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The Church of Ireland during the Viking Invasions from the 9th - 11th Centuries

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Abstract

By the 8th century, Ireland had experienced a flourishing period, not only economically but also spiritually, when the tribes and numerous Irish kingdoms rose around the great monasteries, sheltering not only church precious objects and other riches, but especially the food necessary for the living of large communities. From the 9th century the monastic wealth was the one that attracted the invasion of the Vikings with all the trouble and tribulation they brought, and, along with the fratricidal wars between the tribes and even the rival monasteries, it gradually led to the extinction of the Orthodox spirit left by the great Irish Fathers from the centuries after their conversion to the Christian religion.

Keywords:

Irish Church, Viking invasion, martyrs, monasteries, local kings

By the 8th century, Ireland had experienced a flourishing period, not only economically but also spiritually, where the tribes and the many Irish kingdoms had risen around the great monasteries. With numerous congregation (like the real cities with up to 2,000 inhabitants), the Irish

monasteries housed not only religious relics, but also other riches, and food for the basic needs of large communities. Till the Vikings' attack, those riches have sparked the appetite of the local rival kings who did not hesitate to attack and rob them¹. Thus, it remained famous in history how the king Fedemid mac Crimthainn, who was bishop at the same time destroyed several churches of his brothers by blood and faith. It seems that he left more desolate monasteries behind him than all the Vikings robbed between years 820-850².

On the other hand, the life of the Irish Church had also suffered greatly because of the conflicts - often armed - between rival churches and monasteries. In the 8th century, more than 200 people were injured and killed in the struggle between the Clonmacnoise and Durrow monasteries³. The abbots were no longer concerned about the spiritual things, but they supported the various local kings with money and weapons.

A victim of this fratricidal conflict was *St. Cormac*, living in the 9th century. With royal origin, scholar and poet alike, he became the bishop of Cashel, and the people loved him for his faith and his kindness for the poor. But in 908 a rival king from a different kingdom killed him along with others⁴.

This is the internal background of the period when the Vikings appeared in the history of Ireland at the end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 9th century. The Irish found out about the Vikings' destructive waves not only from those who escaped from the destroyed monasteries, but even before year 794, from the mouth of the hermits retreated to the Northern islands. Numerous Irish hermits had inhabited many islands in the Faroe Islands, and had lived there solitary and unknown for hundreds of years, generation after generation. When the Vikings started their naval incursions

¹ Anne-Christine Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, The Viking Ship Museum, Roskilde, 2001, p. 140. A historian made a statistic of the attacks on Irish monasteries during the years 795-820. It seems that out of 113 attacks recorded in the chronicles, only 26 were by the Vikings, so not even a quarter, the rest being blows given by Irish kings or even monks from rival communities. See: Martyn Whittock, Hannah Whittock, *The Viking Blitzkrieg, 789-1098 AD*, The History Press, Stroud, 2013.

² Peter and Fiona Somerset Fly, *A History of Ireland*, Psychology Press, Londra, 1991, p. 49.

³ P. and F. Somerset Fly, *A History of Ireland*, p. 49.

⁴ Rev. A. Butler, *The Lives of the Saints, vol. IX: September*, Dublin, 1866.

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at the beginning of the 8th century, the monks left the islands, and retreated to their native lands where they told their fellow about the cruel fighters of Scandinavia⁵.

However, at the end of the 8th century, the Irish were largely unaware of what it was going to happen. The first Vikings who landed in Ireland were traders and the Irish greeted them in a peaceful way. But the things that happened afterwards were a real shock to the Irish: Iona monastery was devastated on several occasions, most monks were killed and the others were forced to move to Ireland, where they built a new monastery⁶. Then the Armagh monastery was sacked three times in one month, leaving no time for the congregation to seek help and to recover after being devastated⁷. And in the coming years, the Vikings surrounded the coastline of the island, attacking the monasteries on the western shore of Ireland.

From now on, as they woke up from the shock, the Irish will take the weapons and fight to save their homeland from the invaders. But the kingdoms were small and in conflict with each other most of the time, therefore they represented an insufficient military force to cope with the new waves of Vikings. On the other hand, paradoxically, tribal fragmentation seems to have been precisely the fact that stopped the Vikings from conquering the centre of the country. As they advanced, they had to meet the opposition of new and new kings, and eventually they gave up, limiting their settlement to shore⁸. In 830 one of the most feared Nordics, Turges the Danish and his army arrived on the Irish shore. The Armagh school and monastery were robbed again, and other monasteries burned⁹. The Vikings had discovered the treasures inside the monasteries and the years that followed were full of cruelty, blood and death, especially for the congregations and the people around the attacked monasteries. The golden adornments of Bangor, Armagh, Clonfert, and Clonmacnoise took the way to Scandinavia, often with many monks, as slaves¹⁰.

⁵ P. and F. Somerset Fly, *A History of Ireland*, p. 46.

⁶ A.-Ch. Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, p. 17.

⁷ Katherine Holman, *The Northern Conquest: Vikings in Britain and Ireland*, Signal Books, Oxford, 2007, p. 34.

⁸ A.-Ch. Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, p. 29.

⁹ Roger Chatterton Newman, *Brian Boru: King of Ireland*, Mercier Press, Cork, 2011, p. 45.

¹⁰ A.-Ch. Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, p. 18.

It seems that the people who lived in those difficult times of invasion, robbery and murder, were aware they suffered all this for their sins. In the 9th century a series of prophecies and poems appeared that talked about paying for a life away from God:

„...*heathens shall come to you from Me... who will carry you into bondage from your own lands, and will offer you up to their own gods*”

(The so-called Epistle of Jesus – *Epistil Isu*)¹¹.

From the small-scale raids of the years 800-830, the Vikings will invade Ireland with numerous armies, conquering the seashore systematically. Dublin, the fortress built by the brothers Olaf and Iwar, has become the Vikings' main camp and the place where they will launch all their attacks on the monasteries inside Ireland¹². In the last half of the 9th century, following the new Scandinavian attacks, several Irish bishops and priests who preached faith in Scotland were killed. Among them were the saints: Adrian, Stalbrand, Geodianus and Gaius¹³.

But from the second half of the 9th century, and especially in the 10th century, the resistance of the locals was growing stronger and would force the Vikings to remain on the shores¹⁴. The Irish people understood that the terrestrial struggle is not enough and they started to build more and more ships that could stand against the powerful Viking fleet. The monasteries came out of defence and built walls and defence towers, or even attacked the Scandinavians¹⁵. The wooden churches will gradually be replaced by others made by stone, thus becoming real fortresses.

At the end of the 9th century, the Irish managed to unite and chase the Vikings to Scotland and York. But twenty years later, the Nordic people returned to recover their lost territories¹⁶. The end of the 10th century is the time of martyrs, a whole host of Irish monks falling prey to Viking robberies and murders. Thus, in 985 on Christmas Eve, the abbot of Iona

¹¹ A.-Ch. Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, p. 99.

¹² Katherine Holman, *The Northern Conquest: Vikings in Britain and Ireland*, Signal Books, Oxford, 2007, p. 36.

¹³ Vladimir Moss, *Lives of the British Saints*, <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/books>, p. 9.

¹⁴ Barry Cunliffe, *Britain Begins*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 470.

¹⁵ P. and F. Somerset Fly, *A History of Ireland*, p. 50.

¹⁶ A.-Ch. Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, p. 22.

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Monastery and 15 monks were killed by the Danes, and next year, the new abbot and other monks would follow their fate¹⁷. But in the year 987 the chronicles record a surprising thing: after a new attack on the monastery, the Vikings retreated, leaving behind them 360 dead people, a miracle made by St. Columba who defended his monastery¹⁸.

Unlike England, the resistance of the local Irish kings and people saved the great monasteries from total destruction. Moreover, although under threat, the small kingdoms continued to live, especially by trade and slaves, and they gained enough economic and military power to fight the Vikings¹⁹.

The changes brought about by the Viking invasions naturally reflected on the monastic life. The small settlements sacked by the Scandinavians were not restored; the monks were concentrated in great lavras, and they sought support from the local monarchs, becoming totally dependent on the Irish royal houses²⁰. The monasteries became real cities, people living in cellars set in the streets, divided into neighbourhoods, alongside a large crowd of workers, craftsmen, etc.

On the other hand, the hermits still survived and kept Ireland in their prayers. The Annals of Clonmacnoise monastery recorded a few names of these praying anchorites from the 8th - 9th centuries²¹.

The renowned schools of the Irish monasteries continued to exist and to gather important theologians. The chronicles recorded dozens of such teachers at least until the 10th century, who brought up scholars who made a name at the courts of Europe²².

The geographic isolation also had advantages for the Irish Church. The heresies that haunted Western Europe in particular penetrated Ireland harder and, most of the times, unsuccessfully as the people was stubborn to keep the tradition received from their ancestors. Thus, St. Columbanus wrote to the pope, warning him of the heresies that were mending the Church:

¹⁷ Vladimir Moss, *The Lives of St. Columba of Iona and the Saints of Iona*, <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/articles/>.

¹⁸ V. Moss, *The Lives of St. Columba of Iona and the Saints of Iona*.

¹⁹ A.-Ch. Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, p. 35.

²⁰ Nancy Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2006, p. 100.

²¹ Annette Kehnel, *Clonmacnois, The Church and Lands of St. Ciaran*, LIT Verlag, Munster, 1995, p. 43.

²² A. Kehnel, *Clonmacnois, The Church and Lands of St. Ciaran*, p. 39.

“who have always kept the Orthodox Faith, whoever these may be, even if they seem to be your subordinates, ... shall be your judges... And thus, even as your honour is great in proportion to the dignity of your see, so great care is mindful for you, lest you lose your dignity through some mistake. For power will be in your hands just so long as your principles remain sound; for he is the appointed keybearer of the Kingdom of Heaven, who opens by true knowledge to the worthy and shuts to the unworthy; otherwise if he does the opposite, he shall be able neither to open nor to shut.”²³

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Beyond the burden of the Viking invasion and fratricidal struggles, the Church of Ireland continued to develop even in these almost impossible times and circumstances. Though death threatened them every moment, the Irish continued to create true works of art as worship objects because they loved beauty. Although in Ireland the architecture of that period was robust and simple, craftsmen shown their talents in small things such as metalworking, making beautiful church objects, sculpting the crosses, etc.²⁴. They were also famous for the manuscripts with simple drawings of ancient influence, but carefully designed in bright colours. Of these, perhaps the *Book of Armagh* has become the best known. It is a collection of writings such as: the New Testament and the preface of Blessed Jerome, the life and memoirs of St. Patrick, the life of St. Martin of Tours written by Sulpicius Severus, brought together by copyists, probably around 807²⁵. The languages used are both Latin and Old Irish²⁶.

The churches were built of wood, but also with stone components, with one room and several small windows. There were stone or wooden crosses scattered throughout the island or in the courts of the churches or at the crossroads. They usually represented the Saviour, or some saints particularly venerated by the Irish and scenes from the earthly work of our

²³ Vladimir Moss, *Celtic Monasticism*, <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/articles/450/celtic-monasticism>.

²⁴ Sean Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Ireland – An Encyclopedia*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2005, p. 44.

²⁵ Ph. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol.IV, CCEL, 1997, p. 69.

²⁶ S. Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Ireland – An Encyclopedia*, p. 51.

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Lord Jesus Christ²⁷. Being diligent pilgrims to Rome, the Irish took over from there the sculptural representations of the apostles and martyrs of the universal Church and some local saints²⁸. But their form was a particular one. Similarities have been sought even with the crosses of Armenia and Coptic Egypt²⁹. However, at that time, the Westerners saw the Irish as distinct Christians, different from the Western way of worshipping. In a letter to King Charles the Great, Alcuin called them “*the children of Egypt*”³⁰.

The first round towers of Ireland date from this period. They were erected as observation points, dominating by their height the area where they were situated, but also as a place of refuge for people and books³¹. Tall, narrow and elegant, with a stone roof, they dominated the Irish landscape. Some authors have made a connection between these and the pillars that the eastern hermits spent their lives on in harsh ascetic labours. Others saw them as places of seclusion and repentance, a new way of withdrawing for the Irish monks³².

After the first waves of Viking robberies, there were mostly preserved objects belonging to the saints (crosses, books, bells), that the Irish had the same piety for as for the relics, but also Church objects of great beauty: the Ardagh silver chalice (of Byzantine influence), or the Book of Kells (a Latin Gospel with thumbnails)³³.

From the pilgrimages that aimed the alienation for Christ and to remain definitively in foreign lands, the Irish from the 8th -12th centuries would begin pilgrimages to the holy places of Christendom that sheltered relics of saints, but afterwards they returned to their home country³⁴. They did not made mission like before, but only worshiped or remained in the German, Italian and French monasteries that needed scholars³⁵. Thus, there is a

²⁷ A.-Ch. Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, p. 83.

²⁸ Colum Hourihane (ed.), *From Ireland Coming*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001, p. 11.

²⁹ C. Hourihane (ed.), *From Ireland Coming*, p. 10.

³⁰ Vladimir Moss, *Celtic Monasticism*, <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/articles/450/celtic-monasticism>, 30 martie 2015.

³¹ Nancy Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2006, p. 128.

³² C. Hourihane (ed.), *From Ireland Coming*, p. 27.

³³ A.-Ch. Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, p. 142.

³⁴ C. Hourihane (ed.), *From Ireland Coming*, p. 13.

³⁵ Dr. Wattenbach, *The Irish Monasteries in Germany*, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*,

life of *Saint Andrew, the deacon*, who came from Ireland in the middle of the 9th century, and remained near the one of the Tuscany hermits, named Donatus. After years of harsh ascetic labour together, Donatus will be named a bishop and will take Andrew with him, ordaining him a deacon. He will serve in the Episcopal Church until his death in year 880, the contemporaries honouring him for his life of holiness³⁶. The silence that covers the Irish monks' life, whether they were hermits in the Northern islands, up to Iceland, or in the large monasteries of their own country or elsewhere in Europe, will cause historians to doubt the fruits of their work. This is especially because the Anglo-Saxons, lovers of order, will take the place of the old Irish pilgrims, converting nations and organizing churches³⁷.

The hardness the Irish lived in those days will make the most zealous of them to think more of their soul and try to live a new life. Thus the communities of *celi De (culdees)* – in translation *companions of God* - emerged and flourished, who lived under strict rules of fasting and virginity. Among the most important of the culdees will be *Oengus*, Bishop of Tallach, a learned Church writer, raised under the direct support of the initiator of this movement, Mael Ruain. He made a Martyrology and at the end of his life he retired in solitude, away from the turmoil of the world and the political struggles involving the Church³⁸. From the two original churches that sheltered them, the community of culdees will stretch until the 840's throughout Ireland, and later in Scotland³⁹. Unfortunately, in time, they have ceased to receive the ordinances of the Mother Church, departing from it and estranging even from honouring the saints and the icons. Then they have not received the seven Holy Mysteries of the Church, and this fact made them true precursors of Protestants over the centuries⁴⁰.

Western Europe has always cherished the scholars Ireland gave birth every century. They were the true treasures of an Orthodoxy that began to

First Series, vol. 7, 1859, p. 236.

³⁶ Rev. A. Butler, *The Lives of the Saints, vol. VIII: August*, Dublin, 1866.

³⁷ Dr. Wattenbach, *The Irish Monasteries in Germany*, p. 232.

³⁸ T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 469.

³⁹ A.-Ch. Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, p. 33.

⁴⁰ Ph. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol.IV, p. 68.

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be forgotten in the West, followers of the Eastern monks and Fathers of the Church from Eastern Europe and Asia Minor. But time, hardships, and especially the fact they became fewer and fewer in their country, will cause the Irish to move away from the living source of Orthodoxy. They did not know Greek anymore, and the books of the Eastern Fathers would remain less accessible to them, especially since neither Rome knew or encouraged the translation of these works⁴¹.

However, the Irish carefully kept numerous Greek manuscripts in the libraries of the monasteries, and the scholars who left for the continent used them as a starting point for learning this language⁴².

Psalter and Holy Scriptures were the most loved and read books in Ireland, and the comments on the Gospels and the Psaltic exegesis of Antiochian inspiration were transmitted from generation to generation until the 12th century⁴³.

On the other hand, around the year 800, an Irish theologian wrote a *Treaty* on the Divine Liturgy, emphasizing the importance of partaking the Holy Eucharist. He speaks of a God-man communion, through the will of man to unite with God in the Holy Mysteries, and through the grace that God pours on him⁴⁴.

We may also mention the settlement of Ros Ailithir, in Munster kingdom, which had become one of the most famous in Ireland. There, the young *Airbertach* (†1016) learned Theology and Latin. He was captured by the Vikings in the battles from the end of the 10th century, but knowing he is a prominent man of the kingdom, King Brian Boru redeemed him and put him at the head of the school he had finished in his youth. There were preserved four works written by this scholar, who excelled in poetry with an Old-Testamentary theme and comments on psalms⁴⁵, as well as a Psalter in lyrics⁴⁶.

⁴¹ Irena Dorota Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, vol. 1, Brill, Leiden, 1997, vol. 1, p. 60.

⁴² Alex Mullen, Patrick James (eds.), *Multilingual in the Graeco-Roman Worlds*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, p. 174.

⁴³ Martin McNamara, *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 2000, p. 12.

⁴⁴ Michael W. Herren, Shirley Ann Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2002, p. 129.

⁴⁵ S. Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Ireland – An Encyclopedia*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ M. McNamara, *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church*, p. 19.

In the middle of the 9th century an emissary of King Charles the Bald arrived in the green lands of Ireland, calling to the royal court a man whom the king knew was the most learned theologian of his time. Baptized *John*, he will be known in history with the name *Scotus* or *Eriugena*, meaning “the Irish”.

John was born in the first decade of the 9th century, during the Viking invasions, in an Ireland struck by pain, robbery and crime. Nearly nothing is known about his training period in the native land. He does not seem to have been ordained. Teacher at one of the renowned Irish monastic schools, John was summoned by the King of the Franks to raise the intellectual and theological level of his court⁴⁷. Being a man of letters and a great admirer of scholars, Charles the Bald placed him at the head of the palace school and asked him to translate into Latin the works of St. Dionysius the Areopagite because he greatly venerated this saint. John translated almost all the works of St. Dionysius and much of the writings of St. Maximus the Confessor⁴⁸. It seems that Charles the Bald also cherished St. Maximus because he had spent some time in Rome and he had been close to Pope Martin the Confessor⁴⁹. The writings of these two holy fathers will familiarize Eriugena with some of the treaties written by: Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Epiphanius of Salamis and St. Basil the Great.

The researchers of his work have failed to agree on the place and time Eriugena had learned Greek. In the preface to the translation of the works of St. Dionysius, John himself admitted he did not know the language as it should, but King Charles was the one who encouraged him to learn it. It is obvious that he had basic notions, but most authors agree that John learned Greek by himself, while translating. Persistent and autodidact, he did not content himself with memorizing the word or with an accurate translation, but would seek the deep meaning of each sentence, trying to penetrate

⁴⁷ Deacon Geoffrey Ready, *An Orthodox Evaluation of Certain Teachings in the Writings of John Scotus Eriugena in the Light of the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas*, <http://web.archive.org/web/20031210140924/http://www.nireland.com/orthodox/eriugena.htm>.

⁴⁸ Deacon G. Ready, *An Orthodox Evaluation of Certain Teachings in the Writings of John Scotus Eriugena in the Light of the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas*.

⁴⁹ Édouard Jauneau, *Jean Scot Érigène et le grec*, Palais des Academies, Paris, 1979, p. 24.

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into the complexities and subtleties of the Eastern theological reason⁵⁰. Through this work, John will come to love the language of the Eastern Fathers, and thus also to love the saints whose works he had translated.

For Eriugena, the Scripture was the truth itself, but the Holy Fathers held the true authority, without which the Bible remained incomprehensible to most people⁵¹. He comes to fight a series of heresies that haunted the West, showing that a superficial knowledge of the Greek language had made Westerners misunderstand the dogmas given by the Holy Fathers⁵².

Deification of man was one of his theological concerns. The Franks had departed altogether this dogma, attributing to God their instincts and impulses. But Eriugena sees more deeply, accusing the Franks of having minds of flesh⁵³. Full of courage, he affirms that the saints are gods through grace, and that the purpose of man is to attain deification and full communion with God. Being convinced rationalists, the Latins will accuse him of heresy, especially because he did not support the Filioque and the predestination dogmas, taken from Blessed Augustine, but deformed by the theologians from Eriugena's epoch. After his death, both the synods in France and the papacy from the 13th century accused him of heresy and burnt his works⁵⁴. John remained little known for many centuries, being rediscovered, read and studied only in the 20th century.

In a world farther away from the true tradition, and where scepticism and scholasticism gained more and more ground, John was the last truly Orthodox confessor, raised by God among the Westerns and for them. He had shown that theology is not only science, but first of all it is living, and the Christian faith is the reality that makes the man soul to live⁵⁵. The Irish poet W. B. Yeats called him "a singing-master of the soul"⁵⁶. After a long time of ignorance, a man enlightened by the fire of the Church Fathers was

⁵⁰ Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 1.

⁵¹ I. D. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West...*, vol. 1, p. 41.

⁵² É. Jeaneau, *Jean Scot Érigène et le grec*, p. 22.

⁵³ Deacon G. Ready, *An Orthodox Evaluation of Certain Teachings in the Writings of John Scotus Eriugena in the Light of the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas*.

⁵⁴ Deacon G. Ready, *An Orthodox Evaluation of Certain Teachings in the Writings of John Scotus Eriugena in the Light of the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas*.

⁵⁵ Christopher Bamford, *The Voice of the Eagle: The Heart of Celtic Christianity, John Scotus Eriugena's Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John*, Lindisfarne Books, Great Barrington, 2000, p. 19.

⁵⁶ Ch. Bamford, *The Voice of the Eagle...*, p. 19.

raised. He was the worthy descendant of saints such as: Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan or Jerome⁵⁷, who spoke Greek fluently and had studied the theologians of the East in original and in-depth.

Beyond the inherent deficiencies of a theologian formed exclusively from books, and without the guidance of a true spiritual father, Eriugena brought to light the Apostolic and Patristic tradition of the Church in an adverse West. He made a peaceful reconciliation between the two parts of Europe, showing his contemporaries there was only one source for the two churches - the Church of the Holy Fathers who preserved the apostolic spirit. He was another voice which God used to call the Christians from the West to the true faith. John Scotus is a singular and incomprehensible voice for those of his time, a scholar far above them, a friend of the Church Fathers both from the East and the West, who, unfortunately, will only succeed partially in bringing them closer to the hearts and minds of his contemporaries⁵⁸.

After the year 1000, the Irish monasteries have fallen rapidly. The important theologians mostly took the road to the continent, where they were appreciated and rewarded. From now on, the monastic communities are led by laymen, living in monasteries with their families, and the services become a rarity. Thus, in the 12th century, when the first Cistercian monks entered Ireland, the native population was impressed by the austerity and simplicity of their life, and would take it over without hesitation, forgetting their roots and traditions⁵⁹.

After 1066, the Normans raised claims on the Church of Ireland, especially in the ports inhabited by Viking who were believed to be of the same blood as the Normans. But the Irish wished to remain independent not only to England which was always a rival, but also to Rome, which they still felt different. Nevertheless the differences were eliminated by force in 1084 when the encyclical of pope Gregory the 7th urged the Irish to accept they must obey him. Thus, the celibacy of the priests was introduced, the great number of bishops was reduced, and Dublin would be directly subordinated to the archbishop of Canterbury⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ Bernard McGinn, William Otten (eds.), *Eriugena: East and West*, University of Notre Dame Press, Londra, 1991, p. 3.

⁵⁸ B. McGinn, W. Otten (eds.), *Eriugena: East and West*, p. 65.

⁵⁹ P. and F. Somerset Fly, *A History of Ireland*, p. 59.

⁶⁰ Ph. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. IV, p. 55.

As in the case of the Anglo-Saxons, the excitement and zeal of the people from the island of St. Patrick have suffered a visible decrease over time too. They did not persevere to live the Christian faith the manner those who brought them to Christ did and as their descendants left it. Although preserving their good name, the monasteries began to be visited not only as a way to salvation, but also for the power they have gained. Local kings were looking for both the material support of the abbots and for the armed people whom the latter could give during the numerous conflicts with other Irish kingdoms. Thus, instead of increasing the unity of faith, the monastic settlements became fiefs in the struggle for power and territory. The true spiritual fathers were only a few, and the life of the common Christian has been greatly affected by the conflicts between brothers of the same blood and faith.

The Viking invasions awakened the Irish partially, making them fight for freedom and faith, but even in the difficult conditions of the Nordic attacks, the islanders remained divided, always fighting between them. This fact gradually led to the extinction of the Orthodox spirit left by the great Irish fathers who lived in the centuries after their conversion to the Christian religion.