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VOLUME I

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HYMNUS S. COLMANI IN LAUDEM S. MICHAELIS
(The hymn of Saint Colmán in praise of Saint Michael)

[Since the name Muircíl (genitive Muircíoch) is rather unusual, it is very likely that our author was the son of Muircíl who wrote the 'life' of Patrick above. This is strengthened by the fact that he was abbot of Moville on Strangford Lough, Co. Down, an area that Muircíl seems to know at first hand. The fact that many prominent churchmen produced sons at this period did not necessarily mean that they were not religious, although it is clear that standards were dropping. The hymn itself is a fine example of Hiberno-Latin poetry. Trisyllabic rhymes are prominent and one can hear the richness of the alliteration and assonance. This hymn seems later to have been taken to the Continent. The text appears in J.H. Bernard and R. Atkinson (eds.), The Irish Latin Hymnmary, Vol. I (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1899), 44-45. The translation is to be found in Rev. J. O'Leary, An Historical Account of the Diocese of Down and Connor, Ancient and Modern, Vol. II (Dublin: Gill, 1880), 17.]

In the Trinity my hope is fixed, not in an omen, And the Archangel I beseech, Michael by name, That he meet me, and be sent to me by God, the leader, At the hour of my exit from this life and this body, Lest the minister of violence lead me into woe, He, the prince of darkness, and the feet of pride. May the assistance of Michael, the Archangel, bring succour To me at the hour when the just and the angels will rejoice. Him I beseech, that he dismiss from me the foul face Of the enemy, and that he lead me where is the repose of the kingdom. May the Holy Michael assist me by day and night; That he place me in the fellowship of the good saints.

May the Holy Michael, an approved assistant, intercede For me, for I am a sinner in act, and frail. May the Holy Michael defend me always by his strength, Along with thousands of saints, when the soul is departing. May the Holy Gabriel, the Holy Raphael, and all the angels, Along with the Archangels, intercede for me always. May the eternal halls of the King of the Kingdom be given, That along with Christ, I may possess the joys of Paradise. Glory always be to God, the Father and the Son, At the same time with the Holy Ghost in one council.

COLUMBUS

(C. 543-615)


LETTER II

1. To the holy Lords and Fathers or Brothers in Christ, the Bishops, Priests, and remaining Orders of holy Church, 1, Columbus the sinner, forward Greeting in Christ.

2. I render thanks to my God, that for my sake so many holy men have been gathered together to treat of the truth of faith and good works, and, as before such, to judge of the matters under dispute with a just judgement, through senses sharpened to the discernment of good and evil. Would that you did so more often; and though you have not always leisure to maintain this canonical practice once or twice a year, in view of the stormy discords of this age, yet as speedily as may be, though it be too seldom, you should be imbued with this as your chief study, that all the dilettante might be made afraid and the zealous be encouraged to greater progress. Yes, I say, thanks be to God, that even on my account the occasion of a holy synod has been produced for you over the Easter controversy. May our Lord Jesus Christ, that prince of pastors, vouchsafe that your council be of use to the profit of His church; and may God Himself, Who is wont to stand in the congregation of the gods, with His presence inspire the hearts of His people entirely to obey His will through strength of the commandments, so that you may not only treat of the affair of Easter, which has already been long discussed and long decided in diverse ways by different authorities; but also of all the necessary canonical observances, marshed as they have been by many, which is a more serious matter, and while the day of judgement is now nearer than it was, you might embark upon some still severer precept of the evangelical religion and apostolical tradition; for if you carefully consider the commandments of the gospel, I am not surprised that you are found to contain the contrary to some men's characters.

3. But let it be enough to have indicated that each will need to be moulded to the example of his redeemer and the pattern of the true shepherd, Who first preaching humility, and adding seven beatitudes to the first, which is poverty of spirit, taught man so fully to follow His footsteps, that by following after righteousness he might attain to the true circumscription of the eighth day; since the eighth beatitude concludes with martyrdom, for the reason that a man is not only righteous by his acts, but also a martyr by his suffering for righteousness' sake, seeing that he is desirable of the heavenly kingdom, and he is crowned with those who strive alike. Thus when, as it is written, He who says that he believes in Christ, ought also himself to walk even as Christ walked — that is, both poor and humble and ever preaching truth under the persecution of mankind — and again, They that will live
a godly life in Christ, shall suffer persecution, and that Faith without works is dead in itself, and the Lord replies to fools who rely on faith alone, That I have known you, and to those who believe well and keep saying Lord, Lord, He declared, that they shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven, and when men cannot be His disciples or worthy of Him, who have not abandoned all that they possess, let each examine himself, whether he has firmly fulfilled or borne these duties, lest he should be estranged from the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, since the son should not be degratate, and the disciple should not contradict the master in his preaching; for he that does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep is a thief and a robber, and he who shuns the toil of chastising and opposing sinful men is a hireling, not a son ever to abide in the church.

4. I have touched these matters briefly for this reason, that if you are willing for us juniors to teach you fathers, you may ever keep in word and word this saying of the true shepherd, which His sheep know for they do not hear the voice of strangers, but for from him whose voice they know, which, unless it be exemplified in practice, does not agree with the voice of the true shepherd. Nor can a disciple proceeding from the mouth of a hireling effectually enter the minds of those whom he instructs, for it bears this token, that he does not himself hear the word that coming from his mouth is heard not; and what the master begins by silencing in his actions, he cannot with bare speech transplant into an example of obedience.

5. Therefore let us all together, whether clerger or monks, first frankly execute these true and unique rules of our Lord Jesus Christ, and thus thereby, laying aside the swelling growth of pride, seek to record a unanimous verdict on the rest. If we all choose the humble and poor for Christ’s sake, Who for our sakes became poor though He was rich, then, with our various lusts laid aside and our mouths shut from sin, casting out from the sinful clay, by humility and by the willing poverty which the gospel teaches, as it were with the causes of disagreement and difference cut off, all the sons of God shall mutually enjoy between themselves a true peace and entire charity, by the likeness of their characters and the agreement of their single will. For great harm has been done and is done to the church’s peace by difference of character and diversity of practice; but yet if, as I have said, we first hasten by the exercise of true humility to heal the wounds of pride so that there be no vain glory, through the teaching of our Saviour Who says for example, Learn of Me I am meek and lowly of heart, and so on, then let us all make perfect with no further blemish, with hatred rooted out, as the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, love one another with our whole heart. And if there be any variety of traditional practice, as there is over Easter, while the humble cannot strive, nor does the church have such a custom, while those will soon know more truly, who with the same purpose and the same desire of knowing truth seek jointly what they may more rightly follow, when none is unquenched except error, and when none boasts in himself but in the Lord, let us then seek together, I beseech you, my most loving fathers and brethren, and let us see which be the more true tradition — yours, or that of your brethren in the West. For, as I have noted in the book of my reply, which I have now sent you, though it was written three years ago, all the churches of the entire West do not consider that the resurrection should take place before the passion, that is, Easter before the equinox, and they do not wait beyond the twentieth moon, lest they should hold a sacrament of the New Testament without authority of the Old. But this I leave to another time; for the rest, I have informed the holy father in three books of their opinions upon Easter, short pamphlets I have further ventured to write the same to your holy brother Arianus.

6. One thing therefore I request of your holiness, that with peace and charity you bear my ignorance and, as some say, my proud impudence in writing, which has been entreated by necessity, not pride, as my very baseness proves; and since I am not the author of this difference, and it is for the sake of Christ the Saviour, our common Lord and God, that I have entered into these lands a pilgrim, I beseech you by our common Lord, and entreat you by Him Who is to judge the quick and the dead, if you deserve His reverence, to let us be at peace from this day, as far as the order of church law will permit; and may I tell you that I never knew you, that I may be allowed with your peace and charity to enjoy the silence of these woods and to live beside the bones of our seventeen dead brethren, even as until now we have been allowed to live twelve years among you, so that, as up to now there has been little charity without any argument, and what agrees better with the Old and New Testament should be maintained without ill-will as any. For if it is of God that you should drive me hence from the place of seclusion, which I have sought from overseas for the sake of my Lord Jesus Christ, it will be my part to use that prophetic speech. If on my account this storm is upon you, take me as your guest up to the sea, that this tempest may recede from you in calm; yet let it first by your part like those mariners to see save the shipwrecked by the bowels of the gales, and to draw the ship to land, as they, though Gentiles, did, according to the scripture, which says, And the men sought to return to land and could not, for the sea ran and the swell increased the more. Finally as my last word I advise, admitted with presumption, that, since many walking on the narrow and broad roadway of this age hasten towards the narrow crossing, if some few are found, who pass through the strait and narrow gate, that leads to life according to the Lord’s command, you should rather help them on to life than hinder them, lest perhaps you also with the Pharisees be smitten by the word of the Lord, saying, Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, since you that the kingdom of heaven before men, and Neither do you enter yourselves, nor do you allow them that are entering to enter.

8. But someone will say: Are we really not entering the kingdom of heaven? Why can you not by the Lord’s grace, if you become as little children, that is, humble and chaste, and not guileful in evil, yet wise in goodness, easy to be entreated and not retaining anger in your heart? But all these things can very hardly be said of those who often look at women and who more often quarrel and grow angry over the riches of the world. Thus our party, once renouncing the world, and cutting off sins’ causes and stripes’ incentives at the start, consider that they may more easily fulfil the Lord’s word in nakedness and wealth. For before the acquisition of these four qualities there is no entrance to the kingdom of heaven, as St. Jerome witnesses to three and Basil to the fourth, who expounded the character of children in accordance with the tenor of the gospel saying. For a child is humble, and does not last after a woman when he looks on her, does not keep one thing on his lips and another in his heart. And these, as I have said, will the benefits of silence; for unless they grow lax, the
secluded live better than the social, except for that still small voice which has the greater reward; for things here the battle is more stubborn, there is found a crown of higher glory. But yet, as says St. Gregory, they are not confided with private virtues who do avoid notorious ill. Therefore knowing this, St. Jerome bade bishops imitate the apostles, but taught monks to follow the fathers who were perfect. For the patterns of clergy and of monks are different, and widely distinct from one another. Let each maintain what he has gospesled, but let all maintain the gospel, and both parties, like single harmonious members of one body, follow Christ the head of all by His own commands, which were revealed by Him to be accomplished in charity and peace. And these two cannot be perfectly accomplished, save by truly humble and unitedly spiritual men, who fulfil Christ's commands, as the Lord Himself bears witness, If ye love Me, keep My commandments, this is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I also have loved you, for in this shall all know that ye are My disciples, if ye love one another. Thus unity of minds and peace and charity then can be assured, spread abroad in the boswells of believers by the Holy Ghost, when all alike long to fulfill the divine commands; for the fiction of peace and charity between the imperfect will be such as is the measure of disagreement in their practical pursuits. Therefore, that we may learn to be more in charity unfolded, let us carefully ponder the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ, and hasten to fulfill them when understood, that by His teaching the whole church may hasten to the heavenly places with one impulse of unbounded zeal. May His free grace afford us this, that we all may shun the world and love Him only and long for Him with the Father and the Holy Ghost, to Whom is the glory unto ages of ages.

 Amen.

 9. For the rest, fathers, pray for us as we also do for you, wretched though we be, and refuse to consider ourselves estranged from you; for we are all joint members of one body, whether Franks or Britons or Irish or whatever our race be. Thus all let our races rejoice in the comprehension of faith and the apprehension of the Son of God, and let us all hasten to approach to perfect mankind, to the measure of the completed growth of the fullness of Jesus Christ, in Whom let us love one another, praise one another, correct one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, that with Him in one another we may reign and triumph. Praise pardon my verbosity and presumption as I toil beyond my strength, most long-suffering and holy fathers and brethren all.

 from:

SANCTI COLUMBANI OPERA: INSTRUCTIO VII
(The Works of St Columbanus: Sermon VIII)

The following sermon is one of thirteen still surviving. It is thought that they were preached by Columbanus while he was staying at Milan in 612 after having crossed the Alps from France.

He was now in the territory of the Lombard duke, Agilulf, and his queen Theodelinda. Theodeflinda was a Roman Christian, Agilulf an Arian heretic. This situation was probably the cause of a fresh period of literary activity by Columbanus.

Columbanus changed his style according to circumstances, and the language of his sermons is simple and restrained. His models were the classical writers, Virgil, Orosi, Juvenal, Martial and Salutius. He included with later writers such as Prudentius, Fortunatus, Isidore, Solinus, Ausonius and Claudian. Cassian and Jerome were the ecclesiastical writers on whose work he most relied.

The sermon opens with a theme that recurs in Columbanus's writings—that human life is like a roadway leading ultimately to the heavenly kingdom.


SERMON VIII

1. Now, you see, we must speak of the end of the way; for we have already said that human life is a roadway, and by the likeness of a shadow we have shown how dark is it and is uncertain, and that it is not what it is, in the same manner, we have said before how incalculable and how blind is it, but concerning the end of our life, by the help of the Holy Spirit, our talk must be continued. It is for travellers to hasten to their homeland, likewise their part is anxiety upon the roadway, and in their homeland peace. Then let us, who are on the way, hasten home; for our whole life is like the journey of a single day. Our first duty is to love nothing here; but if we want to love anything above, our wisdom above, and above all let us seek our home; for the fatherland is there where our Father is, for we have no home on earth, since our Father is in heaven. And indeed, if He is everywhere in virtue of His power and by the greatness of His Godhead, He is deeper than ocean, firmer than earth, broader than the world, clearer than air, higher than heaven, brighter than the sun; yet He dwells openly in the heavens, where He is the bread of angels, who as His eternal inhabit the blessed palace of the highest heaven, and enjoy the sight of God. But since our weaker nature could not bear the pure nature of the invisible God, for that reason God in His goodness, in Whom are all things and beyond Whom is nothing, allotted to the supreme virtues the first region of the knowledge of Himself, which He bounded by the first heaven, and mollified that heaven by the waters that are above, for unless that nature of the first heaven were mollified by the aforesaid waters, it would be set on fire by the virtue of the Most High God, and could by no means be endured by lower natures; and so, while everywhere present to all, God remains invisible. For He is greater than what could be seen clearly, and greater than all things, for He created all of nothing; and thus when seen He is imperceptible, since Who He is and how great He is, to Him is known. Yet let us beseech Him, since God the Trinity, though imperceptible and incomprehensible, is known and present to each one, in proportion to the desires of our purity. Let us beseech Him, I say, at least here, that there we may more closely approach, or more clearly understand, and singing on our journey let us say, Let us praise after Thee towards the odour of Thy perfumes, and, My soul has clung behind Thee, and, Draw me after Thee, that with these songs we may quickly pass through the world, and controlled from above may scorn the things of the present, and ever think of heavenly things, and may shun the things of earth; for unless we long unweariedly with heavenly desires, we needs must be entangled in earthly ones. 2. Then, lest we be concerned with human things, let us concern ourselves with things divine, and as pilgrims ever sigh for and desire our home-land, for the end of the road is ever the object of travellers' hopes and desires, and thus, since we are travellers and pilgrims in the world, let us ever ponder on the end of the road, that is of our life, for the end of our roadway is our home. But there all who journey through ages find various huts according to their merits; and the good travellers have peace in their homeland, but the evil shall perish without; for many lose their true home, because they love rather the road. Let us not love the roadway rather than the homeland, lest we lose our external home; for we have such a home that we ought to love it. Therefore let this principle abide with us, that on the road we so live as travellers, as pilgrims, as guests of the world, enjamed by no laws, longing with no earthly desires, but let us fill our minds with heavenly and spiritual impressions, singing with grace and power, When shall I come and appear before the face of my God? For my soul thirsts for the mighty and living God, and, My soul is like a waterless land before Thee, and saying with Paul, I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, let us know that though we are strangers from the Lord while we remain in the body, yet we are present to the eyes of God. Hence, sparing all wickedness, and laying aside all sloth, let us strive to please Him Who is everywhere present, that with a good conscience we may happily pass over from the roadway of this age to the blessed and eternal homeland of our eternal Father, from present things to things absent, from monstrous things to things of joy, from transitory things to things eternal, from earthly things to heavenly, from the sphere of death to that of the living, where we shall see heavenly things face to face, and the Ruler of rulers, ruling His realms with an upright rule, our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is glory unto ages of ages. Amen.

from:

SANCTI COLUMBANI OPERA: REGULAE
(The Works of St Columbanus: Rules)

[Columbanus's 'rule' is probably derived from that in use in Burgond under St Congall. The rule was strict, although, as the extracts below show, Columbanus urged moderation in all things.

He made use of the works of Cassian, Jerome and Basil. The rule itself was soon overtaken by that of Benedic,