



The Dawn of Monasticism



Monasticism is considered by some to have been "founded" by *St Martin of Tours* (AD316-397) but one cannot accept this without first paying heed to his own teachers, particularly *St Hilary*. At the time when [St Ninian](#) was about to embark on his "instruction at Rome" three of the great masters or Doctors of the Church - *St Ambrose* (AD339-397), *St Jerome* (AD341-420), *St Augustine* (AD354-430) - were already in middle age. Also, in Gaul, St Martin's own master, St Hilary (AD315-368), was only recently dead. As a consequence, the leadership of the Gallican Church had devolved on St Martin, abbot-bishop of *Caesarodunum*, which is Tours.



The long connection of *Tourraine* with Scotland goes back before either Scotland or France existed as discrete kingdoms. The cradle of Scots Christianity is St Martin's abbey, by the River Loire, near Tours. The Church in Gaul derived from the East rather than from Italy. *Potinus*, apostle of Gaul, was a pupil of *St Ploycarp of Smyrna*, and St Hilary, who consolidated the Church in Gaul, had been for some time in *Phrygia*. Now, St Martin, a soldier (though probably a conscript) and son of a Roman officer, a great administrator as well as a saint, scholar, and founder of the first Christian hospital in the West, had brought into Gaul an institution which was new to the Western Church. Long before the Christian era, men had withdrawn themselves to solitary contemplation of a God (or Gods). After Christianity came there were Christian hermits. In the early fourth-century *St Pachomius* had drawn many of these together to live in groups, under a *rule* of poverty, chastity, and obedience, combining organised prayer with study and manual labour.

St Martin brought this communal, strictly-ruled, way of living into the Western Church that was in the country of the *Pictones* - Poitou, Poictou, or Pictavia. In AD360, on his return from banishment in Poitiers, Hilary gave St Martin land at *Ligugé* where he then became a solitary monk. However, in time he attracted others, and his community became famous - so much so that he was forced to leave this first small house at Ligugé to found another larger one, a *Magnum Monasterium* or *Mór Muinntir*, Marmoutier, close to Tours, of which city, as we have said, he became bishop. It was to this community that St Ninian went to study and become an enthusiastic disciple of St Martin before coming back to his homeland.



Marmoutier



St Ninian's foundation at *Whithorn* was at first to be known as *Muinntir Mór*, but he himself called it after Martin's first establishment at Ligugé – *Logotegiacum*, that being the Latin form of Ligugé, coming from the Celtic *leuk* (Gaelic *geal*, shining white) and *tigh*, a house. From this then came the name *Candida Casa*, and its daughter house in Wales *Ty Gwynn*, the Bright House.

Scotland, then, was the recipient of Martinian monasticism at a very early time, very nearly it could be said from the very mouth of its "founder". In this sense we can rightly argue a very ancient pedigree for the Church in Scotland and also, then, for the Church in Pictland of Alba which was founded from *Candida Cassa*.

The route taken by Ninian on his return to his homeland is a matter for speculation but, I would suggest, it is possible that he came, at least in part, by sea. The link between the Church in Scotland and that in St Martin's Gaul would bypass, to a large extent, and certainly until later times, the church that may have existed in southern and central Britain. Monasticism came first to Scotland and Alba!



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