurr in Lund; Bishop Ketill Þorsteinsson of Hólar (1122-1145) supported him in securing its acceptance (H 3.6).

The sources on which this paper is based make mention of the legal skill of certain bishops. Of Magnús Einarsson the saga-writer comments that "he was above all a peace-maker wherever he was engaged in men's suits, and to this end he spared nought - neither words nor money." (H. 4.2), or again "... he never spared any outlay as long as he was bishop to bring them to peace that were before at odds with one another, and he would always contribute out of his own to make up the difference between them; hence there arose no feuds between men as long as he was bishop." (H. 4.5). Klængr Þorsteinsson was a skilled lawyer and always consulted in most cases. He was very well versed in the Constitution with the result that those chiefs did better whose side he joined; in all great cases he was consulted by both sides (5.6). Þorlákr Þórhallsson strove with all earnestness to reconcile those at enmity.

Páll Jónsson had as a principal legal objective the canonisation of his uncle (PS. 6.2). In 1198 it was decided to translate Þorlákr's relics and Páll held a costly feast before the ceremony of translation of relics (PS 6.3). It was decreed at Althing of 1199 that feast of St Þorlákr be held throughout the country and that a two day fast precede the feast (PS. 6.4). When Gizurr Hallsson was law-speaker there arose the issue of the official length of the ell. Many had measured fraudulently and the counsel of Bishop Páll was sought by the leading chieftains (PS. 7.2).

## THE EDUCATION OF THE CLERGY

An almost insuperable problem was the training of clergy. The Christian priest was required to be literate, to have a sufficient command of Latin for the performance of his liturgical duties, a grasp of basic Christian doctrine to instruct his parishioners and a knowledge of the Christian moral law. Ísleifr Gizurarson was aware of the need for proper training of his clergy. Many men handed over their sons for education and they became good clerics, including two bishops, Kolr in Vík and Jón of Hólar (H. 1.7; ÍB. 9.1). Similarly, Þorlákr Runólfsson took many men as his disciples (scholars) and they became good clerics (H. 3.4). Klængr Þorsteinsson "It was his whole business at once to teach the young priests, and recite and sing the psalter and he gave orders with all wherever it was needed." (H. 5.8). Þorlákr Þórhalsson often read elevating devotional literature and encouraged his clerics to do so. (PS. 9.11).

In his educational policy and practice Jón of Hólar had the five decades of experience of the see of Skálholt to draw upon. He had a cathedral-school built west of the church-door and imported Gísli Finnason, a brilliant grammarian and teacher from Gotland. His task was both to teach the young clerics and to help the bishop in his teaching and addresses. Because of his youth and a feeling of insecurity, Gísli Finnason always preached with an open book in front of him for moral support. In his private life Gísli practised what he preached and had a profound moral influence on the community gathered around the cathedral and the diocese at large (JSH 10.1).

Jón appointed excellent teachers besides Gísli. One of these was his chaplain and friend, the learned Frenchman, Ríkinn, who taught singing and verse-making. All the students at the cathedral-school were kept very busy, the older teaching the younger, the younger writing between their lessons. There was harmony and unity in the school, all performed the hours with great care, only beautiful singing and holy prayers were heard in the choir; the younger were well disciplined and did not dare misbehave (JSH 12.4). There is the delightful story of the builder, Þoroddr Gamlaason, who quietly listened to the grammar classes for the young clerics while he worked away. As a result of his eaves-dropping he became very accomplished in the subjects studied in the school (JSH 9.2).

Amongst the alumni of the cathedral-school at Hólar were Klængr who afterwards adorned his bishop's seat at Skálholt by his making of books, Björn, the third bishop of Hólar and two future abbots, as well as many worthy clerics. (JSH 12.5)

## MORAL POLICY

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the introduction of Christianity was the teaching and the subsequent implementation of the Christian moral law. It involved a change of direction, a change of behavioural patterns and a change of patterns of thinking. The first bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarson, found great difficulties with "disobedience of men" which was evident in their lack of faith and in their blatant immorality. For example, he found that the law-speaker had married a mother and her daughter, which was forbidden by the laws of kinship and affinity (H. 1.4). As well, he was shocked by the moral behaviour of some of the men who went out on viking expeditions and in war-ships. It seems as if he was referring to homosexual practices (H. 1.4). On his deathbed Ísleifr said that "they would be long in getting a bishop in Iceland unless they promised to behave in more seemly wise to him who should succeed him than they had done to himself." (H. 1.8).

Þorlákr Runólfsson undertook a campaign for the moral reform of the people with the help of Archbishop Özurr of Lund (H. 3.6). At the very end of action on his life "many chiefs were troublesome to Bishop Þorlákr by means of their disobedience and some in evil life and breach of law, but he managed everything in the best possible way." (H. 3.14).

Þorlákr Þórhalsson ordered clergy who had committed a capital sin to confess before they performed any service of worship (PS 9.5). He kept a strict watch on those who were unaware of their sins to lead them back to the right path. If they did not finally respond he would interdict or excommunicate them. Evil behaviour grieved him and he would not tolerate it. He took his responsibility very seriously and

himself suffered because of some of his subjects' evil lives and actions (PS 10.1). The author of H. tells that he made judicious use of the power of the keys given to him at consecration. On one side no passion or lack of moderation, on the other not slack nor lenient (PS. 10.2). He took pains to foster the marriage-bond of those already married. He considered adultery the greatest sin. Money paid in penance for such sins was placed in a special fund which was reserved for poor yet faithful married people to strengthen their matrimonial bond (PS 10.5).

OP. graphically described some of the encounters which Bishop Þorlákr had with those whom he charged with immorality. It is always to do with sexual morals, either marrying within the degrees of kindred or affinity, unmarried people living together or the producing of ex-nuptial children. Þorlákr faced up to those whom he condemned with calm courage and fortitude and was not afraid to confront even the greatest chieftain in the land, Jón Loftsson, as has been referred to above. In the cases referred to in OP., Þorlákr was generally successful in the long run. The writer of OP. comments: "Many men made great opposition to Bishop Þorlákr, but some were more open about it than others, because they held it to be hard-hearted and merciless of him towards the people, because he rebuked them for their evil ways and the open sins of wicked men, and constrained those people with the the power and severity of the holy church who were unwilling to mend their ways at his helpful admonitions." (OP. 4.4).

Shortly after his installation, Jón of Hólar set attempted to implement a policy of moral reformation. "He became full of chastisement to men of ill-life, but he was blithe and gentle to all good men, and showed in himself that all which he taught in his words he fulfilled in his work." (JSH 11.1). He worked very hard as a spiritual counsellor and confessor to lead them to the right path and to keep them there (JSH 11.6).

#### THE ANTI-HEATHEN POLEMIC

Many commentators write of the syncretism of Christian and heathen peasant beliefs and practices amongst all Germanic peoples north of the Alps after their conversion to Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Indeed this syncretism is reflected in folk beliefs and customs which persisted in Europe until the period of industrialisation. Nevertheless, it is an interesting fact that H. does not mention any anti-heathen polemic of the first seven bishops of Skálholt. It is impossible to believe that there was no anti-heathen strategy. The only mention in H. is the account that one of the seven authorised visiting bishops "in the days of Bishop Ísleifr", meaning presumably in his youth before consecration, was Barnharðr inn saxneski who spent 20 winters in Iceland "He blessed many things, which bear many marks thereof, church and bells, causeways and brooks, fords and rivers, rocks and small hills, and all those things are held to have shown forth true proofs of his goodness." (H. 1.11).

The veil is lifted in JSH. Here we learn that Jón of Hólar, having drawn up a set of rules concerning private devotions, elaborated a second set of rules. In them Jón forbade:

- (1) All manner of heathen customs, magic and charms.<sup>14</sup>
- (2) Omens linked with phases of the moon and week-days (JSH 11.3).
- (3) The old names of week-days which referred to the gods were changed according to practice of early church Fathers from Scripture (JSH 11.3).
- (4) Unseemly plays with sexual significance.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> On syncretism in Iceland see Foote, Peter, "Observations on 'syncretism' in Iceland", *Árbók Vísindafélags Íslendinga*, 1974, pp.69-86.

<sup>14</sup> The saga-writer comments perceptively, that Jón "forbade altogether all evil customs and heathendom and sacrifices, magic and charms, and stood up against them with all his might, for it was not altogether done away with while Christendom was young." (JSH 11.3)

<sup>15</sup> The saga writer narrates: "There was a play men used much, which was unseemly, wherein a man must recite to a woman, and a woman to a man, verses foul and light an not fit to listen to, and this he had abolished and altogether forbade it to be done." (JSH 11.4) The reference to this prohibition in *Jóns saga heilga (eldri gerð)* runs: "This play was dear to men before the holy Jón was bishop, wherein a man would recite to a woman in the dance effeminate and satirical poems, and a woman to a man love-verses. This play he abolished and strongly forbade it." ch. 24 p. 38 (vol. 2). VP report that AM. 392 had a third version: "A play \* \* \* at that time that was very unseemly to carry on butt-fillings, wherein

(5) Love -poems and songs which he disliked but failed to eradicate. (JSH 11.4)<sup>16</sup>

## SUPPORT GROUPS.

To be able to attempt to campaign for a moral reformation, particularly amongst some of the leading families and to transfer the ownership of church property from the hands of the chieftains and leading farmers to those of the church, the early Icelandic bishops needed to cultivate the support of as many people as possible.

(1) Popularity It was important for the bishops to be popular with the bulk of the Icelandic society. We are told that Gizurr Ísefsson was received gladly by all the people on return to Iceland (H. 2.5); that Þorlákr Runólfsson was well received on his arrival home after consecration (H. 3.3); that Magnús Einarsson "kept same lowly behaviour to the commonalty as before though he was bishop..." (H. 4.5) and that Klængur Þorsteinsson was beloved of the commonalty and won over all who opposed him. (H. 5.4)

Of Páll Jónsson it was said that people were very pleased with his gracious manners during his visitations, "and thereby he became so beloved by the whole community, that well-nigh every man held him most dear, both they that were in his diocese and no less they that were of the other diocese." (PS. 4.4)

Jón of Hólar he was so popular that scarcely any man would oppose him, not through bodily fear, but through respect for his godly life (JSH. 11.6). Because of his piety and inherent goodness, he became dear both to God and to good men (JSH. 3.5). He was noted for helping Icelanders at home and abroad, e.g. he managed to locate Sæmundr Sigfússon (who had been away so long that all contact with him had been lost) and brought him back to Iceland (JSH. 4.4).

(2) Generosity to poor The bishops were, no doubt, altruistically concerned with the welfare of the poor, but the support of the indigent was also much needed and greatly appreciated. Gizurr Ísefsson would have come very high in a popularity poll with the poor because of his new tithes law by which the poor would receive a quarter of the tithes (H. 2.7). On the other hand, Þorlákr Runólfsson was said to have been "bountiful to the helpless", but was also said to have been "close-fisted" and discerned clearly between the need cases and those people who were parasites on charity (H. 3.9). Klængur Þorsteinsson is described with the usual pious formulation that he was "open-handed and an almsgiver to the poor." (H. 5.4). Þorlákr Þórhallsson did more than anyone previously to help the poor. At great festivals would gather a little group of poor and would wash their feet (PS. 9.16). Moreover, he kept a leper until his death-day who came to his funeral as an act of generosity to his benefactor. (PS. 13.3).

Jón of Hólar kept up the episcopal tradition and the saga-writer commented that he "was so generous and open-handed with the poor, that his equal could scarcely be found. He was a true father to all poor people, he comforted the widows and the fatherless, and nobody ever came in such distress to see him without receiving comfort of some kind from his means." (JSH. 11.6)

(3) Friends and family It was very important for the bishops to have the support of their friends and family and the latter were often the recipients of episcopal generosity. The saga-writer tells us that Klængur Þorsteinsson was a magnanimous and generous giver to friends (H. 5.4), and again that there was hospitality to all with well-attended feasts and lavish gifts to his friends (H. 5.5). Despite his sanctity, Þorlákr Þórhallsson did not fail to leave his kinsmen well- provided for (PS. 15.1). His nephew and successor, Páll Jónsson, came to Eyjaförðr straight from his consecration he and put on a magnificent banquet for Bishop Brandr and others of his friends whom he could get there, "with wine to drink and beer and all the best sorts of other food and drink that could be obtained." (PS 4.1).

the man recited to the woman licentious verses not fit to be heard, with insinuations of love and foul words." (VP, vol 1, p.555)

<sup>16</sup> The saga-writer comments: "Love-poems and songs he would no hear recited or have recited, but he could not get rid of them altogether." (JSH 11.4)

4 The powerful The bishops carefully planned to cultivate people in high places in both Iceland and abroad. The great journey for consecration was also one of good public relations with spiritual and secular rulers. When Jón of Hólar was in Norway for his consecration averted nasty consequences when he alone at an assembly was able to intercede for the life of Gísl, son of Illugi the poet, who had slain Gjafvaldr, a house-carle of King Magnús Ólafsson and his father's murderer. Only Jón was able to sway both the king and the assembly (JSH. 4.5). We learn that Páll Jónsson gave gold rings to consecrators, which no doubt ensured him life-long friends (PS. 3.5).

Klaengr Þorsteinsson organised a splendid banquet to all the 840 who attended the consecration of the rebuilt cathedral at Skálholt and the food began to run short before the end; "more out of magnificence than prudence", and the important guests received valuable gifts on departing (H. 5.7).

But the bishops, particularly Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson, were not subservient to the powerful in the land. OP. clearly indicates the power-struggle between Þorlákr and Iceland's most powerful chieftain, Jón Loptsson, on matters concerning Jón's promiscuity and refusal to hand over the possession of church property to the bishop. In the end Þorlákr succeeded on the issue of promiscuity, but OP. relates that the matter of church ownership was not resolved between them (OP. 2.8). Indeed, the writer of OP. stressed that Þorlákr, who unflinchingly faced all difficulties and foes, was constantly under divine support and hence tough men's arms would lose their strength as the fatal blow was to be delivered (OP. 6.2) or fogs would suddenly descend to thwart the knavish tricks of his waylayers (OP. 5.2, 6.2). After 15 years in his see, Þorlákr wished to resign. He was his episcopate as a yoke which needed a stronger ox than he. The author of PS. aptly comments that he was "beloved by God and by good men, but much wearied by his adversaries" (PS. 12.1).

#### EPISCOPAL LUCK

The author of H., PS. and PS. is cautious in attributing miracles and states that he does not narrate them one by one (H. 1.9). But the author of JSH. is much more lavish in his depiction of the miraculous, and the whole section of Jón's miracles after his death is omitted by VP.

The question which concerns this investigation is the attitude which the writers had towards the miraculous during the specific bishop's lifetime. Of the eight bishops even were later regarded as being "saints" and it is perhaps to be expected that those popularly canonised were particularly blessed with *mana*. Was their miraculous activity to be attributed to an episcopate or to a saintly dimension? Whereas the author of H. does not stress the miraculous aspects of St Þorlákr Þórhallsson, the writer of JSH. stressed those of St Jón.

During a visitation in 1107 Jón of Hólar chastised evil men and strengthened good men "with the power that was given him on God's behalf." We can note that the writer stressed the divine source of the bishop's power, important in the emphasising of episcopal rule (JSH. 8.3).

There is a reference to *mana* residing in the episcopal office. Concerning Ísleifr Gizurarson, the author uses the word *kraft* which VP translate as "power in working miracles" (H. 1.9). There is another reference to the effect of a bishop's *mana*. When Gizurr Ísefsson died the and was "drooping" as in Rome after the death of Pope Gregory the Great. There was distress from bad seasons, the wrecking of ships and loss of life, damage to stock, civil strife, the breaking of laws and finally unprecedented mortality (H. 2.18).

Two examples are given of *miracles* performed by Ísleifr Gizurarson. He cured people from fits of madness and removed the harm from drink containing dandelion (H. 1.9). Þorlákr Þórhallsson quenched fire by blessing the building; chanted over sick livestock; blessed water to cure men and cattle; prevented mice from harming meat or clothes. His holy water became particularly popular. The author cautious about these things, whether they can be regarded as miracles or as resulting from his particular sanctity. He had luck with brewing beer and his beer never went bad (PS. 11.2). Moreover, after his death his colour brightened, the pupils of his eyes retained brightness a long time and all the sores on his body vanished

(PS. 13.10).

There are examples of dreams, visions, and omens seen in natural catastrophic phenomena. Concerning *dreams*, Þorlákr Þórhallsson had a dream that he was walking from the Athing to his booth carrying the head of St Martin. Páll, priest of Reykjaholt interpreted it that he would bear a holy bishop's head wherever he went (PS. 11.6). Concerning *visions*, the day and hour Þorlákr Runólfsson died a priest travelling in the north of Iceland, Arni son of Björn Karlsefni, heard a beautiful song up in the heavens and it was a cantilena of Bishop Lambert: "Sic animam claris caelorum reddidit astris" ("Thus he gave back his soul to the clear stars of heaven") He looked around and nobody was there (H. 3.12). Finally, concerning *natural catastrophic phenomena*, we are told that in the days of Gizurr Ísefsson there was a terrible storm during Holy Week that clerics could not say the office in the northern part of the country on Good Friday, a merchant-ship was stranded and few could take communion at Easter. Afterwards many found dead outside.(H. 2.17) On another occasion when men were riding to the Athing the livestock was killed in the north; the church at Thingvellir collapsed for which Haraldr Sigurðarson had given the timber (H. 2.17).

## CONCLUSION

The sources used for this paper indicate that the first Icelandic bishops played a highly significant part in forming the profile of the church. After the coming of Christianity to Iceland the church was leaderless, and in the process of inculturation the secular leaders assumed considerable control. Firstly, they determined the supply of the first priests, built the first churches and placed the ownership of church property in their hands.

The bishops had the task of guiding the infant church in a different direction from that which it has originally taken. They developed two major strategies - one of a formation of a deeper Christian character of both clergy and people and the other the development of a new identity of the Church of Iceland under episcopal control.

The principal aim of the early bishops was to deepen and foster Christianity and Christian behaviour amongst the population of the country. This they did firstly by the establishment of schools for an intensified programme of training candidates for the priesthood, by establishing and fostering patterns of piety and of Christian behavioural patterns for both clergy and people with the bishops themselves as rôle-models in this regard. Then, secondly, they stressed the need for the implementation of Christian morality in society. This morality concerned principally sexual behaviour and seems to have been rather gently advocated until Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson inn helgi Inaugurated his moral crusade. Thirdly, Bishop Jón of Hólar campaigned vigorously against all sorts of heathen folk-customs that had been carried over into Christian times. Finally, the Christian identity was strengthened by the local canonisation of two bishops, one for each diocese, Þorlákr Þórhallsson inn helgi (1178-1193) at Skálholt and Jón Ögmundarson inn helgi (1106-1121) at Hólar.

To create a new church profile the bishops firstly set up efficient diocesan administrations and Gizurr Ísefsson, Skálholt's second bishop, assured a solid economic base for the church by the introduction of the tithelaw. Moreover, the transfer of the title-deeds of all church property into episcopal hands greatly strengthened the economic standing of the bishops and their sees. Then they saw to it that two cathedrals in the country became fine buildings which were liturgical, administrative and educational centres. Moreover, these well-constructed and finely adorned buildings took on the function of being tangible symbols of Christian identity.

The bishops themselves were on the whole men of mark. They came mainly from leading families who wielded economic and political power; three of the eight under consideration in this paper were descended from the first Christian chieftains in Iceland. They were popularly chosen at the Athing, at times with an input by their predecessors. The fact that they were all consecrated abroad, ever closer as the centre of responsibility for the Icelandic church moved from Bremen to Lund and then Trondhjem, gave them overseas legitimacy. The first bishops received their training a broad and a study-tour and experience overseas, sometimes before election and always after consecration was considered desirable. The problem of celibacy did not seem to worry the Icelandic population or the clergy despite increasing pressure from Rome and then from Trondhjem for the prohibition of clerical marriage. Any

concern in this matter came from the monkish authors of the *Byskupa sögur*. Páll Jónsson (1195-1211) of Skálholt was the last married Icelandic bishop until the Reformation. To maintain their position in society the bishops had to be popular with various groups within the society. They carefully fostered the support of the poor, the clergy, the power-élite and their kinsmen and friends. However, it has been noted that St Þorlákr fearlessly carried out his crusade for moral reformation, regardless of the social standing of the evil-doers. Some of the bishops showed great skill in legal matters and their expertise was called upon when needed.

The introduction of the episcopate in Iceland influenced and accelerated certain aspects in the transformation of Icelandic society and intensified certain changes which came with the acceptance of Christianity. The church became an economic and legal power within the community and this caused a realignment of economic, political and legal structures. All this development was hastened and strengthened by the bishops. The tithelaw and the transfer of ownership of church properties into the bishops' hands assured the church economic stability and independence.

The strengthening of the ecclesiastical profile of the bishops led to deep changes in the Icelanders' perception of reality. Even if the bishops had been local lads, they could always point to foreign prelates to whom they had sworn fealty, the archbishop of Trondhjem and the pope of Rome, and then to God himself who in His inscrutable governance elected, appointed and sustained them, as the sources of their authority. Because of this divine support, they were seen by others as being special people with special qualities and powers, under the stamp of divine approval. In other words, they possessed a special *mana*.

With their emphasis on the celebration of the Christian year, the two local saints, the celebration of further saints' days and the celebration of certain times at the cathedrals, the bishops caused a deep transformation in the Icelanders' temporal sense with its older focus on Midsummer and Yule and the holy period of the assemblies. International Christian time replaced local heathen time. Then with the establishment of the cathedrals as centres of the sees, as special cult-centres, beautifully constructed and adorned, and as foci of the diocese and its activities transformed Icelandic dimension of sacred space, which had been centred on the Althing and other assemblies. Now there were new foci of the spatial dimension in an international context.

In *First Book of Samuel* the prophet foretells that the Israelites of old would lament that they earlier had demanded of the Lord to give them a king to rule them.<sup>17</sup> One can only speculate what would have happened if Iceland had been left "bishopless" relying on the services of "visiting" bishops or of *episcopi vagantes* whenever their need was felt.

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<sup>17</sup> *First Book of Samuel*, 8:1-22.