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"Dove of the Church":
Saint Columba from Seventh- and Sixteenth-Century
Perspectives

Mary F. Thurlkill*

For the whole body of the ship was violently shaken, and heavily struck by great masses of waves, with a mighty storm of winds that pressed on all sides. . . [T]hen the sailors said to him . . . What you are doing now does not very greatly profit us in our danger. You should rather pray for us who are perishing. (Adomnan 351)¹

In this text, Columba, a sixth-century Irish saint, performed a great miracle. He prayed for the sinking ship, the winds ceased to blow and the waters calmed. Columba controlled nature and had direct access to God. His disciples on the boat, as well as the readers of his *vita* (or life), did not care about the saint's nautical skills or steady hand. Columba had tried to bail the water out of the ship, but his shipmates begged him to pray instead. They wanted a miracle, and a miracle they usually received.

Hagiography is the writing about saints' lives that has a didactic agenda. In the story above, the lesson related the proof of prayer. A saint prayed and God responded in his mercy and grace. However, hagiography usually contains a political lesson as well. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the didactic agenda, both spiritual and political, of two lives (*vitae*) of Saint Columba. In doing so, the paper will recreate the problems and issues important to the Medieval and Early Modern church and ruling structures. It will also examine how hagiographers shaped the lives of saints to didactic ends. The two texts were written by two different authors from two different centuries: Adomnan from the seventh-century and Manus O'Donnell from the sixteenth. Adomnan, abbot at Iona, a

monastery which Columba founded, not only praised his community's founder but also addressed controversial issues confronting the Church in the seventh-century. Manus O'Donnell, author of the sixteenth-century text, was the son of Hugh O'Donnell, Lord of Tirconnell, a northern Irish district. His *betha* (Irish saint's life) proved to be more secular in orientation, addressing Ireland's disunity and English intervention.

Adomnan and O'Donnell chose this Irish saint, complete with the peculiarities of Irish sainthood and Irish Christianity, for didactic purposes unique to their epoches. Hagiography of Irish saints contained more miracles and displays of power than that of any other culture. Irish saints notoriously cursed, healed, blessed, built, and destroyed. Despite the differences in the *vitae* and the authors' dual purposes in creating their respective texts, Columba remained distinctly Irish. Both lives portrayed a powerful abbot, a loving and vengeful saint, a controller of nature, and an intercessor with God. Yet Columba's message and sermons changed from century to century according to the needs of Adomnan and O'Donnell.

This essay analyzes the authors' purposes behind each text and shows how the different miracles and powers attributed to Saint Columba support the social and political realities of the time. I situate each *vita* in terms of the issues surrounding the Church during each time period. Without first understanding the uniqueness of Irish culture, however, it is impossible to understand the *vitae* of Adomnan and O'Donnell; indeed, many of their subject saint's actions appear harsh and brutal. Although both authors largely refashioned Columba to suit their didactic purposes, remnants of sixth-century monasticism, Irish tradition, and biographical fact remain. I first intermingle the two *vitae* to show the consistencies surrounding the character of both Irish Christianity and Saint Columba. Then, I discuss the texts of Adomnan and O'Donnell individually, focusing on differences and purpose.

Columba's Life

The political and economic climate of sixth-century Ireland, the time Columba lived, appeared quite harsh and disjointed. Over

100 tuatha (clans, or tribes) contended throughout Ireland for supremacy. Surviving sagas from the period related the values of a warrior civilization: strength of warrior heroes and loyalty to regional kings. One extant text, *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, praised the warrior attributes of hero Cuchulainn to the King of Ulster despite his murderous acts. The economy centered on livestock with herding as the predominant activity. Culturally, Ireland inherited a rich Celtic tradition with Mediterranean Christianity superimposed. Roman or Anglo-Saxon influence had not yet strongly effected society.

Columba's parents, Fedilmith and Ethne, lived in this culture and therein raised their son. They were members of the powerful northern Ui-Neill clan with much political influence and strength. Originally named Cremthann, Columba adopted this new Latinized name for monastic purposes. His name in Irish, Colum(m)-cille, translates as "dove of the Church" (or more crudely and less romantically, "Church-pigeon").² Around the age of 42, Columba abandoned Ireland in order to serve as a missionary to Britain, Scotland, and Iona where he founded several monasteries. Why Columba left at this time and vowed never to return (even though he did), is difficult to determine. Rumors circulated by the seventh century that Columba considered his departure from Ireland as penance for his participation in the Battle of Cull-drebenem, a heated struggle between the Ui-Neill and southern Irish clans.³ By the sixteenth century, and possibly earlier, a more mythical explanation of his exile surfaced. Columba apparently copied a Psalter belonging to Bishop Finnen and refused to return the copy to him. Bishop Finnen took the matter before King Diarmaid (king of the tuath), and the King ordered Columba to return the copy:⁴

(The King decreed): "To every cow her young cow,
that is, her calf, and to every book its transcript.
And therefore to Finnen belongeth the book thou
has written, O Columcille." (O'Donnell 179)⁵

When Columba refused to comply, the King banished him from Ireland.

Adomnan's *vita* included no mention of the Psalter, exile, or self-imposed penance. He simply stated that, "Columba sailed away from Ireland to Britain, wishing to be a pilgrim for Christ."⁶ Adomnan chose to portray Columba, and his twelve disciples (a direct *imitatio Christi*), as zealous missionaries spreading Christianity.⁷ This apostolic description fit the holy man, who had established monasteries at Derry, Swords, Durow, Kells, and Iona.

The Christian and monastic practices Columba transported to his mission fields emerged from a very different tradition than that of the continent. Missionaries, including the British Patrick, converted the island in the fourth or fifth century. However, Ireland, outside the Roman empire, possessed no pre-existing roman governmental infrastructure. On the continent, the Christian hierarchy developed along the lines of Roman provinces: i. e. most of the dioceses followed the established provincial lines of the Roman empire.⁸ With no such divisions to follow, Ireland integrated the Christian hierarchy along the family/clan structure. The abbot assumed responsibilities as head of the monastery, just as the *ri'* (Irish king) acted as king of the *tuath*, or tribe. On the continent, bishops held influence over a geographic area whereas the abbot administered control through his monastery. Ireland, unlike the continent, recognized the power of the abbots within the geographical region above bishops, archbishops, and deacons.

Saint Columba, abbot at Iona, operated within his monastery as the absolute head. He loved the monks as a father and provided

for their every need. Upon his death, he carefully checked the supply of food:

the venerable man himself. . .went to bless the nearest barn. After entering it, and blessing it and two heaps of grain that were there in store, the saint spoke thus . . . "I greatly congratulate my family of monks, because in this year also, if I have to depart from you to any place, you will have enough [bread] for the year." (Adomnan 521)⁹

With such care provided by the abbot, the bishops and diocesan structure seemed obsolete. Rome failed to significantly influence the structure of the Irish Church until the twelfth-century reform movement.¹⁰

Irish monasticism deviated from that of the continent in more areas than merely organizational and hierarchical. Holy men, like Columcille, as well as holy women, practiced a more severe asceticism and adherence to strict penitentials. Such severity complemented the barbarian law codes of the Irish tuath: just as crimes against the clan deserved quick and just recompense, transgressors of God's law received their prescribed punishments.¹¹ If a holy man, such as Columba, failed to administer his own penance, angelic beings provided it for him. After Columba refused to ordain Aidan as King of Erin, the leader chosen by God, an angel appeared to him:

the angel suddenly stretched out his hand and struck the holy man with a scourge, the livid scar from which remained on his side all the days of his life. (Adomnan 473)¹²

Irish monastics practiced a harsh, dynamic form of Christianity as demonstrated by this passage. The angel delivered quick punishment for Columba's disobedience and sin, reflecting the adherence to rigorous asceticism. Columba then enforced such

standards in his missionary outposts among his monks.

The harsh Irish landscape differed from that of the continent and added to the ascetic prowess of its monks. Rainfall in Ireland numbered more than 200 days a year, and the sun only shone about one hour a day in the winter.¹³ Arable land was scarce and periods of hunger and famine were frequent. The genre of miracles and asceticism performed by Irish saints paralleled this environment. The saints controlled nature and the wild elements that threatened everyday subsistence (i. e. rainstorms, famine, wild beasts). Columba, for example, killed threatening animals:

Then he raised his holy hand, with invocation of the name of God, and praying intently said to the boar: "You will approach no further; in the place to which you have now come, die." (Adomnan 385)¹⁴

In a similar passage from O'Donnell, Columba raised his hand to a wild hound sent out to kill him by a jealous man. The dog died on the spot and no hound ever lived on the isle again.¹⁵

Columba also converted naturally dry lands to watery basins by his voice or strike of his rod:

because water was not to be found anywhere near, the saint turned aside to a rock close by, bowed his knees, and prayed for a little while. And rising after his prayer, he blessed the face of the rock, from which thereupon water flowed in an abundant cascade. (Adomnan 347)¹⁶

Not only did Columcille imitate Moses from the Old Testament herein, he also promised arable land to his followers. Thus the saint prepared good land for his monks and the community (*populos*) which later grew around the water source.

Through the miraculous intervention and spiritual discernment of the saint, the monks usually built their houses on sacred land. The Irish holy man distinguished the area by altering nature. For

example, Saint Declan, another Irish saint, struck a rock on one location that opened into a continuous stream for his monastery.¹⁷ Holy men, also, located good lands for their monks through visions. Many times, the saints witnessed angels ascending and descending from heaven through a "door." When the saint died, he usually entered into the presence of God through the "door", as did his disciples after him.¹⁸ Hagiographers usually attributed this correlation between saint and monastery to sanctify the establishment, or show its uniqueness from miraculous beginnings.

Irish hagiographers connected saints with the foundation of monasteries for another important reason. The saint validated the transformation of previously pagan sites to Christian use. Monasteries sometimes occupied old pagan grounds marked by sacred wells and groves of oak trees.¹⁹ When confronted with one such vestige of pagan practice, Saint Columba changed the evil "waters" of the well into a sacred spring:

But he (Columba), first raising his holy hand in invocation of the name of Christ, washed his hands and feet; and after that, with those that accompanied him, drank of the same water, which he had blessed. And from that day, the demons withdrew from that well . . . (Adomnan 351)²⁰

Columba integrated these sacred places from pagan and druidic ages into a new tradition. With the assimilation of such diverse belief systems, the saint helped refashion Irish Christianity into something very different from Rome.²¹

The secret practices of the druids shroud the level of exchange between themselves and early Christians in uncertainty. Druids comprised the learned and priestly class of the Celtic British Isles. Their mystical identification with sacred springs, wells and oak groves survived, but little is known of their religion. Brigit, a druid mother goddess, constitutes the best example of Christian assimilation of pagan practices. Brigit guarded a perpetual fire among a sacred grove of oaks. A Christian hagiographer, Cognitius,

recorded the *vita* of Brigit, the Irish abbess of Cell Dara, who protected a fire along with her nuns.²² The druid religion certainly exemplified a rigorous religion of sacrifice and secrecy among a warlike people.²³ Saints, like Columba, inherited many of these traits. He was both a Christian and a warrior; he both blessed and cursed; he both accepted persecution and sought revenge.

Rather than operating within the realm of Christian *caritas* (charity) and mercy, Saint Columba often unleashed prompt judgment upon his offenders:

Columcille went to require some relics to put in the shrine. And Tice (the holy man) said he would not give them. . . Anon went Tice to wash his hands in the stream fast by the church, and when he took off his gloves to wash his hands, his thumb fell from his right hand into the glove.²⁴

Tice took the thumb to Columcille and apologized for his obstinate behavior. Columcille first accepted the apology and then the thumb as a new relic for his shrine, exemplifying his powers of cursing and judgment.

Adomnan's Account

Adomnan wrote his account of the sixth-century holy man almost 100 years after Columcille's death, c. A. D. 688-692. Adomnan served as abbot at Iona, the monastery established by Saint Columba. Adomnan had already written one book, *De Locis Sanctis*, concerning sacred places in the Holy Land, and he possessed a previously written *Life of Colum Cille by Cuimine Ailbe*, abbot of Iona from A. D. 657-658.²⁵ Adomnan recounted many of the holy man's miracles using Biblical *topoi* (recurring themes), but with a specific purpose in mind.

The hagiographer's agenda proved specific in its goal: Adomnan both propagandized and defended the traditions of the Irish Church against the *Romani* (of the Romans) policies of standardization. Rome wanted to insure universal adherence to

Roman Catholicism. The power of Irish abbots had fulfilled the Church need for local patronage and Episcopal structure, but even though they recognized the Pope and Rome, Irish monasteries remained independent from diocesan organization. By the seventh century, when Adomnan wrote about Saint Columba, Rome increasingly pressured Ireland to elevate the status of bishops and conform Irish traditions to Roman decrees.

Calls for reform ranged from the pedantic to the paramount. First, Rome rejected the deviant Johannes tonsure of the Irish monks which differed from the circular tonsure of the continent. Irish monks shaved their heads from ear to ear, reminiscent of the druidic hairstyle.²⁶ Second, the Irish Church celebrated Easter on a different day than the European Church: Rome recognized the holiday on the first moon after Spring and the Irish three days later. The Roman church regarded disobedience to the Catholic calendar, settled at the Council at Whitby (A. D. 663), as heresy.²⁷ Third, seventh-century Christianity was still in the process of defining the Sabbath: should it be the Jewish holy day or Sunday, as instituted by the disciples? Ireland, longer than anyone else, distinguished between the "Sabbath" and Sunday, thereby resisting the "Sabbitization" of Sunday. Finally, a number of late seventh- and eighth-century canons from Rome called for more bishop and Episcopal control of the Irish Church.²⁸

Even though Adomnan did not address each of these issues individually, his *vita* stressed the importance of following Irish customs. He validated these traditions through the life of Saint Columcille, a man chosen by God with divine discernment and knowledge. Columba's actions, commands and beliefs, albeit in the words of Adomnan, should be considered the will of God and validation of Irish tradition.

To prove Columcille's sanctification (and to manipulate Columcille's life to read as a voice against Romanization), Adomnan utilized several hagiographical tools. He sprinkled his *vita* with many Old and New Testament *topoi*. First, an angel informed Columba's mother about her child:

Woman, do not grieve, (said the angel) for you will bear to the man to whom you are joined by [the bond] of marriage a son, of such grace that he, as though one of the prophets of God, shall be counted in their number; and he has been predestined by God to be a leader of innumerable souls to the heavenly country.²⁹

Just like the Blessed Virgin Mary at the annunciation, Columba's mother knew she carried a divine child. Columba's father, like Joseph, also realized the uniqueness of his "foster-son." One night Fedilmith saw a ball of fire standing around the child's head while sleeping.³⁰

In further detailing young Columba's *imitatio Christi*, Adomnan recounted the saint's first miracle as turning water into wine.

in his youth, when the blessed man was in Ireland, living as a deacon with the holy bishop Findbarr, and the necessary wine for the most holy mysteries was lacking by virtue of prayer he changed pure water into true wine.³¹

Christ had turned water into wine in his first public miracle as told by the Evangelist John. By using these *topoi*, Adomnan not only taught the gospels to his readers but also validated Columba's actions and words as a holy imitation of Christ.

After providing numerous examples of the sanctification of Columba, Adomnan addressed the Roman Sabbath controversy by using the holy man's voice. In one story, Columba clearly distinguished between the "Sabbath" and Sunday (the Lord's Day):

This day is called in the sacred books "Sabbath," which is interpreted "rest." And truly this day is for me a Sabbath, because it is my last day of this present laborious life. . . at midnight of this

following venerated Lord's-day, in the language of the Scriptures, I shall go the way of the fathers.³²

Columba also engaged in various activities on Sunday, including traveling to Troit and aiding wayfarers.³³ Saint Columba even died on a Sunday and fishermen, busy at work, witnessed miracles surrounding his ascension.³⁴ Adomnan used Columba to protest the Rome-supported "Sabbatization." Irish Christians, until well after Adomnan's time, recognized Saturday as their holy day.

The activities surrounding Columba's death (on Sunday) and the saint's dying plea for peace and concord also addressed the problems with Rome. As he died, Columba said:

I commend to you, my children, these latest words, that you shall have among yourselves mutual and unfeigned charity, with peace. If you follow this course after the example of the holy father, God, who gives strength to the good, will help you; and I, abiding with him, shall intercede for you.³⁵

Adomnan, in the seventh-century, probably considered the Easter controversy one of the most important points of friction in the Church. "Peace" among the brethren meant a reconciliation with the Roman hierarchy who considered the Irish Christians quasi-heretics. In Adomnan's eloquent rendition of Columba's last words, he pleaded for the healing of the rift between Ireland and the continent. He argued that peace and concord among the family of God superseded everything else.

O'Donnell's Story

During the years between Adomnan (seventh century) and O'Donnell (sixteenth century), the *cultus* (cult or popular following) of Columba remained popular. Ireland, however, underwent many changes. Viking raids began in A. D. 795 with the sacking of Iona and desecration of Saint Columcille's grave. The raids persisted for 200 years, or until the end of the tenth century. By that time, many

Vikings had accepted Irish customs and Christianity. Brian Boru also provided for the ensuing peace; he became high king of Southern Ireland and expanded his power to include the Irish, Vikings, and Danes.³⁶

By the twelfth century, sympathies between the Danes in Ireland and the English Danes increased. The English Catholics were especially eager to bring the Irish finally under Roman Catholicism. Thus, England's first formal claim to Ireland occurred when Pope Adrian IV granted lordship of the island to Henry II. By 1250, the Anglo-Normans controlled three-quarters of the country.³⁷ Racial tensions mounted and segregated the "Pale" region which originally referred to a series of double ditches separating English and Irish landholdings.³⁸ Eventually the Pale evolved into the bulwark of English control centered on Dublin. Although the English presence waned after the twelfth century, their occupation remained a source of adversity.

Manus O'Donnell wrote his *betha* (Irish *vita*) during the heightened tensions between the Anglo and the Irish in 1532. He was the son of Hugh O'Donnell, Lord of Tirconnell, one of the greatest (and wealthiest) chieftains of Ireland. Manus O'Donnell was especially sensitive to the political activities with England and clan rivalries as is evident throughout his *betha*. In addition, O'Donnell inherited a rich medieval tradition including Arthurian legend, troubadours, chivalry, and folk-tales. These various traditions intermingle with popular accounts of Columba to form O'Donnell's *betha*. One historian wrote that the *betha* was "a collection of legends brought out by Manus O'Donnell . . . a compilation more readable than historical."³⁹

O'Donnell borrowed from these chivalric influences when he introduced three women to Columcille after the Saint's vows of celibacy. If Adomnan had introduced these women, Columba might have fled the scene, fearing the temptresses,⁴⁰ but O'Donnell's saint questioned the maidens who showered him with kisses:

[the maidens] said it was their own father that
had given them in wedlock to Columcille . . . the

Lord Jesu Christ, Creator of Heaven and Earth, that was their father. Said Columcille: "Right noble is your father; tell me your names." "Virginity and Wisdom and Prophecy are our name," say they, "and we shall be three wives to cherish thee till thy death and we shall foster and keep love for thee without change for ever."⁴¹

O'Donnell's account herein contains the *topos* (recurring theme) of chivalric honor and courtesy typical of the high Middle Ages.

Politics and Church issues were equally, if not more effective in shaping O'Donnell's *betha* despite the courtly gestures and noble virtues. An Anglo-Norman population existed in Ireland and direct English Lordships controlled most of the Pale and the urban centers. But as the British Crown had practically withdrawn from Ireland by the fifteenth century because of domestic concerns, wars between the Gaeil (Gaelic Irish) and the Gaill (Anglo-Irish) increased and local Gaelic dynasties consolidated their land holdings. By the 1500's, the Anglo-Irish desperately sought reform and stability from the negligent English government. As a result, the Irish parliament declared Henry VIII head of the Irish Church in 1536⁴² and Thomas Cromwell, England's Prime Minister, placed both the secular and ecclesiastical spheres back under British Crown control.⁴³

On the eve of this Anglicization of the Irish Church (declared in 1536), O'Donnell set out to write his *betha* (1532). Although he made no direct reference to Henry VIII's imminent reformation, O'Donnell obviously feared the encroachment of Protestantism. In a number of passages, O'Donnell used Columcille to urge the Irish Church to examine itself and to renew its sense of righteousness. For example, O'Donnell related the story of a bishop who accused Columcille of committing a "deadly sin". However, one young monk, Brenainn of Birr, ignored the bishop's banishment of Columba and met the saint as he approached the monastery. Brenainn accused the bishop of bringing a false charge against the saint and the Church of failing in its responsibilities:

For the power to bind and to loose was not given the Church except she stray not from the very rule that hath been given her. And he declared that they were indeed straying and doing great foolishness, to wit, they were falsely imputing a crime to Columcille that had never done any deadly sin.⁴⁴

Employing Brenainn as his spokesman, O'Donnell warned the Church to please God and not to "stray" from His will. He knew Protestantism spread throughout the continent, with its adherents attacking Catholic corruption and decadence. Whether O'Donnell realized it or not, this new "heresy" would transform Ireland, too, by the late sixteenth century.

O'Donnell clearly understood, however, that Ireland required some type of political transformation in order to save it from foreign domination. To call him a nationalist, using a modern conception of "nation-state," would be premature, but he did use the *betha* to intensify pride in the native Irish Church. Ireland, divided by feuding clans and chieftains, could not as yet form a common resistance. O'Donnell, for many years, tried to consolidate some of the more powerful tribes; his own clan even sought peace with the O'Neills, their longstanding enemies. The plan failed and by 1555 the famous clans resumed their ancient feuds, including the O'Donnells and O'Neills.

Throughout his *betha*, O'Donnell continued his plea for Ireland's release from foreign domination. Again and again Columcille prophesied the Irish "yoke" (i. e. foreign, British presence) and urged faith and prayer to God so that the land might be returned.⁴⁵ In one prophetic act, Columcille watched the "symbolic action" of his three pets: a cat, a wren and a fly. The wren turned and ate the fly, and the cat ate the wren. Columcille said:

the strong of them (men) should eat the weak, that is to say, should take his wealth and his gear from him, and should show him neither right nor justice.

. . . that while the Gael of Erin were thus, the power of foreigners should be over them, and whenever right and justice were kept by them, they should themselves have power again.⁴⁶

Columcille then turned and spoke to his pets who immediately rose from the dead, just as, in O'Donnell's mind, Ireland would one day be resurrected from English control.

O'Donnell used Columba's exile to incite nationalistic fervor or pride. The exile supposedly resulted after King Diarmaid decided against the saint's argument about a copied Psalter. The saint vowed revenge and waged a small war against the King of Erin. Eventually Columcille, remorseful and convicted by the Holy Spirit, left Ireland because of the catastrophic battle and high death toll. O'Donnell stressed that the departure was a self-inflicted penance; Ireland did not cast out its saint. While away, Columba gazed admiringly on his homeland, longing to return:

This is why I love Derry/For its level fields, for its
brightness/For the hosts of its white angels,/From
one end to the other. And he said that not more
numerous were the leaves on the trees, or the grass
on the meadows, than the angels that hovered over
that place.⁴⁷

Hoping to inculcate a sense of pride and nationalism, O'Donnell included many such instances of Columba's homesickness and penitential commentaries. Columba became the patron saint of exiles which inspired love for and awe of Ireland.

O'Donnell's narrative, portraying Columcille as the great exile, neglected one fact: the saint returned to Ireland to attend Church councils, to visit for *aliquot dies* (special days), and to found the monastery of Durrow.⁴⁸ O'Donnell confronted this with the grace of a master storyteller:

he had vowed when he departed therefrom that

he would not set foot upon the soil of Erin forever, nor look upon her men nor her women, nor taste her food or her drink till Doomsday. But Columcille did observe that fully, for there was a sod of the soil of Alba under his feet the while he was in Erin, and there was cere-cloth over his eyes. . . and he brought with him from Alba sufficient of food and of drink. . . ⁴⁹

Herein, Columba never broke his promise and remained Ireland's patron saint of exiles. He could continue to lament his separation from his country which would, as O'Donnell hoped, stir the pride of the Irish.

Conclusion

Adomnan and O'Donnell present distinct depictions of Columcille. Despite their differences, however, uniquely Irish characteristics appear in both *vitae*. The Church of Ireland diverged from that of the continent because it experienced conversion outside the Roman Empire and drew from a rich barbarian/pagan/druid culture. The Irish Church also had to survive in a sometimes harsh climate and landscape. As the Church differed from that of the *Romani*, so did their saints. Columba cursed and blessed; he accepted persecution and sought revenge.

Adomnan and O'Donnell reconstructed parts of Columcille's *vita* for didactic purposes. Adomnan stressed the independence and validity of the Irish customs against *Romani* pressure to assimilate. He also pleaded for peace within the Church and an end to the trials that threatened the *opus Dei* (work of God). O'Donnell resisted the Protestant Reformation and a rapidly disintegrating Irish political structure due to English domination. He urged the Church to re-examine itself and become just in the sight of God. He strove to unite the Irish clans through an intense pride in order to oust foreign domination.

The political and bureaucratic motivations of the hagiographers do not distract from their message of piety. Columba

imitated Christ in his miracles, teaching the lessons of the gospels; he helped the poor and cared for the sick; he built monasteries to train young monks; and his missionary zeal proved almost unequalled. These *vitae*, as all hagiography, exemplified the dynamic coupling of religious messages with didactic calls for reform, action, and courage.

Notes:

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1. A. O. and M. O. Anderson, eds., *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Lt., 1961), 351.

2. *Ibid.*, 67.

3. *Ibid.*, 71.

4. Henry Glassie, ed., *Irish Folktales* (New York: Patheon Books, 1985), 61-62.

5. Manus O'Donnell, compiler. *Betha Colaim Chille*. Intro, glossary, notes and indices by A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1918), 179.

6. Adomnan, 187.

7. Hagiography often employs biblical themes to human actions. In this instance, Columba is attributed twelve followers in imitation of the twelve apostles of Christ.

8. J. A. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 3.

9. Adomnan, 521. See O'Donnell, 407, for a similar passage. Herein, Columba tells his disciples that he will soon leave them, but that they

should not weep. This is, of course, an *imitatio Christi*, but it also shows the abbot's love for his monks.

10. The twelfth-century reform movement began under Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) and his plan of "Unity and Purity." He pursued a policy of stringent adherence to Roman Catholicism throughout areas of Britain and the continent. He also claimed authority to Ireland because of Gregory I's placement of Saint Augustine as Archbishop of Canterbury in the sixth century. The Archbishop supposedly controlled the whole British Isles.

11. Kathleen Hughes and Ann Hamlin, *Celtic Monasticism: The Modern Traveler to the Early Irish Church* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 5.

12. Adomnan, 473. See O'Donnell, 395, for a similar passage. The hagiographer refers to the severe asceticism practised by Columba, including solitude and scourging himself.

13. Lisa M. Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 1990), 19-20.

14. Adomnan, 385.

15. O'Donnell, 105.

16. Adomnan, 347. See also O'Donnell, 77-79, for similar passage. Columba again strikes a rock and water springs forth.

17. Bitel, 17-18.

18. *Ibid.*, 55.

19. *Ibid.*, 45.

20. Adomnan, 351. See O'Donnell, 67, for a similar passage. Columba herein blesses Derry and notices a fire threatening a nearby grove of trees. Columba sings a hymn, *Noli Pater indulgere*, and protects the grove from destruction.

21. O'Donnell, 127, includes one odd story about Columba's encounter with a druid. The druid had received the power to prophecy from God, but Columba told him he was going to die soon. The druid converted, took the sacraments, and went to heaven. God's blessings upon a druid priest proves the assimilation between the two traditions.

22. Gerhard Herm, *The Celts: the People Who Came out of the Darkness* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 159. This does not mean, however, that Christianity assumed the worship of a pagan goddess. As Peter Brown suggested, the mentality behind the worship remained very different while the tradition of heaven meeting earth in one sacred spot stayed the same. See Peter Brown's discussion in *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

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23. See Herm, chapter 9, discussion of the Druids.
 24. O'Donnell, 151. See the similar passage in Adomnan, 369. Columba visited a niggardly man and received no hospitality. The rich man then lost all his riches, became a beggar, and died after being struck with an axe.
 25. Michael Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 82.
 26. Herm, 267.
 27. *Ibid.*, 268.
 28. Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), 126.
 29. Adomnan, 467.
 30. *Ibid.*, 469. Fire or light is used throughout hagiography to signify the holiness of an individual, imitating the "shekinah" of the Old Testament figures. See, in particular, Exodus 34.34-35.
 31. *Ibid.*, 197. See also O'Donnell's account of the same first miracle, 55.
 32. Adomnan, 523.
 33. *Ibid.*, 293, 271.
 34. *Ibid.*, 533-535.
 35. *Ibid.*, 527.
 36. John O'Beirne Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 27-31.
 37. *Ibid.*, 33-38.
 38. O'Donnell, xxxiv.
 39. D'Arcy, 74.
 40. Seventh-century Christianity often associated the female with carnality and temptation. Notice, in particular, the theological arguments and epistles to virgins of Ambrose, Jerome, and Tertullian.
 41. O'Donnell, 53.
 42. Richter, 175.
 43. Brendan Bradshaw, *The Irish Constitutional Revolution of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 118.
 44. O'Donnell, 59.
 45. See O'Donnell 39 and 125 for two examples.
 46. O'Donnell, 111-113.
 47. *Ibid.*, 189.
 48. See Adomnan, 293 and 409, as examples. These passages are discussed in the introduction, 73. It should be noted here that Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, 223, wrote that Columba founded Durrow before leaving Ireland. A. O. and M. O. Anderson argue that Bede could be

mistaken because of Durrow's claim to be senior and independent of Iona. 49. O'Donnell, 354.

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