

# COLUMBA AND WILFRID - MODELS FOR THE CHURCH?

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Recent years have seen a phenomenal growth of interest in Celtic Spirituality, largely due to a belief that it shows the way forward for the Church in this age. Columba has been seen as a figurehead for this movement, and his star has risen in the estimation of many modern Christians who see his style of mission and spirituality as an example of how the Church can engage in mission to a postmodern world. Wilfrid, in contrast, has appeared to be painted as the arch-villain to end all arch-villains - the Beast of the Synod of Whitby. Many have seen this account of events as being somewhat overdone<sup>1</sup>, and perhaps it is time to re-examine both these historical figures to see what they really do have to teach us about how to be the church in today's world.

## 1. COLUMBA

Columba is popularly portrayed as the archetype of the Celtic church, independent of Rome, in touch with local society and customs, in harmony with nature, democratic (with bishops being subject to the abbot and abbots ruling in a collegial fashion with their fellow-monks), eschewing the pleasures, riches, and power of this world, but wielding great spiritual power in conflict with the forces of darkness. Ian Bradley, in the book referred to in note 1 has done enough to show how exaggerated and inaccurate this picture is. Columba's theology would have been recognised by Augustine as largely orthodox, and the much-vaunted independence from Rome was as much due to a breakdown of communications between Rome and the British Isles in the centuries following the Sack of Rome<sup>2</sup>. Much of the other features of the Celtic Church owe much to their social context. The monastic *familiae* related more or less to the *tuatha* or kingships of the Irish people, and were a much more effective way of networking with a largely widespread rural population with close kinship links than the Roman diocesan system of church government<sup>3</sup>.

In such a context it would also seem normal to regard the abbot of the monastery as the "king", and the bishop as the "druid". Of course, the Celtic Christian monks were utterly opposed to the druids as a pagan order, and Adamnan describes, in his *Vita Columbae* a story of a conflict between Columba and the druid Broichan, who served the Pictish king Brude (a conflict in which Columba, of course, was the victor), but there are a number of instances in which Irish saints are portrayed as fulfilling the role druids played in pre-Christian days. Columba's role in kingmaking in the ordination of Aedan mac Gabhrain as king of Dalriada is one instance of this, as is the wonder-working contest between Columba and Broichan which suggests both are magicians seeking to prove whose powers are greater. Columba attributes his power to God, but assumes a similar social role to Broichan in the process. Similarly, there are two types of miracles attributed to Columba. One type are based on Gospel miracles, and are such as can be found in many *Vitae Sanctorum*, but the other type are much more local in colour, and relate to the kind of wonders performed by druids in Celtic myth and legend - calling down a storm on the boat of the pirate Ioan, providing favourable winds for sailors, the returning of Cainnech's staff (lost at sea), and the use of the saint's cowl to deflect a weapon, not to mention the quelling of the Loch Ness Monster.<sup>4</sup> The prophecies and miracles attributed to Columba and other Celtic saints are just what would have been expected of a druid in Irish legend, the fights against devils parallel the conflict with the forces of faery in Celtic legend, and the supposed subordinate position of the bishop is perhaps due to his being regarded as the abbot's (or "king's") druid. If so, then the bishop was not perhaps quite so subordinate as may at first appear, because druids in pre-Christian Celtic society had many privileges. The druids memorised and interpreted the laws and traditions of the Celts, they had magical powers and could influence human fate by their blessing and curses. Such a person, though technically subordinate to a king, could in fact exercise considerable power over him. Caesar records that all who were 'excommunicated' by the Druids 'are reckoned in the number of the vile and wicked; all persons avoid and fly their company and discourse, lest they should receive any infection by contagion; they are not permitted to commence a (sc. law) suit; neither is any post entrusted to them....The Druids are generally freed from military service, nor do they pay taxes with the rest.'<sup>5</sup> Sometimes it is said that a bishop's function in a Celtic monastery was "mainly sacramental and liturgical", without really understanding how important those two aspects of life were in that community, and especially in that context. Of course, there is also a sense in which the whole community of monks are druids to the society as a whole. The whole community keeps the

records and traditions of the community alive - in copying the scriptures, in codifying secular laws, in memorising psalms (equivalent to memorising poems or spells), and in administering blessings and curses. This explains the great respect ceded to Columba and his monks even by pagans.

Columba and his monks, and representatives of Celtic Christianity in general, show little interest in worldly comfort and possessions, which derives from the influence of the Desert Fathers<sup>6</sup>, and the contacts between the Irish church of the time with Egyptian and Syrian Christianity. Bradley suggests that 'Iona, in common with other monastic communities on the western side of the British Isles, had at least as much contact with Egyptian and Syrian Christianity as with Rome'<sup>7</sup> while Chadwick traces Coptic and Syrian influence in the Book of Durrow<sup>8</sup>, and archaeological digs on Iona have found evidence of trade with the Eastern Mediterranean, such as pieces of red pottery from Carthage, and fragments of amphorae from Asia Minor. Indeed, Bradley indicates that 'references in early poems by monks associated with Iona suggest that Athanasius' Life of St. Anthony, Sulpicius Severus' Life of Martin of Tours, and Cassian's Conferences, which give an account of the teaching and practices of the early Egyptian monks and hermits, were among the most thumbed volumes in the island's library.'<sup>9</sup> Though one hopes it will not be seen as too cynical to ask whether such deliberate poverty, rejection of comfort, such strict penances (the Irish life of Columba has him rising at dawn every day, even in the worst weather to chant the entire psalter by the sea-shore, while St. Cuthbert and St. David are recorded as standing actually in the sea to perform the same exercise<sup>10</sup>), and even the practice of pilgrimage (or white martyrdom as it was called) do not testify to a strong natural desire for wealth, comfort, and family, which the monks felt they had to resist in order to find their resurrection, but which nevertheless caused a severe 'war within the members' (to use St. Paul's phrase)?

Certainly, Columba did not eschew power. Despite occasional acts of humble service, there is never any doubt who is in charge in the Iona community. He attends the conference at Druim Ceat with a retinue about as large as any of the kings, and plays the most influential part in that conference. Columba was, of course, related to the family of the high kings of Ireland, and he was not above making use of his connections and rank where necessary. Certainly, the man who refuses worldly wealth for himself is not backward in coming forward to ask for grants of land and endowments for his monastery. And the same could be said of other Celtic saints. As for the suggestion of some that Celtic monasteries were run in a collegial fashion, it is difficult to find evidence for this. The abbot seems to have ruled very firmly in all things, as indeed did his secular equivalent, the king of the local tuath.

What, then, can we learn from Columba and Celtic Christianity? A great deal. The Celtic saints were great men of prayer. Their monastic rule enjoined more daily offices, and especially the night offices, than the later Benedictine rule, and there were the 'optional extras', such as chanting psalms by the sea-shore, on top of that. The influence of Anthony of Egypt and the Desert Fathers inclined many of them to become hermits (eg. Cuthbert, among others). This engendered a deep spirituality which was noted by all who encountered them. They were more than usually open to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. This may well have been due to their Druidic heritage, but in Columba and the Celtic Christians this power is certainly in God's hands and is used for good purposes.

By contrast, perhaps, we should note the Celtic sense of penitence which is so much a part of the life of the monks of Iona and as is testified to by the Irish Penitentials and the early Iona poetry. The Celtic Christians had a very clear view of what was right and wrong, and believed that repentance should not be made too easy. Columba refuses to allow a man who has slept with his mother and killed his brother on to Iona. He banishes the man to the land of the Britons, but acknowledges that the man will return to Ireland and meet a sticky end, which is what in fact happens. Perhaps our age has become too lax about sin. Perhaps we assume too easily that 'Of course God will forgive. That's his business'(Voltaire). Perhaps from the Celtic attitude to sin and penance, we can recover something of the awe they felt before a holy God. And maybe we can learn the need to do battle with our 'besetting sins'. Of particular note is the role of the anamchara or soul-friend, whom Bradley terms a combination of "spiritual counsellor, father confessor, and buddy".<sup>11</sup>

Another lesson one can learn from the Celtic Christians is their commitment to tradition. By that word I include the traditions of their faith and the traditions of their culture, which were essentially pagan. What we know of Celtic culture in these islands we owe entirely to Celtic monks writing down what their forebears committed to memory, while the hours they spent producing illustrated manuscripts of the Scriptures and the works of the fathers shows their commitment to the sources of their faith. The instant canonisation of

spiritual leaders like Columba, Brendan, Finnian etc., shows a respect for the teaching of the ancients and a desire to remain true to the path they followed which can too easily be lost by a rootless age which is constantly looking for the next trend, the latest big idea, and which can tend to regard tradition as boring and irrelevant.

Celtic Christianity also teaches the lesson of obedience to spiritual authority. It is interesting to note that, though many modern day devotees of Celtic Christianity are attracted by its tolerance of eccentrics and the supposedly reduced power of bishops, in actual fact, abbots expected, and usually received, unquestioning obedience. Adamnan tells of a prophecy made by Columba concerning a monk, Cormac, who was seeking to found a monastery, to the effect that this venture would fail as one of the monks accompanying him was travelling without permission of his abbot. Brendan the Navigator's voyage also suffers because some brothers get onto his ship against Brendan's wishes. The abbot is God's voice on earth, and must be obeyed, even in small matters. If Celtic Christianity does limit the power of the bishop, it makes the abbot all-powerful. But perhaps the Celtic Christians realised that authority had to rest somewhere, and provided the abbot was indeed a holy man, he was the obvious person, being in a similar position to the king of a tribe. Most abbots were normally related to secular royalty into the bargain, and most Celtic monasteries practised a kind of 'inheritance' of the title, the post passing to a relative of the founder or the previous abbot. The modern age would not consider that practice democratic, but it had the merit of reducing arguments about succession. Usually the appointment was made by the previous abbot before he died. Such a system would not suit our modern age, but it was never designed to do so. It suited Ireland and Scotland in the Dark Ages, which was the whole intention. But perhaps our age has had so much freedom it needs to learn the limits of freedom, and respect for people in authority because of the office they hold and because of the need to preserve good order, regardless of our own personal feelings and opinions.

Maybe also we can learn from the Celtic saints the need to live in community. Perhaps a society that is largely privatised and compartmentalised needs to learn about community and living with other people, and providing for our own needs and those of others without expecting someone else to do it all for us. Iona was self-sufficient, and everyone had their own job to do. No-one was idle.

But paradoxically, the Celts knew the value of retreat. Columba himself, and many of his monks, went on regular retreats to Hinba, and Tiree. In a Celtic monastery there would be monks and hermits. Perhaps the church in our age can learn from Columba and his community how to take time out from busy schedules to get back in touch with God and our inner selves.

One matter that is often mentioned in relation to Celtic Christianity is its missionary concern, and the frequent travels of the Celtic saints to preach the gospel. It is far from clear whether Columba did travel to preach the gospel to any great extent, though others may have done so. It is specifically doubtful whether the Celtic monks travelled in order to preach the gospel, or to engage in the 'white martyrdom' of giving up home, family, and native land, with the preaching of the gospel to the heathen along the way being only a by-product. However, the founding of new monasteries did bring the gospel message to new areas, and helped spread Christianity, though it must be questioned how much ordinary people outside the monastery knew about their new faith, and how much of an admixture of the old paganism there was. But in any case, the Celtic Christians were always on the way somewhere. Their communities were always roughly built and provisional. They were always moving on, seeking out where God would take them next.<sup>12</sup>

## **2. WILFRID**

Wilfrid<sup>13</sup>, as we have seen, is often compared unfavourably with the Celtic Saints. This is to some extent understandable. Wilfrid did upset a great number of people in his lifetime, and even in the adulatory account of his life given by Eddius Stephanus one can trace some less than edifying traits. His hectoring manner, his unbending will, and the bargaining style that squeezes the last drop of blood out of his business associates<sup>14</sup> would hardly tend to make him popular. It was no surprise he had enemies. But Eddius Stephanus is probably correct when he puts most of the opposition to Wilfrid down to jealousy. The main problem with Wilfrid was he was too clever, too wealthy, and far too successful. And he did not suffer fools gladly. But we are talking here of human faults and personality traits. Did he really deserve all the opposition he got? Was he entirely wrong?

A careful review of Wilfrid's life and work will, I believe show that he was more often than not in the right (indeed that was probably what his enemies found hardest to forgive) and that he did the English church of his time a great service, even though it did not show much gratitude. In order to assess Wilfrid properly it is necessary to look at him in the context of his time, and to look beneath the surface of his story and his words.

Wilfrid was an educated and eloquent man who knew the meaning of words, and who knew the way to win an argument. The text of his argument often conceals a more substantial subtext, and it is at the level of the subtext that the real argument lies. Ian Bradley realises that the real issue between the parties at the Synod of Whitby is the conflict between Celtic and Roman ways of organising the church (monastic *paruchia* v. diocesan system)<sup>15</sup>. But he says this was not on the agenda at Whitby. I believe it was, but not openly. Wilfrid knew which arguments were most likely to produce the result he desired and he used them. Colman was well aware that when he had lost over the matters of tonsure and the date of Easter, he had lost the whole argument. If Peter could overrule Columba, he was out of line. That is why so much time and effort were put in to debating what appear to us to be obscure topics. Wilfrid is a consummate ecclesiastical politician, and his words require the same amount of analysis as do political speeches. But what can posterity learn from Wilfrid?

Firstly, Wilfrid demonstrates the need for the church to live in the real world. Maybe the reason why the late twentieth century has taken the Celtic Church to its heart is because of a certain romanticism in the heart of both Celtic Christianity and contemporary postmodernism. Wilfrid sensed the church in his day was getting too heavenly minded to be any earthly good, and was losing its connection, not only with the wider Christian communion, but also with the reality of life in the British Isles at the time. As we saw earlier, Celtic Christianity was perfectly adapted to the life of Celtic society. But Celtic influence and Celtic society was on the wane. The Anglo-Saxon invaders had, by the late 7th. century completely taken over what we now call England, and had consolidated their control. They were even beginning to cast their predatory eyes on Scotland and Ireland. The golden age of Celtdom was over, and the Anglo-Saxon star was in the ascendant. This had very far-reaching implications for the church. The Anglo-Saxons came from the European continent and looked more naturally to the continent, especially to their Frankish cousins whose ideas and culture had been greatly influenced by Roman Gaul, whose land they had conquered. They were developing a more sophisticated society which was leaving the Celtic society behind. And, not unnaturally, they were looking to Rome for a lead.

The Celtic church was not so well adapted to the new social reality. Indeed, it may well be that the reason for the deep emotion demonstrated at Whitby was that not only were two systems of church government in conflict, but also the old and new societies - the old indigenous Celtic society, and the new society of the Saxon invaders. Not for the first or the last time, conflict in the church mirrored, and was grounded in, conflict in society. Wilfrid had grown up and been educated at Lindisfarne and Whitby. He had known and loved the Celtic church. But his contact with the court of Northumbria brought him into contact with another form of Christianity, and he saw that this was the way forward for the future. He could see that the old Celtic ways were never going to meet the needs of the England of his day, and that Rome held the hope for the future. So he set himself to go to Rome to learn the Roman ways and Roman teaching.

The Saxons, of course, came from the continent and continued to have close links with Europe. From the seventh century onwards there is evidence of frequent contact with Gaul, under both Merovingians and Franks. Royal houses intermarried (King Ethelbert of Kent had a Frankish wife) and the faithful went on pilgrimages. There was no way Britain could continue to enjoy the isolation from Europe that had been necessary during the unstable times following the fall of Rome to the Goths. In ecclesiastical terms, Britain either threw in its lot with Europe (Rome) or it floundered on its own. Wilfrid saw this and resolved to take the necessary action to bring the church of his day into the real world. Postmodernism shows some of the tendency of Colman and his Celtic reactionaries to seek refuge in a comfortable past. Wilfrid demonstrates the need to take the hard decisions, to do the unromantic and unpopular thing, to do what is necessary to enable the church to minister to the real world.

The monastic structure of the Celtic church made sense when people lived in widespread kinship groups. The monastery resembled the king's dun. Wandering monks may evangelise a village, but without a constant presence, villagers went back to their pagan ways, as there were always local pagan practitioners. The Roman diocesan system put a local bishop in every kingdom, who could guide the faithful in the way and keep potential backsliders in line. This system suited Saxon secular forms of government. The bishop could relate to the king and fulfil the role pagan priests had exercised in society. The adoption of the trappings of wealth and power were part of this process. A Saxon

king, especially one who had witnessed the magnificence of the Merovingian and Frankish rulers and bishops, would look down on a poorly dressed cleric. A bishop in fine clothes who had riches and land would gain far more respect. A comparison with Columba at Druim Ceat shows that such considerations were not absent from the mind of the Celtic saints, but the voluntary renunciation of wealth was seen as a sign of holiness by Celtic secular leaders, and as a sign of madness by Saxon secular leaders, who were attracted by the wealth and splendour of the Franks. Wilfrid's programme of church building and beautification, his seeming obsession with grants of land to his monasteries, and his great abilities as a lawyer<sup>16</sup>, all are intended to impress the secular authorities, and thus to secure the future, authority, and status of his monasteries and the church in general. We must not forget that it was only in the recent past that Northumbria had become decisively Christian, and that Wilfrid himself was responsible for the conversion of one of the few remaining areas not under Christian leadership. Underground, paganism was to flourish for much longer. It was only by making friends with kings and nobles that this position would be consolidated. Hence the provision in Wilfrid's will that a quarter of his estate be left to the monasteries to help them buy such friendship. The modern age would call it sleaze, but that is the way government was conducted in the 7th. century.

Secondly, the importance of connection to the wider church. Wilfrid's attempt to bring the English church under the rule of Rome was an ecumenical endeavour. Those British bishops who continued to hold to the Celtic ways could with some reason be regarded as schismatics<sup>17</sup>. They may have merely preserved a more conservative form of Christian faith and practice, and it may well be that it was only the difficulty of communications between Rome and Britain in the 4th. century which prevented the British church from moving in step with the wider Christian communion (but cf. Beresford Ellis' point in note 2). but by Wilfrid's time this communication problem had been solved. The position of the wider church was clear, but the British clergy were still refusing to accept the majority view. This resistance threatened the unity of the church, and Wilfrid realised that the British church would be the loser if the schism became formal and permanent, being cut off from the learning and resources of the Continent.

As for the Irish church, and its offshoot in Iona, the situation was less clear. Ireland was more cut off from Continental influences than mainland Britain, but by Wilfrid's time the southern part of Ireland had accepted Roman ways, and only the northern Irish and Iona held to the old ways<sup>18</sup>. Colman, certainly after Whitby could reasonably be regarded as a schismatic in a way Columba never could. Whatever the attractiveness of the teachings of the Celtic Saints, when adherence to their teachings leads to disunity in the church and the separation of believers, it becomes dangerous. How long could the church in the British Isles maintain its isolation from the church in general? Perhaps the lesson for the church of today is that it is only together with the whole of the church of Christ that anything of significance can be done, and that we need to transcend denominational labels and work together to continue the mission of God. Perhaps moves towards closer ecumenical relations and convergence in liturgy and doctrine are the kind of things into which Wilfrid's example would lead us.

Thirdly, Wilfrid can teach posterity the need for obedience to and respect for authority. This message is a very unpopular one to modern ears. Indeed, one of the most insistent themes of the revival of Celtic Christianity is the moderation of the powers of the episcopacy, and the greater exercise of freedom and even democracy in the body of Christ<sup>19</sup>. We have seen above that this is a misreading of the situation in the Celtic church. The Celtic abbot, as we have seen, was a very authoritarian figure and the idea of the submission of the bishop in Celtic Christianity is very overdone. Perhaps our age needs to learn from St. Columba as well as St. Wilfrid the lesson of the need for a strong central authority to keep order and to protect the integrity of the message, allied to a pastoral heart at the centre which is prepared to apply the rules with compassion. Communities such as monasteries or churches cannot live together without some fairly strong authority to settle disputes, to restrain some of the less helpful tendencies which may develop, and to administer discipline where required. Wherever two or three people gather together there is the potential for their individual interests to conflict with the interests of the group. If the grouping is larger, and is perhaps an organisation, there is the possibility that larger groups within the whole could find that their interests conflict. Authority is therefore necessary.

Wilfrid may seem at first glance an unlikely example of obedience. He was in conflict with his king and archbishop for most of his life. But the Holy See (as both Eddius Stephanus and Bede record) upheld Wilfrid's every appeal, and held the local authorities to be in error. There needed to be a strong central

authority in 7th. century Europe. Otherwise each local king, bishop, or abbot, would seek to influence the church to their own advantage, but to the detriment of the church; individual charismatic teachers could lead the faithful astray into heresy; and all kinds of local power politics could be pursued unchecked. But it needed to be a fair-minded central authority with a respect for Scripture and tradition, as existed in Wilfrid's day. The fact that many of the above-mentioned dangers happened anyway, and the fact that historically the central authority itself became corrupt in time should not obscure the influence for good that a strong central authority can be, and the utter chaos that would ensue without it. Indeed, most churches which have reacted against the Roman model of authority have replaced it with a system of authority at least as strong, if not stronger, though different in nature. Perhaps Wilfrid teaches that not only is it necessary to keep in touch with the world-wide church, but it is also vital to recognise the limits of freedom, and to submit to the legitimate authorities, not only because we find them 'authoritative' for us, but because they are legitimately appointed and because the only alternatives are chaos and heresy.

Fourthly, Wilfrid was as committed to the idea of community as the Celtic Saints. He founded as many monasteries as many of them, and his monasteries were always dear to his heart, as we have seen. Wilfrid's faithful community of monks, particularly those who accompanied him in his 'wilderness years', were his faithful lieutenants without whom he could not have succeeded. Indeed, he acknowledged this debt in his legacy, leaving his monasteries one portion of his bequest, and yet another to those who had been with him in exile. Many of Wilfrid's battles with king and archbishop centred on monasteries and the land granted to them. Wilfrid knew well that the Christian path was not a solitary one, and that a community of faithful followers were necessary to consolidate the work and ensure the continuance of the tradition into the future. Wilfrid's founding of monasteries rooted the Roman ways into English culture<sup>20</sup>. A strong Christian community in communion with the whole church throughout the world (there was as yet no break between the Eastern and the Western church, though each had their own emphases) was undoubtedly the way for the gospel to progress in the 7th. century. Perhaps a similar formula may be appropriate today, though we may think in terms of communities which differ in nature from those Wilfrid founded, and the wider church would be an ecumenical association, not the monolithic organisation of Wilfrid's time.

### **3. COLUMBA AND WILFRID**

So what is it these two leaders of the medieval church have to teach us? Columba and Wilfrid both have much to teach us about how to be the church. And the surprising thing, when one carefully surveys the evidence, is that they teach us largely the same things. Both figures knew and valued their scriptures and traditions well, both were men of prayer<sup>21</sup>, who show evidence of great spiritual power (Eddius relates miracles performed by Wilfrid, just as Adamnan does of Columba), and who are committed to life in community. Both men had a concern to spread the gospel of Christ to places where pagan belief was still strong (Wilfrid has stronger credentials here because of his work among the South Saxons), and both believed firmly in the need for obedience to the legitimate spiritual authority. Columba and Wilfrid may have operated with different systems of church government, but neither was an innovator in this regard. Columba was following in the tradition of his Celtic forbears, and Wilfrid in the mainline Christian tradition of his day (which he argued went back to St. Peter). Both enjoined absolute obedience on their followers, and generally set an example of obedience themselves (though Columba may have erred in his youth in copying the psalter, the mature man sets an excellent example). Wilfrid may have been in conflict with his archbishop, but he kept his protests within legally permissible boundaries, and keeps out of the way until the Pope has decided his case).

However there are some points where each saint has something distinctive to contribute. There is a greater simplicity about Columba and his community on Iona, and his rejection of worldly wealth and luxury will resonate more in our times than Wilfrid's use of wealth to secure respect for his message and the future for his monasteries. The secular world in our day tends to look with suspicion on wealthy religious figures and movements, and however much hypocrisy may lay behind that judgement, it is one the church does well to heed. The Celtic need to retreat, to take time out, even to seek the 'white martyrdom' of leaving 'home and toil and kindred' (CF Alexander) for the gospel, is also something this world with its relentless rat-race needs to learn from. The church could also learn from the related theme of pilgrimage - seeing life as a never-ending journey from the one place where God leads us to the next.

From Wilfrid, however, we need to learn that there is a time when we in the church need to come down from the mount of transfiguration and to live in the real world. It was a lesson

Columba, for all his contemplation and retreat, never forgot. The Columba of Druim Ceat was certainly in touch with reality. But perhaps not all his followers were. There are tough and painful decisions to be made, and sometimes those decisions will be unpopular and cause trouble, but the church cannot abdicate responsibility.

Wilfrid also emphasises the need to continue on our pilgrimage in connection with the whole church of Christ. Each Christian community must travel on hand in hand with the whole church of Christ worldwide, taking on board their insights and offering them our own, and resisting the temptation to hibernate into a comfortable isolation.

The revival of interest in Celtic Christianity has influenced the church for good, but as with all movements some of its more enthusiastic proponents have been rather more extreme than was warranted in criticising Wilfrid and what is loosely termed 'Roman Spirituality'. This 'Roman Spirituality' has informed and influenced the Christian church for many centuries, and the Reformation did not remove all the traces by any means. No spirituality is perfect, and no doubt the church of today has much to learn from the Celts, from the Eastern church (which so much influenced the Celtic church), and from others. But let us not despise the tradition brought to our shores by Augustine of Canterbury and espoused by Wilfrid which has done so much to shape church life in this country. Rather let us take all the cords of spirituality and weave them into a single rope which is stronger than any of the component strands.

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### **NOTES**

1. See Ian Bradley's balanced account of Columba in his *Columba - Pilgrim and Penitent* (Glasgow 1996). Cf. also C.F. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, (Third Edition), Pennsylvania 1991, pp.129ff. and E. John, *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England*, Manchester 1996, p.35f. for a balanced account of Wilfrid.
2. Cf. Nora Chadwick, *The Celts*, New Edition (Harmondsworth 1997) pp.199-200. See, however, P. Beresford Ellis, *Celts and Saxons*, London 1993, pp.119ff. for an alternative view, namely that the Celts were deliberately following the customs of the Eastern Church rather than the preferences of the Western Church. Of course, there was not at that time the great East/West split in the church that later developed (An Eastern monk -Theodore- was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury), but divergences were beginning to appear that would assume greater significance later.
3. Cf. Ian Bradley, *op. cit.* P.68.
4. Cf. *ibid.* pp.47-9, Mayr-Harting, *op.cit.* p.78("Columba.....was expected to exercise some of the powers of the old druids.")
5. Quoted in T.W. Rolleston, *Celtic*(Reissued London 1994) p.37. Note also the power the 'satirist' (obviously a druidical figure) had to require Cuchulain's spear from him, even in a situation of mortal danger (complying with the request led directly to Cuchulain's death), *ibid* p.232f.
6. Nora Chadwick describes St. Anthony as a 'favourite saint'. *op. cit* p.249
7. *op. cit.* p.66. See also P. Beresford Ellis, *op.cit.* Pp.119ff.
8. *op. cit.* P.252
9. Ian Bradley, *op. cit.* P.69

10. *ibid* p.53

11. *ibid*. P.83

12. *ibid*. Pp.84ff.

13. Important sources for the life of St. Wilfrid are Bede's *A History of the English Church and People*, London 1968 and Eddius Stephanus' *Life of Wilfrid*, in *The Age of Bede* (London 1988). The introduction to *The Age of Bede* by D.H. Farmer is also useful.

14. Cf. Eddius Stephanus, *op. cit.* chapter 17 (*Age of Bede* pp. 123-4). See also Mayr-Harting's assessment that, "If there were popularity stakes for the story of the Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity, they would not be won by Wilfrid." *op.cit.* p.129

15. Ian Bradley, *op. cit.* P.93.

16. The speeches and petitions recorded by Bede and Eddius Stephanus (surely based on contemporary records) in relation to the Synod of Whitby and Wifrid's various appeals to Rome are masterpieces of the art of contemporary advocacy.

17. Archbishop Theodore evidently so regarded them, when he declared Chad's consecration uncanonical (Bede, *History of the English Church* 4:2, cf. 3:28)

18. Thirty years before Whitby the Irish bishop Cummian complained that Iona seemed to think that Rome was wrong, Alexandria was wrong, Gaul was wrong, and only Iona and a tip of Ireland were right. Cf. D.H. Farmer (ed), *The Age of Bede*, p.23. Celtic areas on the Continent had begun accepting the Roman usage about the same time as Cummian spoke (cf. N. Chadwick, *op. cit.* P.214).

19. Cf. eg. R. Simpson, *Exploring Celtic Spirituality* (London 1995) p.141.

20. Wilfrid may even have laid the foundations for the rooting of the Roman ways in Scottish culture, as he is reputed to have strongly championed the cult of St. Andrew, which spread from the Northumbrian English to the Picts of north-east Fife in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. The Picts apparently adopted this cult as a counter to the Scots' support for the Gaelic Columba. In later centuries the cult of St. Andrew eased the way for the spread of Roman Christianity north of the border. Cf. Ian Bradley, *op. cit.* P.97

22. Cf. Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Wilfrid*, 36-37 in D.H. Farmer (ed) *The Age of Bede* pp.143-4.