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Philip Perry's Saint Columba and the Protestant Celtic Church

Judith Rebollar Villanueva

Tutor/Tutora: Anunciación Carrera de la Red

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

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ABSTRACT

The mission of St. Columba and his contribution to the formation of the Church of Ireland and Scotland have been transmitted through the lives of saints and various ecclesiastical histories. The textual transmission of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (ca. 699) ensured that the cult of Columba was transmitted across the European continent throughout the Middle Ages. With the Anglican Reformation, his figure and that of the Churches of Scotland, Ireland and Wales, with the uniqueness of their practices, served to defend that the history of the Church of England was that of a 'Celtic Church' independent of Rome. The English Catholic priest Philip Mark Perry, Rector of the English College of Valladolid between 1768 and 1774, wrote in his *Sketch of the Ancient British History* (unpublished until 2009) a sketch of Columba's life and debunked the myth of the so-called 'Celtic Church,' two hundred years ahead of the most important debates on the British Churches.

Keywords: Columba, Early British Church, Philip Mark Perry, Recusants, British history, Church history

RESUMEN

La misión de San Columba y su contribución a la formación de la iglesia de Irlanda y Escocia han sido transmitidas a través de vidas de santos e historias eclesiásticas diversas. La transmisión textual de la *Vita Columbae* de Adomnán (699 aprox.) consiguió que el culto de Columba se transmitiera por el continente europeo a lo largo de la Edad Media. Con la Reforma Anglicana, su figura y la de las iglesias de Escocia, Irlanda y Gales, con la singularidad de sus prácticas, sirvieron para defender que la historia de la Iglesia de Inglaterra era la de una 'Iglesia Celta' independiente de Roma. El sacerdote católico inglés Philip Mark Perry, Rector del Colegio de los Ingleses de Valladolid entre 1768 y 1774, escribió en su *Sketch of the Ancient British History* (inédito hasta 2009) un esbozo de la vida de Columba y desacreditó el mito de la llamada 'Iglesia celta', doscientos años antes de los debates más importantes sobre las iglesias británicas.

Palabras clave: Columba, Iglesia británica temprana, Philip Mark Perry, Recusantes, Historia británica, Historia de la iglesia

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Introduction

This Final Degree Project belongs to the field of historical and cultural studies. It is focused on a figure from the early ecclesiastical history of Ireland and Scotland, St Columba (d.597) and on the treatment that the Rector of the Royal College of St Alban in Valladolid, Philip M. Perry (1720-1774), made of his life in his Sketch of the Ancient British History. It deals with ecclesiastical history, transmission of texts, and religious controversy, from the fifth century AD until the end of the eighteenth century. It analyzes the way in which St Columba, his contemporaries and the church of his time are integrated into his Recusant history of the British Church up to the end of the sixth century, written to defend its adherence to Rome from its origins.

Columba (520-597) is known as one of the most representative saints of Ireland and Scotland. He came from a line of Irish kings belonging to the Uí Neill clan, settled in the Irish kingdom of Dál Riata. He began his religious training at a very early age and at the age of 42 he left Ireland as a result of a hostile encounter with the bishop Finnio—the one who had been in charge of his religious training. Then, Columba went to Great Britain, where he stayed with Conall, king of the British Dál Riata, who gave him the isle of Iona. Once established there, his mission focused on converting the whole Pictish nation, until the day of his death.

After the Protestant Reformation, the Irish and Scottish Protestants and Catholics gave a different treatment to the Church of Columba's time. On one hand, the Irish and Scottish Protestants argued that Columba's Church was proto-Protestant, since according to them, it remained free from Rome and papal influence. Both claimed that they were the real heirs of the Columban Church, and basing on Ussher's claims, they also stated that the primitive Church of Ireland differed on certain points of ritual from that of Rome from the beginning of the times. On the other hand, Catholics asserted that, despite they were indeed their ancestors, and although they had different ritual aspects, they never ceased to be in communion with Rome. Furthermore, they stated that a homogeneous church did not exist,

since each church in a geographical part will have different customs, without this meaning a break with Rome.

The belief in the existence of a so-called 'Celtic Church' separate from Rome emerged in the nineteenth century among Protestant historians, but is still widely spread today and is rooted in the earlier historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, like, for instance, the Anglican archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656), or the Anglo-Irish antiquarian Walter Harris (1686-1761), who claimed that the Church of Ireland was the direct heir of a Protestant 'Celtic' Christianity. From the seventeenth century and throughout all the eighteenth, the figure of Columba and that of the representatives of the British Church have been used by Protestants to defend that the first church existing in the British Isles was independent of Rome, making reference to its rites and its celebrations. They claimed that the Celtic Church presented a different institutional organization—a monastic one—different from the rest of the churches of the continent. Moreover, they attested that the religious practices of this Celtic Church also differed from the other churches, as could be reflected in the private penance practices, the way of wearing the tonsure, or the celebration dates of Easter.

Philip M. Perry (1720-1774) is an exception to the trend in his time. As a Catholic Recusant, his task was to give a response to that previous Protestant interpretation, saying that the representatives of the first British, Irish and Scottish Churches—such as Columba—did obey Rome and did not act independently from it. His allegations to prove that can be summarize in that he stated that the British Church has been in constant connection with Rome, since the British prelates went to the synods and councils that were summoned by Rome, where bishops met and made decisions for their respective regions—such as the Council of Rimini, the Council of Nicaea, or the Synod of Whitby. Apart from this, and in order to prove this connection, Perry also alluded to the existence of figures like St Ninian and St Patrick—who were the first preachers of the Christian gospel among the Picts and the Irish, respectively—and from whom the British Church had been gradually receiving the Roman Catholic faith. Contrary to what Protestants—such as Ussher—have claimed, Perry claimed that even though the British Church differed in some points from

the Roman Church, it did not suppose a separation of communion, since this was something common to a large part of the Irish Churches of the time. In his words, he said that Britain was chosen by God to be evangelized by Rome.

This study is the first one in analyzing Philip Perry's contribution on Columba, the Irish, the Picts and the Scots, as well as on the British Church. To do so, I have first researched the lives of Columba and his transmission from medieval times to the Protestant Reformation. Afterwards, the two different interpretations made by Catholics and Protestants of Scotland and Ireland regarding his figure, the peoples who inhabited Ireland and Scotland at his time, and the interpretation of the history of his church have been also studied. Finally, Perry's Sketch has been read to identify his position in the religious controversy debate.

The results presented below have been organized into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on how Columba's life and mission have been transmitted through the centuries, focusing on the Middle Ages —especially through Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*—, and the Modern Age, and how, after the Protestant Reformation, his interpretation, along with that of the early British Church, varied significantly between that offered by the Irish and Scottish Protestants, and that of the Catholics, the main point of divergence being whether or not the British Church depended on Rome. Likewise, as a result of this ecclesiastical controversy, the myth of the so-called 'Celtic Church' arises among the first historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Ussher, who affirms the separation between the first British Church and Rome, referring to their different religious practices and customs. It is in this context, in which the figure of Philip Perry—who is going to be treated in the following chapter—emerges. The second and final chapter is focused on how Philip Perry tries to prove in his Sketch that the British Church was in constant connection with that of Rome, from which it received the Catholic faith, despite that it had aspects of ritual and practice that differed from those of Rome. He begins by talking about the continental origin of the inhabitants of the Great Britain, who are said to come from the Northern Scythians, and the barbarous and uncivilized customs that characterized them. He continues arguing how this people was civilized by Rome, and how as a consequence of this connection, Christian religion arrived, and with it, the first saints who would spread

their faith throughout Britain and end up converting the peoples who had remained unconquered. Among these saints, he underlines St Columba. After talking about some of Columba's missions among the Picts and the Scots and how he established his own rule for his monasteries—making allusion to some of their peculiar customs like the celebration of Easter or the way of wearing the tonsure—, Perry ends by emphasizing how Columba managed to convert the Pictish nation through his miracles and prophetic powers, as well as the legacy that he left to the English Church until his death.

In the end, it is intended to show that Perry, through his work and his defense of the Catholic Church, is almost two centuries ahead of the interpretation of the history of the early Churches of Ireland and England that would not come until the end of the twentieth century.

1. Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, its textual transmission and the spread of Columba's cult

Columba (520-597), also known as Colum Cille, is considered one of the most representative saints of early Christian Ireland and Scotland. He came from a lineage of Irish kings—he was descendant of Niall of the Nine Hostages—belonging to the Uí Neill clan, who were settled in the Irish kingdom of Dál Riata. Columba started his religious training in boyhood, and then, he studied under the bishop Finnio. When he was forty-two, he left Ireland as a result of a hostile encounter with this same bishop; this dispute led to the battle of Cúl Drebene (560-61), after which Columba was excommunicated and went to Britain in 563. Once there, he stayed with the overking of the British Dál Riata, Conall, who gave Columba the isle of Iona, the site of the principal of his monastic foundations. He spent a total of thirty-four years on pilgrimage in Britain, returning to Ireland only once. On June 9, 597—the Pentecost Sunday—, he died in Iona, where he was buried.

1.1. Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*

Columba's most renowned biographer was Adomnán (628-704). He was the ninth abbot of Iona, where he was in charge of the monastery during the absence of Failbe—his predecessor—, from 673 to 676. His father was descended by five generations from Columba's grandfather, but the first time Adomnán started to know about Columba was when Arcluf, a Gaulish bishop, visited him in Iona on his return from a voyage to the Holy Land. From all the information he collected, Adomnán wrote two works: the first was a treatise on sacred places—based on Arcluf's accounts—called *De Locis Sanctis*, and the second was his renowned *Vita Columbae*, composed in Iona in 699 and which later would become "the most complete piece of this type of biography that all of Europe can boast" (Reeves 7). *Vita Columbae* was divided in three books—as a convention of hagiography, the first book being on Columba's prophetic revelations, the second on his miracles, and the third on his visions of angels.

The sources on which Adomnán relied to write his *Vita Columbae* were both oral and written (Reeves 6). With respect to this first aspect, Adomnán had the opportunity to converse with those who had known Columba, such as the bishop Arcluf. As for the written sources he employed, there is the account of Cumméne the Fair, which Adomnán transferred almost intact to his own work, specifically to the third book (6). However, Adomnán also had another memoir, where he talked about an event that was not included in Cumméne's account (6). In addition to this, he also used as reference the poems in the Scots language on the praises of Columba—probably written by a contemporary of Columba—as well as those written by Baithene Mor—a friend of the saint—, who commemorated details of his life (6). Further to this, Adomnán also drew on the metrical compositions of St. Mura to deal with Columba's childhood (7).

1.2. The *Vita Columbae* throughout the Middle Ages

Through the early Middle Ages, the spread of the cult of Columba in Continental Europe was possible thanks to the transmission of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (699), and to the oral tradition of the Irish monks who travelled around the Continent. As Adomnán states in his *Vita*, the fame of Columba "was already known on the Continent even in the 7th century" (Reeves 6), despite his cult was not as much spread as those of Patrick and Brigit. His statement was supported by the references to the festivities of Brigit, Patrick, and Columba in some texts of the seventh and eighth centuries, like the calendar of Saint Willibrord—found in Frisia—, which is the oldest reference to Columba on the Continent.

Once Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* was written, the first areas the cult of Columba reached were those of Northern France and the Rhine Valley, since the earliest copy of *Vita Columbae*, written in Iona by Dorbéne (713), was brought to northern France during the 8th century. Moreover, considering that this copy became the source of all the rest of copies of the *Vita Columbae,* its subsequent copies reached other areas of the Continent in the following centuries—ninth and tenth centuries—the monasteries of St-Gall and Reichenau being the main centers of transmission of these copies. There, some important writers like Walahfrid Strabo, Notker Balbulus of St-Gall, and the Abbot Grimoald produced their own works in which Columba was mentioned. Walahfrid Strabo alluded to Columba in his poem on the death of Blathmac, the cleric killed while trying to protect Columba's relics during the Viking raid on Iona in 825. In the case of Notker Balbulus, he wrote on the significance of the cult of Columba in St-Gall—probably based on the Dorbéne Codex. Finally, the Abbot Grimoald produced the best-known version of the Life of Columba during the Middle Ages—and also the first to be printed (by the Bollandists in 1604)—concerned with Columba's miracles and the edification of the monks. In the following centuries, due to the arrival of many Irishmen to Regensburg, the cult of Columba was reinforced in Germany—indeed, as evidenced by some calendars and martyrologies, Columba was commemorated in the regions of Swabia and Bavaria. Outside Germany, thanks to the arrival of Hermann of St Félix's *Vita Cadroe* at Metz, the interest in the cult of Columba was revived in northern France (Lorraine). Apart from these regions, Columba

also reached Brittany, the Loire Valley, and Normandy, but his cult did not leave many traces there.

Throughout the late Middle Ages, from the 20th century onwards, the cult of Columba suffered a decline, due to the fact that it has been only commemorated in those places where there was Irish activity. Therefore, once the Irish presence on the Continent disappeared, his cult declined. Furthermore, Ireland started to be portrayed as a land of savages and pagans (Picard 20), and even the work of Adomnán began to be considered to be barbarous and no worthy of reproduction. Thereby, it was not until the Modern Age, with the birth of the printing press, that both the cult of Columba and the work of Adomnán revived.

1.3. The *Vita* through the Modern Age

During the Modern Age, and after a long period of decline both in the fame of Columba and Adomnán, numerous printed copies of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* were found over the Continent. It was first printed by Henry Canisius (*Sancti Adamnani Scoti libri tres, de Sancto Columba Scoto*, Monastery of Bavaria, 1604), and included in the fifth volume of his *Antique lectiones*. Twenty years later, the Irish priest Thomas Messsingham reprinted this tract from Canisius in his *Florilegium* (*Vita Sancti Columbæ presbyteri et confessoris*, Paris, 1624), adding some titles and marginal glosses to the work. About the same time, the Jesuit Stephen White transcribed a copy of Adomnán that he found in the monastery of Reichenau (*Apologia pro Hibernia adversus Cambri calumnias*, Dublin, 1639) and which was later included within John Colgan's *Trias Thaumaturga* (*Quarta Vita S. Columbæ Abbatis, Scotorum & Pictorum apostoli, & utriusque Scotia patroni,* Louvain, 1647)—and which is considered one of the best publications of the *Vita*. Moreover, White gave one of these copies to the Bollandists, from which another copy was printed (*De Sancto Columba, presbytero abbate in Iona Scotia insula,* Belgium, 1698), but in a less faithful way, since the division of chapters and titles was altered. Once in the 18th century, the next publication of the *Vita* was the reprint of Canisius' *Lectiones* in Basnage's *Thesaurus (Thesaurus*

monumentorum ecclesiasticorum et historicorum, Amsterdam, 1715). Then, in 1789, it appeared another Adomnán's copy of smaller dimensions in Pinkerton's *Collections* (*Vita Columbæ autore Adomnano, tribus libris conscripta*, London, 1789) which, although intended to be better than that of Canisius, it was considered worse than Colgan's.

1.4. The primitive Churches of Ireland and Scotland and the Reformation

The Anglican Reformation created a new Columba. To the ecclesiastical historiographers of the new Church of England, Columba had preached the word of God as it had been taught by the early apostles and the structure of his early church was understood to be the origin of the Protestant one, free form the imperfections that had been brought by Rome, with the arrival to England of Saint Augustine in the year 597.

This notion of Columba and his church staying pure form papal influence, and therefore, Protestant at heart, owes its provenance mainly to the Anglican Archbishop of Armagh James Ussher (1581-1656). He can be considered the first one to argue that "the religion of the Columbans was for substance the same which the Protestants now profess" (Davies 13) and that "the Church of Ireland was not new, but the direct heir of an uncorrupted and Protestant 'Celtic' Christianity" (Temple 47). He did so in *A Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish and British* (1623), where he writes that

> by such records of the former ages as have come to my hands (either manuscript or printed), the religion professed by the ancient bishops, priests, monks, and other Christians in this land was for substance the very same that which now by public authority is maintained against the foreign doctrine brought in later times by the bishop of Rome's followers. (qtd. in Temple 47)

Ussher's claims, and related ones by his contemporaries, were rebutted by Catholic authors like the tutor of King of Leinster Hugh O'Neill's sons, the Irish Franciscan Aodh Mac Cathmhaoil (1571-1626) and his work *Mirror of the Sacrament of Penance* (1618),

under whose guidance, John Colgan (1592-1658) participated in a project to compile and edit the lives, histories and martyrologies of the Irish saints, organized by feast days. Colgan published a separate volume, *Trias Thamaturgae Hiberniae* (1647), which edited the manuscript lives of Patrick, Brigit, and Columcille. The popularity of his book was great and its value immense, as from then on, the three saints became "clearly identified with the case of Gaelic Catholic nationalism" (Temple 48).

1.5. Ireland, Scotland, religion and the nation in the 1700s

Indeed, during the course of the 18th century, the idea of a primitive proto-Protestant Church became gradually more associated with politics and national identity. In Ireland, already in the 17th century, the New English scholars such as Edmund Spenser and Sir John Davies compared the Gaels' barbarism with those primitive customs of the native peoples of the New World and argued that the Old English had become native—in terms of manners—with the Reformation, since "they would have succumbed Catholic superstition instead of reforming Celtic barbarity" (Kidd 1199). By contrast and in order to defend Irish civility, Gaelic and Old Irish historiography emerged, led by Ireland's Counter-Reformation exiled clerics (like for example, John Colgan) who argued that Catholic Christianity was established in Ireland as a proof of the civility of its earlier inhabitants. Some Catholic scholars like Sylvester O'Halloran, Charles O'Conor, and Charles Vallancey went as far as to argue that the ancient Milesians—considered to be a high civilization in pagan Irish antiquity—was equal to that of Greece and Rome (Kidd 1203-1204). Others even portrayed Gaelic culture as a union of all confessions, in hope of winning Protestant favor, and they did so with success among historians like Walter Harries and Joseph Walker (Kidd 1201). According to Kidd, once these ideas of the Irish Catholic Enlightenment reached 19th century "Celtic" scholarship, the national claim that Ireland had emerged on an ancient high civilization remained credible to both confessions (1204).

Religious identity in Scotland also depended on its Gaelic past, especially on the tales of the conversion of the Dalriadic king, Donald I, and of the religious achievements of

those saints as Columba (Kidd 1205). However, even though the Scottish civilization tried to cultivate a strong sense of collective identity as an ethnically diverse Scottish nation originated in the Gaelic kingdom of Dalriada, from the middle of the 1500s “this Dalriadic imagination [...] coexisted in Scotland with a Lowland critique of Gaelic life and manners, especially on the lawlessness of the Highland clans” (Kidd 1206). Besides the attempts of some Catholic antiquaries like Thomas Innes (1662-1744) to demolish these arguments, Scottish Gaelic identity was undermined from the 1750s onwards by the theories of human social development developed by philosophers and historical sociologists of the Scottish Enlightenment, such as William Robertson, who reinterpreted the values of the Highland Gaelic culture as symptoms of social backwardness (Kidd 1206).

As it can be seen, whereas in Ireland the notion of Gaelic antiquity was centered in the promotion of religious tolerance by modern Irish antiquarians, even with the support of the Protestant antiquarians, in Scotland it put the focus on the evolution of society, where Gaelic culture is reduced to a status of savagery. Thus, the powerful and positive image of Gaelic culture in Ireland and the supremely civilized Gales helped to create a strong sense of identity in Ireland, far from what happened in Scotland. Meanwhile, a more popular perception of the Protestant/Catholic controversy had taken root and coexisted with such scholarly debates. Since the 16th century, in the Protestant households, Catholic saints as role models were replaced by the Old Testament Patriarchs and the English proto-Protestant martyrs (Temple 57). Their lives were chronicled in extremely successful publications, from John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* (1563) to John Howie’s *Scots Worthies* (1775), both recounting the sufferings and testimonies of Protestant in times of persecution and promoting and cementing Protestant spirituality over the old practices of the Catholics.

1.6. The rise of the “Celtic Church”

Ussher’s notion that the early Irish and British Churches were Protestant is essence, for being detached in their practice with Rome, became the official stand of the Anglican and Presbyterian historians in the 1800s, as they defended how the Protestant Churches of

Ireland, Scotland and Wales were the sole successors of an ancient, homogenous Celtic Church, as it came to be named in their writings. Here are a few examples. The Anglican James Henthorn Todd (1805-1869) considered the Irish Church as "the Church of Patrick, Bridget and Columcille, and the only Church that possesses their true successors" (qtd. in Temple 49). Reverend William S. Kerr (1873-1960) likewise claimed that "the Church of Ireland [was] a national self-governing Church in unbroken succession from the first Christians in this island," adding that it was "under no outside jurisdiction," was "independent of all foreign control," and made its laws and "appoint[ed] its own bishops" (qtd. in Temple 49). These ideas lived on throughout the century and well into the 1900s Unsurprisingly, there was a response by Roman Catholics such as Cardinal Joseph MacRory, but still, the Protestant appropriation of Columba and the early Irish and Scottish Churches was not limited to Ireland and the Anglicans there, but also to Scotland and the Scottish Anglicans and Presbyterians. James Seaton Reid (1798-1847), for instance, similarly defended that "the primitive Church of Ireland [...] differed most materially and for a length of time, from that of Rome" (Temple 51).

The main points of divergence in the monastic and non-diocesan organization of these early Irish and British Churches from Rome were, principally, the manner in which their monks wore the tonsure—they wore the tonsure in a semicircular form, instead of the common monastic crown-like one—, as well as the date of Easter celebration—because in these Celtic areas it was used the 84-year cycle in order to determine the exact date of celebration, instead of the 19-year cycle (Davies 17).

The idea of the Celtic Church survived into the 1900s, as can be seen in the work of Revered Thomas Hamilton (1842-1926), when he writes that "the Scoto-Irish Church was the oldest of all the Protestant Churches represented in modern Christendom" (Temple 51). Again, to become widespread and popular, the idea of a Celtic Church that was in the origin of the Protestant Churches only needed one work to circulate widely. Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* (1900) and its warm welcome among readers for decades is said to have ensured "that the 20th century would be well supplied with a store of popular belief" (Broun and Clancy 254).

1.7. The "Celtic debates" of the 1900s

This idea that there was one "Celtic Church," a series of common beliefs, religious practices and religious institutions in Celtic countries, all of them different from those on the continent, and so, independent from Rome and the Pope, was not challenged until the 1990s. It was the result of the investigations of Kathleen Hughes ("The Celtic Church: Is this a Valid Concept?", 1981) and Wendy Davies ("The Myth of the Celtic Church", 1992). They argued that the notion that "Celtic Christians of the early Middle Ages were deemed the natural ancestors of the true Protestants of the early modern period, championing simplicity and independence against the tyranny of Rome" was mythical (Davies 13). First, the so-called "Celtic Church" does not correspond to a clearly defined period; it is only focused on place. The existing material is very difficult to handle, many texts are undated and not clearly located. Second, most of it only refers to Ireland, and the existing material referring to other areas such as Scotland, Brittany or Wales is very sparse.

With regards to its structure, a most important question, they provided evidence that during the Middle Age, both in the British Isles and on the continent, the fact that there was not a single institutional organization common to all the Celtic areas was general; that "there were regional synods within Celtic areas, when bishops met together and made decisions for their regions" (Davies 14) was not a system particular to the British Isles. In fact, there were also institutional differences within these Celtic regions: some churches harbored superior titles—like that of archbishop—while others did not; in some areas, powerful abbots had the managerial powers that the early Christian Church used to entrust to bishops, like the management of religious personnel and finances—and they were even exempt from episcopal inspection—, while bishops only performed sacramental functions; there were even abbots whose episcopal households were referred to as monasteries "and who ruled the 'monastery' as well as their own proper area of jurisdiction" (15). Even more, these monastic organizations could be also found outside Celtic areas in early Christian history. In sum, "there were varieties of monastic order and different patterns of monastic authority in 11th and 12th century Europe [...] there are features as familiar in 8th century England or in 10th century France or Germany as in the Celtic West" (16).

The same can be applied to the religious practices of this alleged Celtic Church. The differences among the several churches were many. Bede and other archbishops argued that baptism and the consecration of bishops in British areas was deviant, but “we do not know what the deviation was” (Davies 16). Private penance practices which, even though claimed to be unique of Celtic areas, are difficult to evidence as characteristic of Celtic Churches (16). Moreover, it was not only in Celtic areas where several types of tonsure had been used, but in all Europe during the 7th and 8th centuries. There were some places where it was used the crown-like tonsure of Simon Peter, or the ‘from ear to ear’ tonsure of Simon Magus, or even no tonsure at all—like in Iona, where did not move to the crown-like tonsure until the early 8th century. Finally, with respect to the celebration of Easter dates, the British practice was a common practice in Europe in the 4th century (17), which proves again that the difference of practice with Rome was not particular of the British Isles.

Having seen all this, it must come as a great surprise to find that around the year 1762, an English Catholic priest called Philp Perry decided to break the existing paradigm writing a Recusant history of the early Church of Britain, in which the representatives of the first Irish, British and Scottish Churches—including Columba—are shown to have been obedient to Rome and not acted independently of it, as Ussher and the rest of Protestant historians had claimed for almost two centuries. This unique book and its portrayal of Columba and his Church will be treated next.

2. Philip Perry’s Recusant St Columba

The English Catholic priest Philip M. Perry (1720-1774) was a devoted historian and a man of letters. Born in Staffordshire, he had completed his studies--including a doctorate in theology—at St Gregory’ English College in Paris, before he was appointed rector of the Royal College of St Alban in Valladolid, at the age of forty-seven, in 1768 (Perry ix). The Seminary was funded in 1589 with the aim of training English Catholic priests to combat the Anglican Reformation in Britain. When Perry arrived, the Seminary was refunded in order to rearrange its teaching methods, given the suppression of the Jesuit order and the

general reform of the Spanish Universities and Colleges by the enlightened monarch Carlos III (x). In the course of the operations, Perry was asked to direct the College and recover the College's patrimonial wealth and heritage and to transfer to it the properties of the other two English colleges in Spain, which were closed: the English colleges of St George in Madrid and St Gregory in Seville. Apart from being a book-collector, Philip Perry was also a prolific author who wrote biography, hagiography, and history. Many of his writings are preserved in the College archive in Valladolid and they include the lives of the early British and Irish saints, celebrations of Old Testament figures, and treatises on the Reformation, among other themes (x). These works were revised and, in their majority, finished during Perry's stay in Valladolid until 1773. None have yet been published, except for his Sketch of the Ancient British History.

The Sketch is a historical work that has been described as anchored in major historical and cultural phenomena like the history of the English Church, the religious history of Europe since the 16th century and the controversies that followed the Reformation (Perry xvi, xvii). It presents the landmarks of the British civil history and those concerning the contemporary Christian and ecclesiastical affairs, beginning with Julius Caesar's expeditions, the landing of the Romans on the island, the subsequent arrival of the first Christians and the removal of Druidism, until the end of St Columba's missions at the close of the 6th century.

Perry's life of St Columba is contained in the final and fifth chapter of his book (163-88), since "though Irish," he is "the Apostle of Britain" and, more concretely, the one who "reputed to the inhabitants of North Britain the blessing his country had received from them in their Apostle Patrick" (Perry 163).

2.1. Perry's sources for Columba and Early Britain

The main source of Perry's life is Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*. He calls him "the most ancient and best informed" of Columba's hagiographers (Perry 167). He had read it in his

copy of John Colgan included in *Triadis Thaumaturgae* (Louvain, 1647). Adomnán's Life of Columba was there edited by Colgan besides the Life of Columba written by Cumméne the Fair, and the lives of Saint Patrick and Saint Brigid. The book is now in the Valladolid College library and still has Perry's annotations (221). A few details of Columba's life come from a life of his disciple Baithen, which Perry had read in the *Bollandist Acta Sanctorum* (164-65). He also took some of the details that he gives on the history of Scotland from Thomas Innes' Essay on the Northern Britains (London, 1729), a book that also belonged to Perry's personal library and is now with the rest at the English College in Valladolid (224).

2.2. The continental origin of the inhabitants of the island

Before starting to write the life of St Columba, Perry reminds the reader of what he has argued throughout the previous four chapters: that the British Church was in constant connection with that of Rome, from which it had received the Catholic faith and the help to fight the heresies, and that, besides this connection, it was "constantly in communion with the Gaulish Churches," again "so closely connected with that of Rome" (Perry 163). From the beginning, Perry does not hide that there were aspects of ritual and practice between them that differed from those of Rome, as when he asserts that the "Britons differed in some points of discipline from the Roman and universal Church" (163); nonetheless, he defends that this does not mean a separation of communion of the churches, giving the example of the Churches of Ireland, since: "none [is] more rigorously attached the See Apostolic" of Rome than the Irish Church (163), which remained largely Catholic until his days.

In fact, the connection between Britain and the Continent had been made clear by Perry from the beginning of the Skecth. Resorting to the writings of Tacitus, Bede, and Julius Caesar, among others, Perry had started his history locating the origins of the ancient inhabitants of the islands among the Northern Scythians. He explained that Britain is supposed to have been peopled at the same time as Gaul and Belgium, from which "some

of the Northern Scythians, or Germans, sailed over immediately from the north towards the northern of Caledonia, while others of the same hive, [...] came as far as Belgium, and from thence sailed over to the southern parts of Britain" (Perry 4). This common origin of the British inhabitants from the Northern Scythians and Gaulish *Celtes* was evidenced by Perry in the fact that this people, as Caesar and Tacitus stated, shared the same British tongue, which, he agreed, "differed very little from the language of the Gauls" (5). Similarly, he underlined that the houses of the Britains were built like those of the Gauls, they had fortified paces, and were also expert in the art of fighting (5).

These are the peoples that had been chosen by God to be subdued by the Roman power, in order to join the rest of the empire. In Perry's words, God's plan was to "unite the whole universe under the one sole Roman Empire, for the more easy propagation of his saving Gospel among mankind" (Perry 3). However, as we shall see, this would not be easy: as Perry claims, the barbarity of its natives and their Druidic—and pagan—religion set an obstacle in the propagation of the saving Gospel among these territories.

2.3. The barbarity of its peoples

Some of their customs were primitive. They "painted themselves with a composition made of glass which gave them a green color and rendered them frightful in battle, [...] wore their hair very long, yet shaved their beards," and "their soldiers in battle went armed with a long sword and a little shield or target" (Perry 12). Also, their societies were uncivilized. In his Sketch, Perry mentions how "they used promiscuously each others' wives, leaving the offspring to him who had taken the woman first in her virginity" (12). Their religious rites were "superstitious", like those of the Gauls. There, as Gildas asserted, even "the mountains, hills, and rivers were all objects of divine worship" (12), but "Britain had many monstrous idols of her own" (12). Perry also records that their teachers were called "Druids" and that they used to perform their religious rites under oaks (12). In this, he says that they were like the first Patriarchs in the Bible, who believed that "under trees and groves […] God had vouchsafed to appear to them" (12), but underscores how, unlike

them, these Druids were said to have “many cruel and abominable customs” (12): they sacrificed their captives and even countrymen to their goddess of Victory, women were forced to walk naked in their processions (13).

2.4. Civilized by Rome and early Christianity

Perry’s history maintains that civilization was brought to the inhabitants of Britain only by the Romans. According to his Sketch, in the conquest of Britain, who contributed most to civilize the natives was Julius Agricola. He subdued the Isle of Anglesea and years later he made a fleet to sail round Northern Britain and subdued the Orkneys, among other areas (Perry 20). Agricola “taught them to build houses, market places, and temples” (20) and with time, the British nobility learned the liberal arts as well as Latin and the art of eloquence, leaving the ancient custom of painting themselves and even wearing the Roman toga (21).

As a result of this process of Romanisation “and the frequent intercourse it opened betwixt the natives and Rome, the good providence of God opened a way to bring over the Gospel of Christ” (Perry 23). This is how Perry links the coming of Christianity with Rome. He stresses that Rome had been chosen to become “the seat of the spiritual power of Christ” (23), when St Peter, the first apostle, had placed his see there, “as the most convenient centre from whence to spread the Gospel light all over the known world” (23). And then he reminds the reader, as assured by Eusebius, that some of the first apostles and seventy-two disciples passed over the British Isles, although he did not specify which of them (24).

The process of Christianisation was going to be slow. The Romans had done all they had in their power to exterminate their Druidic religion. For Perry, this was justified, because God willed it: “Providence itself seemed to have authorized this fact” (25). Nevertheless, there were still remains of Druidism among the British people and of “the cruel superstitions of their Druidish teachers” (3), since some of them had escaped to

Ireland, to the Isle of Man or to other islands of the west of Scotland, as Henry Rowlands had proved in his *Mona Antiqua Restaurata* (Dublin, 1729) (27). In Perry's narrative, it was the Christian religion which culminated that mission: the coming of Christianly from Rome "produced many saints whose sanctity wiped off the old stain of Druidish impiety" (27), so that their faith was spread throughout Britain.

The process met with obstacles before "any regular hierarchical Church" existed in Britain (Perry 28). The Roman Pontiffs had also problems with the many heresies and breaches of discipline that were found. In reviewing the number of Councils and Synods that the early Church celebrated to fight Arianism and the heresies of the time, Perry took the opportunity to single out all the occasions in which the British prelates were summoned to join the rest of representatives of the Roman Church. This included Arles, where there were "three of our British prelates" (62), Nicaea, where also there, the "British prelates had the occasion to show their zeal for the unity of the faith and discipline of the universal Church" (63), and Rimini, where unfortunately they were "drawn into subscribe an equivocal definition of faith," Arianism (68). With all the others, the British prelates in the end, says Perry, remained "so firm in the orthodox faith and in their opposition to Arianism […] among the staunch adherers to the Nicaene faith" (75), that, as testified by St Jerome, "[t]he Church of the Roman city is noways different from that of the whole world," and very importantly, "the Gauls and the Britains ... adore one and the same Christ and observe one and the same rule of truth" (qtd. in Perry 75). The early British Church, Perry underlines, was Roman from the beginning.

2.5. The barbarous Picts and Scots

However, those parts of the island that had not been conquered by the Romans would still require the work of missionaries. The Picts were "unconquered extraprovincials of the north," who painted their bodies (Perry 21), and "idolaters" (91); the Scots of Dalriada are depicted as savages, or in any way, "more barbarous than the Britons, inhuman, inhospitable, ignorant of all virtue, and making no distinction betwixt right and wrong" (80,

81). Their conversion and that of the Welsh, would be the work of Saint Ninian, Apostle of the Southern Picts, Saint Patrick, Apostle of Ireland, Saint David, Apostle of Wales, and Saint Columba, Apostle of North Britain. This is the context into which Philip Perry inserts Saint Columba's life.

2.6. The birth of Columba

According to Perry, Columba was born in Gartan in the year 520. His father, Ferdlimyd, was son of Fergus and grandson of Conal, who had been converted by St Patrick; his mother, Aithne, also belonged to the Irish royal family. From the beginning, there are signs of wonder in Columba's Life. His name and birth had been foretold many years before by St Mochtee, a British prelate and St Patrick's disciple. The rest of his life as a religious man, founder of monasteries and missionary, was full of his miracles. His extraordinary powers to fast and pray, like for example, standing praying in the water during the winter, were "so continual as to exceed the ordinary power of human abilities" (Perry 165). This custom and Columba's visionary gifts could seem similar to the retreats of the Druids, but Perry starts by warning that, as St Fintan said, "in him resided the Holy Spirit of God" (164) and that Columba was nothing but "the receptacle of the holy spirit of God and of his gifts in miraculous powers or in seeing the future and distant things, or in conversing while on earth with the world of spirits above" (164). With this warning, Perry begins his life.

2.7. A founder of cell monasteries and a rule of his own

Having become priest at the age of twenty-five, St Columba started to found a great number of monasteries—or 'cells' (Perry 164)—, both in Ireland and Scotland, to which he gave a rule of his own. The first one was Iona, in the lands of the Scots, of which he was, according to Perry, "abbot superior general," caring of all the rest in the western islands (170). Perry explains he governed them by priors (*praepositos*) under him, which were, according to the authority of Adomnán, chosen among his disciples and were of all degrees,

“including bishops” (170). This is Perry’s first recognition of the jurisdiction of the abbots over the diocesan churches in the Irish tradition.

Perry is aware that Columba’s rule and that of the Irish monks was in some aspects distant from that of Rome (Perry 166). He justifies it by saying that it is because the St Benedict’s Rule has not yet been able to reach these extremities of the west (165). Indeed, he agrees that those monks in Scotland and Ireland—who Perry refers to as “extramundane solitaries” (166)—had some different practices from the rest of the world. For instance, Perry refers to the fact that they did not abstain from eating flesh except on certain days, fasted on Wednesdays, worked with their own hands and even built their own cells with twigs and hurdles (165). More extensively, Perry describes how the tonsure that Columba and his monks wore was not the common monastic clerical tonsure, “which was circular, in imitation of our Saviour’s crown of thorns, and consisted of a crown or ring of hair left all round the head, by shaving the crown alone and cropping the hair below” (166). Instead, they wore the tonsure in a semicircular form. Although Perry considered this “an imperfect representation of the crown of thorns” (166), it was for him only “a matter of great indifference” (166). The singularity practiced by St Columba and his Church of celebrating Easter on the fourteenth of the first spring moon was clearly distant from Roman practice, which followed that of the Asiatic quartodecimans, as the universal Church did (166).

All these practices were a sign of separation from Rome in Protestant historiography; however, Perry tries to exculpate Columba from that fault, speculating that of this practice, “St Columba was not the first author, which perhaps was no other than St Patrick or his next successors” (Perry 166) and that perhaps he did not live “at liberty to do otherwise than conform to the discipline of this national Church” (166). To substantiate his Recusant narrative, Perry recalls that, according to his best-known biographer, such differences were something Columba disagreed with: “he seems rather to have disproved than approved this discipline, since, according to Adomnán, [...] he foretold the schism and disturbances this diversity of practice would produce in after times” (166). He refers to the Synod of Whitby of 664, where the Churches of Ireland and Scotland had to conform to the practices and

discipline of the Anglo-Saxon Church, but the echo that this mention has with the Anglican schism can also be heard.

2.8. Mission through miracles

"With the virtues of the cloister St Columba united those of the Apostles" (Perry 172). This is how Perry introduces his description of Columba's first missionary expeditions among the Northern Picts of Scotland, ruled by "a heathen and a fierce barbarian," King Brude (172). Among these "deluded pagans", the saint "met with no small opposition from the gentile bards or Druids" (172), whom are also called "magicians" (173). Columba had to fight the magic of the Druids on many occasions. They "followed him, and endeavoured to disturb his devotions and prevent the praises of God from being heard among this gentile people" (172). But Columba's power was always stronger. For instance, the Pictish Druid Brocan, who had been the king's tutor, trying to sink Columba's boat in Loch Ness raising a storm "by the devil's power" (173), failed in the attempt, because Columba managed to get safe to port with his trust in God. The victory was deemed by Perry greater and Brocan's opposition fiercer, since the Druid had already defied Columba before and would have almost died, if it had not been for Columba's intervention: "The dying Brochan, by only drinking of the water in which the blessed stone had been dipped, recovered the health of this body, but not that of his mind, as appears by his impious opposition of the saint" (173). Similarly, the monster of Loch Ness, which had flown out of the water to devour one of Columba's companions, who was swimming across the lake, was halted by Columba's command at the sign of the Cross (174).

Through all these miracles, Columba managed to convert the whole Pictish nation—"for which he has been ever esteemed and venerated as the apostle" (Perry 174)—since his mission was not limited only to the north. He also visited the Picts of the South, already converted by St Ninian in the previous century. With similar signs and miracles, "not only the saint's disciples, but even the barbarian and gentile inhabitants, struck with the miracle, magnified the God of the Christians" (174).

2.9. His ubiquity and prophetic powers

In this way, he continued using his “enlightened and apostolic vigour” to conduct penitents that arrived at his place (Perry 175-76). This wisdom that was accompanied by other wonderful gifts. He had the gift of ubiquity. Often, when sitting at his cell in Iona or elsewhere, he was at the same time present in any other island, Ireland or among the Pictish coverts (176). He could irradiate light at the consecration of the mass or while in extasy (176). But above every other power, Columba was gifted with the power of prophecy of someone’s fate or upcoming events. He could receive “the communication of many heavenly secrets” (176) often while in retirement and in extasy. His many prophecies concerned the converted Picts (179-80), the Irish princes (181-82), the Britons in Cumbria (186), or the Kings of Dalriada (184-86).

Columba had fought the Druids and their practices, divination, among them, but at the same time it seems clear that many of his gifts were similar. Perry seems to be aware of that and therefore, closes the series of narratives of his prophetical interventions with a passage from Adomnán’s life that can clear any doubt. In the passage, someone enquired Columba on the manner in which those revelations were communicated to him. His answer is in the third person but unequivocal: “There are some, though few, to whom God has given such grace as to behold the whole universe, heaven, earth, and seas, clearly and distinctly at one single sight” (Perry 186).

2.10. His death and his legacy to the early English Church

The end of Perry’s Sketch comes just afterwards, evoking one unsolved problem. Earlier in the book Perry had not been able to provide evidence of the existence of a Roman diocesan Church in Scotland in Columba’s days and after his mission. Neither Adomnán nor Bede expressly say anything on the matter and both give only speculations. Adomnán “supposes [there was] one bishop at least,” either in the isles or among the Picts, and Bede “supposes the same of one or more bishops, when he says that by an unusual custom the whole

province and its bishops were subject to the jurisdiction of the abbot of Hy [Iona]" (Perry 175). Perry has to admit that where those episcopal sees were fixed is not easy to determine, but believes that it is "inconceivable that on the conversion of the Picts no bishop should have been established among them" (175).

When to finish his work Perry gives the date when St Columba died, 9 June 597, he sounds very pleased to write that it was "the very year, if not the very month, in which St Augustine landed in South Britain to begin his mission and conversion of the Saxons" (Perry 187). In this way, he larks the end his history of the early British Church history, pointing to the continuity of the early British and Saxon Churches in Britain through the figure of St Columba. At the same time he refutes those who speak of the British Church as separate from Rome with regard to the hierarchical precedence of abbots over bishops, since this practice was an "extraordinary case and contrary to the common discipline of the Church, and even to St Columba's own express sentiments", so that this jurisdiction was "only in some temporal matters", and resulted from the fact that many of those who finally became bishops in Scotland and the north of England were his own disciples and would only act in obedience and subjection to his master and his successors (188).

With all this, if Perry had been published his work in his time, he would not have been very successful in his defense of the Catholic Church. However, it is fair to say, that not only there was no work like his in his day, but that, in his attempt, he is almost two centuries ahead of the interpretation of the history of the early Churches of Ireland and England that arrived at the end of the 20th century.

Conclusion

With the aim of showing the way in which, within the religious controversy of the time, the English Catholic priest Philip M. Perry (1720-1774) proves the adherence of the early British Church to Rome from its origins—focusing on the central figure of Saint Columba—, this study has shown, through the different sections and periods, how he tries

to dismantle the myth that affirmed the existence of a so-called 'Celtic Church' separated from Rome. In his Sketch of the Ancient British History, completed while he was Rector of the English College of St Alban in Valladolid, Perry offers arguments that assert that, despite the different customs and existing points of difference between the early Irish and Scottish Churches and Rome, these had never acted independently of the Roman rule.

The discussion has been divided in two parts. The first part traces how the cult of St Columba has been transmitted since the Middle Ages, and how, since the Protestant Reformation, his life and mission, as well as the structure and practices of his church, have been interpreted differently by Protestants and Catholics; the second part focuses on how Philip Perry builds his argument in favor of the connection and links between the early British Churches and the Roman Church before AD 597, contrary to the majority of Protestant accounts of the period.

The first section deals with how the life of St Columba has been disseminated over the continent during the Middle Ages. Its spread was possible thanks to the transmission of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (c. AD 699) and to the oral tradition carried by the Irish monks who travelled around the Continent, as well as to the various copies that they used to make of that of Adomnán. It also circulated in the Modern Age, when, after a period of decline in the cult of Columba, it was widely printed, especially thanks to the work of John Colgan or Henry Canisius. From the Protestant Reformation onwards, the interpretation received by both Columba and the early British Church by the Irish and Scottish Protestants—Anglicans and Presbyterians—differs greatly from that of Catholics. While Protestant historians assert that Columba's Church was the ancestor of the Church of England, because it remained free from Rome—which they evidence by proving that it differs on some points of ritual from it—, the Catholic scholars maintain that the relations between the Church in Britain and the Roman See in those early days were clear, and that, although the differences were evident, this never meant a cessation of communion between both. It is these ideas, together with the nationalist theories emerging in Ireland and Scotland during the eighteenth century, that give rise to the creation of the myth of the so-called 'Celtic Church.' This myth, which finds its roots in the earlier historians of the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, starting by James Ussher, is not demolished until the 1990s, when it is claimed by historians Kathleen Hughes and Wendy Davies that these differences regarding the religious rites, celebrations—such as Easter—and institutional organization, were something common among the Christian Churches of the fourth and fifth centuries, given that the universal Catholic Church was still under formation.

The last section deals with the labour of Philip Perry in trying to build his argument in favour of a connections of these British Churches with that of Rome and continuity with the Church of the Angles and Saxons. Taking as its main source Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*—through Colgan's *Trias Thaumaturga* (1647)—he states that, contrary to all that the Protestant historians of his time acclaimed, the first British, Irish, and Scottish Churches had been always in connection with Rome and the Pope. He also affirms that the influence of the Roman Church had been exerted in Great Britain since the sixth century, when St Augustine was sent by the Pope to evangelize the island, thus proving again the connection of Rome with the first British Church since the beginning. Furthermore, Perry supports his argument by saying that the connection of this early church with Rome could be proven with the attendance of some of the British prelates at the synods and councils that were convened by Rome—such as those of Rimini or Nicaea—and alludes to the fact it was thanks to the labour of the Christian missionaries and first preachers of the Christian gospel—among whom he inserts St Columba—that the true Christian religion, and therefore the true Catholic faith, had managed to enter Great Britain. Thus, the relevance that Perry gives to St Columba has the purpose of linking his figure with the continuity of the first British Church with the Roman Church, since it was thanks to his work through miracles and prophetic powers (bestowed upon him by God) that the Picts and the Scots managed to leave their ancient druidic and pagan customs behind and convert to Christianity.

With all this, Philip Perry, from his position as a Catholic Recusant, proves that, contrary to everything that had been said so far about the independence of the British Church from Rome, it was always linked to Rome, among others, thanks to the existence of great figures such as that of St Columba, whose work, not only evangelizing, but fighting—

against the barbarity of the unconquered peoples—managed to bring the Catholic faith to the British.

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