

## The Columban Church in northern Britain, 664–717: a reassessment

Kenneth Veitch\*

### ABSTRACT

*This paper† challenges the accepted view that the Columban Church in northern Britain underwent a period of decline during the late seventh and early eighth centuries.*

During the past decade, there has been an encouraging revival in interest regarding the spread of Christianity in early medieval northern Britain, stimulated particularly by historians studying the development and role of the Columban Church in Scottish Dál Riata and Pictland, but also by those investigating the forces which facilitated the union of the Picts and Scots. Thus, from studies revealing further details about Columba's life and legacy, to those highlighting specific aspects of the Columban Church's importance in the formation of the cultural and political entity known as Alba, such as the enduring ties with Ireland and rapprochement with the post-union Scottish dynasty, our knowledge of the subject has been broadened and enriched (see, for example, Adomnán, *Columba*; Broun 1994; Clancy 1996; Hudson 1994; Macquarrie 1992 & 1997).

Despite this wealth of historical literature, however, one facet of Columban Church history has been somewhat neglected. This is the consideration of the underlying threads of continuity which linked the religious society established in northern Britain by Columba, his followers and contemporaries, not only to the Church of post-union Alba, but also that of medieval Scotland. The reason for this having been the case is no doubt due primarily to the persistence of the belief that the Columban Church was not only demoralized and largely ostracized after the ecclesiological disputes with a supposedly hostile Roman Church, but also suffered a damaging hiatus in its influence in Pictland during the eighth century. This can lead to the perception that the vibrant and confident missionary Church of the sixth and early seventh centuries was gradually superseded by a secularized, decaying anachronism. This has dominated any potential study of the Columban Church in northern Britain, with the famous events of 664, c 711 and 717 providing conveniently dramatic historical pegs upon which to hang theories of decline and extinction. However, through a reassessment of these events in particular, and the period from 664 to 717 in general, this study aims to demonstrate that, on the one hand the differences between the Columban traditionalists and the Romanists and the divisive effects of their disputes have been over-exaggerated, while on the other, there was no drastic break in the Columban Church's hegemony over Pictish religious society. Moreover, it will argue that the Columban Church

\* 16 Bangholm Bower Avenue, Edinburgh EH5 3NS

† This paper was awarded the Chalmers-Jervaise essay prize

played a continuous and ideologically constant role first in Pictland and then in Alba, while at the same time adapting and modifying itself to accommodate both religious and political developments within the universal Church and society as a whole.

The ecclesiological differences which developed between the Gaelic Church<sup>1</sup> as a whole and the Church on the Continent, due to their estrangement and resultant independent development during the conquest of much of Europe by pagans (such as the differing emphasis placed upon the duties and jurisdiction of bishops and abbots), were also accompanied by a divergence in respect of certain other ecclesiastical issues. On the whole these were minor anomalies, such as the style of tonsure to be worn by religious, which in isolation did not pose a serious threat to a rapprochement between the two traditions (Gougaud 1992, 185–216). Thus, in his letter to Nechtán, Ceolfrith remarks that ‘we freely admit that a difference in tonsure is not hurtful to those whose faith in God is untainted and their love for their neighbour sincere’ (Bede, *Eccles Hist*, V, 21). However, these differences were polarized by a far more serious disagreement over the dating of Easter, with the Columban Church adhering to an 84-year cycle, while the churches on the Continent had gradually adopted the Alexandrian 19-year cycle promulgated in 525 by Dionysius Exiguus (for discussion, see Gougaud 1992, 185–92; Kenney 1993, 210–17; Ó Cróinín 1985). This meant that the Churches in the Gaelic- and Roman-influenced areas of Europe often observed different Lenten periods and Easter days. Hence, since the Church’s movable feasts were calculated from the paschal feast, they regularly celebrated the most important holy days of the Christian calendar on different dates. This discrepancy was later emphasized when the two Churches expanded and their spheres of influence began to overlap. For example, Columbanus’ mission to the Lombards at the beginning of the seventh century brought him into conflict with the Romanist hierarchy of the re-emergent Church on the Continent. Indeed, in a famous letter to Pope Boniface IV in 613, the saint openly challenged the Roman Church’s paschal tables while staunchly defending those produced by his compatriots in Ireland (Walker 1957, 37–57). The struggles between Columbanus and the papacy were, nevertheless, merely to be the preliminary skirmishes of a long and sometimes acrimonious paschal debate, which was to drag on throughout the seventh and eighth centuries. The main battleground was Britain and Ireland, where increased contact with the continental Church, such as the mission of Augustine to the English in 597, resulted in the encroachment of Roman practices into the neighbouring Gaelic Church territories. The problems which this created were most vividly displayed when the Columban Church-adherent Oswiu of Northumbria married Eanflæd, who, after being baptized by Paulinus and spending much of her childhood in Kent, practised the Roman usage (Bede, *Eccles Hist*, II, 9 & 20), for as Bede (*ibid*, III, 25) remarked, ‘in these days it sometimes happened that Easter was celebrated twice in the same year, so that the king had finished the fast and was keeping Easter Sunday, while the queen and her people were still in Lent and observing Palm Sunday’. To heal this split in the royal court of Northumbria, Oswiu called and presided over a Church synod at Whitby in 664, an event which was to be the defining moment in the history of the Columban Church in early medieval northern Britain.

Considering the crucial importance of Whitby to the history of the Columban Church, it is unfortunate that no member of that institution compiled an account of the synod. Consequently, studies of this event and its ramifications have been forced to rely on the commentaries of the Romanist authors Bede and Eddius Stephanus, both of whom had partisan motives which inevitably affected their objectivity when it came to recording the Easter debate. Thus, the *Ecclesiastical History* (III, 25) and *Life of Wilfrid* (Wilfrid, in Farmer & Webb 1988, ch 12) both depict the Columban Church as an isolated anachronism, holding out ‘against the whole world’ (Bede, *Eccles Hist*, III, 25) with its antiquated beliefs. Ultimately, as both writers triumphantly

heralded, these wrong-headed notions, along with their adherents, were subsequently ‘rejected’ and ‘despised’ (*ibid.*, III, 25) by Oswiu and his subjects in 664. Indeed, in his determination to create a ‘them and us’ atmosphere for his paschal episode, Eddius goes as far as slanderously labelling the Gaelic traditionalists ‘Quartodecimans’,<sup>2</sup> and so portrays them as wanton heretics (*Wilfrid*, 12). Likewise, Bede (*Eccles Hist.*, III, 25) attempts to sully the character of Bishop Colmán of Lindisfarne (660–4), the pro-Gaelic usage spokesman at Whitby, by implying that it was his intransigence and insensitivity which caused the damaging confrontation in 664. Conversely (although Bede evidently had a personal dislike for him), the loquacity of Wilfrid is praised, with his famous declaration at Whitby regarding the authority of St Peter being deployed by both authors as the culmination of their commentaries on the synod.

Influenced by these eighth-century works, subsequent accounts have tended to present a distorted image of the whole Easter controversy and its ramifications for the Columban Church in northern Britain. Thus, Whitby has been viewed not only as the death-knell of the Columban Church as a major political and cultural force in Northumbria (see, for example, Gougaud 1992, 198), but also as the cause for the *familia Iae*’s apparently inextricable fall from its pre-eminent position in Pictland, which was to reach its allegedly calamitous conclusion in the events of 717 (see, for example, Duke 1932, 101). Indeed, one of the *Ecclesiastical History*’s most enduring legacies for the study of the Columban Church is that its commentary on the Easter issue gives the impression that the events of 664 and 717 were part of a symbiotic historical progression, whose destiny was as clear-cut as it was inevitable (Donaldson 1960, 11). However, through a more critical assessment of the extant evidence, it can be demonstrated that the model presented by Bede and Eddius, and followed by many later writers, is not only both overly simplistic and unduly negative when dealing with the Columban Church’s history from 664 to the mid-eighth century, but also overlooks the fact that there was far more to the Easter debate in northern Britain than an ecclesiological conflict between two anti-pathetic Churches. It can even be argued that the religious policies of Oswiu and Nechtán were inspired more by individual political ambition than a common zeal for ecclesiological reform; with the result that the period from 664 to 717 should be viewed as one when the Columban Church’s involvement in northern Britain was redefined according to the local political climate rather than terminated by a hostile and concerted pro-Roman campaign.

For example, it would appear as if Oswiu’s quest for religious harmony in his kingdom was predominantly motivated by political ambition. The greatest of these aspirations, evident from the *Ecclesiastical History*, was to extend his authority into southern Britain and thus secure his position as the *Bretwalda* of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Bede, *Eccles Hist.*, III, 24 & IV, 26; & for discussion, Higham 1995). Already by the mid-seventh century Oswiu had demonstrated his formidable qualities in northern Britain by supposedly imposing his nephew Talorgan on the Picts (Smyth 1984, 61–2),<sup>3</sup> subjecting Strathclyde to his rule and gaining some sort of submission from the Scots of Dál Riata (Bede, *Eccles Hist.*, III, 5 & III, 24; Bannerman 1974, 155). His southern ambitions were not so easily achieved, however, as, despite his political marriage to Eanfled, he was plagued by Deiran revolts led by disgruntled relatives, as well as persistent hostility from the Mercians.

These problems were given an added edge by the emerging conflict between the Gaelic and Romanist factions, with the majority of his enemies, as well as his wife’s potentially hostile entourage, adhering to the latter. Notably, these opponents sometimes even played upon this religious disparity to discomfit Oswiu, as when his rebellious son, Ahlfrith, befriended the arch-Romanist Wilfrid, to whom he granted Ripon, which resulted in the expulsion of the king’s pro-Gaelic usage community (*Life of Cuthbert*, in Farmer & Webb 1988, ch 8; Bede, *Eccles Hist.*, III,

25). Significantly, even when Oswiu overcame his disloyal kinsmen and conquered Mercia, his political hegemony continued to be undermined by religious differences, a lesson which he could have learnt from his brother Oswald's experience with the king of Wessex (*ibid*, III, 7). Hence, it would have been obvious to Oswiu that some sort of rapprochement had to be reached with the Romanists if his authority was to be effectively extended into southern Britain. Indeed, this need for Oswiu to gain the 'right' result from the Synod of Whitby, so as to further his political aspirations, was probably the reason why he, a secular ruler, played such a prominent role in a Church convention. It was this unorthodox secular involvement in what was essentially an ecclesiological affair which doubtless led to Colmán's well-documented displeasure over the synod's conclusions, as similar conventions held elsewhere by the Gaelic Church were notably free from such secular interference. For example, the Irish synods of Mag Léne and Mag nAilbe in the 630s had no such secular chairmen (Gougauud 1992, 194; Ó Cróinín 1995, 152). Whatever the case, by coming out in favour of the Roman usage, Oswiu was not so much 'rejecting' and 'despising' his erstwhile protectors' beliefs, but recognizing the key part which religion played in early medieval political life and that his ambitions had outgrown the diplomatic opportunities offered by the Columban Church.

Evidence that Oswiu's judgement at Whitby was motivated by political self-interest, rather than a Damascene reversal in his religious principles, is apparent in the nature of the Columban Church's involvement in Northumbria after 664. For example, Whitby naturally led to a decline in the Church's direct political involvement in Northumbria and consequently its influence elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon England (Stenton 1947, 88–92). Admittedly, the career of Aldfrith, (king of Northumbria, 685–705), who was not only the grandson of the Uí Néill high-king, Colmán Rímid, and so the possible nephew of Bishop Finán of Northumbria, but also the alleged pupil of Adomnán, demonstrated that ties between Irish and Northumbrian rulers could still be engendered by the Columban clergy (Ireland 1991; Moisl 1983; Smyth 1984, 128–31). Indeed, one of the reasons why Alhfrith befriended Wilfrid and agitated against the Columban Church in Northumbria, may have been because the Columban clergy supported his half-brother Aldfrith's claim to succeed Oswiu in the kingship. The practical politics of late seventh-century Northumbrian society, however, dictated that Aldfrith's Columban Church upbringing was to manifest itself more in the field of art than politics, with the emergence during his reign of a highly influential Hiberno-Saxon artistic style. Thus significantly, Aldfrith chose Wilfrid of York as his son Osred's foster-father and not one of his erstwhile tutors in Iona, or even a member of the Lindisfarne *familia*.

It is important to appreciate, however, that the inevitable decline in the Columban Church's political role in Northumbria did not preclude the continuance of its religious influence amongst its people. Indeed, a sudden transformation would have been impossible, not only in the practical terms of replacing or converting the existing clergy, but also because Columban Church traditions appear to have been the popular choice amongst the Northumbrians themselves. This can be inferred from a passage in the *Ecclesiastical History* (III, 17) which states that Aidan 'was compelled by the force of public opinion (*gentis auctoritate*) not to follow' the Roman usage. Thus, despite the replacement of Colmán as bishop of Northumbria by the Irish Romanist Tuda, the continuity of the Columban Church was preserved to a certain extent when Eata of Melrose, a disciple of Aidan, was made abbot of Lindisfarne. Moreover, Bede (*Eccles Hist*, III, 26) records that this appointment was a 'favour' obtained from Oswiu by the departing Colmán, who was still 'greatly loved' by the Northumbrians, therefore contradicting the view that the bishop either skulked away despised from Whitby or was peremptorily expelled from his monastery (Kirby 1973, 19). Indeed, while it is tempting to interpret both the departure of Colmán along with some

members of his monastery and the powerfully symbolic division of Aidan's relics (Bede, *Eccles Hist*, IV, 4; *Annals of Ulster* [AU], AD 668) as the last act of the Columban community on Lindisfarne, it is possible to view it in a more positive light. For example, that Colmán took with him neither the whole community nor all of the relics, allied to the aforementioned promotion of Eata, strongly implies the survival of a Columban-loyalist community on Lindisfarne after 664. Indeed, it is evident from Bede's *Life of Cuthbert* (ch 39) that during Eata's tenure as abbot (664–78), the abbey of Lindisfarne observed the same constitution as had Aidan's community in the years before Whitby and even contained some monks who still practised the Gaelic usage.

Columban Church continuity was not confined to the monastery of Lindisfarne. In illustration, when the triumphant Wilfrid travelled to Paris after the Synod of Whitby for consecration as bishop of Northumbria, Oswiu elevated Chad in his place, a cleric who was both an Irish-trained disciple of Aidan and a 'candidate of the Quartodeciman party' (*Wilfrid*, 14; Bede, *Eccles Hist*, III, 28). Though Chad's tenure proved to be short-lived, the Lindisfarne community had the support of other Columban Church sympathisers, such as Abbess Hild of Whitby, who remained a redoubtable opponent of the Romanist Wilfrid despite accepting the decision reached by the synod held at her own community (*Wilfrid*, 54; Bede, *Eccles Hist*, IV, 23). An even more important ally was Cuthbert, who in his capacity as abbot of Melrose probably tried to ensure that the religious houses of Lothian remained under the jurisdiction of Lindisfarne. Indeed, from his early days as a disciple of Aidan and friend of Eata and Boisil, to his expulsion from Ripon and austerity as bishop of Lindisfarne, Cuthbert was the model of a seventh-century Columban churchman (see *Cuthbert*). Admittedly, Bede depicts Cuthbert on his death-bed denouncing those who still held out against the Roman usage, but the accuracy of this claim has been challenged (Kirby 1973, 12–13). It is surely indicative, moreover, that the first Northumbrian bishop of Abercorn (although evidently not of the Picts, as Bede remarked that Wilfrid enjoyed diocesan powers over 'all the Northumbrians and Picts, as far as Oswiu's power extended') (Bede, *Eccles Hist*, IV, 3), Trumwine, was a friend and confidant of Cuthbert (*Cuthbert*, 1). Moreover, it is perhaps equally significant that both Trumwine as bishop of the Picts, and Cuthbert through his epiphanal visit to the 'Niduari', were linked with Pictland, an area dominated in the seventh century by the Columban Church (*ibid*, 1). There is even evidence to suggest that less august Northumbrian churchmen continued to look to Ireland for religious guidance, with the English monk Hæmgisl returning there during the reign of Aldfrith to become a hermit (Bede, *Eccles Hist*, V, 12). Indeed, Bede records that in the 660s 'there were many in England, both nobles and commons who . . . had left their own country and retired to Ireland for the sake of religious studies or to live a more ascetic life' (*ibid*, III, 27). Significantly, as is demonstrated by the celebrated career of Ecgberht, the events of 664 did not force the 'exiles' in the Columban areas of Ireland back to Northumbria, and hence an English presence was maintained in the Columban Church. Furthermore, it is important to appreciate that adherence to the Roman usage did not prevent clerics such as Hild and Cuthbert from admiring the Columban Church and some of its traditions, such as austerity and anchorism. Thus, in spite of his prejudicial bluster about the intransigence of Colmán, even Bede could praise him for his 'innate prudence' and asceticism (*ibid*, III, 26). Likewise, Eddius' denouncement of Chad was tempered by the acknowledgement that he was 'a truly devout servant of God and a great teacher' (*Cuthbert*, 14; Bede, *Eccles Hist*, IV, 5). Furthermore, the great cultural renaissance which occurred in Northumbria during the reign of Aldfrith owed much to the fact that the intellectual Christian atmosphere engendered by the Columban Church continued to influence the post-Whitby Church of Northumbria. Thus, on the one hand, it is evident from the Hiberno-Saxon artwork of the Lindisfarne Gospels that the Church instituted in Northumbria by Irish

missionaries had assimilated comfortably with Anglo-Saxon society, while, on the other, the *Anonymous Life of Cuthbert* demonstrates that Columban literary skills were admired and hence still commissioned by those adhering to Roman ecclesiological practices.

The ease with which this cultural continuity and assimilation was achieved should not be viewed as extraordinary. It merely underlines the fact that the Gaelic and Roman traditions within the Church conformed to far more than they differed. This was as true for ecclesiological and theological beliefs as artistic styles; for example, both institutions practised the same Mass and Sacraments, followed a Latin liturgy, gave spiritual prominence to bishops, and adhered to the notion of a single, catholic Church. Certainly, the ultra-orthodox statutes of the synods initiated by Theodore of Canterbury appear to have attacked Gaelic Church practices, such as wandering monks and ordination by Irish clergy (Haddan & Stubbs 1869–79, III, 418; Cubbitt 1995, 149–50, 193). However, these measures were arguably due more to the need to unify the Church throughout England than a draconian rejection of anti-Roman traditions. Likewise, the whole notion that the clergy of the Gaelic Church were somehow hostile to Rome is patently erroneous when the evidence is properly considered. For example, that the Gaels revered Rome as the pre-eminent shrine of saints and martyrs in Christendom is demonstrated by the fact that the Latin *Roma* was borrowed into Old Irish as *ruam* to specify a cemetery of important relics (Watson 1926, 257–8). Similarly, if a Gaelic Church scribe wished to bestow the highest praise upon an Irish church, he compared it with the city of St Peter, as when Glendalough was described in the *Félire Óengusso* as the ‘*ruam* of the western world’ (Stokes 1905, 25). Significantly, this respect was displayed in ecclesiological matters as well, with Cumman in c 633 and the northern Irish churches in c 640 both addressing their problems to Rome, ‘as children to their mother’ (Walsh & Ó Cróinín 1988, 26). The most compelling evidence of this respect, however, is Columbanus’ letter to Boniface IV of 613 (Walker 1957, 37–57), which calls the Pope ‘the most fair Head of all the Churches of the whole of Europe . . . Shepherd of Shepherds’, and Rome the head of the Churches of the world’. Moreover, Columbanus declares ‘For all we Irish, inhabitants of the world’s edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul . . . and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching’. Admittedly, this praise is tempered with some rather barbed comments regarding ‘the disgrace of St Peter’s chair’ and the assertion that although ‘Rome be great and famous, among us it is only on that chair that her greatness and her fame depends’, which demonstrates that Columbanus was not willing to be lectured to by the Pope on matters ecclesiological. To interpret this as a schismatic, or even anti-papal stance, however, is to transpose 11th-century notions of papal monarchalism onto a period when the papacy was not viewed as an omnipotent, centralized power. That there was a bond between the clergy adhering to the Gaelic and the Romanized usage which was stronger than any dispute, however acrimonious, regarding the Christian calendar, is apparent by the fact that the decision of 664 did not result in the formation of a breakaway Church, as was to occur in eastern Christendom in 1054.

Thus, bearing these facts in mind, it is arguable that the traditional, Bede-inspired interpretation of the Northumbrian Easter debate not only over-emphasizes the rancour and division which Oswiu’s pronouncement at Whitby caused, but also ignores the fundamental unity of the Church throughout early medieval Britain. Consequently, without this black and white interpretation, it seems quite natural that the Columban Church should have continued to influence on many levels the Christian practices of what, in deference to its post-664 political milieu, should be called the Northumbrian Church.

Unsurprisingly, a similarly moderate interpretation can be proposed for the Easter debate’s effect on the Columban Church elsewhere in northern Britain, which was neither as rapid nor as

damaging as would first appear. For example, despite the aforementioned supremacy enjoyed by Oswiu in northern Britain, his decision to adopt the Roman usage conspicuously did not meet with any immediate response beyond the boundaries of his own kingdom of Northumbria. That this was the case must bring into question the practical impact of the Northumbrian hegemony over Pictland in general, and in particular the effectiveness of the Anglian bishopric of Abercorn. Indeed, Abercorn's location on the southern shore of the Firth of Forth, and the marked absence of Anglian place-names, ecclesiastical or otherwise, in Pictland, both suggest that the designation 'Bishop of the Picts' was largely titular. Moreover, Trumwine's tenure appears to have been reliant on the military power of the Northumbrian regime, with Ecgrith's disastrous defeat at Nechtansmere in 685 terminating Abercorn's diocesan pretensions. Significantly, it has been proposed that Culross rose to prominence under the leadership of St Serf after the collapse of the superficial Northumbrian Church presence on the shores of the Forth (Macquarrie 1993, 133). This foundation (being a monastery with a scattered *paruchia* and, subsequently, an important cult centre) consequently can be viewed as a symbol of the re-affirmation of Columban-style organization in an area noted as having strong connections with Dál Riata,<sup>4</sup> as well as a testimony to the failure of the Romanized Northumbrian Church to penetrate Pictland in the decades after Whitby. Indeed, it is evident from the *Life of Columba* that the Columban Church's hegemony in Pictland, through the continuing unity of the Columban federation, remained intact at the end of the seventh century. For example, in trying to explain why a plague which had devastated Ireland and the rest of Britain left Dál Riata and Pictland unmolested, Adomnán states that it was because the monasteries of the Scots and the Picts still honoured Columba (Adomnán, *Columba*, II, 46). Arguably, the crucial element underpinning this unity was the fact that, unlike in Northumbria where a large part of Iona's power was delegated to Lindisfarne, the Columban Church in Pictland remained under the jurisdiction of the *comarba Coluim Chille*. Hence, there was little ecclesiological latitude afforded to the Columban clergy in Pictland and less opportunity for the Church there to fall under the domination of manipulative rulers. In addition to this, there appears to have been friendly contact between Iona and the kings Bruide mac Bili (c 672–93) and Bruide mac Derile (697–706) (Anderson 1973, 170–6; Smyth 1984, 134–7), both of whom were active opponents of Northumbrian influence in Pictland, and so unlikely to have welcomed the encroachment of an English-sponsored Romanist Church.

Of course, with the conversion of Adomnán, abbot of Iona, to the Roman usage contrary to the wishes of his community, the Easter controversy did eventually affect the Columban federation in Dál Riata and Pictland. The main account of this conversion is supplied by Bede, who claims that it occurred while Adomnán was at the court of Aldfrith on a diplomatic mission. Thus, in language redolent of his earlier account of the Whitby debate, Bede (*Eccles Hist*, V, 15) states that 'He [Adomnán] was earnestly advised by many who were better instructed than himself that he, in company with a small band of followers, living in the remotest corner of the world, should not presume to go against the universal custom of the church in the matter of keeping Easter and in various other ordinances.' Bede's version of events, however, needs to be treated cautiously, mainly because it forms part of the treatise which runs throughout the *Ecclesiastical History* on the righteous triumph of the Romanizing Northumbrian Church over its Columban counterpart. Hence, it was in Bede's best interest to claim that the head of the Gaelic Church's most powerful *familia*, the abbot of Iona, had 'altered his opinions greatly' due to English enlightenment. In this way Bede was settling the score, as it were, for the Gaelic conversion of Northumbria, with the erstwhile pupils now teaching the teachers. In addition to these doubts concerning Bede's motives, it is noteworthy that his account does not always correlate with the evidence presented by the Irish annals, which for the most part record only Adomnán's first visit

to Northumbria in 686 (Adomnán, *Columba*, II, 46; see also Herbert 1988, 48; Skene 1886–90, II, 172; Smyth 1984, 130). For example, the Iona-compiled *Annals of Ulster* do not mention the second visit and thus the conversion, at all, but rather confine themselves to recording his sojourn of 686 with the typically laconic note that ‘Adomnán brought back sixty [former] captives to Ireland’ (*AU*, 686). The *Annals of the Four Masters* likewise overlook any adoption of the Roman usage, although they do embellish the entry detailing the hostage release with the claim that Adomnán performed miracles and wonders (Anderson 1990, II, 196). Interestingly though, despite what could perhaps be a form of judicious amnesia on the part of some annalists who may have been displeased by Adomnán’s apparent volte-face, the conversion is mentioned in one set of annals. Thus, certain annal evidence, based no doubt on Bede’s own account, records that Adomnán adopted the Roman tonsure. However, the implication is that it was only done as part of a deal to gain the freedom of the hostages (Radner 1978, 58). This important caveat may at first seem a fanciful elaboration on the part of an annalist keen to explain away Adomnán’s decision, and certainly by telescoping the events of the two separate visits the accuracy of his account is called into question. Moreover, it would seem unlikely that a churchman of Adomnán’s stature could be bullied into changing his beliefs, or that his friend and quondam student, Aldfrith, would threaten him. Nevertheless, by linking the conversion to the diplomatic efforts of Adomnán, both the annalist and, for that matter, Bede are providing a glimpse of the political expediency which was the probable reason behind this momentous event.

There are a number of reasons why this should be the case. For example, even though the threat was more apparent than real at the end of the seventh century, Adomnán would have been well aware through texts, such as the *Book of the Angel* and *Life of Patrick*, of the challenge within the Gaelic Church from Armagh to Iona’s pre-eminent position in northern Ireland and its traditionally close relationship with the ruling Uí Néill family (Bieler 1979; Ó Cróinín 1995, 154–61). Furthermore, with the loss of Dál Riata’s Irish territories due to the disastrous reign of Domnall Brecc and the subsequent decline of Iona’s patrons, the Cenél nGabráin, in the face of a resurgent Cenél Loairn (Bannerman 1974, 114), the *familia Iae*’s political foundations were further weakened. In addition to this, the challenge to Iona’s hegemony in Pictland from Ceolfrith of Northumbria’s contact with Nechtán and the continuing debate with the churches of southern Ireland (Gougaud 1992, 192–4; De Paor 1994, 151–3; Ó Cróinín 1995, 152–4) must have further convinced Adomnán that if it rested upon its laurels, his *familia* was in danger of becoming perilously isolated. Thus, many of the landmarks of his illustrious career can be interpreted as earnest attempts to sustain the elevated status of Iona against a rising tide of adversity. For example, the *Life of Columba* has been recognized, among other things, as a refutation of Armagh’s claims, a defence of Columba against Ceolfrith’s attacks, and a manifesto of Iona’s proprietorial claims in Ireland and northern Britain (Picard 1982, 172–6; Herbert 1988, 134–50). Likewise, the visit to Aldfrith in 686 was on behalf of the Uí Néill high-king, with whom Adomnán was doubtless trying to engender the sort of relationship portrayed in his hagiography between Columba and Áedán (Herbert 1988, 47–8; Moisl 1983, 103–26). Adomnán’s political efforts on behalf of Iona were to reach their zenith, however, with the promulgation of the *Lex Innocentium* (Law of Innocents) at the Synod of Birr in 697 (Márkus 1997; Meyer 1905; Adomnán, *Columba*, 50–3; Ní Dhonnchadha 1982; Ó Cróinín 1995, 80). The *Cáin Adomnáin* (Law of Adomnán), as it became known, brought enriching legal dues to Iona and for the first time put into practical, not just theoretical, effect a monastery’s claims of control over both a wide *paruchia* of lesser churches and the corresponding lay population. Moreover, the illustrious roll-call of witnesses to the Law, which included Eochaid mac Domangairt, king of Dál Riata, and Bruide mac Derile, king of Picts, allied the abbot of Iona with the prominent leaders of the



age, and in so doing demonstrated that the community of Iona remained the diplomatic and cultural linchpin between Ireland and Pictland. Thus, despite the *familia Iae* being threatened on all sides (although, see Herbert 1988, 146), Adomnán through his law and the prominent role he played in other synods held in northern Ireland — some of which, significantly, were convoked in attempt to resolve the Easter controversy (Radner 1978, 57; Bede, *Eccles Hist*, V, 15) — not only reaffirmed Iona's pre-eminence amongst the monasteries of the Gaelic Church, but also gave his community a status to which the theorists of Armagh could as yet only aspire.

Due mainly to the influential testimony of Bede (*Eccles Hist*, V, 15), however, it has been presumed that Adomnán's achievement in promulgating the *Law of Innocents* was overshadowed by a bitter rift between himself and the community of Iona over the latter's refusal to adopt Roman practices. Consequently, the confused succession to the title *comarba Coluim Chille* after Adomnán's death has been interpreted as a manifestation within the community itself of this dispute (Hughes 1962, 14; Skene 1886–90, II, 175). However, historians have more recently challenged this orthodoxy by highlighting the unreliability of Bede's polarized account of Adomnán's 'exile' from Iona, and have instead proposed that the relationship between the abbot and his conservative brethren was far from rancorous (Adomnán, *Columba*, 49–53; Herbert 1988, 50–3; Smyth 1984, 131–4). Thus, that Adomnán was not *persona non grata* with his community is demonstrated by the support given to his law by Bishop Cœti and Conamail mac Conain, who were two of Iona's paschal traditionalists (Adomnán, *Columba*, 52). It has been further proposed both on the strength of this revisionism and a different approach to the relevant annal entries, that there is no real foundation for the belief that Iona was riven by ecclesiological factionalism after 704, rather indeed, it was on the threshold of a new 'golden age' (Adomnán, *Columba*, 74–6).<sup>5</sup> Significantly, this re-interpretation of the Easter controversy's effects on the *familia Iae* has important consequences for the study not only of Adomnán's career, but also Columban Church continuity in Pictland. This is because it has traditionally been presumed that the turmoil which Bede alleged disrupted the monastery of Iona in the early eighth century had a demoralizing and weakening affect on its *familia* in Pictland. For example, it has been proposed that King Nechtán's alleged persecution of the Columban Church in his kingdom (part of his so-called 'anti-Irish activities') was prompted by the supposed split in the *familia Iae* (Picard 1982, 164). However, as the preceding discussion evidently undermines the theory that the Columban federation was either politically isolated or torn apart by internecine dispute, the motives behind and the ramifications of Nechtán's momentous decision demand reassessment.

Crucial to any such reassessment is the recognition that the Church in Pictland had experienced some fundamental changes in the period immediately prior to 711. For example, Bede (*Eccles Hist*, V, 21) makes it clear that before Nechtán contacted Ceolfrith, the Pictish king had already 'renounced' the traditional Gaelic usage after gaining 'by assiduous study of ecclesiastical writings . . . no small knowledge' about Romanist practices. Accordingly, Bede (who, in the form of his own version of Ceolfrith's letter to the Pictish king, offers the only extant record of this appeal) goes on to remark that the abbot's advice merely confirmed what Nechtán already knew. Consequently, as Nechtán's initial adoption of Roman practices goes unexplained by Bede, it would appear more than likely that the Pictish king was converted not by English advice, but through the exhortations of the Columban Church's Romanist faction. This theory seems all the more credible when it is remembered that the most famous advocate of the Roman usage during this period, Adomnán, had close ties with the Pictish ruling house, including Nechtán's brother and predecessor Bruide. Indeed, with recent research concluding that Nechtán was descended from the Cenél Comgaill,<sup>6</sup> a kindred which up until c 700 formed a sept of the Cenél nGabráin (Bannerman 1974, 110) whose leaders were, of course, Iona's main patrons, it is

probable that this Scoto-Pictish king was not only personally acquainted with the hierarchy of the *familia Iae*, but also treated the *comarba Coluim Chille* as his spiritual adviser. Thus, it is entirely possible that Adomnán had converted the Pictish royal family during the reign of Nechtán's brother Bruide, and therefore set in motion the conversion of the *familia Iae* in Pictland despite the continuing obduracy of Iona. Certainly there is no record of these events in the *Ecclesiastical History*, but, as mentioned earlier, Bede seriously polarized his account of the abbot of Iona's post-686 career to facilitate his narrative's partisan and didactic flow, to which a Columban Church-influenced conversion of the Picts to the Roman usage would not have been conducive. Moreover, notwithstanding Bede's ostensible silence, there are other pieces of evidence, apart from the contact Adomnán had with Bruide mac Derile, to suggest that Columba's hagiographer played both an extensive and defining role in the shaping of Christianity in eighth-century Pictland (Smyth 1984, 138–9). Firstly, by emphasizing Adomnán's conversion to the Roman usage (Bede, *Eccles Hist*, V, 21), Ceolfrith's letter to Nechtán suggests that, in order to lend his treatise more weight, the abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow was calling upon a figure well known to and respected by both the Northumbrian Church and the Pictish king. Ceolfrith's reference to Adomnán may also have been meant to imply to Nechtán and his churchmen that their appeal to the English for religious guidance did not mean that they would have to abandon their loyalty to a revered Gaelic holyman. This would have been an important consideration, as it is apparent from the widespread and numerous dedications to Adomnán in Pictland — including Aboyn, Dalmeny, Forglen, Furvie, Inchkeith, Killearnan, Sanda and Tannadice (Watson 1926, 270–1) — and the emergence of a cult to him soon after his death, that the abbot of Iona was also an extremely popular figure amongst the wider Pictish population (Taylor 1997, 60–2). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the dedications indicate that Adomnán may have proselytized extensively in Pictland (possibly when he took the *Law of Innocents* to Bruide mac Derile's subjects), which would, of course, have resulted in further conversions to the Romanist faction.

Characteristically, it would appear as if while spreading Roman ecclesiological practices, Adomnán remained a staunch advocate of Iona's religious traditions, as some of the churches bearing his name are also dedicated to St Columba. In illustration, Forglen has a joint dedication, while the Andersons noted that a Banffshire church recorded in the Arbroath register was granted to Columba but dedicated to Adomnán (Anderson & Anderson 1961, 95). Indeed, it has been proposed that one of Adomnán's motivations for writing his *Life of Columba* was to demonstrate that there was no conflict in being a follower of the Roman usage and a member of the *familia Iae*, and so conciliate the traditionalists of Iona (Herbert 1988, 142–4). It may even be the fact that Columba's popular and enduring cult in Pictland was due as much to his hagiographer's efforts as to his own proselytizing, and that the real cultural dominance of Iona came at the end of the seventh and not the sixth century. Whichever the case, it appears probable from this evidence that not only had the majority of the churches in Pictland already converted to the Roman usage before Ceolfrith's recommendations to Nechtán, but also, crucially, these reformed religious sites remained firmly part of the *familia Iae* due to the activities of Adomnán. Accordingly, the ecclesiological ramifications of Nechtán's appeal to the Northumbrian Church would have been minimal for the majority of the clergy in Pictland, to whom the Pictish king's decree that all of his churchmen should adopt the Roman usage was evidently superfluous. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that Bede (*Eccles Hist*, V, 21) could confidently announce that Ceolfrith's recommendations were so welcome that 'All ministers of the altar and monks received the tonsure in the form of a crown', as the English abbot was merely confirming what was already known and to a large extent practised throughout Pictland. Importantly, the influence which the

appeal exerted on the *familia Iae*'s hegemony in this kingdom was no doubt similarly negligible, as, apart from the implication by Bede that a stone church dedicated to St Peter was constructed by English masons somewhere in Nechtán's domain (Barrow 1983, 8; Donaldson 1985, 1–3), there is a complete lack of evidence indicating a direct involvement by Northumbrians in the religious society of Pictland. For example, it can be inferred from Bede's silence on the matter that the events of c 711 prompted neither an attempt by Nechtán to subject his churchmen to a Northumbrian bishop, nor, more significantly, a move by the Northumbrian Church to reinstitute a bishopric of the Picts. Indeed, Nechtán's decision to correspond with an abbot and not a bishop may not only have been due to his Gaelic Church background, but also dictated by a desire to avoid becoming beholden to a territorially ambitious bishop in the tradition of Wilfrid of York. Likewise, there does not appear to have been an influx of English Romanist 'missionaries' into Pictland in the wake of Ceolfrith's letter, or the rise of a predominantly native faction of clergy outwith the *familia Iae*'s control as had occurred in Northumbria after 664. In fact, due to the activities of holymen such as Curetán, it is evident that in the years immediately after 711 the Columban Church experienced a period of consolidation, not to say expansion, in Pictland.

Admittedly, this may initially appear a somewhat misguided interpretation of Curetán's enigmatic career (for which, see MacDonald 1992), as it has been a long-held belief that with his obvious adherence to the cult of St Peter, he was an anti-Columban agent for the embryonic Pictish Church, being promoted post-c 711 by Nechtán (see, for example, Duncan 1975, 71; Henderson 1990, 22; MacDonald 1992, 46; Simpson 1935, 111). However, if it is accepted that there was nothing antagonistic about being both a follower of Gaelic usage and a devotee of St Peter, and that the predominantly Romanized *familia Iae* maintained its pre-eminent position in Pictland, then this traditional theory regarding Curetán's mission is largely invalidated. Rather, it invites the revised conclusion that Curetán was actually a member of the Columban Church's pro-Roman faction and perhaps even part of Adomnán's reforming mission amongst the *familia Iae* in Pictland. This suggestion of an Adomnán connection is strengthened when it is remembered that the one firm historical fact known about Curetán — that he witnessed the *Law of Innocents* in 697 (Meyer 1905; Ní Dhonnchadha 1982, 196) — indicates that he was an acquaintance of the abbot of Iona and supported his work (Taylor 1996, 102). Indeed, it could be the case that the frequently remarked upon relationship between Curetán and Nechtán mac Derile was a consequence of the strong links which this law helped forge between Adomnán and the Pictish royal family. It can therefore be surmised that Curetán was merely following traditional Columban Church practice by gaining the native ruler's backing for his mission, rather than acting as Nechtán's political pawn. In addition to this, that the *Law*'s guarantor list accords Curetán the title of bishop (although for doubts regarding this title see Ní Dhonnchadha 1982, 184–5, 192) and places him immediately after Bishop Cóeti of Iona implies that he was the spiritual, and probably also administrative, head of a Columban community in northern Britain which was deemed second in importance only to the mother-house. The most likely candidate for this accolade would have been the monastery at Rosemarkie (Lynch 1992, 34; Smyth 1984, 128; Ritchie 1989, 34–5), and interestingly enough, Curetán is commemorated in the Irish calendars as that house's bishop *and* abbot (Skene 1886–90, II, 231). There was, moreover, a popular local cult to Curetán in the vicinity of Rosemarkie, the effects of which are still visible in place-names such as *Tobar Churaidan* (Curetán's Well), while legend states that his *alter ego* Boniface built a new church on the site (MacDonald 1992, 32; Watson 1926, 315). It is therefore entirely possible that Curetán was abbot of Rosemarkie by 697 and had thus established the site's noted role as a Petrine missionary centre long before the events of c 711. Consequently, it can be proposed that while Adomnán was converting the *familia Iae* in southern Pictland to the Roman usage, Curetán

was likewise reforming the Columban Church communities of northern Pictland from his base at Rosemarkie. That this mission not only achieved its aim in propagating the Roman usage, but managed also to attract the support and patronage of the local nobility, is demonstrated by the cluster of dedications to St Peter and the wealth of carved stones (including the impressive monuments of Hilton of Cadboll, Nigg and Tarbat) in the countryside around Rosemarkie (Foster 1996, 91; MacDonald 1992, 24; Ritchie 1989, 9–10, 34–5; Skene 1886–90, II, 233). Indeed, it has even been suggested that Curetán took advantage of the expansion of Nechtán's power into the northern isles by establishing a *pro-Roman* presence in Orkney (Lamb 1994). Whatever the case, with this mission in northern Pictland conspicuously successful, it is probable that on Adomnán's death, Curetán became the leader of the Columban Church's *pro-Roman* faction in Pictland, just as Ecgberht and Dúnchad assumed that role in Dál Riata and Ireland (Herbert 1988, 58–60; Kirby 1973, 19; Smyth 1984, 132; Taylor 1996, 100). Hence, with the aid of fellow missionaries such as Fergus — whose connection with the abbot-bishop of Rosemarkie is implied by the similar geographical extent of his cult and the tradition which credits him with the conversion of Caithness in the early eighth century (Skene 1886–90, II, 232–3; Watson 1926, 322) — Curetán probably consolidated the abbot of Iona's efforts in such areas as Buchan, Angus and the Mearns, where dedications to St Peter are so prevalent (Kirby 1973, 17).

The legends therefore which depict Curetán, through his *alter ego* Boniface, as a pope who hailed from the east can be seen as an allegorical attempt by later Columban Church hagiographers to convey both his success in promoting the cult of St Peter and the belief that their communities, far from being isolated, were in fact an integral part of the Church of Rome's universal Christian culture. Curetán was thus being promoted as the key figure of a transitional period in the religious society of Pictland, when the Columban Church was adapting to take account of the cultural impulses emanating from the Continent,<sup>7</sup> yet at the same time maintaining its own traditions and status.

Accordingly, two of the great ecclesiastical events traditionally associated with Nechtán's reign should be viewed not as memorials to the decline of the *familia Iae* in Pictland, but as symbols of the Columban Church's ability, through the work of holymen such as Adomnán and Curetán, to engender continuity by embracing change. For example, the famous foundation near or at Restennet, with its proximity to a royal site and dedication to St Peter, was a balance between the old Columban practice of establishing religious communities near key secular centres and a recognition of the prevailing cultural passion for Roman practices. Likewise, the possible appearance at the same time of some sort of episcopal centre at Abernethy (*Scotichron*, IV, XII; for discussion, see Macquarrie 1992, 114–18), was probably an attempt by the *familia Iae* to take account of the Romanizers' preference for the organizational supremacy of bishops by giving the bishop/abbot of that significant early Columban foundation a more prominent role in the ecclesiastical affairs of Pictland.<sup>8</sup> That Nechtán was evidently so involved in both of these developments is perhaps unsurprising, as through such patronage of its *pro-Roman* faction he was aligning himself with the powerful *familia Iae* in Pictland and thus bolstering his own kingship by endowing it with a potential sacred element. This theory would certainly appear to be strengthened by the suggestion that the Pictish king lists were produced at this time by genealogists, who were no doubt churchmen, in support of their royal patron Nechtán (Lynch 1992, 21). It may even be the case that the elevation of Abernethy to the rank of episcopal centre was Nechtán's attempt to establish a churchman within the *familia Iae* who could not only act as a more immediate adviser and spokesman than the relatively distant *comarba Coluim Chille*, and thus further associate his dynasty with the Columban Church, but also (as with Fergus in Rome), represent both himself and his clergy at the courts of foreign potentates. Whatever the case, it is

apparent from the available evidence that the popular belief (see Donaldson 1960, 11; Henderson 1971, 58; Macquarrie 1992, 114; Simpson 1925, 110) that the whole episode in c 711 was a move by Nechtán to establish a national Pictish Church in opposition to the *familia Iae* is quite fanciful. Hence, while the religious society of Pictland undoubtedly evolved during his reign, due to the fact that this was an essentially inter-Columban Church reformation patronized and encouraged by the king himself, it is conspicuous that the whole *ecclesiological* aspect of Nechtán's approach to Ceolfrith was, if not a complete dead letter, then at least somewhat unnecessary.

If this theory is correct, then it invites the conclusion that if not for religious reasons, the Pictish king's decision in c 711 must have been motivated by secular concerns. Interestingly, this supposition is considerably strengthened when the Pictish Easter debate is placed within its wider political context, for it then becomes obvious that at the time of his correspondence with Ceolfrith, Nechtán was facing two potentially serious threats to his kingship. First, judging from the endemic civil wars which disrupted his later reign (Anderson 1973, 85–9; Smyth 1984, 139), it is evident that Nechtán's claim to the Pictish kingship was far from undisputed, a situation which was surely apparent to him before the first recorded incident of dynastic unrest in 713 when he imprisoned his brother, Talorgan (*AU*, 713). Moreover, the continuing Scottish expansion into Pictland, which notably included an increasingly influential role being played by Dál Riata families in the kingship of the Picts — as personified not only by Nechtán himself, but also his main contenders, Drust, Alpín and Óengus, all of whom had connections with Irish dynasties (Anderson 1973, 179–84; Hudson 1994a, 21–9 & 38) — could possibly have fuelled these dynastic disputes. Second, the early years of Nechtán's reign saw continued hostilities between the Picts and Northumbrians, which culminated in a defeat for Nechtán's forces on the plains of *Manaw* (*AU*, 711). Significantly, this set-back, which would not only have encouraged further dynastic unrest, but also opened up the possibility of a Northumbrian counter-invasion of southern Pictland and a return to the subjection of pre-685 for its people, reportedly occurred in about the very same year that Ceolfrith was in contact with Nechtán. Suffering, therefore, from possible internal unrest and a very real external threat, the priority for Nechtán by 711 would have been to secure his southern border and gain an ally against dynastic rivals, rather than enter into a correspondence regarding ecclesiological practices of which he was already aware. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to note that in a chapter following the *Ecclesiastical History's* account of Ceolfrith's letter to Nechtán, Bede (*Eccles Hist*, V, 23) states that 'The Picts now have a treaty of peace with the English and rejoice to share the Catholic peace and truth of the Church universal . . . [and]. The Irish . . . are content with their own territories.' This is significant because Bede not only openly connects the religious rapprochement between the Picts and Northumbrians with a secular non-aggression pact, but also implies that an eventual consequence of this treaty was a cessation of the Scottish expansion into Pictland.

Ergo, it would appear as if, by exploiting the known divisions within the Columban Church concerning the correct observance of Easter and playing upon the Northumbrian Church's reputation as the champion of the Romanist cause in northern Britain (Kirby 1973, 14), Nechtán was able to find common ground with his erstwhile English enemies and in so doing alleviate some of his own political difficulties. That he chose to go through the medium of the Northumbrian Church to achieve this goal demonstrates that, rather than acting in the role of an anti-Columban Church zealot, the Pictish king merely recognized the highly politicized nature of an institution whose senior members, such as Ceolfrith, were not only literate and so ideally suited to long-range diplomacy, but also enjoyed the confidence of the local ruler (Bede, *Lives of the Abbots*, Farmer & Webb 1988, ch 15 & 17). Indeed, through both the praise given to Adomnán in the *Ecclesiastical History* and the influential role played by the English cleric Ecgberht in the

conversion of Iona, it can be inferred that the Northumbrian Church maintained amicable contact with their fellow Romanists in the *familia Iae*, so engendering channels of communication which would have been ideal for Nechtán's diplomatic purposes. The belief that contact was maintained after Whitby is arguably borne out, moreover, not only by the fact that, despite being in Ireland/Dál Riata from the 660s, the exploits of Ecgberht were known to his fellow Englishman Bede (*Eccles Hist*, III, 27; Herbert 1988, 58–60), but also by the emergence of an artistic style which fused Gaelic and Northumbrian elements (Ritchie 1989, 29–37; Smyth 1984, 76–9). On the strength of this evidence, therefore, as well as the preceding discussion regarding the ecclesiastical climate in Pictland before and after 711, it is apparent that Nechtán's famous approach to Ceolfriht was primarily a diplomatic device the sole aim of which was to gain a 'foot in the door' of the royal court of Northumbria. Accordingly, it can be proposed that the received interpretation of the events of 711 as a primarily religious affair which brought about drastic changes in the ecclesiology of Pictland is essentially flawed, with the evidence suggesting that the pre-eminence of the Pictish provinces' predominantly Romanized Columban Church was largely unaffected — as had no doubt been intended — by Nechtán's Northumbrian policy.

Significantly, this apparently amicable relationship between the Pictish ruler and *familia Iae* had patently deteriorated quite drastically by 717, as in that year the annals record the 'Expulsion of the community of Í beyond *Dorsum Britanniae* by King Nechtán' (*AU*, 717; Anderson 1990, I, 217). Unfortunately, though, with the typically terse annal evidence remaining uncorroborated, the nature of and the reasons behind this undoubtedly important event are difficult to determine. The dearth of information regarding Nechtán's actions has not, however, prevented the emergence of various theories upon the subject, most of which base their interpretations upon the assumption, contrary to the conclusions presented above, that the period from 664 to the early eighth century was one of ecclesiological isolation and waning political support for the *familia Iae*. Indeed, over the last one hundred years or so, it has been widely held by those studying the Church in early medieval Britain that, prompted by his own pro-Roman sentiments and encouraged by the conversion of Iona in 716 (*AU*, 716; & Bede, *Eccles Hist*, V, 22), Nechtán finally completed the ecclesiastical reforms begun in 711 and exiled those intransigent members of the *familia Iae* who still adhered to the Gaelic usage (a view held by a diverse range of scholars: Donaldson 1960, 11; Duncan 1975, 71; Foster 1996, 90; Herbert 1988, 59; Hughes 1970, 15; Kirby 1973, 19; Macquarrie 1992, 116–17; Muirhead 1996, 6; Skene 1886–90, II, 177–8). Consequently, as it is widely thought that the majority of the *familia Iae* in Pictland were resistant to Nechtán's reforming initiative, such speculation often results in the conclusion that the year 717 witnessed a mass expulsion of Columban clergy. For example, Skene (1886–90, II, 177–8) stated that 'The greater part, if not the whole, of the dependent monasteries among the Picts seem to have resisted the change, and to have refused obedience . . . [with the result that] the whole of the Columban monks were expelled from his kingdom.' Despite its enduring popularity, however, this traditional interpretation has been challenged somewhat in recent years. For example, while admitting that information relevant to the event is 'very obscure', Sharpe (Adomnán, *Columba*, 76–7) has argued that due to the *Ecclesiastical History's* silence regarding the affair, it is highly unlikely that there was a mass expulsion of Columban monks in 717, especially as it would have necessitated the recruitment of replacement clergy from Northumbria which Bede would surely have heralded. Likewise, due no doubt to the implausibility of a supposedly ardent pro-Romanist such as Nechtán tolerating what is assumed to have been a dissenting majority amongst his clergy for six years before banishing them with draconian efficiency, Sharpe (*ibid*, 77) calls into question the assertion that the expulsion in 717 was the culmination of the policy initiated by the Pictish king six years earlier. Indeed, in common with Smyth (1984, 139) and Cummins (1995, 98) Sharpe

proposes that Nechtán's decision in 717 had more to do with the king's own secular concerns than a final attempt to achieve ecclesiological conformity throughout his territories. For example, both Sharpe (Adomnán, *Columba*, 76) and Smyth (1984, 139) speculate that it was a crisis in Nechtán's already precarious kingship which necessitated the expulsion of Columban dissidents, while Cummins (1995, 98) — arguing from the belief that adherence to Rome meant chiefly alliance with Northumbria — goes further by suggesting that the *familia Iae* had incurred the Pictish king's wrath because they were supporters of an anti-English, anti-Romanist backlash fomented by dynastic rivals who viewed him 'as a treacherous and potentially anglophile king'.

Interestingly, while Sharpe's revisionary proposals are based upon the otherwise traditional argument that the Roman usage was imposed on Pictland against the wishes of the *familia Iae* by Nechtán, following his appeal to Ceolfrith in 711 (Adomnán, *Columba*, 76), they are nevertheless compatible with the belief that the Columban clergy in his kingdom were reformed under the guidance of Adomnán and his Columban Church successors. For example, the supposition that the expulsion in 717 was a relatively minor affair corresponds with the proposal that the *familia Iae* was principally Romanist long before Iona's conversion, for if Nechtán was motivated by a sudden desire to eradicate the Gaelic usage in his kingdom he would have needed to exile only a handful of traditionalists. Similarly, the refutation that there was a connection between the events of 711 and 717 otherwise corresponds with the hypothesis that the approach to Ceolfrith was a political manoeuvre and that there was no enmity between Nechtán and the *familia Iae* in Pictland. The view of the civil wars of the 720s as a partly sectarian and ideological conflict between partisans of Rome and Iona (Cummins 1995, 99) admittedly appears to be somewhat fantastical in the light of the revised theory regarding the relationship which Nechtán had with the *familia Iae*. However, the more general proposition put forward by Sharpe and Smyth, that the expulsion was connected to the king's dynastic difficulties, nevertheless helps to strengthen a potentially weak link in the argument that Nechtán was a patron and friend of the *familia Iae* in Pictland. Thus, the obvious question why Nechtán should have victimized the *familia Iae* when it has been argued that he not only patronized their clergy but also encouraged closer ties between his kingship and the Columban hierarchy, is partially answered by the conclusion that the Pictish king expelled them due to dynastic strife. For example, if the Columban clergy had withdrawn their not inconsiderable political backing from their erstwhile ally and transferred it to one of his dynastic rivals, then Nechtán would have had no choice but to attempt a purge of the Church.

While this supposition is admittedly difficult to substantiate due to the opacity of the already meagre evidence, there are nevertheless precedents throughout the history of Britain, and indeed Europe, of the Church and its leading clergy playing influential and often decisive roles in the dynastic politics of early medieval kingdoms.<sup>9</sup> Thus, just as Alhfrith had mobilized Church support to further his bid to oust Oswiu from the kingship of Northumbria, it is possible that the closest heirs to Nechtán, Drust and Alpín (Anderson 1973, 177–9, 182–3; Hudson 1994a, 23–5; Skene 1886–90, I, 286–8; Smyth 1984, 72–5), solicited similar ecclesiastical backing from the *familia Iae*. Conversely, there are also examples of secular leaders having Church support withdrawn from them by offended clergy, such as the excommunication of Áed Oirdnide by the *familia Columbae* (*AU*, 817). The implication that the *familia Iae* in Pictland abandoned Nechtán is not as far fetched as it may initially appear, particularly when his rivals' antecedents are studied. For example, Anderson (1973, 177–9, 182–3) has argued that Drust and Alpín were sons of the Dál Riata king, Eochaid mac Domangairt (697), and so members of the once all-powerful Cenél nGabraín. As such, they are likely to have received the support of the community of Iona, not only because of the natural affinity which its clergy (who at times can appear like the Cenél

nGabráin at prayer) had with this kindred, but also because of the prospect of a Pictish king descended from one of their noted patrons, and so probably sympathetic to their cause, would have been highly attractive. Indeed, with the rise of the Cenél Loairn to the kingship of Dál Riata and the resultant reduction in the political, and hence, significantly, the patronal power of the Cenél nGabráin — the head of which at this time, Dúnchad Becc, held the lesser title *Rex Cenn Tíre* (AU, 719 & 721) — it would have been in the *familia Iae*'s best interests to promote the careers of Drust and Alpín in order to counter-balance the aggressive authority of Selbach. That they arguably chose only to do so by 717 was perhaps due to the change in leadership of the *familia Iae* in the previous year (Herbert 1988, 59), with the new incumbent Fáelchú (who was installed alongside Abbot Dúnchad in 716, before replacing him the following year) possibly taking advantage of the end of the paschal controversy by undertaking a more robust secular policy. Certainly, although the evidence is tenuous and any conclusions speculative, it is possible to detect signs that Drust<sup>10</sup> and perhaps even his kinsman and political rival Alpín<sup>11</sup> enjoyed the support of the Church at certain times during their careers in Pictland.

Avowedly, the names of Drust and Alpín do not appear in the records until the 720s, but it is feasible that before challenging Nechtán in open revolt, they tried to consolidate their power by gradually winning over a number of provinces to their cause using less confrontational methods, and resulting in a subtle shift of influence which the annalists (who were calendarists rather than historians) are unlikely to have noted. Certainly, such a scenario would not only account for the negligible effect which Nechtán's decision to expel the *familia Iae* had on that federation's ecclesiastical hegemony in Pictland but also, intriguingly, explain why an undoubtedly well-informed source such as the *Annals of Ulster* should apparently have given such an erroneously severe assessment of the event. This is possibly because the annalist who composed the entry for 717 doubtless took for granted that his audience knew full well that Nechtán's suzerainty had been curtailed by that time, and hence never intended to imply that there was a mass expulsion of Columban clergy. Indeed, by highlighting the fact that the *familia Iae* were banished across *Dorsum Britanniae*, the annalist is perhaps providing a clue to where the returning clergy were being expelled from, as this range formed the natural boundary between Dál Riata and Atholl, a province with which Nechtán appears to have had very close connections. For example, on his death the *Annals of Ulster* (739) describe Nechtán's brother Talorgan as the King of Atholl, suggesting that this province was the power-base from where this kindred's attempts to claim the high-kingship were launched. Whatever the case, if it was the *familia Iae*'s policy to help re-establish the political fortunes of their main secular allies, then it appears to have met with some success, as the 720s not only witnessed two Cenél nGabráin kings of Picts, but also that kindred's renewed hegemony over Dál Riata (Anderson 1973, 183).

Therefore, in summation of the preceding arguments, it can be advanced that the expulsion ordered by Nechtán in 717 had little to do with the events of 711 and the ongoing ecclesiological debate, but was rather a political move prompted by the *familia Iae*'s support for one or both of the Cenél nGabráin contenders for the Pictish kingship. Nevertheless, Nechtán's attempt to reduce the influence of the Columban clergy was hindered by the dwindling of his own authority in much of Pictland, and it was thus restricted only to those members of the *familia Iae* who were based within the provinces over which he had direct control, primarily Atholl.<sup>12</sup> Hence, while the whole affair demonstrates how the *familia Iae*'s continued involvement in the political life of the kingdoms of northern Britain made them vulnerable to the displeasure of a hostile monarch, the expulsion in 717 turned out to be a small-scale set-back for the Columban clergy, who evidently maintained their pre-eminent position in the ecclesiastical society of Pictland long after Nechtán's fall from power.



On the basis of this argument, therefore, it appears obvious that the traditional perspective of the seventh and eighth centuries as a period of decline for the *familia Iae* in northern Britain is no longer valid. A proposal which, notably, correlates with recent research demonstrates that under a succession of Cenél Conaill abbots, the Columban mother-house enjoyed a period of renewed prestige, wealth and security (Adomnán, *Columba*, 77–80). Certainly, the emergence sometime before 727 of an official cult honouring Adomnán (*AU*, 727; Herbert 1988, 61; Smyth 1984, 139) is proof that the *familia Iae* was at ease with itself over the often bitterly debated transition from the Gaelic to the Roman usage and was therefore once more confident of its pivotal role in the religious society of Ireland and northern Britain. Naturally, in an inherently conservative organization such as the *familia Iae* structural change did not occur overnight, but with the development of Adomnán’s cult in Dál Riata, Ireland and Pictland, the Columban clergy’s ability to progress through the reaffirmation of tradition is clearly demonstrated, making it impossible to dismiss them as ecclesiastical archaists. It is equally important to recognize that the *familia Iae*’s political power did not wither during the eighth century either, with the abbots of Iona maintaining their high profile amongst the aristocracy. For example, Abbot Cilléne (726–52) went on a circuit of Ireland with the relics of Adomnán from 727 to 730 (*AU*), during which time he not only undoubtedly collected the tribute due from the saint’s Irish *familia* and reasserted his own position as the *comarba Coluim Chille*, but allegedly also brokered a peace between the Cenél Conaill and the Cenél nÉogain (Herbert 1988, 61). Further indication that Iona continued to influence the ruling classes of Ireland throughout the eighth century is shown by the illustrious pilgrims who travelled to the island monastery, including Domnall mac Murchada and Niall Frossach, Kings of Tara (Anderson 1990, I, 245, 247), and Artgal mac Cathail, King of Connacht (*AU*, 782 & 791). Admittedly, these examples give testimony to Iona’s continued prestige and influence only in its Irish territories, and analogous evidence of the Columban clergy enjoying similar contact with the Pictish aristocracy initially appears wanting. Indeed, the reign of Óengus mac Fergusa (729–761), who subjected Dál Riata to his overlordship after a series of campaigns culminating in the ‘hammering’ of the Columban homeland in 742 (*AU*, 731, 734, 736 & 741; Anderson 1973, 182–9; Bannerman 1974, 113; Hudson 1994a, 26–9), would seem to have offered little opportunity for the *familia Iae* to express their new-found confidence in Pictland. However, while he undoubtedly inflicted severe depredations upon the kingdom of Dál Riata, Óengus mac Fergusa should not be stigmatized as a zealous Pictish nationalist intent on reversing the centuries-old trend of Columban influence in Pictland. Indeed, although the Irish annalists clearly identify him among the Picts, Óengus was himself, as previously mentioned, of Gaelic descent. Rather, the bellicose attention he paid to Dál Riata should be placed in the context of similar attacks on the Britons of Strathclyde and possibly the Northumbrians (Anderson 1990, I, 239; Bede, *Eccles Hist*, 297; Hudson 1994a, 28), and hence viewed as the actions of a typical early medieval ruler whose ambition (like Æthelfrith of Northumbria’s and Áedán mac Gabráin of Dál Riata’s before him) may have been to assert his authority over, and so gain status-affirming tribute from, neighbouring kingdoms. Thus, the assaults made upon Dál Riata can be seen as an extension of his earlier domestic campaign to oust Nechtán and claim the over-kingship of the Picts. It is therefore wrong to presume that just because he was hostile towards the Scots of Dál Riata, Óengus was necessarily keen on terminating the *familia Iae*’s hegemony over Pictland’s Church. Actually, with its record of consolidating the power-bases of its patron and lending approbation to the civil authority, it is much more likely that Óengus would have courted the endorsement of the Pictish *familia Iae*, whose conjectured withdrawal of support from Nechtán may have precipitated his rise to power.

Hence, it can be posited that far from finding themselves sidelined due to a combination of Romanist expansionism and Pictish nationalism, only to return much decayed on the tails of the conquering MacAlpín dynasty, the Columban clergy played a consistently pre-eminent role in the important religious and secular developments which both pre-dated and, arguably, facilitated to a large extent the union of Picts and Scots. Thus, the influence of the newly Romanized *familia Iae* can be recognized in the apparent artistic *renovatio* in the mid-eighth-century Church in Pictland (Henry 1965; Henderson 1967, 104–60; *idem*, 1982, 79–105; Ritchie 1989, 29–37), the introduction of the *Cèle Dé* reforms and re-building work at Dunkeld and Cennrigmonaid during the early ninth century (Clancy 1996, 111–30), and even in the triumph of the Gaelic language over Pictish (for discussion, see Broun 1994; Jackson 1955, 129–76; O’Rahilly 1984, 370–4). Moreover, with the proposal that, rather than a serious ecclesiological divergence from the Romanist faction in the greater Church, there was a methodical and diplomatic adoption and adaptation of universal Church customs and practices by the Columban Church, the clergy of the *familia Iae* can also be credited with the gradual assimilation of Scottish religious society into harmony with the rest of Europe. Thus, while its clergy continued to take their lead predominantly from their fellow Gaels in Ireland and, indeed, continued to act as the conduit for the introduction of an Irish cultural influence which was to play a seminal role in the shaping of Scottish identity, the Columban Church remained highly receptive to developments outwith its own cultural and linguistic orbit. This was distinguished from the eighth century onwards by increasing contact between the Columban clergy and co-religionists in Northumbria, the Carolingian Empire and beyond;<sup>13</sup> a process which negates the often quasi-nationalistic impression that an independent and isolated Scottish clergy resisted foreign ideas and innovations until forced to do so by the Canmore dynasty. Indeed, from a medieval perspective, the argument for Columban Church continuity can explain why so many of the characteristics which distinguished religious society of northern Britain before the eighth century, such as its strong Columban heritage, intensive political involvement, and its mixture of Irish and continental practices and traditions, can readily be recognized in ecclesiastical developments well into the Canmore period.

Accordingly, in the light of this revised theory regarding the effects of the Easter dispute on the *familia Iae* in northern Britain, the ecclesiastical developments in early medieval Alba and, even more significantly, in medieval Scotland should perhaps be reassessed and put into a more evolutionary context within Columban Church history.

## NOTES

- 1 The form ‘Gaelic Church’ has been preferred here to the more traditional ‘Celtic Church’ for describing in general the Church in Ireland and that established in northern Britain by Irish missionaries. This is because the latter title is rather misleading, not only because it erroneously implies that the Churches in the various Celtic lands enjoyed some sort of ecclesiastical unity, but also as it has unfortunately compounded, as well as given a stubbornly persistent (and eminently marketable) moniker to the romantic and misguided belief that there was some sort of separate spiritual movement set up by the Celts in opposition to the continental Church. The term ‘Gaelic Church’ is more appropriate both because it does not carry with it such anti-Roman Church connotations, and as it helps to define the rather general ‘Celtic’ by focusing the attention on the real heartland of the movement, ie Ireland and the Irish colonies in northern Britain.
- 2 Quartodecimans were heretics who celebrated Easter on the 14th day of Nisan, whether or not it fell on a Sunday. Columbanus was also accused of this heresy (Gougaud 1992, 189; Ó Cróinín 1985).

- 3 It should be noted, however, that this proposal is based upon the disputed supposition that Talorgan gained the Pictish kingship only because he was Oswiu's nephew, rather than due to Pictish matrilineal succession. It is also possible that the chronology upon which this proposal is based is erroneous; Talorgan may well have been king before Oswiu gained complete control in Northumbria.
- 4 Current research by Dr J Bannerman, Department of Scottish History, University of Edinburgh, has suggested that there was *Scotti* settlement in the western districts of Fife from the fifth century onwards.
- 5 Bannerman 1962, 113–16, proposes that there was a disruption to the succession, but it was caused by the political upheavals in Scottish Dál Riata and not the paschal debate. Herbert (1988, 58), while supporting the notion that there was a schism, suggests that it was due to the religious differences in the community and lasted only until c 716.
- 6 Unpublished research being undertaken by Dr T O Clancy, Department of Celtic, University of Glasgow.
- 7 Another example of a Gaelic saint connected with Pictland being given a Roman gloss is Buite, who is said to have resurrected a King Nechtán on his return from a pilgrimage to Rome, perhaps on the site now known as Kirkbuddo (Plummer 1910, I, 159; Watson 1926, 313). Further assimilation of eastern ideas is demonstrated by the influence which eastern Mediterranean artistic designs had on native stone carving, as at the aforementioned Hilton of Cadboll (Foster 1996, 91).
- 8 Whilst evidence for Fergus as a bishop is limited to his episcopacy in Ireland, it is interesting to speculate that he may have been the first churchman to enjoy Abernethy's elevated episcopal rank and that he was also the 'Pict Bishop of Scotia' who visited Rome in 721. Certainly, the fact that the relic of his head was enshrined at the Pictish royal centre of Scone implies that he held a politically, as well as spiritually, influential position in Pictland during Nechtán's reign (Haddan & Stubbs 1869–79, II, i, 7; Macquarrie 1992, 118; Skene 1886–90, II, 232–3; Watson 1926, 322).
- 9 A trend which can be identified in the history of Dál Riata (Áedán mac Gabráin), England (Edwin), France (Clovis), etc.
- 10 For example, it can be inferred from his failed attempt to oust his successor in 726 (which was to result in a supposedly more severe imprisonment), that Nechtán's religious retirement in 724 was forced upon him by Drust — a strategy which could have been carried out only if Drust had the goodwill and loyalty of the monastery in question (Anderson 1990, I, 220–4). It should be noted, however, that Anderson proposes that Nechtán entered the religious life from choice.
- 11 For example, if Skene (1886–90, I, 280 & 288) is correct in the dubious assertion that *Caislen Credi* translates as 'Fortress of Belief' and can thus be equated with Scone, then (as it is likely that he retreated to his own stronghold after experiencing a crushing defeat at the hands of Óengus mac Fergusa in 728) it is possible that Alpín controlled this crucially important Columban Church/Pictish kingship sacred site. Certainly, wherever *Caislen Credi* was situated, it must have been a key fortress in Pictland, as after being defeated there by Nechtán, Alpín not only lost the kingship but was also stripped of his *cricha* (territories). Further indication that Alpín had the sympathy of the Gaelic Church is evident in the annalists' reaction to his final disastrous battle, with the *AU* (728) in a rare display of emotion, bemoaning it as 'pitiful' (Anderson 1990, I, 223–4). Although, once more, it has to be noted that Anderson holds a different view, questioning with some justification, both Skene's translation of *Caislen Credi* and the proposal that the annalists displayed any particular sympathy for Alpín.
- 12 Notably, the discovery in the very regions where Nechtán was most powerful of numerous Columban Church iron hand-bells dating from 700 to 800 reveals that even this small-scale banishment was largely ineffectual (Bourke 1983, 466–8).
- 13 A number of Scoto-Pictish kings were recorded in the *Liber Vitae* of Durham, revealing that they were patrons of the Northumbrian Church. (See Gerschow 1988, 149, a book whose importance for early Scottish history has been highlighted by Airlie 1994, 41–2.) The development of a Hiberno-Saxon ecclesiastical artistic style further demonstrates friendly contact between the two Churches.

The influence of Carolingian ideas on the wider Gaelic Church has been demonstrated in Hudson (1994, 155–8).

## REFERENCES

- Adomnán 1995 *Life of Columba* (ed & trans R Sharpe). London.
- Airlie, S 1994 'The View from Maastricht', 33–44, in Crawford 1994, 33–46.
- Anderson, A O & Anderson, M O (eds) 1961 *Adomnán's Life of Columba*. London.
- Anderson, M O 1973 *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*. Edinburgh.
- Anderson, A O (ed) 1990 *The Early Sources of Scottish History AD 500–1286*, 2 vols repr. Stamford.
- Annals of Ulster* 1983 MacAirt, S & MacNiocaill, G (eds). Dublin.
- Bannerman, J 1962 appendix to Hughes 1962.
- Bannerman, J 1974 *Studies in the History of Dalriada*. Edinburgh.
- Barrow, G W S 1983 'The Childhood of Scottish Christianity', *Scott Stud*, 27 (1983), 1–15.
- Batey, C E *et al* (eds) 1994 *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*. Edinburgh.
- Bede *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 1994 trans Colgrave, B; McClure, J & Collins, R (eds). Oxford.
- Bieler, L (ed) 1979 *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*. Dublin.
- Blair, J & Sharpe, R (eds) 1992 *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*. Leicester.
- Bourke, C 1983 'The hand-bells of the early Scottish Church', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 113 (1983), 464–8.
- Broun, D 1994 'The Origin of Scottish Identity in its European Context', in Crawford 1994, 21–31.
- Clancy, T O 1996 'Iona, Scotland and the *Céli Dé*', in Crawford 1996, 111–230.
- Crawford, B E (ed) 1994 *Scotland in Dark Age Europe*. St Andrews.
- Crawford, B E (ed) 1996 *Scotland in Dark Age Britain*. St Andrews.
- Cubbitt, C 1995 *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-c.850*. London.
- Cummins, W A 1995 *The Age of the Picts*. Stroud.
- De Paor, L 1994 *Saint Patrick's World*. Dublin.
- Donaldson, G 1960 *Scotland: Church and Nation through sixteen centuries*. London.
- Donaldson, G 1985 'Scotland's Earliest Church Buildings' (rev edn), *Scott Church Hist*. Edinburgh, 1–10.
- Duke, J A 1932 *The Columban Church*. London.
- Duncan, A A M 1975 *Scotland: the making of the kingdom*. Edinburgh.
- Farmer, D H (ed) & Webb, J F (trans) 1988 *The Age of Bede* repr. London.
- Forrester, D & Murray, D (eds) 1996 *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland*. 2nd edn. Edinburgh.
- Foster, S M 1996 *Picts, Gaels and Scots*. London.
- Gerschow, J 1988 *Die Gedenküberlieferung der Angelsachsen*. Berlin.
- Gougaud, L 1992 *Christianity in Celtic Lands*. Dublin.
- Haddan, A W & Stubbs, W (eds) 1869–79 *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols. Oxford.
- Henderson, I 1967 *The Picts*. London.
- Henderson, I 1971 'The Problem of the Picts', *Menzies* 1971, 51–65.
- Henderson, I 1990 *The Art and Function of Rosemarkie's Pictish Monuments*. Groam House Trust.
- Henry, F 1965 *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period to AD 800*. London.
- Herbert, M 1988 *Iona, Kells and Derry*. Oxford.
- Higham, N J 1995 *An English Empire*. Manchester.
- Hudson, B T 1994 'Kings and Church in Early Scotland', *Scott Hist Rev*, 73 (1994), 145–70.
- Hudson, B T 1994a *Kings of Celtic Scotland*. Westport, Conn.
- Hughes, K 1962 'The Church and the World in Early Christian Ireland', *Ir Hist Stud*, 13 (1962), 99–196.
- Hughes, K 1970 *Early Christianity in Pictland*. Jarrow Lecture.
- Ireland, C 1991 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies', *Celtica*, 22 (1991), 64–78.
- Jackson, K H 1955 'The Pictish Language', in Wainwright 1955, 129–66.
- Jackson, K H 1972 *The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer*. Cambridge.

- Kenny, J F 1993 *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland, Ecclesiastical*. rev edn. Dublin.
- Kirby, D P 1973 'Bede and the Pictish Church', *Innes Rev*, 24 (1973), 6–25.
- Lamb, R 1994, 'Carolingian Orkney and its transformation', in Batey *et al* 1994, 260–71.
- Lynch, M 1992 *Scotland: a new history*. rev edn. London.
- MacDonald, A 1992 *Curadán, Boniface and the Early Church of Rosemarkie*. Inverness.
- Macquarrie, A 1992 'Early Christian Religious Houses in Scotland: foundation and function', in Blair & Sharpe 1992, 110–33.
- Macquarrie, A 1993 'Vita Sancti Servani: The Life of St Serf', *Innes Rev*, 44 (1993), 122–52.
- Macquarrie, A 1997 *The Saints of Scotland, Essays in Scottish Church History AD 450–1093*. Edinburgh.
- Márkus, G 1997 *Adomnán's 'Law of the Innocents': Cáin Adomnáin*. Glasgow.
- Menzies, G (ed) 1971 *Who Are The Scots?* London.
- Meyer, K (ed) 1905 *Cáin Adomnáin*. Oxford.
- Moisl, H 1983 'The Bernician Royal Dynasty and the Irish in the Seventh Century', *Peritia*, 2 (1983), 103–26.
- Muirhead, I 1996 'The Beginnings', in Forrester & Murray 1996, 1–17.
- Ní Dhonnchadha, M 1982 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), 178–215.
- Ó Cróinín, D 1985 "'New Heresy for Old": Pelagianism in Ireland and the Papal Letter of 640', *Speculum*, 60/63 (1985), 505–16.
- Ó Cróinín, D 1995 *Early Medieval Ireland 400–1200*. London.
- O'Rahilly, T F 1984 *Early Irish History and Mythology*, repr edn. Dublin.
- Picard, J-M 1982 'The Purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), 160–77.
- Plummer, C 1910 *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, 2 vols. Oxford.
- Radner, J N (ed) 1978 *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*. Dublin.
- Ritchie, A 1989 *Picts*. Edinburgh.
- Sharpe, R 1995 *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba*. London.
- Simpson, W D 1935 *The Celtic Church in Scotland*. Aberdeen.
- Skene, W F 1886–90 *Celtic Scotland: a history of ancient Alban*, 3 vols. Edinburgh.
- Smyth, A P 1984 *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80–1000*. London.
- Stenton, F M 1947 *Anglo-Saxon England*. 2nd edn. Oxford.
- Stokes, W (ed) 1905 *Félire Óengusso Céili Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*. London.
- Taylor, S 1996 'Place-Names and the Early Church in Eastern Scotland', Crawford 1996, 93–110.
- Taylor, S 1997 'Seventh-century Iona abbots in Scottish place-names', *Innes Rev*, 48 (1997), 45–72.
- Wainwright, F 1955 *The Problem of the Picts*. Edinburgh.
- Walker, G S M (ed) 1957 *Sancti Columbani Opera*. Dublin.
- Walsh, M & Ó Cróinín, D (eds) 1988 *Cummian's letter 'De controversia paschali' together with a related Irish compustistical tract 'De Ratione Computandi'*. Toronto.
- Watson, W J 1926 *The Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*. Edinburgh.