“Kardong is America’s foremost scholar on monasticism in general and on monastic rules in particular. To his much-acclaimed translation of and commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict, Kardong can now add his translation of the Rule of Monks, the Cenobitic Rule, the Penitential Rule, and the Rule Walbert. Kardong’s translation, based on both French and English sources, as well as on his own prodigious knowledge of Latin, is first rate. Especially helpful is his introduction and copious footnotes. In both, we see Kardong’s wit and scholarship at their best. A must-have for anyone interested in monastic studies.”

— Fr. Benedict M. Guevin, OSB
St. Anselm Abbey

“Columban was a force to be reckoned with and his story becomes even more compelling as presented by Terrence G. Kardong. While having some things in common with the Rule of Benedict, the Rule of Columban presents a fascinating view of another type of monasticism that existed shortly after the time of Benedict. Kardong presents it in a clear contemporary translation, accompanied by interesting and detailed commentary. While its penal code may seem harsh to modern sensibilities, many of the faults it deals with will be no stranger to readers. Kardong points out that Columban’s penitential actually paved the way for the sacrament of confession as we now know it. Although it appears last in this volume, those interested in rules for women’s communities will certainly not want to miss the rule that Columban’s successor Walbert wrote for nuns.”

— Sr. Colleen Maura McGrane, OSB
Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
“The productiveness of Fr. Terrence Kardong is astounding and from it we have all benefited. Here, once again, he makes accessible to us a literary monument of the ancient monastic tradition, this time the Rule of Columban, written not more than fifty or sixty years after the Rule of St. Benedict. With the meticulousness and erudition and wit that we have come to expect from him, Fr. Terrence provides fresh and lively translations of this historically significant Rule and one of its epigones, the Rule of Walbert. What a wealth of fascinating—and strange—material one finds in these texts!”

—Mark DelCogliano
Assistant Professor of Theology
University of St. Thomas
Saint Columban

His Life, Rule, and Legacy

Translated and Introduced by
Terrence G. Kardong, OSB

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture texts in this work are translated by its author.

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## Abbreviations

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coen</td>
<td>Coenobitic Rule of Columban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conf</td>
<td>Cassian, Conferences</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSEL</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSQ</td>
<td>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>De eccl dogm</td>
<td>Gennadius, <em>De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>DHGE</td>
<td><em>Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques.</em> Paris, 1912–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dial</td>
<td>Dialogues, Gregory the Great</td>
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<tr>
<td>DialSul</td>
<td>Dialogues, Sulpicius Severus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enchir</td>
<td><em>Enchiridion</em>, Sextus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ep(p)</td>
<td>Epistolae, Augustine; Jerome</td>
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<td>Inst</td>
<td>Cassian, <em>Institutes</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Instr</td>
<td>Instructions, Columban</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liber Davidis</td>
<td><em>Excerpta Davidis</em></td>
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<td>MGH</td>
<td>Monumenta Germanica Historia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mir</td>
<td><em>Miracula</em>, Gregory of Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mor</td>
<td><em>Moralia in Iob</em>, Gregory the Great</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAB</td>
<td>New American Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>OLD</td>
<td>Oxford Latin Dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Old Testament</td>
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<td>Paen</td>
<td><em>Paenitentiale, Columban</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pen Bigotianum</td>
<td><em>Paenitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum</em></td>
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<td>PenF</td>
<td><em>Paenitentiale, Finnian of Clonard</em></td>
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<td>Penit</td>
<td><em>Penitentiale, Theodore</em></td>
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<td>Pr</td>
<td><em>Praecepta, Pachomius</em></td>
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<td>Praec</td>
<td><em>Praeceptum, Augustine</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praef Gildas</td>
<td><em>Praefatio Gildae de Paenitentia</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>Rule of Saint Benedict</td>
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<tr>
<td>RBasil</td>
<td>Basil, <em>Regula</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>RCes</td>
<td>Caesarius, <em>Regula</em></td>
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<td>RDon</td>
<td>Donatus, <em>Regula</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reg</td>
<td><em>Rule of Monks, Columban</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reg Virg</td>
<td><em>Regula sanctarum virginum, Caesarius of Arles</em></td>
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<td>RM</td>
<td>Rule of the Master</td>
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<tr>
<td>RM ThP</td>
<td>Rule of the Master Thema Pater (commentary on the Lord’s Prayer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td><em>Sermo</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SBo</td>
<td>Sahidic-Bohairic</td>
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<td>VC</td>
<td><em>Vita Sancti Columbani, Jonas of Bobbio</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>VMart</td>
<td><em>Vita S. Martini, Sulpicius Severus</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wal</td>
<td><em>Rule of Walbert</em></td>
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A reasonable opening question to introduce this study of the Rule of Columban might be simply: why? The Rule of Columban is not a very attractive body of early monastic literature, at least to the modern sensibility, as is suggested by the fact that the last, and only, English translation appeared forty-three years ago: *Sancti Columbani Opera*, edited by G. S. M. Walker, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970). The reason behind this lack of interest is revealed by a cursory glance at the pages. This Rule is, by our current standards, quite harsh. Of course, that might be said of almost every ancient monastic Rule. Yet the Rule of Columban is an extreme case, for it is largely composed of penalties. In fact, two of its three sections (*Regula Coenobialis* and *Paenitentiale*) are entirely made up of faults and their punishment.

Still, this Rule from about AD 600 is well worth another look. At least one of the greatest experts on early monasticism, Adalbert de Vogüé, thought so. He devoted two entire volumes in the Bellefontaine series *Vie Monastique* 19–20 to the life of Columban and to his Rule. Vogüé also included about two hundred pages of commentary on the Columbanian texts in his monumental *Histoire Littéraire du Mouvement Monastique dans l’Antiquité* 10–11 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006–2007). Although Vogüé’s work can intimidate any scholar coming after him, his obvious respect for this material certainly recommends it.

So, then, what is the positive value of this literature? For a Benedictine monk like me, the Columbanian material has important connections to the Rule of Benedict. For one thing,
the Rule of Columban was written not more than fifty to sixty years after the Rule of Benedict and therefore provides a rare glimpse into a rather murky period of monastic and medieval church history. Columban was an immigrant to continental Europe from Ireland, but he was well read, and that reading included the Rule of Benedict (see Adalbert de Vogüé, ed. and trans., Règles et pénitentiels monastiques). Columban does not quote the Rule of Benedict directly, but the mere fact that it influenced him is significant, for it suggests that Benedict’s Rule was known north of the Alps by AD 600.

This possibility becomes a probability when we consider that by ca. 630–640 Columban’s successors were supplementing the Rule of Columban with the Rule of Benedict. Both Abbot Walbert of Luxeuil and Bishop Donatus of Besançon, a former monk of Luxeuil, wrote Rules for nuns in which they included parts of these two Rules, plus others. The reason they created these “mixed” rules was probably that the Rule of Columban is not sufficiently comprehensive. There are many aspects of community life that it simply does not cover.

This being the case, we might say that the Rule of Columban was the vehicle, as it were, that carried the Rule of Benedict over the Alps. If we wonder why the Rule of Benedict needed help for this to happen, I think the probable answer is the Lombards. They were the latest, and fiercest, Germanic tribe to invade Italy, and they destroyed Benedict’s own monastery of Monte Cassino in about 568. But the Lombards did much more damage than that; they were aggressive Arians who crippled the Catholic Church in northern Italy for a whole century. Anyone who reads the correspondence of Pope Gregory the Great gets a vivid idea of how grievously the Lombards wounded the church in the sixth century.

Therefore it is not surprising that Benedictine monasticism only slowly spread north. Yet the reverse was not true: Columbanian monasticism soon spread south when the saint himself crossed the Alps and in the last years of his life founded the
monastery of Bobbio. I find it baffling that these Irish Catho-
lrics were allowed to settle within a few miles of the Lombard
capital of Milan-Pavia, for Columban was staunchly anti-
Arian. Lest anyone think this fact shows that Columban had
mellowed in his old age, his biographer, Jonas, in *Vita Sancti
Columbani* assures us he had not! But Jonas also says that by the
year 610 the Lombard kings were looking for accommodation
with Rome. Perhaps Columban and his monks helped further
this process.

Aside from its role as a vehicle of and partner with
Benedict’s Rule, is Columban’s Rule of much intrinsic interest
to us today? As far as I know, no modern religious order claims
to follow it, so why should we bother to study it? The first
reason is that it was and is one of the foundational documents
of early monasticism. As such, it is worth our attention if we
wish to understand the mind-set and customs of the pioneers
of an important movement in the history of the Roman Catholic
Church.

When we read and study the Rule of Columban, it is well
to remember that it is an *Irish* Rule, transmitting the Chris-
tian vision of a non-Roman church. A glance at the map of
Europe shows plainly that Ireland is on the edge. At the time
of Columban, people thought Ireland was virtually the end of
the world, *finis terrae*. But even if Ireland was peripheral, it was
not marginal. Indeed, it was the home of a vibrant and self-
assured Christian community. It was a long way from Rome,
both geographically and temperamentally, and so it tended
to make the European church nervous. Where the customs
differed, the temptation was to bully the Irish back into line. A
man like Columban, however, was not easily pushed around.
He would lecture the pope himself if he thought the sover-
eign pontiff needed it (see his Letter 1 to Gregory the Great).
As such, Columban stands as a healthy symbolic antidote to
Roman Catholic centralization and Ultramontanism, which
has become especially strong in our own day.
As we have seen, the Rule of Columban is loaded with penalties. From the standpoint of general monastic history, we might say that it is overloaded with penalties. Did monks ever live that way? They certainly do not today! I have lived in a typical American monastery for fifty years, but rarely have I seen a monk publicly punished. Maybe some of us should have been, but we were not. Moreover, it does not look as if Saint Benedict was nearly so preoccupied with punishment as was Columban. True, there are about a dozen short chapters of the Rule of Benedict devoted to penalties, but that is well below the Columbanian standard.

In this regard, we might ask whether the monks of Columban actually lived under such a penal system. Perhaps it was just one of those ascetic ideals that were more theoretical than practical? No: they put it into practice, as is suggested by the fact that the Rule (Coen I) begins with the requirement that “we make confession before meat or entering our beds.” That is, the monks confessed their faults to the superior every day. What is more, when this Rule was adapted for women, e.g., by Walbert for Eboriac, the nuns were urged to confess their faults three times a day! See Regula Cuiusdam Patris VI; French version: Lazare Seilhaç and M. Bernard Saïd, trans., “Règle de saint Donat, ou Règle pour les vierges,” in Règles Monastiques au Féminin: dans la tradition de Benoît et Columban, Vie monastique, série monachisme ancien, 33 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1996), 57–95, here 69–71. When a nun was experiencing a hard death, the “Miracles of Eboriac” (see part 2 of the Vita Columbani) assumes that it is because she has not confessed her faults and sins to the abbess.

It is often pointed out that the penitential transaction between monks and nuns and their superiors was not sacramental. Probably not, but it does seem that it had a definite effect on the history of the Catholic sacrament of penance. Before the sixth or seventh century, penance was a public affair, involving only very serious sins and resulting in long, severe
penances. The upshot was that many people deferred confession until their deathbed. Because of the influence of the Irish missionaries like Columban, the Catholic Church developed a more humane practice of private confession that has now been in effect for 1,500 years (see Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, s.v. penance). Still, it does seem that the Columbanian Rule was preoccupied with the element of penance. For the penitential practice to have a long-term monastic future, it had to be modified.

The same could be said for the Divine Office. Modern nuns or monks who read this legislation for the first time will probably wonder how they could possibly have said so many psalms together. To our way of thinking, their horarium was as grossly unbalanced as was that of Cluny a few centuries later. So this feature also had to be modified in subsequent generations. But Columban was not alone on this point. Not only was Irish monasticism noted for its enormously long Offices, but so was the practice of the Frankish monks and nuns. For his part, Vogüé never missed a chance to complain about the overly long Offices in ancient Gaul. He knew that such practices had a deleterious effect on general monastic health. But the Irish felt right at home.

Yet it does not make sense to dwell too much on the weaknesses of the Rule of Columban. Even though it did not prove to be an adequate pattern for long-term cenobitic excellence, it nevertheless contains a wealth of detail concerning early medieval monastic life. When a person examines the text minutely, as I like to do, many curious aspects of everyday life come into focus. As L. P. Hartley said in The Go-Between, “The past is a foreign country. They do things different there.” They do indeed, but our tendency is to read our own culture and mind-set back into the past. We can only avoid this by practicing careful exegesis: trying to grasp what the ancient text is actually saying. The hermeneutical question comes only second: How should we respond to it?
One of the great attractions of the Rule of Columban is the happy fact that we know quite a lot about the author and his circumstances. Unlike most early monastic legislators, we have a good *vita* of Columban and his followers. Therefore I thought it helpful to include a fairly detailed summary of Jonas’s work, although the text itself is too long to be included. Of course, Jonas’s *vita* is not a modern biography with all the warts, but it rings much truer to real life than, say, Gregory’s *Dialogue II* on Benedict. Here too there is a wealth of detail, which would repay a close commentary.

Not only was the Rule of Columban important in its own right, but it also had a significant effect on posterity. Two of Columban’s own disciples from Luxeuil, Walbert and Donatus, wrote monastic Rules for nuns. These Rules use parts of the Rule of Columban plus materials from other monastic Rules, especially those of Benedict and Caesarius of Arles. For my purposes here I consider the Rule of Walbert (*Regula Cuiusdam Patris ad Virgines*) more interesting. Therefore I have included a translation of and commentary on it in my book, following the three parts of Columban’s rule: *Regula Monachorum* (Reg), *Regula Coenobialis* (Coen), and *Paenitentiale* (Paen).

But we have even more than a Rule and Life for Columban. We also have some of his letters and some of his sermons. I have not studied these in any depth, but at least I can say that we know more about Columban than about most ancient monastic writers and founders. I plan to expand my research, and I hope others will join me.

Assumption Abbey
Richardton, North Dakota
Spring 2014
Columban\textsuperscript{1} was an Irish monk who nevertheless spent his last twenty-five years on the European continent. In fact, his self-imposed exile from Ireland to Europe established a pattern for Irish monks that continued throughout the Middle Ages, with important consequences for European Catholicism. This tradition of pilgrimage (\textit{peregrinatio}) was seen by the Irish monks as penitential because of their love of their beloved homeland. But it also had a missionary thrust: Columban went to Gaul to convert the Gauls.

Columban was born in Leinster, a county in eastern Ireland, in about 540.\textsuperscript{2} Regarding his early life, his biographer, Jonas,

\textsuperscript{1}Columban is often confused with Columba, another great Irish saint of the same period (521–597), who also left the Emerald Isle to evangelize, in his case, Scotland. In fact, their names are identical in Irish: Colum Cille. What is more, Columban calls himself Columba (\textit{vilis Columba}: a poor dove) in a letter to Pope Gregory I (Letter 1, AD 600). \textit{Columbanus} is simply the adjectival form of \textit{Columbia}.

\textsuperscript{2}Jonas Elnonensis, \textit{Vita Sancti Columbani Abbatis} (\textit{Life of Columban} = VC) 1.9. Jonas does not offer a date for Columban’s birth. In fact, he seems to know rather little about Columban’s Irish days. That is not surprising, since Jonas never met Columban in person. He became a monk of Bobbio in 617, two years after Columban’s death. The Latin original of Jonas’s \textit{Vita Columbani} is found in PL 87:1011–46A. The only English I was able to consult appeared in an old series called \textit{Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History}, ed. Dana Carleton Munro, vol. 2, no. 7 (Philadelphia: Department of History, the University of Pennsylvania, 1899), 1–36. This book contains only the first book of Jonas’s \textit{Life}. My quotations of the \textit{Life} come from this book.
relies on some rather blatant hagiographical clichés: While his
mother was pregnant with him, she dreamt that a sun rose from
her bosom and shone over the whole world (VC 1.6). The boy
Columban began learning grammar and also became aware
of lustful attractions. He consulted a holy woman, who urged
him to flee the world. To do so, he had to step over the body of
his mother blocking the door (VC 1.8). He then went to study
the Bible with the holy man Senilis, who pressed his students
to live out what they were learning (VC 1.9).

Columban’s next move was to Bangor, a monastery in the
far north of Ireland where the famous Comgall was abbot.
Jonas does not present any particular motivation for this move,
which seems like a logical one for a pious young man. In fact,
the Irish church in the sixth century was heavily monastic,
so much so that some historians have claimed that abbots,
not bishops, ruled it. Whether that was strictly true or not, it

3 In “The Career of Columbanus,” in Columbanus: Studies of the Latin
Writings, ed. Michael Lapidge (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 1997), 1–28,
here 3, Donald Bullough says that Columban got a decent education and
was quite literate before he went to Bangor. But even though Columban
occasionally quotes classic authors, Bullough thinks those passages are
mainly from memorized copybooks and not from any deep classical learn-
ing. Still, Columban writes good Latin and can vary his style depending
on his purpose. The standard version of Columban’s works in Latin
and English is found in Sancti Columbani Opera, ed. and trans. G. S. M.
Walker (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970); the
manuscript history of the three rules translated in this volume, explaining
the long and short versions of each, appears in Walker, xlv–lv. Vogüé
discusses the long text of the Coenobitic Rule in Saint Colomban, Règles et
pénitentiels monastiques, trans. Adalbert de Vogüé with Pierre Sangiani and
Jean-Baptiste Juglar, Aux sources du monachisme colombien vol. 2, Vie
monastique 20 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges, France: Abbaye de Bellefontaine,
1989), 94–115. Wherever I depart from Walker, the translation is my own.

4 The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F. L. Cross and
puts the matter nicely: “Until the 12th cent., the Irish Church retained a
probably colored Columban’s later conflicts with the bishops in Gaul.\(^5\)

Jonas does not tell us much about Columban’s life at Bangor, except that he had been in the cloister “many years” when he left for Gaul in 590–591 (VC 1.9). Yet Jonas also says that Columban was about thirty when he left Ireland (VC 1.10).\(^6\) The main experts on Columban, namely G. S. M. Walker and Adalbert de Vogüé,\(^7\) think that he was in fact closer to fifty when he left. Moreover, Walker thinks he was the chief teacher at Bangor for many years.\(^8\)

Because Columban was one of Comgall’s main collaborators, Comgall only reluctantly granted him permission to depart for Gaul, and all the more reluctantly since he was taking with him a dozen brethren. But what was Columban’s real reason for making this decisive change in his life? Certainly it was not to get away from Comgall and his monastic customs!

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5 Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, xvi.

6 Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, xi. Thirty was considered a perfect age because Christ was thought to have begun his ministry at that age.


Columban never lost his love for Irish ecclesiastical and monastic usages. We can assume that his Rule is largely what he learned at Bangor from Comgall. And his troubles with the French bishops were largely due to his stubborn adherence to the Irish date for Easter.

But then what was Columban’s motivation? According to Jonas, he was driven overseas by the famous text of Genesis 12:1, where God commands Abraham, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” Of course, that explanation still leaves open the question of exactly where God was sending those Irish monastic pilgrims. Apparently not to Britain, for they sailed right past it, landing somewhere in Brittany. Although the Bretons were fellow Celts, Columban did not find them open to his preaching (VC 1.10). Accordingly, the Irish monks went to Gaul, where they found a better audience, especially with the King of Austrasia.

Before we proceed further, we should take up the question of Columban’s missionary preaching. Although he considered the Gauls basically uncatechized, in fact, as Jonas points out, he was not the first one to preach the Gospel in Gaul:

At that time, either because of the numerous enemies from without, or on account of the carelessness of the bishops, the Christian faith had almost departed from the country. The creed alone remained. But the saving grace of penance and the longing to root out the lusts

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9 Perhaps at Nantes, the main port of Brittany, from which the Merovingian king later tried, but failed, to deport the Irishmen (see VC 1.47). Local legends claim that Columban and his troop landed at St. Malo, which is equally plausible.

10 Jonas says this was King Sigebert (VC 1.12), but that cannot be right, since Sigebert died in 575, long before Columban arrived in Gaul. The king must have been Childebert II, who reigned until 595.
of the flesh were to be found only in a few. Everywhere that he went, the noble man preached the Gospel. And it pleased the people, because his teaching was adorned by eloquence and enforced by examples of virtue.\footnote{VC 1.11; \textit{Translation from Original Sources}, 6.}

At first glance, it might appear that what was at work here was just Irish chauvinism. Yet while it was true that the Irish did consider their brand of Christianity superior to any other, the author of this passage is Jonas, not Columban. And Jonas was not an Irishman; he was a Gaul.\footnote{Bullough calls Jonas a Burgundian Frank but goes on to point out that at that time Burgundy extended into what is now Italy. He quotes book 2 of the VC on Jonas’s origins: “the town of Susa, a noble city, once the colony of the Turians, distant about 140 miles from Bobbio” (“The Career of Columbanus,” 1).} So this statement was not merely a matter of ethnic disdain.

King Childeric was so impressed with Columban’s preaching\footnote{Literally, “the greatness of his learning caused him to stand high in favor of the king and court” (VC 1.12). This was probably at Chalons-sur-Saône, the capital of Burgundy. It could have been at Metz, the capital of Austrasia, but that is much farther from Anegray, his first foundation.} that he urged him to settle in his territory.\footnote{Exactly why Childeric was so intent that Columban “not go to other peoples and leave him” is not clear. Probably he was feuding with his brother, the King of Neustria, to the west. At any rate, there would come a time when the king’s son, Theuderich, would try to expel Columban and his Irish confreres.} Jonas says that Columban “followed the king’s advice and chose for himself a hermitage” (VC 1.12). It is interesting that Columban chose for himself a monastic site; from the very beginning, Columban makes it clear that his preaching will take place in a monastic context. Yet he puts the matter to the king in a subtle way. He says he has to follow Jesus’ words: “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”
Saint Columban

(VC 1.12; Matt 16:24). Childebert immediately picked up the implication: “If you wish to take the cross of Christ and follow him, seek the quiet of a hermitage.” Apparently the king knew that monks need solitude.

At any rate, Columban and his compatriots immediately took up residence at Anegray, a ruined fort in the forests of the Vosges Mountains. This ruined fort no doubt belonged to the king, but that fact did not mean that the monks were wards of the crown. Within a few days they were virtually starving, but a neighboring abbot saved them by sending his procurator with a cartload of provisions to sustain them. This beautiful act of generosity was also heroic, since the horses had to walk through the night across woods unknown to them. Yet a miracle brought them and their load to the monks.

Although the Irish monks settled in a remote area, it did not take long for crowds to flock to Columban for healing (VC 1.14). Perhaps from the social pressure, and no doubt because of his general taste for solitary contemplation, Columban soon took to roaming the woods of the Vosges. At one point, wolves sniffed his clothes but did him no harm (VC 1.15). He found a cave suitable for a retreat, but unfortunately it also contained a bear. No problem: he persuaded the bear to vacate, and the cave

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15 Anegray, and nearby Luxeuil, are about fifty miles north of Besançon. Luxeuil is still a town of about eight thousand persons. Both places are situated on the headwaters of the River Moselle, though on opposite sides of it. For an extensive report on the archeological remains of these places, see Henri Leclercq, “Luxeuil,” Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie (Paris: Letouzy et Ané, 1907).

16 Jonas (VC 1.14) says this was Caramtoc, Salicis’s abbot. A Google search for this man and his monastery turns up nothing. What is worth noting is that there were monks in the region before the Irish arrived. In addition, to the south of Besançon were the Jura monasteries of St. Claude and La Balme, founded about a century before Anegray and Luxeuil. So Columban was not the first.
became his favorite retreat (VC 1.16). The cave was remote from water, but Columban commanded his young servant to dig in the nearby rock—and up sprang fresh, pure water!

Finding water in the wilderness is, of course, a hagiographical commonplace. In fact, almost all the episodes in this part of Jonas’s account are marked by a miraculous solution. In this sense, the *Vita Columbani* is much like the more famous *Dialogues* of Saint Gregory, written about fifty years previously. Actually, all medieval lives of the saints are replete with the miraculous, a fact that reduces their historicity. Yet that does not mean that a saint like Columban was just an ordinary fellow. Nor does it completely invalidate the basic truth of Jonas’s account. In fact, both Walker and Vogüé give Jonas fairly high marks as a historian.

People came to Columban not only for succor but also to join his new monastery. Soon the size of the group prompted Columban to move to another abandoned fort. This was Luxeuil, some eight miles southwest of Anegray and across the River Moselle. But the new monastery was still not adequate for the numbers, so Columban founded another house at Fontaines. This third house was close enough to Luxeuil that Columban could serve as superior in three places. But since he could not be everywhere at once, he also began compiling a written Rule of life for his monks (VC 1.17).

17 By the time of Columban, there was a long tradition of monks dealing fearlessly and peaceably with wild animals. In fact, the prototypical desert hermit, Saint Antony, is reported by his hagiographer, Saint Athanasius, to have lived in harmony with the wild animals around his cave in the remote wilderness near the Red Sea (*Life of Antony*, 50). In Italy, Antony (whose feast day is January 17) is celebrated especially as the patron of wild animals.

18 Hagiographers are usually happy to recycle episodes from the lives of other saints.


20 This was the origin of the famous Rule of Columban, which is the subject of this book. The scenario of the founder’s serving as a living
What was life like for the monks at Luxeuil-Fontaines-Anegray? Jonas does not say much about the structure of the community, but one can safely assume that it was similar to that of all the early cenobitic communities. These monks lived a common life of work and prayer, much like what we know from the contemporary Rule of Saint Benedict. But a closer study of their lifestyle in the Rule of Columban shows that they spent a lot of time at the Divine Office, and there was a great emphasis on penance and the confession of sins.

Despite the reticence of Jonas’s account, we get an occasional glimpse of daily life in those communities. VC 1.19–20 describes the monks harvesting, 21 and the abbot is laboring among them. 22 Columban is not only working but also driving his monks hard: at Luxeuil he punishishes those who claim to be too weak and sick to harvest (VC 1.19); at Fontaines he insists that they go out to harvest in the pouring rain (VC 1.20). As soon as they obediently slog out to the field, the sun comes out!

Although he was abbot of a growing community, Columban was still drawn to the wilderness for solitude. When he was

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21 These accounts show that the Vosges was not entirely dense woods. Still, if the monks had to clear mature timber, that was backbreaking work in those days before power equipment. Actually, harvesting by hand is hard enough. Nor were Columban’s monks the only ones to avoid it. Saint Benedict also chides his monks for complaining when they must go out to harvest (RB 48.7–9). See my Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 388–89.

22 This may not seem too remarkable until we remember that Columban was already an old man by the time he got to Luxeuil. If he was born about 540, this would make him about sixty years old, a great age in the sixth century. Moreover, Jonas shows him hauling great timbers to repair the Bobbio church shortly before his death at the age of seventy-five (VC 1.60). Clearly he had a strong constitution!
away from the monastery, he tried to live from the land. For an Irishman, that meant fish. Apparently his compatriot Gall was an expert angler. Yet when Columban sent him to fish in the River Brusch, he came home with an empty creel. But Gall had actually fished in the River Oignon, which bit of disobedience Columban knew by clairvoyance (VC 1.19). When he then fished in the right river, he caught his limit. Another act of disobedience by Gall occurred later in Switzerland when he refused to follow Columban to Italy. At that point the irascible abbot forbade Gall ever to say Mass again! For some reason, Jonas entirely omits this whole episode.23 Did he find Gall’s disobedience scandalous? Or was it Columban’s harsh reaction he preferred to pass over in silence? Hagiographers do not like to expose the warts of their heroes.24

The theme of Columban’s exercising a gentle control over the wild animals continued as long as he lived at Luxeuil. The monk Chamnoald once saw him playing with the wild creatures that flocked to him (VC 1.30). Predators stayed away from a dead stag that Columban wanted for the hide (VC 1.27). One time a raven stole his work glove during lunch break, but under Columban’s potent threat the bird returned the glove (VC 1.25). But Columban’s thaumaturgic power extended to persons as well. He healed the severed finger of Theudegisil (VC 1.23) and the head wound of Winnoc (VC 1.24). He also

23 We have two Lives of Saint Gall, by Wettinus and by Walafrid Strabo, monks of the Abbey of Saint Gall, who wrote in the ninth century. See MGH. Script. Rer. Merov. 4.

24 Gall went on to become the great missionary of the Alemanni. One of the reasons Gall was so successful with the Alemanni was that he could preach in their language. This fact may have led the author of the entry “Gall” in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church to assume that he was of “Frankish or Alemannian origin.” But the Gall who appears in VC 1.20 is clearly an Irishman. Saint Gall is commemorated on October 16 in the Roman calendar. He was the founder of the famous Abbey of St. Gall, one of the greatest cultural and spiritual centers of the Middle Ages.
Saint Columban persuaded God to fill an empty granary, and he multiplied loaves and beer for the monks at Fontaines who were engaged in the heavy labor of breaking up clods in the field (VC 1.28).

Columban soon became famous in the Vosges region. When Waldalen, count of Besançon, and his wife were unable to conceive a child, they came to the saint for his blessing. He agreed to give it, but only if the child was consecrated to the service of God. The parents agreed, and the boy, Donatus, eventually became a monk of Luxeuil. Beyond that, he became bishop of Besançon, one of the many bishops produced by Columbanian monasticism. As bishop, Donatus wrote a monastic rule for the nuns of his city. Not surprisingly, it is heavily influenced by the Rule of Columban.25

Yet the early history of Luxeuil was not all miracles and growth in numbers. There were also serious conflicts with the local culture, at least for Abbot Columban. The first conflict was religious. The fact that the Irish celebrated Easter according to a different system of dating than the Franks was a source of constant irritation to the local bishops. They must have pressed the monks to conform to local custom, but Columban was intransigent. He not only refused to abandon the Irish custom but also wrote an indignant letter to Pope Gregory in AD 600.26


26 Columban’s Letters are found in Walker, Sancti Columbani Opera, 2–59; Letter 1, pp. 2–12. In this letter, Columban indicates that the confusion has arisen from the mistaken Roman idea that the spring equinox falls on March 21—everybody knows it falls on March 25! In addition, the sheer difficulty of detecting precisely when the equinox occurs has
The Rule of Columban
The Rule of Monks
(Regula Monachorum)\textsuperscript{1}

Thus begins the Rule for Monks of Saint Columban Abbot. First of all we are taught to love God with our whole heart and with our whole mind and with all our strength, and our neighbor as ourselves; then (come) works:

I. Obedience\textsuperscript{2}

1. At the first command of the senior, all who hear him must stand up to obey, because obedience is shown to God,
2. as our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Whoever listens to you, listens to me” [Luke 10:16].
3. So if anyone hears the command but does not immediately rise up, he is to be considered disobedient.\textsuperscript{3}


\textsuperscript{2}The title (T) “Obedience” and verses 1 and 2 are based on RB 5.4, 6, and RB 5.15, though not verbally. Benedict quotes Luke 10:16 in both places.

\textsuperscript{3}“if anyone hears the command . . . to be considered.” Basil, Regula 70.1 has the same wording, except that he has non obtemperans for non statim surrexerit (hereafter RBasil).
4. But if someone contradicts [the superior], he is guilty of insubordination,
5. and therefore he is not only guilty of disobedience but is to be reckoned the destroyer of many because he opened the door of contradiction to others.
6. If anyone murmurs, but obeys grudgingly, he is to be held disobedient.5
7. Thus his work is to be rejected until he manifests good will.
8. On the other hand, what is the limit of obedience?6
9. It is certainly commanded to the point of death, for Christ obeyed the Father for us unto death.
10. He himself recommended this to us when he said through the apostle, “Have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus.

4 These verses quote RBasil 69.1–2: “Q. Is it permissible for anyone to excuse himself from the work he is charged to do and to seek something else? R. Since it is defined that the measure of obedience is even unto death [Phil 2:8], anyone who avoids what he is charged to do and seeks something else is first of all guilty of disobedience and manifestly shows that he has not yet denied himself [Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23]. Second, he becomes the cause of many more ills both for himself and for others. For he opens the door of contradiction to the many and accustoms himself to contradicting” (The Rule of St. Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition, trans. Anna M. Silvas [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013], 165).

5 Here is Silvas’s rendition of RBasil 71.T–2: “Q. What of someone obeying who murmurs? R. Since the apostle says: Do all things without murmurings or hesitations [Phil 2:14], a murmurer is estranged from the unity of the brothers, and his work is rejected. For such a one is manifestly sick with want of faith and does not have the sure confidence of hope for the future.”

6 The source here is RBasil 65.T–1: “Q. What ought to be the measure of obedience of one who desires to fulfill the rule of being well pleasing to God? R. The apostle shows when he sets before us the obedience of the Lord, who was made obedient, he says, unto death, even death on a cross [Phil 2:8], and he prefaced it with, have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus” [Phil 2:5].
11. Although he was in divine form, he did not think he should cling jealously to his equality with God.
12. No, he abased himself by accepting the role of a slave.
13. Not only did he behave like an ordinary person, but he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the Father unto death, death on a cross” [Phil 2:5-8].
14. Therefore truly obedient disciples of Christ ought not refuse anything, no matter how hard and strenuous it is. It should rather be welcomed with the warmest joy,
15. for unless obedience is of that sort, it will not be acceptable to the Lord. For he said, “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” [Matt 16:24].
16. Therefore he says of a worthy disciple, “Wherever I am, there my servant will be with me” [John 12:26].

II. Silence

1. It is decreed that the rule of silence is to be carefully observed, for it is written, “But the fruit of righteousness is silence and peace” [Isa 32:17].

Now Columban returns to RB 5.14-18: “But this same obedience will only be acceptable to God and humanly attractive if the command is not executed fearfully, slowly, or listlessly, or with murmuring or refusal. For obedience given to superiors is given to God, who said, ‘Whoever listens to you listens to me.’ And it should be given gladly by disciples, for ‘God loves a cheerful giver.’ If a disciple grudgingly obeys and murmurs not only out loud but internally, even if he carries out the order, it will not be acceptable to God. For he sees the heart of the murmurer” (Benedict’s Rule, trans. Terrence Kardong [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996], 104). Overall, Columban makes more use of Basil than of Benedict in this first chapter, but he has effected a workable combination. RB 5 is one of the most rigorous chapters in the whole Rule, and Basil is also very stern on obedience. So Columban has put together a tough chapter.

“Fruit.” The Oxford Latin Dictionary doesn’t give this meaning for cultus but Vogüé does. As the perfect passive participle of colo, it makes sense. The NAB for Isa 32:17 has “Right will produce calm and security.”
2. Therefore, so as not to be accused of verbosity,⁹ one must maintain silence except for useful and necessary matters. For according to Scripture, “In much talking there will be sin” [Prov 10:19].¹⁰

3. Therefore the Savior says, “You will be justified on the basis of your words, and you will also be condemned on the basis of your words” [Matt 12:37].

4. They will be rightly condemned who, when they could have spoken justly if they wished,

5. instead preferred to speak evil, unjust, impious, silly, injurious, dubious, false, hostile, disparaging, wicked, outlandish, blasphemous, harsh, and devious words, and with extreme verbosity.

6. Therefore, we should avoid these and like words, and speak cautiously and reasonably. Otherwise, detractions or loud arguments may erupt in a vicious flood of words.

III. Food and Drink

1. Let the food of the monks be plain, and taken in the evening. Their food should [help them] avoid gluttony and their drink inebriation; it should sustain and not harm them. They should eat vegetables, beans, and flour cooked in water accompanied by a small loaf of bread. Thus the stomach will not be overloaded nor the spirit stifled.

2. Those who desire an eternal reward should only consider how such things are useful and compatible with their lifestyle.¹¹

⁹The literal sense here is more verbose: “Therefore, lest one be convicted of being guilty of verbosity.”

¹⁰Gregory, Moralia in Iob (hereafter Mor) 7.XXXVII.58 has the same quotations (Isa 32 and Prov 10) but in reverse order. In Mor 10.II.2, the same two quotations are given but in the usual order.

¹¹“Useful and compatible with their lifestyle.” The Latin utilitati et usui is much more compact but also cryptic. Walker does not advance our understanding much with “usefulness and use” (Sancti Columbani Opera,
3. Therefore, their lifestyle ought to be moderate, and so should their manner of working. True moderation consists in maintaining the possibility of spiritual progress along with an abstinence that mortifies the body,

4. for if abstinence goes too far, it is a vice and not a virtue. Virtue sustains and contains many good things.

5. So we should fast every day, just as we should eat every day.

6. Since we must eat daily, we should feed the body with simple food, and not much of it. We need to eat every day because we need to make daily progress by praying, working, and reading.

IV. Poverty or Conquering Greed

1. Monks ought to avoid avarice, “for the world is crucified to them and they to the world” for Christ. It is damnable for them not only to possess, but even to wish to do so.
2. It is their will that counts, not their bank account. They have left everything and followed Christ the Lord daily with the cross of fear, so they will have treasure in heaven [Matt 19:21].

3. For this reason, since they will possess much in heaven, they ought to be content on earth with just enough to stay alive.

4. They know that cupidity is leprosy for monks who are imitators of the sons of the prophets. For a disciple of Christ it is treason and ruin, and it is death for the doubting followers of the apostles.

5. Therefore, nakedness and disdain for riches are the first perfection of monks. The second is the cleansing away of vice. Third is the most perfect, continuous love for God,

16 “Bank account” (census). Jerome has the same idea in Ep 68.1, with res instead of census. Strictly speaking, it does not matter whether a monk handles money; in fact, some monks must handle large sums. What counts is whether one is attached to or detached from it.

17 “Cross of fear.” In Inst 4.34, Cassian begs God to pierce his “flesh with the fear of the Lord,” a reference to Ps 118:120.

18 “Just enough to stay alive,” my free translation of parvo extremae necessitatis censu. I translated census rather differently in the previous line; like res it is very adaptable.

19 The references here are all biblical and also lifted directly from Cassian, Inst 7.14: “sons of the prophets” refers to Gehazi in 2 Kgs 5:27; “disciple of Christ” refers to Judas in Matt 27:5; “doubting followers of the apostles” refers to Ananias and Sapphira of Acts 5:5 and 5:10.

20 These three “perfections” correspond to Cassian’s three “renunciations” of Conf 3.7 and 8. As Vogüé remarks (Règles, 57 n. 5), only the third member of the series is usually considered a spiritual perfection. The first perfection is also quoted verbatim by Columban from Cassian, Inst 4.43. Perfection number two is a direct transcription of Inst 4.39. For the third number, however, Columban makes an important change: where Cassian (Conf 3.6.1) has “to contemplate the future and to desire the invisible,” Columban simply substitutes the love of God.
and also of the divine law.21 This comes after the forgetfulness of earthly things.

6. This being the case, according to the saying of the Lord, we need few things.22 Indeed, we need only one.

7. There are very few true necessities without which we cannot live, or even one thing, like food, literally speaking.

8. But we require purity of understanding by the grace of God, so as to understand spiritually the few things of love suggested to Martha by the Lord.

V. Conquering Vanity

1. The peril of vanity may be shown from a few words of our Savior. When his disciples were crowing with vanity, he said to them, “I have observed Satan fall from lightning from the sky” [Luke 10:18].23

21 “Divine law” (divinorum iugus) could also refer to the religious life (Albert Blaise, Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens [Strasbourg: Le Latin Chrétien, 1954], s.v. jugum).

22 “Few things, or even one.” This is the formulation of Cassian in Conf 1.8 and Conf 23.3. Although Cassian has slightly altered Luke 10:42 (“only one thing”), he follows the gospel faithfully in making the one thing contemplation. Columban interprets it (temporarily) as food. Vogüé, Règles, 58 n. 8: “In Conf 1.8, the pauca (few things) are “the acts and admirable services of the holy ones,” the objects of a contemplation inferior to that of God (“the only one”).

23 “The peril of . . . .” Vogüé, Règles, 58 n. 1 points to a similar formulation in Cassian, Inst 11.10 (quam perniciosus), which also pertains to vanity. Although Columban interprets Jesus’ words—“I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky” (NAB)—as a reproach, as does Gregory the Great in Mor 20.V.13 and 23.VI.13, that is not the only possible meaning of this passage. For example, the note in NAB (1986) at Luke 10:18 says, “As the kingdom of God is gradually being established, evil in all its forms is being defeated; the dominion of Satan over humanity is at an end.”
2. And when some Jews justified themselves, he told them, “What men esteem as high is abominable in God’s eyes” [Luke 16:15].

3. From these examples, and from the most famous one of the Pharisee who justified himself, we gather that vanity and self-importance destroy all good deeds. For the good deeds the Pharisee bragged about perished, but the sins confessed by the tax collector vanished.

4. So let’s have no big talk from monks lest their big efforts be in vain.

VI. Regarding Chastity

1. The chastity of a monk is judged by his thoughts, and he was doubtless the target of the Lord’s words to the disciples when they gathered to listen to him: “Whoever ogles a woman is guilty of defiling her in his heart” [Matt 5:28].

24 “Justified.” In Luke 16:8-13, Jesus unleashes a diatribe against avarice. The Pharisees, overhearing, take it as aimed at them. They must have been right, because Jesus then rounds directly on them, accusing them of hypocrisy in addition to greed. The result is that the aphorism is restricted to the Pharisees: “What men esteem as high is abominable in God’s eyes.” According to Vogüé (Règles, 58 n. 2), Gregory also cites Luke 16:15 in Dial 1.4.18 but “in another manner.” He must refer to the different wording in the two texts: Gregory’s version reads *quia quod hominibus altum est, abominabile est ante Deum*. Columban has *quod autem altum est in hominibus abominatio est in conspectu domini*. In fact, Gregory is quoting the Vulgate exactly, but Columban is not. Perhaps he is quoting from memory.

25 The allusion here is to Luke 18:9-14, about the Pharisee and the tax collector. Note that Columban explicitly affirms that the Pharisee did do a great deal of good—but vitiated it with his vanity. This is also the theme of Cassian in Inst 11.19. The Pharisee and publican are referred to by Gregory, Mor 23.VI.13, just before Luke 10:18. All in all, Gregory is the main influence on this little chapter of Columban’s Rule.

26 Matt 5:28 is similarly quoted by Cassian in Inst 6.12, which is devoted to the “the spirit of fornication.” Like Cassian, Columban knows
2. When the One to whom {the monk} is consecrated scrutinizes his vow, he should be afraid that the One might find something abominable.

3. {Then he would fall under} the judgment of Saint Peter: “They have eyes full of sensuality and adultery” [2 Pet 2:14].

4. What good is it to be a physical virgin if one is not a spiritual one?  

5. For “God is spirit” [John 4:24], who dwells in the spirit and mind that he sees is pure, in which there is no adulterous thought, no stain of an impure spirit, no blemish of sin.  

VII. The Divine Office

1. Regarding the *synaxis*, that is, the Office of psalms and prayers in the canonical form, certain distinctions must
be made because the thing has been handed on to us in various ways by different authors.

2. Therefore, I must also arrange things variously to suit our way of life\textsuperscript{30} and the succession of seasons.

3. Because of the changing of seasons, it should not be a uniform program.

4. When the nights are long, the Office should be long; when the nights are short, the Office should be likewise.

5. So, with the custom of our elders, from June 24, when the nights grow appreciably longer, the Office begins to grow from twelve \textit{chora}, the smallest number allowed for Saturday night and Sunday, until the beginning of winter, that is, November 1.\textsuperscript{31}

down the Egyptian norm (Inst 2.3). “Psalms and prayers in the canonical form” is traditional language, found already in Cassian, Inst 2.9: orationum canonicarum modum.

\textsuperscript{30} “Our way of life.” Walker has “the nature of man’s life,” but Vogüé has “notre manière de vivre,” which makes better sense.

\textsuperscript{31} Vogüé’s explanation of the Columbanian Night Office is instructive: “Let us enter then at Luxeuil or Bobbio some morning, at daybreak, when the monks come to end the longest of their daily Offices, that is, \textit{matins}, where they sometimes recite half the psalter. They rise for the first time at midnight to recite twelve psalms; then they go back to bed. They rise again for the great \textit{vigil} of the last hours of the night. This varies according to the seasons from twenty-four to thirty-six psalms on ordinary days, and from thirty-six to sixty-five on Saturday and Sunday. The enormous number of psalms is lightened by abridgements and incessant alteration. After each psalm, they stop for a brief prayer. They kneel for this during ordinary time and bow for it on Sundays and during Paschal Time. The monks silently recite the verse \textit{Deus in adjutorium} three times and rise up. To these interruptions of the chant are added changes in the mode of execution: after two psalms recited by soloists, the third is chanted antiphonally by all. Each one of these groups of three psalms, which give rhythm to the psalmody, is called a \textit{chora}” (from the General Introduction of Columban, \textit{Règles et Pénitentiels Monastiques}, II [not vol. III, as p. 60 n. 5 of the work reads]).
6. Of these, they sing twenty-five antiphonal psalms, which always follow two psalms, that is, twice the same number, in the third place. Thus they sing the whole psalter on the aforementioned two nights. But for the other nights in winter, they limit themselves to twelve *chora* (thirty-six psalms).

7. At the end of winter, throughout spring, they drop three psalms each week, so that twelve antiphonal psalms remain on only the holy nights (Saturday and Sunday). This applies to the thirty-six psalms of the daily Office in winter.

8. But there are twenty-four psalms for the whole of spring and summer up to the autumn equinox, that is, September 24.

9. So the manner of the *synaxis* is like the spring equinox, that is, March 24, seeing that the Office gradually increases and decreases by mutual changes.

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32 *Twice the same number* (*eiusdem numeri duplicis*). This phrase has puzzled commentators from Germain Morin (“Mêlange d’érudition chrétienne,” *Revue Bénédictine* 12 [1895]: 193–203, here 200–201) to Walker, who considers it an interpolation to be left in brackets after “twenty-five antiphonal psalms.” Vogüé, however, takes it in stride, though he moves it, as I have. The huge number of psalms sung at Luxeuil had an Irish origin but was also characteristic of Gaul. In Inst 2, Cassian struggles to convince the Gauls to limit the psalms of Vigils to twelve, but to judge from texts like Caesarius’s *Rule for Nuns* (Reg Virg), he did not succeed. “Other nights of winter” begin on September 24 and end March 24. Modern calendars place the equinoxes on the twenty-first or twenty-second day of the month.

33 *Only on the holy nights.* Although Walker understands the Irish Office well enough, he contributes to the confusion by writing “only twelve antiphons remain on the holy nights, that is, the thirty-six psalms of the daily winter office.” The Latin is rather obscure, but the sense requires that this sentence refer to the dropping of three psalms a week in daily Vigils. I do not believe either Walker or Vogüé makes this clear enough in his translation.

34 As far as I can understand, the “whole of spring and summer” here means May 1 to September 24. The period of decrease is March 24 to May 1.

35 *Increases* must refer to a spring transition from twenty-four (winter) to thirty-six (summer) psalms, which parallels the decrease that
10. Thus we must proportion our vigils to our strength, especially since we are commanded by the author of our salvation to watch and “pray at all times” [Luke 21:36]. And Paul orders us to “pray ceaselessly” [1 Thess 5:17].

11. But we need to know the measure of the canonical prayers, at which all come together at set hours to pray together, after which each one should pray in his room [Matt 6:6].

12. Therefore, our ancestors have decided that three psalms should be said at the Day Hours, taking into account the work to be done in the intervals.

13. {We should add} versicles that intercede first for our sins, then for the whole Christian people, then for priests and

occurs in September. It seems to me that this opaque sentence could well mean that the psalmody should match the hours of daylight. That is, the longer the night, the longer the Office of Vigils.

While Columban’s arrangement of the psalms may strike us as excessive, and even grotesque, he presents it here as a restriction, the purpose of which is to enable us to “pray ceaselessly” (1 Thess 5:17).

“Measure.” Modus can mean either “manner” or “measure,” the first referring to quality and the second quantity. Walker has the first, but Vogüé the second, I believe correctly. The issue here is the quantity of vigils. Cassian spends much of Inst 2 discussing this very question. For him, 1 Thess 5:17, “pray ceaselessly,” is a capital text. In Conf 9–10, he insists that this is the true monastic ideal, which prevailed in Egypt. In Syria (including Palestine), they set down great numbers of psalms to be sung at fixed hours, but in Cassian’s view that does not implement “pray always” but undermines it. As for Columban, he often cites Cassian, but he seems to follow the Syrian model.

These three psalms were presumably short ones if Columban was serious about work. As it is, formal prayer every three hours can preclude certain kinds of sustained work—especially agriculture. In Inst 3.3, Cassian says that only three psalms are said, precisely to allow for work.

“Day Hours.” Diurnae horae is technical language referring to Prime, Terce, Sext, and None, the Little Hours of the Office. In occurs in the earlier RB at 16.3; 18.20; and 43.10.

“For our sins.” In the Rule of the Master, chap. 50, the monks are told to give thanks every three hours for having survived the previous
the other orders of the holy people that are consecrated to God. Next [we should pray] for those who give alms and for peace among kings.

14. Last {let us pray} for our enemies,**41** lest God hold it as sin [Acts 7:60] when they persecute and slander us, “for they do not know what they are doing” [Luke 23:34].

15. At the beginning of the night twelve psalms are chanted, and the same thing is done at midnight.**42**

16. At Morning Office, twice ten plus twice two {= twenty-four psalms} are set down.**43** This is when the nights are short, as I have said. But more are always set down for Sunday and Saturday nights, at which seventy-five psalms are sung one after the other**44** at a single Office.

17. These things have been said regarding the common Office.

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three-hour interval free of sin. Indeed, this seems to be the very purpose of the Day Hours for the Master. Columban does not seem to have been influenced by the Rule of the Master, although he was very concerned with the forgiveness of sins.

**41**“Our enemies.” Columban did not have to use his imagination on this score, since he had frequent troubles with the Merovingian kings. In fact, one of them, Theuderich (see Jonas, VC 1.35), tried to deport him back to Ireland but gave up when the winds would not let the ship depart from the port of Nantes (see p. 13 of the introduction above).

**42**Adamnan mentions three night Offices in his *Life of Columba* 3.28. The one at the beginning of the night, which would be equivalent to Vespers or Compline, is called *duodecima* (twelve) in Columban’s Coen III.2. Cassian, Inst 2.4, insists on twelve psalms (only) for the Night Office.

**43**“Set down” (*dispositi*). When or where these were “set down” is not clear to me. Since this Rule was written soon after they arrived in Gaul, presumably the model for Columban was what he had learned at Bangor, Ulster, where he was trained.

**44**“One after another” (*sub uno cursu*). How this relates to the system of *chora* (VII.5–6) is not obvious. The *chora* was a block of three psalms, with the third always done antiphonally. It is unclear whether there was a pause between *chorae*, but at least the variation of performance would introduce some variety in this interminable lineup of seventy-five psalms.
18. However, as I have said, the true tradition of prayer varies so that the capacity of the person devoted to it should be able to perdure without undermining his vow. It also depends on whether one can actually do it and whether one’s mental capacity allows for it, considering the necessities of one’s life.

19. It should also be varied as the fervor of each one requires, according to whether he is free or alone, to how much learning he has, to how much leisure he has, to how much zeal he has, or at what age he arrived at the monastery.

20. And so the realization of this one ideal should be variously valued, for the demands of work and place must be taken into account.

21. So although the length of standing or singing may be varied, a person will achieve equal perfection in prayer of the heart and continual attention to God.

22. There are, however, some Catholics for whom the same number of psalms is canonical, whether the nights are short or long.

Surely it would have taken at least two or three hours to sing half the Psalter?

“Realization” is Vogüé’s inspired rendition of perfectio; Vogüé notes that the word has the same connotation in v. 18. Although perfectio will have its more usual sense of faultlessness and total excellence in v. 21, the point being made here is that “perfect” prayer is precisely what suits the individual. “Pray as you can, not as you can’t” (John Chapman).

“This one ideal” must refer to the ideal of constant prayer, which the author admits must be tailored to the actual condition and circumstances of the monk.

Walker’s rendition of this verse is as follows: “And thus, although the length of standing or singing may be various, yet the identity of prayer in the heart and mental concentration that is unceasing with God’s help will be of singular excellence.” Compared to Vogüé’s French translation, which I have used as a model, this is far from clear.

“Attention to God,” literally “attention with God’s help” (cum Deo jugis attentio).

“Catholics” (Catholici) is a typical Irish expression; “Christians” was the usual term in the days before the Reformation. But Walker’s
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