

Eastern Bishops and the Celtic Order of the Culdee

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Introduction

Evidence suggests there were many Christian missions sent to evangelize Britain beginning in the first century. Such jurisdictions as the Hebraic (Jerusalem), Ephesine, East Syrian, Alexandrian and Roman Churches can all be argued as present at some period with historically founded conviction. To facilitate the conversion of the Celts, further evidence suggests that the Druidic schools were often converted to Christianity as a whole since their theology of God was not totally dissimilar to Judaism and later, Christianity:

"This was the Druidic trinity, the three aspects of which were known as Beli, Taran, Esu or Yesu. When Christianity preached Jesus as God, it preached the most familiar name of its own deity to Druidism: and in the ancient British tongue 'Jesus' has never assumed its Greek, Latin, or Hebrew form, but remains the pure Druidic 'Yesu.' It is singular thus that the ancient Briton has never changed the name of the God he and his forefathers worshiped, nor has ever worshiped but one God." [1a]

It is believed by many historians that the Druids did communicate with their counterparts in other cultures including those in the middle East and the Orient. This suggests that the Hebrew Scriptures were well known to them as were other religious writings.

In this paper, it is the objective of the author to present the evidence of the origins of the Culdee, its name and the later Culdee Reformation occurring between the 8th and 11th centuries.

Origin of the Term Culdee

The original exact meaning of the Gaelic term Culdee is not known. Such translations as 'Friends of God', 'Servants of God' and 'Worshippers of God' are commonly ascribed to the term Culdee in identifying a Celtic reformation movement in the 8th-14th centuries in Britain. Professor John Colgan, celebrated hagiologist and topographer, translates another form of the term, Culdrich (quidam advanae'), as *certain strangers* in identifying a group of Christian refugees who immigrated to Ireland from the East. His research suggested they were Jewish disciples that came from Jerusalem in AD 37. [1b]

Matt Gravet traces the name Culdee to Syria:

The origin of the word CELT is from the Milesian numerology system for Hebrew, which we usually term Ath-Bash. In this the alphabet is divided into two halves ("Beauty & Bands") and a letter substitution is effected. ("Alpha for Omega" kind-of-a-thing) The four end-letters of the arrangement clearly "say"....K'LT!

Culdee, which is identical in Chaldean, simply means CELT and is best thought of as a sort of "traveling name", as one might use on a religious pilgrimage. Because of it's general adoption by Arabic speakers during the time of the Aramaic language in Syria, KHALID is "Friend of God" a nickname of Abraham who traveled from the UR of the Chaldeas. [1c]

The above interpretation is suspect. However, it may not be totally off track. By considering a transliteration of similar words from Chaldean to those used by the Celts, there appears to emerge a common origin. Using Strong's Chaldean-Hebrew to English Lexicon, we find the following Chaldean terms that suggest a Culdee common origin.

kaw-doshe (6918 from 6942): sacred, God, an angel, saint, holy one, sanctuary;
kaw-dash (6942): clean, consecrate, holy, keep;
keh-desh (6943): sanctuary;
kaw-deem (6921): the front, to/from the [Holy] East;
kaw-deesh (6922): Holy Saint

With the 'w' and the 'l' being of similar articulated sound, the emerging meaning could read, kal-dee. Translated into English: 'Holy Saint(s) from the East'. To be a saint, one must be a friend of God, a servant of God and a worshiper of God. This interpretation is also in keeping with the tradition that Joseph of Arimathea and 12 companions were the founders of the Celtic Church in Britain and these Jewish missionaries were called the Culdee by local Celts. [1d]

The Order of the Culdee is noted as being first active in the Celtic Church of Wales, then Ireland and later Scotland including Iona. According to Jamison, as quoted by Elder, there is a general tradition in the Highlands of Scotland that the name Culdee was given to the first Christians of Britain and they succeeded the Druids as the tribal ministers of religion. [2]

Eastern Bishops Resided in Ireland

Professor Adam Loughridge writing on Oengus the Culdee (circa 8th century) in the New International Dictionary of the Christian Church states: [Oengus] is best known as the author of a Litany which commemorates the fact that large numbers of scholars from the Middle East sought refuge in Ireland in the eighth and ninth centuries. Oengus provides lists of Bishops and Pilgrims who lived in groups of seven. [3]

Evidence of East Syrian Liturgy

Loughridge also states that the Litany of Oengus reveals the influence of the East Syrian Church (Nestorians) on the monastic life of the Celtic Church. [4] It is also of notable consequence that the Didache and the East Syrian Liturgy of Mari and Addai follow the same form as the Stowe Missal which contrasts all other Eucharistic Liturgies that developed separately in the west. [5] Bradshaw, in quoting William Lockton (1918) and others, attributes the writing of the Didache to the School of St. John. [6] St. John is remembered as the earliest Patron Saint of Scotland and the Apostle often cited in the 7th century by the Celtic Church to justify Celtic Christian traditions and doctrines when they were confronted by Rome. [7] It is highly possible that the Didache was the earliest liturgy used among the Celtic Christians in Britain.

Celtic Polity

Differing from the rest of the western Church, the Celtic Church embraced the Johannine theology as "taught to them by their Egyptian and Syrian teachers." [8] The writings of St. John focused on the theme of relationship and community rather than on outward acts of righteousness and hierarchies of ecclesiastical authority. There was a clear influence of the Jewish Qumran community upon Johannine thought, or St. John on the community, in the relationship of theology and their view of life history. [9] Man and Nature are seen as being in a relationship of balance rather than viewed as hierarchies of power. For this reason, St. John's teaching appealed to the druidic tribal Celts when they embraced Christianity in the first century. This predisposition is evident in how the Celtic communities were structured around paternal Abbots and the Culdee uncommon view of religious celibacy.

Married "monks" were not uncommon among the Culdee, also having the support of Athanasius of Alexandria who wrote of monks that had children. [10] It was also common among the Culdee for the sons of Abbots to inherit the monasteries. The Culdees were still identified well into the 17th century. [11] Clerical marriage was also allowed in the jurisdiction of St. Patrick, although St. Patrick chose to remain celibate. [12]

The Irish church looked to Leviticus 21:10 for the understanding of priestly unction (the anointing of the head and hands for ministry) a century before it was a custom on the continent. As Donnchadh O' Corrain has pointed out:

There was, it seems, a "tribe of the church", with differing orders, grades, and functions; it was consciously modeled on the **Tribe of Levi**, many of whose institutions it made its own.

He further observed that:

Careful comparison of Irish law with scripture shows that where the Pentateuch provided detailed rules of the law, these were often adopted to the letter. In laying down the rules governing the priesthood, the Irish Canonists follow the rules of the Pentateuch very closely. [13]

The fact that Jerusalem and the Eastern Churches retained a large population of Jewish Christian scholars who held to certain customs of Hebrew Orthodoxy is not antagonistic to the evidence that the Culdee Reformation was brought to Ireland by a new wave of East Syrian bishops.

Rule of the Culdee

Training for the Culdee priesthood took seven years to complete -- often involving several Anamcharas or mentors and colleges. When training was completed, the disciple was released to travel and begin a mission. There is record of thousands of men in Britain in training at notable monasteries.

The four vows of the Order of the Culdee of the 8th-17th centuries as deduced by studying the writings and missions of the Culdee. The Culdee vows include 1) prayer (w/ fasting), 2) study, 3) work and 4) worship. "Pray without ceasing" is the call of the Culdee with designated fast days "to break the bonds of wickedness". Prayer also included a weekly celebration of the Eucharist. The Culdee shall "study to show thyself approved -- a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" by following a structured learning program under a mentor or Anamchara. Manual work was done by all in fulfilling the command to "Let each man work with his own hands" in the call to "owe no man anything. This seasoned with charity that the world may know the Culdee as Christ's disciples "because of [their] great love one for another". Finally, the Culdee was to worship God with "heart, soul and strength." [14]

Jerusalem

When the Celtic Church argued its right of independence from Roman jurisdiction at the Councils of Augustine's Oak (AD 603) and of Whitby (AD 664), it was never suggested by Rome that the Celtic Church was not orthodox nor founded by the Apostles. The debate was over who were the greater Apostles. Peter and Paul of Rome? Or St. John of Ephesus? The ensuing debate over the correct date of Easter compounded the division by making liturgical differences unacceptable. [15]

In an earlier letter from the Celtic Bishop Columbanus to Pope Boniface (AD 590), he does not write as a subordinate, but as a fellow bishop encouraging him to "cleanse his holy See" from error. He further relates that he holds a high place of honor as the See of Rome, but this is secondary to the place of honor given to the See of Jerusalem since it is the place of the Lord's resurrection. Columbanus further upbraids the Pope for proudly claiming a greater authority than the other churches in holding the Keys of St. Peter and clarifies that the power of the Keys is based on reasons other than simple geographical location. [16]

Eastern Chapels

It was the custom of the Celtic Church, as it was among the Asia Minor Greek Church, to build a number of small chapels (seven buildings of 20-40 feet) as oratories where priests would celebrate the Eucharist before a small gathering of people. The construction was clearly Eastern with no Roman influence in the use of mortared stone or architectural

design. [17] Eastern Bishops are attributed as the inspiration of building these chapels, in addition to round 'prayer' towers also used for protection from Viking attacks. These bishops also introduced a study of Hebrew and Greek to the monastic settlements of the Culdees. [18] Over 70 of these Culdee towers are still standing in Ireland today. [19] These Churches are similar to the multiple-building designs of Mt. Athos and Asia Minor. There are also some very early mortarless stone bee-hive buildings to the west that are Eastern in origin and also found in India and Greece. [20]

Celtic Chant Came from the East

The earliest records of music sung by the Celtic Christians dating from the 3rd Century suggests that it was Hebraic in origin and of a plainsong style using exclusively the Psalms. [21] St. Columba sang a form of chant that was different and predated Pope Gregory by 20 years. Although the Celtic chant is said to be lost, that is not altogether true. A piece of Celtic Psalm music from the Inchcolm Antiphoner, originating from the West Highlands, and resembles in scale, key, timing, melodic movement and general embellishments a chanted psalm sang by an isolated Christian group in Ethiopia. It is generally believed by historians that the isolated Ethiopian Church retained the most ancient of Christian music, possibly from original Palestinian or Temple sources. [22] With the known traffic between the Eastern Church and the Celtic Church in Britain during the centuries surrounding and preceding Columba, this is highly possible.

Additional recent evidence of a fusion of a Celtic-Hebraic Chant form is the result of the systematic deciphering by Haik-Vantuura of the notation existing in the ancient Masoretic Hebrew Old testament of the 9th century. The Masoretic author, Moses Ben Asher, noted in the text that the notation was "delivered to him as passed down from the prophets of old." Analysis reveals there are many similarities in the embellishments, modes and melodies of the early Irish Psalmody and the Hebrew Temple chant of the Book of Psalms. [23].

Celtic Artistic Style from the East

The illustrations in the Book of the Kells best match the art of Assyrian and Southern Egyptian origins. There is no evidence of any Italian influence in Celtic art. As to the art originating from Scandinavia or the Isle of man, this would seem impossible in that the oldest northern artifacts are several centuries more recent than those found in Britain. Therefore, an Eastern origin is ascribed to Celtic art, as it is closest in type to ancient Syriac, Egyptian and Ethiopian art design and style. [24]

Prophecy that the Celtic Church will Rise Again

St. David, Celtic Bishop of Wales living until AD. 601 is remembered as being consecrated an Archbishop in Jerusalem by the Patriarch John III in AD 519 and given a stone Altar made of the Sepulcher in which Jesus was laid. [25] A Celtic prophecy unearthed by the Normans predating the oldest of the Grail/Arthurian literature about the Altar is yet to be fulfilled. The prophecy reveals that as the heathen invaded Britain, the last genetic heir of St. David fled to the East with the Altar of St. David and died there. It is foretold that he [St.

David or heir?]) shall return with the Altar, expel the Saxons and reinstate the Celtic Rite upon the Altar of St. David. [26]

In the latter part of the 19th century, the Antiochian Patriarch, Mar Ignatius sought to re-established a jurisdiction in Iona, Scotland although it does not exist there today. This decision was based upon the overwhelming evidence of a Syro-Christian presence in the early years of the Celtic Church. [27] Based on the Litany of Oengus the Culdee and other compelling evidence, it is more reasonable to consider this influence as originating with the East Syrian Church.

Conclusion

There is substantial archeological, literary and historical evidence to support the conclusion that there was indeed an Eastern Church of Jewish traditions that reinforced their polity and ethos in Ireland well into the 11th century. It is the belief of this author that there is a current spiritual and cultural need to call a gathering of the Celtic tribes under a single banner of Christian unity. To raise this banner, it is only fitting that we of the Celtic and Catholic faith should seek to reestablish a working relationship with the Eastern Churches and maintain our relationship with the Churches of the West. Of necessity, three historic jurisdictional streams must flow together in unity for there to be God's peace in the Isles. The Anglican, Roman and Eastern Jurisdictions are encouraged to consider the Culdee as their own as a cultural bridge to reunify the West, East and Far East in Christian service to the World.

Postlog 1998

Great progress has occurred in the Culdee mission over the last few years for the Order of the Culdee. We are now working within the Orthodox, Anglican-Episcopal, Roman and East-Syrian Churches. A relationship with Rome is in development - by the Grace of God. This is in keeping with the spirit of a 12th century agreement between the Culdee and Rome to use a Chapel for services at Saint Andrews Cathedral, Scotland.

Abbot +David

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