

Celtic Sts: Brigid - 8 mm
Tape Columba - 5 mm
David - Wales - 2 mm
Aiden - 3 mm
Hilda - 2 mm
Whitby - 3 mm
Nature - 3 mm

LECTURE 11
CELTIC CHRISTIANITY II

THE IRISH CHURCH AFTER PATRICK

As discussed last week, the organization that Patrick tried to impose on the Church, the Roman Diocessin model, failed in Ireland since the Monastic type was actually there first and towns are needed for bishops to sit in, which didn't exist for three hundred years when the Vikings began to build the countrys first towns.

By the sixth century we find Columba deliberately rejecting the chance of promotion to the office of bishop as it was so trivial. Monasteries were fulfilling their early ideals--becoming universities of religion, with Christ, a liberal chancellor, permitting the study of non-religious topics.

100
When the diocesan movement did take hold, much later on, efforts were made to change the history of this early period. The *Catalogue of the Saints of Ireland*, written in the 9th century, classifies Patrick and the other bishops as the "most holy". The second order were a grade below that the "very holy". These were considered to be under the faulty influence of Celtic missions from Wales. This included most of the saints familiar to the Celtic church.

Finally there were the "holy", the hermits and ascetics who led lives of pious deprivation but showed little sense of social responsibility. The analysis is mostly wrong and names are juggled to make Rome's side plausible. What it shows clearly is the subsequent victory of the orthodox Roman school of Christianity in Ireland over the babblingly opinionated Celtic church and how far Ireland had "strayed" in her isolation from the Roman camp.

The Irish religion was not a unified whole. The south of the country had taken its character from Spain and Aquitaine --the last Celtic refuges on the Continent-- and indirectly from the eccentric churches of Syria and Egypt. The North was based more on Rome thru conscientious intermediaries like Patrick.

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THE CHURCH AND THE ARISTOCRACY:

Ireland absorbed the message brought from abroad but was able to maintain the framework of their old structure. The aristocracy of the days of Druids dispensed with the tree priests and gave it favors to the newcomers. result: the church became more than usually undemocratic.

The Church depended on the aristocracy for land and money. After a generation a practice of mutual advantage was worked out. It became the custom for younger sons of ruling families to enter the local monastery, bringing with them a kind of ecclesiastical dowry, in return for which they would eventually rise to the office of abbot.

Once under a family's appointment, the abbacy would stay that way, sometimes for as long as five hundred years. From here more ambitious empire building banding monasteries together with the most influential abbot becoming a minor primate. Columba himself, founder of Iona in Scotland, was a product of this system.

THE IRISH: THE CHOSEN RACE

Perhaps the most illuminating trait of the Irish Church--for it helps explain its faults, its successes and its subsequent history--was that in its isolation it developed a distinct belief in itself as the chosen race.

Biographers of the saints associated their lives with the saints of the old and new testaments and later saints as well. For example, Columba turned water into wine for the eucharist. There were the "Twelve apostles of Ireland", including Patrick, Columba and Brendan, etc. Columba chose 12 monks to accompany him to Scotland. Columba's birth is even preceeded by an annunciation.

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Identification of Mary with the cause of Ireland appears in all the literature, but it is seldom explicit. If it were more so it would have become a heresy.

When these ideas came to the notice of the orthodox missions from Rome, it was not appreciated. There are other Irish claims to a favored position in God's eyes, so much so that much in line with Belloc's "How odd of God to choose the Jews" has come another poem, "How did God fail to choose the Gael?"

Privilege was extended at the end of the world. Irishmen on the Day of judgement were to appear before Patrick, not Christ, and Ireland would be spared the final horrors of doomsday by a gentle wave inundating it a week before.

PENANCE AND DISCIPLINE

The Irish efforts at physically attempting to resolve the weakness of human nature, ^{the Penitentials were writings} on penance, discipline, and rules of various abbeys and the recording of these was one of the lasting characteristics of the Irish Church.

The system and not necessarily the practice of penance and sanction were well known so the Irish were looked on as a race of enduring heroes, because it was thought they lived up to the standards they set themselves. Those standards may have been as remote but they created an aura, and gave the Irish a special position in men's minds.

cut [It can never be known how far the rules remained theory, and how much other Christian nations resented the paperwork, or the actual higher sanctity, of the Irish. There is reason to think that at times the Irish took themselves too seriously.

Most the saints were not paragons of virtue and it is the saving grace of many biographers that instead of omitting the failings of their subjects they describe them and then justify, leaving us--and perhaps in a wry way they meant us to-- to discard the excuses for failure.

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TRAVEL AND MISSIONARY ACTIVITY:

The qualities of discipline and restlessness came together in the expansion of the Irish to places abroad, but the origin of their missionary activity was the conviction that they were singled out as the chosen, special people.

The Irish took the message about leaving home (father, mother, lands, etc.) to their hearts. It was the perfect justification for their restlessness. Going into the unknown had a long and awesome tradition in Ireland. Around Britain many of the islands were colonised by hermits. The basic desire was to renounce all for God, but there were more material aims to achieve in travel. 100

Contact with Britain in the mid sixth century revealed that that island was in a religious plight, invaded and dominated by the tutanic tribes and the gods of those tribes. It was at this time that the young Irish Church, convinced of its own position, its own special preferment in God's eyes, began to realise its mission and that the first trickle of missionaries began to leave the country.

Even so, the first interest was obeying Christ's injunction to lead a perfect life. Even Columba left Ireland to be simply an exile for Christ, not an apostle among the tribes of north Britain. 200

PILGRIMS:

In the Old Irish Life of Columba three kinds of pilgrims are mentioned.

First: is the person who left home in body but not spirit and thereby earned no merit.

Second: is the would-be traveller prevented by bodily weakness from taking off. He is a pilgrim by desire, and his spirit is right.

Third: comes the real pilgrim who leaves bodily and in will. that one is the perfect pilgrim, of whom Columba himself can be taken as an example. Perfection is not always present, but as usual practice does not entirely conform with the rule. 300

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Show tape: monasticism + Brigd - @ 10.5 min
 COLUMBA (521-597) Columba - 5 min

Columba (whose name means dove) was born into a royal family, the direct descendent of a king, Niall of the Nine hostages. His mother herself was daughter of a king. He could have become a king if that had been his desire. However, he felt obliged to serve God.

His name, Columcille, by which he is also known, means "column of the church"

cut He studied at several monasteries, and seemed to become the favorite at each (probably because he brought a good dowry). He had a very strong singing voice, was apparently tall and handsome. He was as strict with himself as with others.

Columba's early training had brought him to the dwindling ranks of the old bardic order and later on, when he had settled on Iona, he was to return once to his own country for a conference in which that order, which offended some Christians by its devotion to old values, was saved by his intervention.

no with Film

The episode which apparently led to his leaving Ireland was an action of Columba's which led to the slaughter of three thousand men (a symbolic number, most likely) three thousand means a big number.

Whatever actually happened, and there are several possibilities, Columba felt he had done wrong and set himself a penance of perpetual exile, or was set the penance. As one account says he was told to convert as many souls as were killed in the battle.

One must realize that monasteries were not much better than the secular people and monks were not excluded from military service till the 9th century and remained devoted to their martial experience.. Thus inter-monastic skirmishes were as common as competitive sports today. these were rough days.

Thus at age 41 Columba departs for Dalriada in Scotland, which had been settled for about half a century or more.

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COLUMBA'S MISSION:

First of all the source of the word Scot seems to be an Irish verb meaning to plunder and dates back to the 4th and 5th centuries when piracy was the main contact between the Irish and their neighbors.

Gaelic was the language of north Scotland, the Highlands, and English that of the low lands. At the time of Columba, this pattern was already emerging.

cwt [How Christian was Scotland when Columba arrived. the debate is on. As far as the Irish are concerned, Columba is the one who brought Christianity but the Scots say he simply took credit for a job that was more or less done th the Pict Ninian two centuries before.]

BEDE says that Ninian was responsible for converting the southern Picts and [Columba the northern. However, Columba got the lion's share of credit.]

The thing is Columbas' arrival was at a time when previous attempts at evangelization had lost their impetus. Part of the reason for this was the conglomeration of races in the country, each speaking its own language and therefore maintaining more hostile attitudes to one another than in Ireland.

THE PICTS above the Antonine Wall were a Celtic race linked by antique ties to the Irish Gaels, but quite differentiated after a seperation of at least five hundred years.

South of there were the British tribes whose links were with Wales, for both had been pushed back by the Germanic invasions from their heritage in the English midlands. (Wales derives from a teutonic word Walas, meaning strangers)

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NINIAN had belonged to the old British inhabitants of Galloway, and went on his mission soon after the year 400. His father is said to have been a Christian king, and he himself went to Rome for his education and was there consecrated a bishop.

On his way back home he went to Martain De Tours, the idol of early monastics, and was lent stonemasons by the saintly man to build a new foundation on his return to Whithorn in Galloway.

The monastery was well built and because of its architectural distinction, was named the White House, Candida Casa. During and after Ninian's time it expanded, won a distant reputation and counted Finnian of Moville and other Irish pioneers among its pupils.

It was the northern most branch of Welsh influence on Ireland, before the current was reversed and the Irish streamed back to the larger island to retrieve its people for their creed.

Dedication of Churches to Ninian go all the way up the east coast of Scotland and more up the center. According to Bede, the Picts had left paganism long before Columba arrived on the scene. However, there had been a relapse.

cut St. Finbarr, a dynamic Irishman, crossed the Irish sea on horseback about 550 and proselytised in the western isles and Argyll. However, in 560 the Irish community in Argyll was invaded by the Picts from the north under their king Brude, and defeated. Brude and his people were diehard pagans so when Columba arrived and looked beyond the small, harrassed settlement, he had to face the prospect of work in virgin territory. cut

Columba had sworn to go where he could not see his homeland. He would land on an island and climb the highest peak and look. Finally, when he got to Iona, he could not see Ireland so it was there he and his twelve monks settled.

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IONA AND ITS MISSION: The monks established their routine, built the church and monastery, etc. Once the monastery had been organized they began to go out into the mountains of Scotland and the islands of the sea to evangelize.

Columba's aim was to convert the Picts and King Brude. He had a tough time as the Picts had conquered the Irish a few years before and were not sympathetic to a mission from them. He decided to go straight to King Brude, a long and dangerous journey to Inverness.

On the way they found a group of peasants burying a man who had been seized and bitten by a water beast. Columba told one of his men to swim out into the Loch but the monster went after him. Columba made the sign of the cross in the air and commanded the beast "you will go no further, turn back speedily" Hearing the command he pulled back and has been reticent ever since to show himself.

BRUDE'S CONVERSION: in spite of a druid foster-father who tried to keep Columba away, He was able to make the gates fall back with the sign of the cross and a knock on the giant door. Brude was convinced and went to meet Columba and address him pleasantly. However, Broichan, the foster father, did not convert for he was a magician, a fairy tale character who kept trying to make trouble.

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To make the impression he had, Columba must have had something more solid than bravado and miracles. To the Picts and scots it offered several things: first, it brought a different view of the afterlife; second: the lessons of a riper civilization, for more of the technical knowledge of Rome had crossed to Ireland than had penetrated the fastnesses of the Highlands.

there was medical knowledge and improved agricultural methods and above all a satisfying, tho exacting routine for life in a small community. It gave an edge and new point to life.

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There are tales of saints everywhere in Scotland at this period; and over them all Iona, tho without a bishop, retained her authority. Unlike the Irish Church, fragmented into a thousand monasteries that governed themselves, the Scottish recognized the supremacy of Iona and its abbot held the power of a primate over the whole heirarchy of Scotland.

In the hierarchy, Columba was no more than a priest, yet in influence he was stronger than a metropolitan bishop.

Columba had founded the abbey and community that was to be a rallying point for religion in Scotland throughout the centuries that followed. Now a new abbey has been built to try to revive the faded message of Christianity this century. It is ecumenical, much like Taize in France, and a place of pilgrimage.

Good place for Break *****

AUGUSTINE arrived as the archbishop of Canterbury the year Columba died (597). England as it was at the end of the 6th century was one of the few almost totally pagan countries of Europe, for the new invaders had brought Odin and Thor to replace the bud of Christianity, which they cut.

After Authur, ancient British morals had declined. Those Christians which were still in In Britain at this time headed for the safety of the Welsh mountains and the remote sanctitiy of the west country.

There were still some Christian remnants among the country population, and more recently the king of Kent, Ethelbert, had married a Christian princess from Gaul. His conversion was not just due to Augustine but it led quickly to more successes. This lay the basis for the establishment in Britain for the solidity of Roman authority. However, Augustine lacked the ability to not hurt people's pride, to persuade with subtlety. He lacked many qualities needed in Britain.

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ROME VS. CELTIC CHRISTIANITY:

The influence of the Irish church was well established in Wales and parts of northern England and the areas of Scotland travelled by Columba. A clash was inevitable and the first sparks came somewhere along the Welsh border when Augustine and the British bishops met each other.

The British were naturally suspicious for the roman church came hand in glove with the conquering Saxons, their recent godless conquerors. For them it was a degrading situation.

When finished his "history of The English church" in 731 AD,
Bede, always pro Roman, speaks of the first council in a detached way that leaves one appreciating the British (Celtic) view. On the way to the council the British clerics visit an old hermit to ask how much they should be prepared to forsake of their old traditions.

the hermit said they should follow Augustine to the letter if he was humble. How would they know? His answer was: If Augustine is meek and lowly of heart, it shows he bears the yoke of Christ himself, and offers it to you.

However, if he is haughty and unbending, then he is not of God, and you should not listen to him." The test he says, is to be on their arrival, in seeing whether Augustine stand up to welcome them, or sits aloof. He failed to stand.

Augustine told the British they must accept the Roman timing of Easter, the Roman method of administering baptism, and the responsibility of preaching to the Saxons. And if they do not, death will be their punishment. The British left in a huff and in time Augustine's threats were carried out. At the Battle of Chester in 616, King Ethelfrith of Bernicia routed and destroyed the massed armies of the Welsh princes.

Over the next half century, Augustine's successors consolidated their influence over lowland Britain and pushed it north to modern Northumberland.

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the Church made sure the Anglo-saxon kings had to rely on the political skill of the church bishops to carry on contact with Gaul and countries beyond. And above all they used their knowledge of legal theory to frame new civil laws, and so codify the states's dependence on the church.

Meanwhile, the mission stations founded by Columba began to extend south as well as north. They did not have the foreign contacts of the Roman church, but they could win loyalty and friends. Iona began to reach out and south until it came, like the Roman mission, to Northumbria.

CELTIC CHURCH ESTABLISHED:

Northumbria had already been won when Edwin, the king, accepted Christianity in 626, thanks to his Christian wife and Augustine's disciple, Paulinus. Edwin then backed the mission to spread Christianity among his people. With Edwin's death in 633 Oswald, the rightful king, came out of exile where he had been at Iona. Thus, the kingdom was Christian again, this time Irish Xian.

As soon as he was established in Northumbria, Oswald sent for Celtic bishops and monks to settle and consolidate the Christian religion there. However, the bishop sent returned quickly to Iona saying the English were obstinate and barbarous and he couldn't teach them a thing.

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AIDEN was then sent, an excellent choice, for he had descretion and many othervirtues as well, according to Bede. He is the last of the great founders of the Irish spiritual empire on English soil. Aiden, born in Ireland and trained in Iona, carried the traditions of his homeland with him and imposed them where he went.

The fact that Aiden was obviously a man of God and yet cut his hair with a celtic (druid) tonsure and celebrated Easter on the wrong day, really bugged Bede writing nearly 100 years after Aiden's efforts.

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LINDISFARNE:

Lindisfarne was where Aiden chose to build his monastery, and is on one of the bleakest stretches of the English coast, a flat and almost treeless area for miles. There were always invaders and the north wind, but it was a chosen island--as the Irish always chose places--because it was exposed and trying, and thus putting its inhabitants at the mercy of God.

Aiden also brought the other harsh disciplines and habits. Bede says Aiden tolerated little compromise in asserting his idea of a Christian way of life. This at times alienated their following. The most important thing about Aiden is the fact that the life he recommended to converts differed in nothing from the life led by himself and his monks.

However, Aiden was very friendly with the king, as they had spent years together at Iona. Oswald would interpret for him on his missions, until Aiden mastered the new language. Aiden, however, never let it go to his head and always remained humble.

The Irish church was repeating the success it had enjoyed in its homeland with churches built all over the north of England. However, it was not a peaceful time. Oswald himself was killed in battle in 642. His kingdom of Northumbria was split with Oswald's brother, Oswin holding half. He was betrayed and died 9 years later.

Aiden died within a few days of Oswin's murder but the monastery was well established and could survive all the commotions around it. For a time it seemed that the Christianity of the whole island might bear the stamp of the Irish.

ROMAN INFLUENCE: Augustine's successors had spread their influence in many areas who had come over to the religion and acknowledged the primacy of canterbury, which meant the direct authority of Rome, not the happy token respect of the Irish but submitting to Rome's authority.

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In a few more years, the two missions would meet, each deriving doctrine and spirit from the same source, each teaching the same basic dogmas, sharing ritual, ethic and God; and each capable of the bitterest mutual spite.

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COLUMBANUS: THE CONTINENTAL MISSION

A contemporary of the founder of Iona is Columbanus (543 - 615 AD). Some have nominated him as the patron saint of European unity. He has also been called "the most dynamic personality the Celtic church produced.

And finally, Pope Pius XI this century said of Columbanus: "The more experts study the most obscure problems of the Middle Ages the clearer it becomes that the renaissance of Christian learning in France, Germany and Italy is due to the work and zeal of St. Columban"

His feast day is Nov. 23 and he is certainly the best documented historically of all his contemporary saints.

the Irish movement to the continent shared few of the characteristics of its host. Superficially the Irish were a Catholic mission coming to a people more orthodox than themselves. France was nominally Christian but continental Christianity had become divorced from any of the ideals Jesus had taught.

It was a tool for use against Arians and pagans, a hoisted standard, as empty of spirit as the blue and green labels of the Byzantine factions, who massacred each other for preferring one pretty color to another. The real source for most actions was a greed for power.

At this time, all over the west (except in Ireland) books and scholarship were disappearing. The great library at Alexandria had held 600,000 volumes at the turn of the millennium. In 391 Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, burned most of them. What he didn't get, the Moslems burned later.

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In this setting, one religion was more or less like another, all a means to material grabbing. Christianity and paganism went together, especially in the country areas. The Christian God was worshipped along with the sun and moon. Christian priests predicted the future from the entrails of birds and animals. Now the Bible was used for divination, sticking pins in verses to read the future. God was kinder than their former protectors. That, after all, was the condition on which they had turned to him.

Into this milieu of shift and deception came the bands of immigrant Irishmen with a clear and unequivocal sense of purpose. That purpose had nothing to do with money or territory and little with emaciating themselves for no purpose.

Worship came first, but good worship which presupposed good health.

They revived long-term farming methods on the land they took over with which they fed themselves, gave free provisions to the needy, and sold the rest for money to expand their activities.

cut They were healthy in mind as much as body and gave no precedence to material things. They showed how to order things for the best in circumstances that were far from good and in dealing with people they showed little fear or favor to rich or poor.

MONASTERIES: were built but had to move sometimes because of the need for more land since so many Franks were flocking to Columbanus. They slowly gained the respect of the tuetonic tribes around them and the creed was taken for what it was, inadequate and inexplicable.

however, more thanks to their farming methods and the strength of the monks, young men began to convert as they discovered one didn't have to be at war to be strong. For the first time on the continent, Xianity began to appeal to the paganus.

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cut COLUMBANUS RULE:

The Rule drawn up by Columbanus still is in existence. It is a model for asceticism, not the killing privation of some hermits of the east, but as hard as any sane body can undergo for long. cut

Obedience to senior monks, fasting twice a week, and silence all the time except on rare occasions. confession was private and explicit penitentials were drawn up listing fit punishments for each crime. Austerity was the keynote.

It was not, however, and austerity that repelled. Suspicion among locals was replaced by curiosity and then by affection.

Columbanus founded three monasteries which all overflowed their walls. Columbanus travelled among them, and wrote letters when he couldn't come. He fulminates against what he considers wrong, and praises without qualification what is right. He has no guile.

Unfortunately, as his ways came to the attention of the French Bishops they found no pleasure in the accounts they heard of the immigrant missionary. The Irish brought with them their learning, their zeal and military discipline allied with rowdy argumentativeness. They showed the strong side of Christian meekness while the bishops wallowed in moral decline. For them, the Irish were a threat.

CONTROVERSY BETWEEN CELTIC AND ROMAN FACTIONS:

The controversy that was brewing centered around three main points, three widespread Irish "irregularities."

FIRST: was the power of the bishops. Because the institution of the monastery fit so well in the social structure of Ireland, bishops had never had great importance after Patrick's first attempt. Bishops existed as they were necessary to ordain priests but among the Irish they were rubber stamp priests. Their power never was that of an abbot. This really was a point of dissent for the French Bishops.

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SECOND: was a technicality, the Irish system of private penance. Public confession, and the consequent public branding of sinners put far more power in the hands of priests. Where the real message of Christianity had disappeared from view, it became a useful weapon in politics and the general gaining of ends.

THIRD: was the old question of Easter. As in Northumbria, so in France, the Irish celebrated the Passion on days different from those around them. The Roman system had been fixed in 525 based on a 19 year cycle while the Irish still worked on an 84 year cycle that before had been widely practiced in the west.

A synod was held by the French bishops to discuss, among other things, the matter of Easter. Columbanus did not attend but wrote a letter defending his ways and those of his countrymen. Columbanus had written Pope Gregory the Great 3 years earlier so the verdict was only cautious condemnation.

The king Theodoric, with the instigation of his grandmother Brunhild, managed to get Columbanus and his monks ejected from the country. So in 612 soldiers arrived and the monks agreed to depart. Only the Irish monks must go, said the order so old friends too leave of each other after many years.

Columbanus, close to 70, did not want to go back to Ireland and thru a series of events ended up going south towards Rome. The Lombards had settled in Italy and in Rome as the dominant tribe and Columbanus set out "to cut out and exterminate with the cauterising knife of the Scriptures the perfidious doctrine of the Arians".

Thus, with the warring and misery going on throughout Europe, Columbanus found a new enemy to fight. That enemy was Arianism, and the Lombards were Arian. ^{cut} Ulfilas the priest had edited the Bible that was to be the basis of Arian beliefs.

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The heresy appealed to the more aggressive barbarian tribes and spread among them till the split of Roman and Barbarian was augmented by their respective identity with Catholic and Arian Christianity. It was this breach that Columbanus set out to heal. thus, he preached, argued and cajoled for years in this crusade.

He made an Irish impact on the papacy and on Italy, inspite of the size of his country and its remoteness from the patriarch's city. That he and his country did not make a greater impression is due to a fundamental difference between the papal church and the Irish.

The Irish were concerned with reaching the kingdom of Heaven and nothing else. The papacy, tho not blind to heaven, saw its attainment thru earthly organization. They both wanted obedience but for different reasons.

cut if
not
Time Gregory the Great in the 6th century gave the Benedictine monastic system his support. The monasticism practised by the Irish had always been too intense and extreme to be anything but a confusion and a nuisance.

The Italians were more practical than the Irish and much more moderate and more controlled in the demands on the monks.

The Irish were worlds apart. Their instinct was for the dramatic and the extreme. For the Benedictines, the Irish were way out of date.

A year after arriving in Italy, Columbanus died on Nov. 23, 615 AD. He was an essential part of the Irish expansion, tho he was an apostle too late, a necessary anacronism.

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CONCLUSION:

The Irish mission was not planned or sustained consciously. the urge that drove them to leave home was part of being Irish, not the need of the continentals. It was the recurring passion to leave all to find Christ, the obedience to biblical command and the imitation of Abraham.

It has been calculated that before the end of the 7th century there were 94 monasteries on the continent that owed their foundation directly or indirectly to Columbanus himself. As late as the 12th century in Germany Irish monasteries were founded by newly arrived immigrants.

Some habits of the Irish did not die out. Private confession spread across Europe superseding the old public disgrace. Penitentials were accepted in many monasteries.

Irish impact was mainly felt by those with whom the Irish came directly in touch, for lives were enhanced by the direct example of a dedicated and unshakeable belief in God and Christ's ethic.

very important
~~Second~~, was their impact on learning in general. The Irish preserved the old traditions and spread them by copying. Since they kept alive pagan classics that would almost surely have been suppressed and forgotten without their care and industry.

To some extent they were responsible for the modern languages of France, Spain and Italy. W/o their skill in Latin, the language might have been less thoroughly preserved in these tongues.

Long after Columbanus' time missions continued to bring hundreds of monks to the continent, and Ireland's fame went on drawing continental pupils and pilgrims.

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