
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. IV.—THE CHURCH OF ST. PATRICK.

THERE can be little doubt but that there were Christian settlements along the southern and eastern coasts of Ireland at a very early period. It was not, however, until the fifth century that there was any special effort made for the conversion of the country. In the year 432, a missionary landed, named PATRICK, or *Patricius*. He was most probably a native of Dumbarton, in North Britain. He met with the most remarkable success, and was the means of turning the nation as a whole to the Christian religion. Hence he has been styled "the Apostle of Ireland." There was at one time very grave doubt expressed as to his existence, and indeed as to all the statements made in the Celtic annals of Ireland. But further examination has shown that these authorities are eminently trustworthy, and that even their most trivial details have a real and historical value. The very success that attended Patrick's efforts has been a cause of doubt and disbelief. Yet, if we fairly consider his position, and his qualifications for the work, our surprise is considerably lessened. Patrick had been for seven years a slave in Ireland; he was, therefore, thoroughly acquainted with the language and the national peculiarities of the Irish people. He had not to contend with any of the preliminary difficulties of a missionary entering a foreign land. His manner of adapting himself to the national feelings wonderfully contributed to his success. He preached first to the chiefs, and did everything in his power to gain their influence, well knowing that, if he gained them, the common people would hear him gladly. Leary, the king, became, if not his convert, at least his friend. Many important chiefs attended his preaching, became Christians, and granted him sites for churches, and lands with which to endow them.

Patrick has been regarded sometimes as a Protestant prelate, sometimes as a Presbyterian elder, sometimes as a sort of Methodist preacher. It is the greatest mistake to import modern ideas into historical questions. We must take history as we find it, and as it interprets itself. History tells us that Patrick was a missionary bishop of the Church of Gaul of the fifth century. Whatever then the Church of Gaul of the fifth century was, he belonged to it. What a bishop of that Church was, he was. The institutions and doctrines of that church, and of that time, he was the means of introducing into Ireland.

In one respect the circumstances of the Church planted by Patrick in Ireland differed from those of the mother Church of Gaul. Gaul was settled and civilized, and under regular

municipal and general government; Ireland, on the other hand, was divided into numerous tribes and principalities, continually at war, and only recognizing the power of the High King, or monarch, when it could be enforced. Hence the Church fell into the national type, and presents most marked tribal characteristics. The abbats, or chief ministers of the great churches, were called *principles*, chiefs, *comarbs*, or successors of the founder, and those under their government were called their *people*. The abbats were chosen from the natural or spiritual line of the founder, before all strangers, no matter how eminent. Even a psalm-singer, who was kin, was preferred to a bishop who had not this necessary qualification; clanship ruled in Church and State.

But this was only one peculiarity of the Celtic Church of Ireland. In common with the Celtic Church of Britain, it differed in many respects from the Churches of the Continent, and especially the Church in Italy. Rome was the capital of Christendom; and the Church of Rome had not only a foremost position as the Church of the capital, but as the see of St. Peter and head of the Catholic Church of the West. Modifications and innovations in ritual and practice, sanctioned by the see of Peter, developments of doctrine, and every change that would enhance the authority of the Church of the metropolis, became fashionable in the provinces, and recognized as part of the ritual and doctrine of the Catholic Church. Celtic Britain and Ireland, being far away from the influence of Rome, and very much isolated, were slow to adopt the changes and fashions of Rome. Hence, the history of the Church in Britain and Ireland, until the twelfth century, is the history of a struggle on the part of Britain and Ireland to preserve their ancient traditions and insular peculiarities, and reject the influence and institutions of Latin Christianity. The early Celtic Church protested against and opposed Latin Christianity, which then in the West monopolized the name of the Catholic Church.

In four points the Celtic Church of Ireland differed from the Latin Churches.

(1.) *Traditions.*—The Church of Rome held the tradition of its descent from St. Peter, and, on that account, claimed the allegiance of the world, as being the seat of the prince of the Apostles. The Church of Ireland proclaimed that it held its traditions and peculiar usages from the direction and example of St. John, and looked upon the memory of the last of the Apostles with especial regard. At the Synod of Whitby, the advocate of the Roman Church, defending Catholic custom, said that all were agreed except "only these (the Irish) and their accomplices in obstinacy, I mean the Picts and the Britons, who foolishly, in these two remote islands of the world, and only in part of them, oppose all the rest of the universe." Bishop Colman, on the Celtic side,

replied, "It is strange that you will call our labours foolish, wherein we follow the example of so great an Apostle, who was thought worthy to lay his head upon our Lord's bosom, when all the world knows him to have lived most wisely." There are a great many traces in the earliest remains of the Church of Ireland of a Greek influence, undoubtedly due to a connection with the south of Gaul, in which there were Greek colonies from Asia Minor, where St. John spent the last years of his life. It is remarkable that St. John's Day still holds a prominent place amongst Irish festivals.

(2.) *Easter Observance.*—This was one of the two greatest points of controversy. The Roman Church, and those of the Continent, calculated the occurrence of the Easter festival by a new and more accurate method. The Irish and British Churches calculated by an old and defective rule, which they considered had been transmitted to them from St. John. The difference was sometimes so much as a whole month between the Celtic and the Catholic Easter. When the two Churches came into contact, as they did in the North of England, this discrepancy gave rise to scandal and controversy. Rome used every effort, in which she was at last successful, to compel or cajole the islanders into uniformity. But this did not take place until after a severe struggle.

(3.) *Tonsure.*—It is unquestionably a great practical convenience that clergymen should have some peculiarity of garb or special mark. It is not so long ago since clergymen might be known by having their chins and faces shaven. In old times the top of the head was shaved or clipped. The Roman and Continental clergy cut the hair on the crown of the head, in imitation, it is said, of the crown of thorns. The Celtic clergy cut the hair on the front of the top of the head, from a line drawn from ear to ear. This had the effect, to say the least, of giving the Celtic clergy a remarkably intellectual appearance. They had all fine foreheads, extending to the top of the head. The Romans nicknamed this custom "the tonsure of Simon Magus." It seems to us a slight matter for a great dispute; but we must remember it was an obvious mark, and showed at once whether a priest was Celtic or Roman, and as being the most prominent sign, evoked more hostility than it deserved from its intrinsic importance.

(4.) *Episcopacy.*—Ireland being broken up into separate tribes, which were frequently at war, and recognized only occasionally any superior authority, it was impossible to have the kind of episcopal government to be found on the Continent in the large cities and important towns. Patrick settled bishops in all the principal tribe-lands, for there were really no towns in Celtic Ireland, except possibly a few on the coast. In the great

churches founded by him a succession of bishops was at first maintained. In the next century, however, St. Columbkill, who was born in 521, declined, either from humility or disgust, to be consecrated a bishop; and in the churches founded by him, and in imitation of his, it became the strict rule that they should be governed by abbats, who were only presbyters. But in order that these churches should carry on their work as missions, and colleges, sending out clergy, it was necessary that there should be bishops to ordain, for in the Celtic Church the power of ordination was confined to bishops. Hence in these churches there was commonly a resident bishop—a bishop to whom the abbat could apply and authorize[1] for this purpose. Hence arose the anomaly, that was so long the difficulty in Irish Church history, How it could come to pass that a bishop should be under the jurisdiction of a presbyter! from which some interested authors have drawn the conclusion that presbyters and bishops were all one in the ancient Irish Church. The truth is, that nowhere was the distinction more carefully maintained than in Ireland between the orders of bishop, priest, and deacon. But in the Irish Church, a bishop had, for the most part, not a local office, but a personal rank. The local office was that of abbat, or head of the Church. He was in Patrician Churches usually a bishop; in Columban, and others of the second order, like Iona and Bangor, always a presbyter. There was nothing to prevent his being a deacon; and it is more than likely that in later times the abbat was occasionally even a layman. Such would be the case when he who was elected, or entitled to succeed, declined to take orders, and delegated his spiritual functions to an episcopal or presbyterial vicar, as the case required. Uniformity with Catholic arrangements, as regards the episcopacy, was not completely secured until the eve of the English invasion. There was, however, always the idea of diocesan episcopacy in Ireland, though it was incompletely carried out in the first instance, and upset to some extent by the Columban custom. In the Brehon laws we find that the three dignitaries of a territory were the king, the bishop, and the brehon. This seems to have been the idea of Patrick; and he tried to settle a bishop in every tribeland. As the tribes were numerous, and some of them small, this could not be carried out. Hence, many places where he settled bishops had no succession, but became merely country churches; others, as time went on, were swamped by the increasing importance of the great monasteries.

[1] A curious instance of this same sort of thing occurs in later times. We find in the "Register of St. Albans" a memorandum that John, Bishop of Ardfert, held an ordination at the High Altar in Advent, at the desire of John of Hertford, Abbot (presbyter) of St. Albans.—Nicholson's *Abbey of St. Alban*, p. 96.

In some other respects, also, Ireland neglected later Catholic usage. It was not an unusual thing to make a layman a bishop at once, as was the case of St. Ambrose, made thus Bishop of Milan. The Irish Church also neglected, or did not receive, the canon requiring the presence and concurrence of three bishops at a consecration.

Gradually the pressure of Latin Catholic opinion, and respect for the chair of St. Peter, compelled uniformity in all the above particulars. The Celtic Church protested; but her protests were smothered by the ever-advancing wave of Latin Christianity.

We come now to the period immediately preceding the Anglo-Norman invasion, when every effort was put forth to bring the old Celtic Church of Ireland into conformity with the rest of Western Christendom, and to make it agreeable to the Roman model. We find records of a series of synods, which show how the Church was guided in a Latin direction.

(1.) *Synod of Fiadh-mac-Naogusa*, 1111.—This synod was the first, and it seems to have been merely preliminary. King Mortough O'Brien called it together. It was attended by Maolmurry O'Dunain, Bishop of Cashel, by Cellach MacAodh, successor of Patrick, by eight other bishops (some say fifty-eight), and by a great number of the other orders. Keating tells us that many wholesome laws and regulations were established, not only for the government of the clergy, but of the laity likewise, throughout the kingdom.

(2.) *The Synod of Uisnech*, 1111.—In it a beginning was made in the distribution of territory into regular dioceses. In the old Church there were, as we have already said, two classes of sees—bishoprics of tribes, and bishoprics of great churches, or monasteries. The former were really diocesan. It is too often forgotten that the diocesan principle always existed in the ancient Irish Church in this class of sees. To the present day many of the Irish dioceses are exactly coterminous with ancient principalities and tribal territories. The bishop of a monastery had jurisdiction over the district under the influence of his monastery. Hence the necessity of defining the boundaries of territory claimed by tribal and monastic bishops, and by the bishops of different churches. The latter was one of the points settled in one case by the Synod of Uisnech, and it is typical. We read: "The great Synod of Uisnech was held in the same year; and it was in this Synod the diocese of the Feara Midhe (Meath) was divided into two parts, between the Bishop of Clonmacnoise and the Bishop of Clonard—viz., from Clochan-au-imrim westwards to the Bishop of Clonmacnoise, and from the same Clochan eastwards to the Bishop of Clonard, by Murchadh O'Meloghlin, and by Eochaidh O'Kelly, and by the congregation of Ciaran, with Gillachrist O'Malone, Abbat of Clonmacnoise."

(3.) *Synod of Rathbrassil*, 1115.—This synod completed the work thus begun, settling the number of the sees and their boundaries, under the presidency of Gillaespuig, or Gilbert, Bishop of Limerick, an ardent advocate of Catholic uniformity, who appeared on the scene in the new quality of legate of Ireland. By the records of this synod, it appears that all Ireland, except Dublin—then Danish, and therefore connected with England—was divided into twenty-five dioceses. These, with some amalgamations, continue to the present day,

(4.) *Synod of Innispatrick*, 1148.—After Gilbert, Bishop of Limerick, the first great leader in the ultramontane movement in the Celtic Church of Ireland, came Malachy, successively Bishop of Connor, Primate of Armagh, and Bishop of Down. This remarkable man, who was well acquainted with the Church on the Continent, and who was fascinated by the authority and claims of the See of Rome, cast into the struggle the whole weight of his personal and official influence. He was horrified at the irregularities of the Church of Ireland, and the abuses, however magnified by Roman authorities, that unquestionably existed. He saw no remedy but in union with the chair of Peter, and in conformity with the ecclesiastical system of the Continent. This was the grand object of his life; and though he did not live to see his plans carried out, it was his influence, and, above all, the influence of his holy life, that attracted the wayward and independent Celts, and caused some of them, at least, to look to Rome for a cure for existing evils. He went to Rome, and entreated the Pope to establish a regular ecclesiastical connection between the chair of Peter and the bishops of Ireland by granting palls to the principal prelates. This the Pope positively declined to do until the request would come, not from an individual bishop, however earnest or exalted, but from a general synod of the Church. Malachy's interviews took place in 1139, and yet it was not until 1148 that he was able to convene a synod for this purpose. From all Ireland only fifteen bishops met at Innispatrick. Malachy gained his point, at the conclusion. "Then Malachy, moreover, proceeded from that synod to confer with the coarb (successor) of St. Peter." He, however, was only able to reach Clairvaux, where he died, 1148, attended in his last moments by his friend and biographer, St. Bernard, last of the Fathers. He was the second legate appointed for Ireland, and the first Irish saint canonized by the Pope.

(5.) *Synod of Kells*, 1152.—Up to this time the work of reorganization was not complete. The Irish bishops had still no official connection with Rome, and acknowledged no dependence on the Roman See. At last the palls were granted, and were sent from Rome for four Irish archbishops. There were no

official archbishops in the old Irish Church. The real primates were the successors of Patrick and Columba; these stood in the first rank of ecclesiastics, though the latter was only a presbyter. Afterwards, the Bishops of Armagh and Cashel were looked upon as the High Bishops of Ireland: but the successor of Patrick alone had undisputed primacy. John, Cardinal Papiron, and Gilla-Christ, or Christian, Bishop of Lismore, the third legate, convened this important synod, and conveyed to the Irish bishops this compliment from the Roman See. The northern clergy were furious at even Cashel being put on a level with Armagh, much less the two new archbishoprics, Dublin and Tuam. But it was done, and Rome thus gained one, or rather, indeed, four points of vantage in her encroachments on the liberties of the Irish Church. When the synod was over, and his work was done, Cardinal John began his journey home, and passed the sea on the 24th of March. We have on record the names of the bishops who took part in this important synod. They are the fathers of the mediæval Church of Ireland, as distinguished from the old Celtic, and from them the succession of the pre-Reformation bishops, so far as it is Celtic, must be traced. The bishops present were :—

Gillachrist O'Conery	Lismore.	Gilla Aodh O'Heyn	Cork.
Giolla MacLiag	Armagh.	Maolbrennan O'Runan	Ardfert.
Daniel O'Lonergan	Cashel.	Turgesius	Limerick.
Hugh O'Heyn	Tuam.	Murtogh O'Maolidhir	Clonmacnoise
Gregory	Dublin.	Maolissa O'Conachtain	Orior Connact
Giolla na Naomh	Glendalough.	O'Rudhan	Achonry.
Dungall O'Caollaighe	Leighlin.	Macraith O'Moran	Ardagh.
Tuistius	Waterford.	Eathruaid O'Miadhachain	Clonard.
Daniel O'Fogarty, Vic.-Gen.	Ossory.	Tuathal O'Connechty	Annadown.
Fionn Mac Tiagurnan	Kildare.	Murray O'Coffey	Derry.
Gilla an Chomde, or Deicola.	——	Melpatrick O'Bannan	Connor.
O'Hardwhaoil	Emly.	Maolissa	Down.

The details of these early synods may seem to be dry and uninteresting, but their records are amongst the title-deeds of the modern Irish Church in establishing her claim to be the Church of Ireland, and the Church founded by St. Patrick. So far, we can see that the action of the Roman See was to get recognition and gain influence; she could not yet exercise control.

(6.) *Synod of Armagh*, 1170.—The work was going on too slow. Soon an opportunity presented itself. King Henry of England asked a grant of Ireland from the Pope, and the Pope (Adrian IV.) made the grant in return for a penny from every house for St. Peter. Let every Irishman know who sent the Saxons to Ireland. Adrian's bull says, "We do grant that you (for the extension of God's Church, the punishment of sin, the reforming of manners, planting of virtue, and the increasing of

Christian religion) do enter to possess that land." And further, "We do strictly charge and require, that all the people of that land do with all humbleness, dutyfulness, and honour receive and accept you as their Liege Lord and Sovereign, reserving and excepting the right of Holy Church to be inviolably preserved; as also the yearly pension of Peter pence out of every house, which we require to be truly answered to St. Peter, and to the Church of Rome." This bull was issued in 1156; in 1169 the advance guard of the English came. "In this troublesome time," says the chronicler Hamner—

The Primate of Armagh called the Prelates and Clergie to a Synod; at Armagh assembled a Councell; where, according to their wisedomes, they endeavoured to finde out the cause of these miseries that fell upon the land; they inquired not whether the Bishops had bought their Bishoprickes for money, whether their parsons did pray, whether their ministers were lettered; what whoredom, symony, or lechery, with other enormities raigned amongst the Clergie, but simply, like themselves, posted over all to the Laytie, and concluded (*insipienter*) that the iust plague fell upon the people, for merchandizing of the English nation; for then they bought and sold of the English birth, such as they found, and made them bondslaves; so they served Saint *Patricke*, called the Apostle of Ireland, who was a bondman sixe yeeres in Ireland, but *Patricke* preached Christ, and the English nation reformed the land. Here the sacred letters reconcile all, *the stone which the builders refused is become the corner stone, and why so? the answer followeth, it is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.* But I may not so leave my Prelates, they synodically decreed as followeth: *that all the Englishmen within the land, whatsoever they were, should bee manumised;* a worshipfull piece of worke, and no thanke to them all, for the English sword was then ready to cut off the Irish heads; this reformation was but a sweeping of a house with a foxe's tayle.

(7.) *Synod of Cashel*, 1172.—King Henry II., having been received as the Pope directed, "with all humbleness, dutyfulness and honour," commanded the assembly of the Church of Ireland in national synod. It was attended by Gillachrist, or Christian, Bishop of Lismore and Legate of the Pope; Donat, Archbishop of Cashel; Laurence, Archbishop of Dublin; Catholicus, Archbishop of Tuam, and the other bishops, except the Primate, who could not attend, but who afterwards concurred in its decrees. Three English clergymen attended on the king's part. In that synod the following decree was passed:—

That all the divine service in the Church of Ireland, shall be kept, used, and observed in the like order and manner as it is in the Church of England; for it is meet and right, that as by God's providence and appointment, Ireland is become now subject, and under the King of England, so the same should take from thence, the order, and rule, and manner how to reform themselves, and to live in better sort.

It is very curious to notice how strictly in conformity with the terms of this canon were the proceedings at the time of the Reformation. They did take from the Church of England "the order, and rule, and manner, how to reform themselves." No doubt for this very reason the latter clauses of this canon have been attributed by Roman Catholic historians, not to the Synod, but to the reporter, Giraldus Cambrensis.

(8.) *Synod of Dublin*, 1186.—The above canon of the Synod of Cashel could not be allowed to remain a dead letter. No doubt in the more remote parts of Ireland it was extremely difficult to enforce conformity; and in all probability the usages of the old Church of Ireland continued to be observed for many a year. It is a question whether, even at the time of the Reformation, complete uniformity had been secured. Within the pale however, and supported by the authority of the English king, there could be no reason for delay. Yet we find that it was not until 1186 that active steps were taken. Archbishop Comyn, the chaplain and nominee of King Henry, was the first English Archbishop of Dublin. In the above year he called a synod, which sat in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Dublin. It does not appear whether this synod was national or provincial. Possibly it was as national as English authority could make it. From the very first canon of this synod, we learn what was the usage of the old Celtic Church concerning the principal act of Christian worship, and what were the novel practices introduced by English authority. We find, too, a complete justification of the acts of the Reformers of latter times. The canon—

> Prohibits priests from celebrating mass on a wooden table, according to the usage of Ireland; and enjoins that, in all monasteries and baptismal churches, altars should be made of stone; and if a stone of sufficient size to cover the whole surface of the altar cannot be had, that in such a case a square, entire, and polished stone be fixed in the middle of the altar, where Christ's body is consecrated, and of a compass broad enough to contain five crosses, and also to bear the foot of the largest chalice. But in chapels, chauntries, or oratories, if they are necessarily obliged to use wooden altars, let the mass be celebrated on plates of stone of the before-mentioned size, firmly fixed in the wood.

Thus we have traced the steps of ecclesiastical legislation by which the independent, national, Celtic Church of Ireland became united to the Church of England in polity, worship, and faith, and in absolute dependence upon the crown of England and the see of Rome.

CHARLES SCOTT.