

Neil Xavier O'Donoghue, *The Eucharist in Pre-Norman Ireland*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. xvi+352pp. \$48; ISBN 978-0-268-03732-1

Frederick Edward Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church*, with Introduction by Neil Xavier O'Donoghue. Third Edition with New Material. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010. 497pp. \$140. ISBN: 978-1-60724-100-3

Although published in different years by different presses, these two books are best read in tandem — or at least the earlier volume, the second reprint of F.E. Warren's classic book of 1881, with a new introduction, depends considerably on the 2011 monograph for clarification and explication of its contents.

The Eucharist in Pre-Norman Ireland is based on the author's Ph.D. thesis submitted to St Patrick's College Maynooth. It comprises an extensive survey of source materials divided into three chapters, followed by a brief concluding summary, an Appendix containing Bartholomew McCarthy's 1885 edition of the Stowe Missal and *Leabhar Breac* versions of the Old Irish Mass Tract, ninety-nine pages of detailed Endnotes, a twenty-eight-page Bibliography, and an Index. The chapters are organised according to the nature of the material discussed: Chapter One is a survey of the Historical Background, Chapter Two addresses Written Sources, and Chapter Three, Archaeological and Iconographic Sources.

The historical survey is a chronological account of the Irish Church from its foundation some time prior to the arrival of St Patrick up to the Norman Conquest in the twelfth century. It opens with a brief description of classical commentators' views on Ireland. In setting the context for this discussion, the author begins by nailing his colours firmly to the mast (1–4), thereby underlining the premise of the entire study. He states that although a constant theme in historiography, travellers' accounts, and the like, the tendency to view Ireland as 'different', 'eccentric', or

‘downright wayward’, has clouded the study of liturgy as much as any other aspect of Irish historical and cultural studies; and that the evidence is quite the contrary. This issue is very familiar, and hardly controversial in present-day scholarly discourse, particularly in more populated fields such as archaeology, art history, and architecture. However, the study of Irish liturgical history is a late-comer — hence a critical analysis of previous research and of common assumptions is merited.

In choosing the topic of the Eucharist, Neil Xavier O’Donoghue achieves a two-fold aim, namely, that of addressing the wider issue of Irish liturgical practices within the framework of West-European church history, and examining the more specific matter of the place of the Eucharist in Irish cultural history. And the argument is all the stronger for focusing on a single theme which not only provides specificity sufficient for indepth comparative analysis, but also enables the author to call upon a wide range of evidence and types of data, resulting in a valuable case study which lays down a marker for future work in this field.

This book is thus more than an investigation of technical or theological questions, embracing as it does issues of pastoral care, popular devotion, spiritual meaning, patronage, and related social and political matters, e.g.: the role of the priest, relations between priests and people, between priests and the hierarchy, and between monks and bishops; as well as of textual nuances such as are found e.g., in litanies, and other prayers, as index of local politics. The examination of texts is complemented by a rich survey of artefacts and iconographic representations with an emphasis on their function in the celebration and sharing of the Eucharist.

The chronological survey examines St Patrick and the ‘origins’ of the early Irish church; early relations and polemics between the English

and Irish churches, with particular reference to the writings of Bede; monasticism and church organisation, and Irish ecclesiastical scholarship from the sixth to the eighth centuries; the development of pastoral care in the seventh century; the impact of Viking raids in the ninth and tenth centuries; and in the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, relations with Canterbury, Irish renewal movements such as synods, and diocesan reorganisation; St Malachy and the arrival of the first continental orders; the Normans and their role in the reform of the Irish church.

This is followed by an historical survey of the place of the Eucharist in the western Church up to the twelfth century, addressing questions such as its liturgical ‘shape’, the species of bread and wine and their symbolism, frequency of Communion and the participation of the laity (37–42). The third stream in the discussion focuses on rite, i.e., a regionally-specific form of the liturgy, such as the Gallican (which was a primary element in the Irish liturgy as in the rest of north-west Europe), and the Roman, and the many changes brought about through different reforms, particularly under Charlemagne (42–50).

As well as providing an essential framework for the core of the study, this overview is useful for any non-specialist wishing to gain a better understanding of the issues. And O’Donoghue has provided a masterly and accessible distillation of a complex topic.

Chapter Two, on Written Sources, gives an item-by-item account of the major Irish primary sources at our disposal. The first section concentrates on liturgical texts in early manuscripts such as the Stowe Missal (c. 800) and the Palimpsest Sacramentary (c. 650). The Stowe Missal is important not only because it is a complete missal from Ireland (and the only one now in Irish holdings), but also because it is one of the oldest witnesses of the Roman Canon — and thus of importance as a document of the western church more generally. It further underlines the

historical connectedness of the Irish church with the wider world; and as a vademecum for a priest doing his rounds from church to church, as O'Donoghue shows, it provides valuable insight into day-to-day parochial practice in a way which other liturgical manuscripts from cathedrals and great abbeys do not. Its annotations provide further interest in that, shortly after its completion a man named Móel Cáich revised parts of the missal to bring it more into line with Gallican practice.

The author focuses on three instances where Stowe differs from Continental missals and where no parallels exist elsewhere, namely: a long litany at the beginning of the eucharistic celebration; a hymn for the *fractio panis* (the breaking of the bread); and a Communion chant of a type not found elsewhere. The litany is of exceptional length and includes a large number of Irish saints (particularly from Leinster and North Munster). Both of these features are found also in other Irish religious texts: the long litanies may derive from the practice of reading out the diptychs during the Eucharistic liturgy to indicate the churches with which a particular church was in communion rather than using the names of the neighbouring bishops; and local saints were deeply embedded in the culture of devotion and protection (68). The text for the *fractio panis* includes a set of six lines at the end which Móel Cáich used to replace the original text. They are taken from scripture and focus on the reception of Christ in Communion. It would have been helpful here had the author included the first text so as to show clearly the nature of these alterations. However, this item and the Communion chant provide an opportunity for discussion of the context and use of these prayers. The hymn, which is rather short, might have been sung repeatedly during the breaking of the bread, whereas the Communion chant is of considerable length — which may indicate that not only the priest but also a congregation of considerable size would have received the

Eucharist. This observation keys into the wider question about public participation in the Mass, which is taken up again in Chapter Three.

The next section provides a brief overview of the role of music in the liturgy of the West. The importance of hymns in the Irish liturgy is again recalled with reference to the contents of the Antiphony of Bangor (7th/8th century) and the Irish Liber Hymnorum (11th/12th century). In addition to containing some unique copies of hymns in honour of Irish saints, the first of these manuscripts also includes the earliest known text of the 'Gloria' and the 'Te Deum'. Furthermore, in the context of the present study, it is especially important for the presence of the eucharistic hymn, 'Sancti venite', to be sung while the priests were receiving Communion.

While acknowledging the absence of melodies, O'Donoghue provides a helpful summary of recent research on not only the importance of singing in the early Irish liturgy but also instrumental music as depicted in ecclesiastical iconography (e.g., reliquaries and high crosses). He then proceeds to a brief survey of other sources containing references to the Eucharist including penitentials, monastic rules (Tallaght, Céili Dé), saints' Lives (Columba, Brigit, Brendan), homiletic materials, the poems of Blathmac; Gille of Limerick; Giraldus Cambrensis; and Infant Communion.

In common with the rest of Christendom, reception of Communion at Mass in pre-Norman Ireland was not a weekly but rather an occasional practice among the laity. However, the Eucharist as holy viaticum was especially important to everyone as a preparation for death. The frequency of chrismals (discussed in the succeeding chapter) indicates that it was common for clergy to carry the Eucharist about on their person, like a talisman, which would also have facilitated the practice of ministering to the dying.

The Irish appear to have been early in adopting the Roman Canon; and in attributing the exact moment of eucharistic transformation. They also seem to have incorporated hymns within the liturgy (including the Eucharist) from the beginning — although this was forbidden in Roman practice until the twelfth century, because of the association of hymn-singing with heresy in the early church on the Continent (84). Other distinctive regional aspects include long litanies and the special place of local saints, and votive masses (97–8). Among the many other interesting insights provided by the textual sources, there is a particularly elaborate description of the *fractio panis* in the Mass Tract from the Stowe Missal (74–76), where the notion of ‘fraction’ involves dividing the host by elaborate numerical combinations. This demonstrates in a particularly practical way the Irish fascination with numerology, as also with the importance attached to social ranking — as enshrined in the Brehon Laws, and reflected in later sources such as the diagrams in the Book of Leinster and the Yellow Book of Lecan illustrating the seating arrangement at the Great Hall of Tara, where portions of meat are assigned according to status: the best cuts being reserved for the higher orders, with gristle and fat for those at the bottom of the scale.

Chapter Three focuses on archaeological and iconographic sources which, as the author notes once again, have not been much scrutinised for evidence of the celebration of the Eucharist, although its importance pervades the surviving repertory of artefacts, including architecture and visual imagery. It is refreshing here to encounter an analysis of material objects (and their representation on stone carvings and in manuscripts) such as altars, chalices and other accoutrements (e.g., patens, chrismals), buildings such as Cormac’s Chapel, and liturgical works such the Book of Kells, in terms of their ritual function and social rôle, rather than the more usual emphasis on technical construction and artistic technique. While a necessary part of historical identification, that

can take us only so far in understanding their purpose. Among several important insights, O'Donoghue proposes that as well as being the focus of liturgical celebration for the feastdays of individual saints, the small outdoor chapels on Irish monastic sites (e.g., Glendalough, Inishmurray, Skellig Michael) may have provided multiple locations for saying Mass by several priests in an expanding community, since the Eucharist could be celebrated only once a day at each altar. His theory is that these would have been the equivalent of different altars under one church roof, as developed on the continent in Carolingian times, but which did not appear in Ireland until the coming of the Cistercians.

Contextualising the evidence gives this study a far greater range and depth than had it focused merely on the technicalities of liturgical practice. It amounts to a significant contribution to the history of the church and of the devotional culture of the population of pre-Norman Ireland. By accounting for the surviving evidence in written and material form, it avoids any heavy ideological bias and thus makes an important case for 'normalising' Irish practice within its western European context. It also contributes to the study of the liturgy internationally by making documents and other materials more accessible to specialists elsewhere, showing where Irish practices may be regional (not to say 'unique') and where they act as harbinger for more standard texts which have not always survived (or at least not in great numbers) from other parts of Europe. Significant also is O'Donoghue's observation that 'by the time of the coming of the Normans, the religious climate of Ireland was probably closer to the continent than ever before ... their arrival only led to superficial differences in the area of eucharistic practice' (201). The very fact that the dating of the Drummond, Rosslyn and Corpus missals is still inconclusive is an indication of how 'mainstream' liturgical practice had become in Ireland by the early twelfth century. The reforms of this period were Irish-led and the Normans helped speed up some of these

processes, such as the more rapid development of the religious orders, and the building of larger churches (this also may have been under way in the Hiberno-Viking towns and Cistercian abbeys).

A few small criticisms: the book is rather tightly bound; it does not remain open when laid flat and has to be held in both hands. The writing style is somewhat repetitive in places, with a persistent use of abbreviations such as ‘didn’t’ (112), ‘don’t’ (150) and ‘wasn’t’ (129) which detract somewhat from the flow and style of delivery. Also there are a few unfortunate errors such as a reference to a manuscript belonging to the ‘Imperial Library’ in Paris(!) (deriving from a presumably unchecked reference from an 1854 publication). In one instance ‘skeuomorphs’ appears as ‘skeomorphs’ (301, n.53), Marie Therese Flanagan appears once as ‘Flannagan’ (301, n.58), Hilary Richardson as ‘Hillary’ (p. 301, n.54), Roger Stalley metamorphoses into ‘Richard’ Stalley (298, n.20), and the Cross of Man is given incorrectly as ‘Mann’ (fig. 17), while St Gall is described in one instance as being in France (163). But these are small blots on an otherwise rich canvas.

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The reissuing of Frederick E. Warren’s book is welcome since the previous (and only other) reprinting, with an introduction by Jane Stevenson (Boydell, 1987), is no longer available. In her edition, Stevenson provided an excellent essay much of which still holds up in spite of later scholarly work (and which could well have been included here) — as indeed does Warren’s original work, so neglected has been the topic of the liturgy of the Irish church.

In this reprint, O’Donoghue has written a brief introduction. He also reproduces Bartholomew McCarthy’s entire article on the Stowe Missal (335–470) and Whitley Stokes’s 1901 edition of the *Leabhar Breac* tractate on the consecration of a church (471–497). However, the full

bibliographic apparatus is missing; no dates are provided for either work, and no editor for the latter, but only a reference to an 'obscure Italian *festschrift*' (xii). Hence one is obliged to consult the book on the Eucharist for full bibliographic information.

It is difficult to find one's way around this book. The contents should surely have included page numbers for the appendices. (For some reason these are detailed in the online catalogue, so could usefully be downloaded by prospective readers.) And oddly, while the Introduction is provided with Roman numerals, the Arabic numeration which commences with Warren's text continues directly (at p. 25) rather than beginning at p. 1. Finally, one wonders why the title page of Warren was omitted whereas the Frontispiece is included, hence the layout here does not faithfully representing the original.

The Introduction provides a useful account which sets a context for Warren's interest in a 'Celtic' church, a theme which was to influence several generations of scholars up to recently (in spite of some opinions to the contrary). And Warren, as a man of his time, had a somewhat romantic edge coupled with a quest for a native or indigenous Christianity. The quest for a non-Roman Old English liturgy resulted in an almost complete emphasis on Irish sources, since these represent the main part of what survives.

As O'Donoghue points out, it is widely accepted nowadays that the Irish liturgy derives from the Gallican rather than being a home-grown rite from within. Many newer publications and critical editions have appeared, including the Munich Palimpsest Sacramentary which, although not known to Warren, is 150 years older than the Stowe Missal, and provides incontrovertible evidence of early Irish use of the Gallican Rite.

The brief Introduction is followed by a select, annotated Bibliography (xv–xxiii) organised according to subject matter: general

liturgical works, historical background, early Christian Ireland and Britain, primary (insular) sources, secondary liturgical sources for Ireland and Britain, and art and architecture (including music though this is not listed in the heading, and contains some regrettable omissions). While one is indebted to both the editor and the publishers for having brought some important texts back into circulation, it is difficult to avoid the impression that this book was rather hastily assembled.

With these two volumes Neil Xavier O'Donoghue has performed a signal service to the study of the liturgy in medieval Ireland, challenging older assumptions, but more importantly, revealing the range and depth of information which can be assembled from seemingly sparse evidence under the scrutiny of a well-honed question.

Ann Buckley
School of Languages, Literatures
and Cultural Studies
Trinity College Dublin
Ann.Buckley@tcd.ie