

# The Papal System – III. The Ancient Scottish Church



Columba of Iona (521-597) Apostle of the Picts, Apostle to Scotland

Continued from [II. The Ancient Irish Church.](#)

THE POPES HAD NO POWER FOR MORE THAN SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS IN THE ANCIENT CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

The country known, in comparatively modern times, as Scotland was blessed with gospel light at a later day than England or Ireland. It is reported that Ninias, a native of North Wales, in A. D. 400, preached the gospel to the Picts or ancient Scotch, and that his labors were attended with some success in the southern portions of their country. But the conversion of the entire people was reserved for other men, and for a later period than the time of Ninias.

*Columba was the Apostle of Scotland.*

Columba was brought up in the evangelical faith of St. Patrick, in Ireland. He was of an ardent spirit, a man of great enterprise, and he was governed by supreme love to Jesus, and burning zeal for the salvation of perishing men. To him nothing possible, however difficult, was a permanent obstacle. He would readily make the greatest sacrifices, and begin the grandest and most laborious undertaking. Previous to his departure from his native land, he built a noble monastery in Ireland, at Dearn Ach, –The Field of Oaks, now called Derry, which became the parent of many similar houses in Ireland.

His heart bled over the idolatry and perdition of the neighboring Picts; and, about A. D. 565, he entered Scotland. Bridius, a powerful monarch, was king of the Pictish nation, whose favor the missionary soon obtained. And, as he and his twelve companions sought the blessing of Heaven upon their labors, and toiled with apostolical zeal and purity of life, they quickly gathered as a harvest the nation of the Picts.

The king gave him the island of Hii, or Iona, as a mission station. The island is about three miles long, and a mile in breadth, Here Columba erected

a monastery and churches; and soon the whole island was covered with cloisters and temples. And a multitude of monks, students, and devout visitors, seeking holy light, crowded the sea-girt and heaven-favored island. There the clergy, nobles, and sovereigns of Scotland were educated. There missions were planned for the north of England and the continent of Europe. There the brightest epochs of gospel zeal and success were equalled. And to that birth-place of Christian light all Scotland looked with devout gratitude and holy enthusiasm. For generations, the Scottish kings were buried in consecrated Iona; and its abbot ruled the whole churches of the land.

Columba died A.D. 597. A copy of the gospels, said to be in his handwriting, and known as The Book of Durrow, is still in existence in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. There are also another copy of the gospels, called the Book of Kells, and a copy of the Psalms, supposed to have been written by him, which are held as sacred treasures by the learned.

#### *The Evangelical Character of the early Clergy of Scotland.*

It is not to be understood that everything taught or practised by those good men was Scriptural or wise; but sprung, as they were, from a people emerging out of barbarism, and not long since out of heathenism, there is ground for astonishment at their measurable purity of doctrine, and at their remarkable charity and holiness of life. The faithful historian of the early Anglo-Saxon Church, though himself an ardent Roman Catholic, and though earnestly condemning the Scotch clergy for their opposition to papal customs and claims, declares that these men were renowned for their continency, their love of God, and their observance of monastic rules. "By reason of their being so far away from the rest of the world," he says, "they only practised such works of piety and chastity as they could learn from the prophetic, evangelical, and apostolical writings." Well would it have been for Christians of all ages if they had learned their faith and practice from the same full and blessed fountains.

Of Bishop Aidan, one of their chief prelates, the most flattering record is made. He was a man of singular meekness and piety, and very zealous in the cause of God; he lived according to the tenor of his own teachings; he neither sought nor loved worldly possessions of any description; he delighted in giving to the poor the gifts he received from princes and kings; he traveled on foot, not on horseback, and when he met an unbeliever, he tried to lead him to trust in Jesus; and if he fell in with a Christian, he endeavored to encourage him by words and actions to alms and good works. All his companions, whether monks or laymen, were employed in "Reading the Scriptures, or in learning the Psalms. This was the daily occupation of himself, and all that were with him, wheresoever they went." What was true of Aidan was nearly as just about Coleman and many of his brethren who labored in Scotland and the north of England in the end of the sixth, and in the seventh centuries.

#### *These Bishops and Monks were not Romanists.*

In that age, when the Bishop of Rome was recognized as a superior prelate, the allegiance demanded was very slight. He had nothing to do with the

consecration of bishops; the metropolitan attended to that business. Except in England, and a little afterwards in Germany, his chief connection with the appointment of archbishops was to send them the pall. Loyalty to Rome was shown by keeping Easter at the Romish time, by wearing a circular tonsure instead of one shaped like a crescent. And as the sturdy Irishmen who led the Picts to Christ had learned no regard from the successors of St. Patrick for the authority of the pope, they taught the Pictish nation to receive nothing at his dictation. And as stoutly as the immortal Covenanters resisted Popery in its full strength, or in its diluted forms, did these old Christians resist every papal encroachment upon their usages and rights.

These Scotch priests ministered in A.D. 664 to Oswy, king of the Northumbrians, who kept Easter at their time; his wife, Eanfleda, a Kentish princess, observed Easter after the Roman time. And it happened that when the king, having ended his fasting, was celebrating Easter, the queen and her followers were still fasting and keeping Palm Sunday; and as the Scotch would not yield a jot, there was confusion in many families, and not a little pious indignation in the breasts of papal priests and bishops.

Adamnan, abbot of Iona, came to Alfrid, king of Northumbria, on an embassy from his nation, and was assailed while in Alfrid's court with all kinds of arguments to submit to the Roman usages, and to lead his countrymen along with him. Adamnan fell; but though, as Abbot of Iona, he was the first ecclesiastic in Scotland, and though he endeavored to "Bring his own people that were in Iona, or that were subject to that monastery, into the way of truth, yet in this he could not prevail."

After the celebrated council held in Whitby, in England, in the time of Oswy and Hilda, when the Scotch were condemned by the king, Bishop Coleman resolved never to bow the knee to Rome, and collecting all his missionary monks at the famous monastery of Lindisfarne, and about thirty English brethren whom they had instructed, and who, like themselves, preached Jesus unfettered by papal chains, he returned to Iona, where they could worship God without the presence of a priest, monk, or bishop, who paid reverence or recommended respect to the See of Rome.

For the first seven hundred years of the Christian era, the servants of Christ in Scotland were as bitterly opposed to the pretensions, and to many of the ways of the bishops of Rome, as the immortal John Knox. Never till, through the superstition and tyranny of Naitan, king of the Scotch, A.D. 716, was the Church of Columba placed under the feet of the Roman bishops. By such an act of wicked despotism as marked the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, *the early Church of Scotland was robbed of her independence, and finally of her Bible and her purity*; and fitted to produce Cardinal Beaton, and the other licentious and cruel men, who, at the Reformation, were a stain upon Christianity, and a reproach upon the land rendered illustrious by the hallowed memories of Columba and Tona.

The ancient Churches of Ireland, England, and Scotland, loving an open Bible, and cultivating purity and love, by the testimony of friends and foes, paid no deference to papal authority; knew nothing of the prince of the apostles or his successors, and were as independent of the See of Rome as any

Protestant Church of the nineteenth century.

(To to continued)

## **All chapters of The Papal System by William Cathcart**

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