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Caitlin Corning

George Fox University, ccorning@georgefox.edu

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Columbanus and the Easter Controversy: Theological, Social and Political Contexts

Caitlin Corning

Determining the correct date for the celebration of Easter involves important theological and practical considerations. Since there was no universal agreement about the manner in which these considerations should be addressed it is not surprising that the dating of Easter became contentious, causing controversy and conflict in the church for centuries. When Columbanus (d. 615) arrived on the Continent in the late sixth century, he brought with him an older system for dating Easter that was different from the one in use in Rome or the Merovingian churches. Within a few years, the two sides were debating questions of authority and interpretation in an attempt to defeat one another's position or reach a resolution. The controversy between Columbanus and the Merovingian episcopacy reveals in microcosm many of the arguments that would be used throughout the process by which the Irish churches eventually abandoned their traditional method of calculating Easter in favour of the Roman practice.

Background on the Easter Controversy

From as early as the second century, there had been disagreements about how to correctly calculate the date of Easter.¹ This date needed to correspond with the information about Christ's death and resurrection from the Bible. The gospel narratives state that Christ was crucified on, or just after, the Jewish Passover and rose from the dead on the following Sunday.² In the Old Testament, the Jews were required to observe Passover on the full moon (*luna* 14) in the first month of spring (Nisan). Therefore, by the third century, most

agreed that Easter should be observed on a Sunday following the first full moon of spring. The incorporation of the lunar calendar into the calculations for the date of Easter meant that the celebration would be a movable feast since lunar days do not occur on the same fixed solar dates from year to year. This is because the lunar year is approximately eleven days shorter than the solar. If adjustments are not made, the lunar months move out of sequence with the seasons. The Easter controversy focused on how to correctly use these two calendar systems to determine the date for Easter.

Christians wanted to be able to predict Easter dates into the future, especially as Lent became part of the church calendar. This meant that Christians could not simply wait for a local Jewish community to observe Passover and themselves celebrate Easter the following Sunday since they needed to begin the Lenten fast approximately forty days before Easter. In addition, some Christians argued that the Jews no longer followed the Old Testament instructions for Passover and sometimes observed it twice in one year. By the Council of Nicaea (325), these two factors, combined with the increasing belief that Christians should not rely on Jews to help determine the date of Easter since they had rejected Christ, resulted in the ecclesiastical leaders ruling that churches should use their own calculations to determine the date of the full moon after the equinox and from this, Easter Sunday.

Even with this general agreement, there were issues that led to conflicting Easter dates. One of these was the date of the equinox. From the time of Julius Caesar until the fourth century, Rome believed it occurred on 25th March.³ However, by the third century, the scholars at Alexandria had recalculated to a more accurate 21st March. If *luna* 14 (the full moon) happened on 22nd March, Alexandria would celebrate on the next Sunday, while those using the 25th March equinox would wait for the next full moon, delaying Easter for over four weeks.

Another disagreement was over the lunar limits within which Easter could fall. *Luna* 14 can occur any day of the week. Since Easter must occur on a Sunday, there needs to be a seven-day span after the full moon for the observance of Easter. For example, if *luna* 14 is on a Tuesday, the following Sunday would be *luna* 19. If *luna* 14 is on a Friday, Easter would be on sixteenth day of the moon. When it came to these lunar limits, some argued that this span should include *luna* 14 since the Gospel of John reports that Christ was crucified on Passover. This group argued for limits of *luna* 14–20. Those at Alexandria believed Easter could not occur on Passover since the Synoptic

Gospels say that Christ was crucified the day after this. Therefore, their limits were *luna* 15–21. The traditional practice in Rome was to have limits of *luna* 16–22. They believed these dates better represented the Gospel story arguing that Christ was crucified on *luna* 14, was in the tomb on *luna* 15 and was resurrected on *luna* 16.

Therefore a complex set of lunar days and solar dates had to be calculated to determine the date of Easter.⁴ Differences in the date of the equinox and the lunar range for the Sunday of Easter combined with a number of additional factors meant competing Easter tables listed conflicting dates.⁵

Sources

During the conflict between Columbanus and the Merovingian Church over Easter, the two tables in question were the Victorian table and the *Latercus* 84-year table. Victorius of Aquitaine created his Easter table in *c.* 457 after Pope Leo's archdeacon, Hilarius, who later become pope, requested that he explore the problem of Easter dating and create a more accurate table to be used in Rome.⁶ It had a 532-year cycle, placed the equinox on 21 March, and had the traditional Roman lunar limits of 16–22. Using these parameters, Easter was observed between 22 March and 24 April (see Chapter 10). A critical problem with this table was that in some years it listed two possible Easter dates causing confusion about which should be followed.⁷ In spite of this, the Victorian table was popular in the Latin West, at least in part because of the perceived papal approval.⁸ In addition, it appeared to provide a perpetual Easter table, as the solar dates for Easter repeated every 532 years. The Merovingian churches officially adopted this table at the Council of Orléans in 541.⁹

Columbanus used the *Latercus*, an 84-year cycle attributed to Sulpicius Severus (*c.* 363–420) that may have arrived in Ireland around 430.¹⁰ For years, historians had done their best to recreate this table using details provided by Columbanus, Bede and others from the seventh and eighth centuries. However, in 1985, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín discovered a copy of it in Padua, Biblioteca Antoniana, MS. I. 27 and soon after published his findings.¹¹ There were scribal errors in the manuscript and initial attempts to recreate the Easter dates proved difficult. Daniel Mc Carthy, who worked with Ó Cróinín on the original reconstruction, was able to make corrections and provided a more accurate reconstruction in 1993.¹² Since then, historians have been able to calculate Easter dates for the fourth through the eighth centuries using the *Latercus* table.¹³ This allows

them to compare specific years in the Victorian and *Latercus* tables to determine whether either listed a date that would be deemed especially controversial.

The *Latercus* used the older 25th March equinox and had lunar limits of 14–20. Easter could occur between 26th March and 23rd April. Since the supporters of the *Latercus* thought the equinox did not occur until 25th March, they would not celebrate Easter from 22nd to 25th March; dates that were perfectly acceptable in the Victorian table (see Chapter 10). The *Latercus* differs from other known 84-year cycles because it inserts the *saltus lunae* every fourteen years. The *saltus* is when a day is skipped in the age of the moon in order to correspond with astronomical reality. Due to the calculations used by the *Latercus*, the lunar dates listed in the table moved out of sequence with the actual moon by 1.28 days for each 84-year cycle.¹⁴ By Columbanus's time, the *Latercus* was listing lunar days that were inaccurate by at least four days. Therefore, if the table identified a day as *luna* 14 (the full moon), it was actually *luna* 10; a date visibly in error.

Unfortunately for historians, there are few narrative sources that provide details on the Easter controversy between Columbanus and the Merovingian church. In the *Vita Columbani*, Jonas of Bobbio purposely neglected to include any information about it.¹⁵ This is not surprising since by the time he wrote the Life in c. 640, the monasteries originally founded by Columbanus had adopted the Victorian table. As with all *vitae*, the purpose of the *Vita Columbani* was to present its protagonist as a saint who was held in favour by God.¹⁶ To report that Columbanus had once supported an Easter table then regarded as incorrect would not have been suitable material for this work. In spite of this, the *Vita* can provide context on Columbanus's relationship with the Merovingian court of Burgundy and the bishops, though, as will be discussed, Jonas also altered this evidence to fit his goals.

Fortunately, there are five surviving letters by Columbanus, four of which discuss the Easter controversy.¹⁷ These letters are invaluable and provide a critical witness in three important ways. First, these letters are the only documents that contain the arguments in support of the *Latercus* table and against the Victorian written by someone who felt the *Latercus* was correct. In all other instances, those who advocated for the Victorian or other tables composed the documents that preserve the arguments in favour of the *Latercus*.¹⁸ Columbanus's letters allow the historian to compare his ideas against the information found in these other sources.

Second, since Columbanus's letters represent a period of over ten years, they reveal the development of his arguments and the modifications in his approaches as the controversy continued. It is not often in the wider history of the Easter controversy that historians have multiple sources by the same person. Given Columbanus's importance in this early phase of the Easter controversy involving Irish churchmen, these letters become even more critical. Finally, because these letters are the only source that details the Easter controversy between the supporters of the *Latercus* and Victorian tables in Merovingian Gaul, they must be used not only to understand Columbanus's opinions but also to reconstruct the arguments of the Merovingian bishops against the *Latercus*.

The controversy as presented in Columbanus's letters

Soon after Columbanus arrived in the Merovingian kingdoms, Easter became an issue. Around 600, he wrote to Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) to ask for papal condemnation of the Victorian table.¹⁹ In this letter, Columbanus attacks the table's legitimacy on three points. First, he argues that by allowing Easter to fall on the 21st or 22nd day of the lunar month, the table supports a 'dark Easter'. By this time in the lunar cycle, the moon rises after midnight so that there are more hours of darkness than moonlight. Since Easter celebrates the triumph of Christ, 'the light of the world', over death, Easter should not be celebrated on a day when light has not conquered darkness. Columbanus then quotes a passage from a document attributed to Anatolius, bishop of Laodicea (d. 283), which states that those who allow Easter to fall on the 21st or 22nd '... not only cannot maintain this on the authority of holy scripture, but also incur the charge of sacrilege and contumacy, together with the peril of their souls'.²⁰ This issue may have been of special concern to Columbanus because the Victorian table listed Easters on these days in 593–4, 597 and 600.

His second complaint is that this table allows Christ's resurrection to be celebrated before his passion.²¹ Since Columbanus regarded 25th March as the date of the equinox and therefore the earliest date for Passover, he did not believe that Easter should be celebrated between 22nd and 25th March. As mentioned, the earliest possible date for Easter in the *Latercus* was 26th March.

His third major accusation against Victorius's table is that its lunar limits (*luna* 16–22) violated the instructions for the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as outlined in the Old Testament. In connection

with Passover, Jews were to observe this in remembrance of the flight of the Hebrews out of Egypt.²² Columbanus believed that it should be observed from the 14th to the 20th day of the lunar month. In other words, Passover and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread occurred on the same day. By allowing Easter to fall on *luna* 21–22, not only did this table allow a dark Easter, but Victorius had added two days to his lunar limits never mentioned in scripture.²³

With regard to the arguments used by the Merovingian bishops against the *Latercus*, Columbanus states their only accusation is that it ‘holds Easter with the Jews’.²⁴ This is an allusion to the fact that the *Latercus* allowed Easter to occur on *luna* 14. In the early church, some Christians had always celebrated Easter on Passover (*luna* 14) no matter the day of the week. This practice, known as Quarto-decimanism, was condemned from the late second century. From that time forward, some argued that *luna* 14, even if it fell on a Sunday, was no longer a viable date for Easter.²⁵

Columbanus sees this as a ridiculous claim and argues that allowing Easter to fall on *luna* 14 is not celebrating with the Jews. It is simply following the instructions for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as outlined in the scriptures. If Christians correctly calculate the date of Easter and it happens to fall on the same day as Passover, this is simply a coincidence. In any case, Passover and Easter belong to God, not to the Jews who rejected Christ. It is God, he contends, who appointed these instructions. Arguing that Easter cannot happen on *luna* 14 is, in effect, questioning God.²⁶

Columbanus is clearly disturbed that the pope has not condemned the Victorian table and cannot believe that he would support a dark Easter. He suggests that if it is humility preventing Gregory from rejecting this table for fear of being seen as ruling against earlier popes who supported it, he must remember that ‘a living saint can right what by another and greater one has not been righted’.²⁷ False humility only harms the church.

Columbanus acknowledges that his letter may seem presumptuous, but assures Gregory that rather than writing on his own authority, he is simply asserting the beliefs of numerous church fathers. He states that all the scholars in Ireland have long dismissed the Victorian table as inherently flawed. He notes that Anatolius, whom Jerome praised as a man of great learning, had condemned the practice of dark Easters (*luna* 21–22).²⁸ Since Victorius allowed these, it remains up to Gregory to choose between Anatolius, and by extension Jerome, on the one hand and Victorius on the other.

This letter reveals Columbanus at his most assured. While he claims humility, he forcefully presents his arguments. This is not a letter that objectively outlines the positives and negatives of the Victorian and *Latercus* tables. Columbanus appears to have believed that his arguments against the Victorian table, his defence of *luna* 14, and his cautions about siding against Jerome would be persuasive enough for Gregory to rule in his favour. He believed he had the obligation to raise these issues with the pope and to remind him of his duty to lead the church into the fullness of truth.²⁹

Though Columbanus states that he wrote additional letters to Pope Gregory and also a *brevis libellus* to Aridius, bishop of Lyon (603–15), none of these documents survive.³⁰ Therefore, there are no sources for this part of the Easter controversy until 603–7 when Columbanus composed his second and third surviving letters. The second letter is addressed to the bishops at the Council of Chalon-sur-Saône (c. 603).³¹ Columbanus had been asked to appear at this council to discuss Easter, but he refused and instead composed a written response. The third letter was sent to Rome, though the pope is not named.³² Since there were short papal vacancies in 604 after the death of Gregory the Great, and from 606–7 after the death of Pope Sabinian, historians assume the letter should be dated to one of these periods.

What is new in these two letters is Columbanus's plea that he and his followers be allowed to use the *Latercus* while the rest of the Merovingian church could follow the Victorian table. He pleads with the bishops, 'let Gaul, I beg, contain us side by side, whom the kingdom of heaven shall contain'.³³ In the third letter, he reminds the pope of the debate between Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (d. 167), and Pope Anicetus (c. 158–67).³⁴ According to tradition, the two could not come to an agreement on the correct dating of Easter but decided to let each celebrate according to their own tradition rather than fracture the unity of the church.

In the past, statements such as these were interpreted by some historians as demonstrating that the Irish supporters of the *Latercus* did not regard diversity in Easter dating as a problem, but instead viewed it as part of the normal multiplicity of practices in the church. For example, Kathleen Hughes in her magisterial *The Church in Early Irish Society* presented the idea that the Irish 'expect[ed] diversity' while the continental church did not. In fact, she argued that only the supporters of the Roman tables saw Easter dating as 'not a matter of church discipline, but almost as a matter of faith'.³⁵

More recently, historians have emphasized that the Irish did regard Easter dating as a matter of significant concern and were not

supportive of diversity in this area.³⁶ In light of this, these passages have been reinterpreted. First, Columbanus states in both letters that he has appended his earlier letter to Pope Gregory.³⁷ As discussed, it clearly condemns the Victorian table. Second, although he assumed his readers would be familiar with his arguments, he does restate his main claims against Victorius's system. To the bishops at Chalon, he reminds them that the Victorian table celebrates Easter before the equinox, uses the unlawful *luna* 21–22, and violates the arguments of Anatolius. Columbanus adds that he regards Victorius as having little authority for he wrote after the great Fathers of the church.³⁸ To the pope, he again emphasizes that Anatolius condemned the lunar limits later adopted by Victorius.³⁹

In Columbanus's second letter, he focuses on the need to submit to God and to seek together for the truth.⁴⁰ He does suggest that both traditions could be followed, but only so long as 'both traditions are good'. Otherwise, 'whatever agrees better with the Old and New Testament should be maintained'.⁴¹ Columbanus's arguments against the Victorian table suggest that he was confident the *Latercus* would prevail if both sides humbly searched for the truth.

Columbanus's shift from requesting a condemnation of the Victorian table to simply requesting that his monastic foundations be allowed to use the *Latercus* most likely arose from the political realities he faced in *c.* 603. In his second letter, he calls upon the bishops to protect rather than persecute his foundations.⁴² He is concerned with the divisions this quarrel is causing and seems troubled that he might be forced to leave Burgundy.⁴³ He realized, at this point, that there was little chance the Merovingian bishops would adopt the *Latercus*. His only option to ensure that his foundations were not forced to use the Victorian table was to attempt to compromise with the bishops.

No record of the Council of Chalon survives. However, given that Columbanus wrote to the papacy after this, it can be assumed that the bishops were not open to his compromise. Therefore, when he wrote to the papacy in 604/606–7, he wanted the pope to rule that he was outside the jurisdiction of the Merovingian bishops. It is in this context that he mentions the story of Polycarp and Pope Anicetus.⁴⁴ For the sake of unity, Pope Anicetus agreed that two Easter traditions could be used. How much more should the pope allow Columbanus to do the same when his Easter table had the support of Anatolius and Jerome? In addition, towards the end of this letter, he reminds the pope of the ruling of the second ecumenical council of Constantinople (381) that churches in

heathen lands should follow the traditions of the Fathers.⁴⁵ By referring to this canon, Columbanus was trying to demonstrate that there was historic precedence for his contention that he should not be subject to the authority of Merovingian bishops, but instead should be allowed to continue to follow the tradition of the Irish churches.

By 607, Columbanus and the Merovingian bishops had been debating Easter for over a decade. Historians recognize that Columbanus must have had royal support in order to ignore the continued opposition by the episcopacy. While Easter was a serious theological issue, politics often influenced the ways in which specific ecclesiastical leaders or institutions could respond. Determining the exact role the Merovingian royal family in Burgundy may have played in the controversy is difficult. Columbanus never refers to the king so his letters provide little help. In addition, historians know that in the *Life of Columbanus*, Jonas has manipulated events in this period to reflect the political situation *c.* 640 when the *Life* was composed. In 613, Chlothar II, king of Neustria (584–629), overthrew Brunhild and her descendants. To justify this, Chlothar and his court encouraged the belief that Brunhild and her descendants were hopelessly corrupt. By the time Jonas wrote the *Life*, Chlothar and his successors had been patrons of the Columbanian houses for almost thirty years. Therefore it is not surprising that Jonas tried to distance Columbanus from Brunhild and her grandson Theuderic (595–613), but portrayed the saint as prophesying the eventual triumph of Chlothar.⁴⁶

Despite the attempts by Jonas to downplay the support Columbanus initially received in Burgundy from the royal family, it is clear that there was a close and influential relationship. It is probable that Luxeuil and Columbanus's other monasteries in Burgundy were royal foundations.⁴⁷ Even in the *Life*, Jonas includes the information that before they turned against Columbanus, Theuderic sought spiritual advice from the saint and Brunhild looked to Columbanus to bless Theuderic's children.⁴⁸

One of the best examples of the importance of royal support can be seen at the Council of Chalon. It is important to keep in mind that many bishops held their positions because of royal patronage. Brunhild was influential in the election of a number of bishops including Aridius of Lyon, who presided at the council meeting.⁴⁹ In addition, Theuderic's approval would have been needed to call a church council.⁵⁰ It is only possible to speculate why the king allowed Easter to be discussed at this meeting. He may have been

pushing for the compromise position Columbanus proposes as a way to solve the ecclesiastical dispute.⁵¹ In any case, in addition to Easter, the bishops at Chalon also discussed the fate of Desiderius, bishop of Vienne (d. 607). Desiderius appears to have offended Brunhild, who responded by arranging for his denunciation and exile by the bishops.⁵² Therefore, Desiderius, who had angered Brunhild, was condemned on various charges and exiled. Columbanus, who did not even bother to attend the meeting, seems to have faced no sanctions. Given the patronage Columbanus received from Theuderic and Brunhild, it is possible the bishops knew that there was little possibility of enforcing any condemnation.

Although not a problem in 603, Thomas Charles-Edwards has suggested that the controversy between Columbanus and the episcopacy in Burgundy eventually contributed to the saint's exile from Burgundy seven years after Chalon.⁵³ Jonas reports that Columbanus was exiled because he refused Brunhild's request to bless her illegitimate great-grandchildren. She then turned the court and episcopal hierarchy against him.⁵⁴ Charles-Edwards, however, points out that in 610, Theuderic had to surrender territory to his brother, Theudebert (595–612), king of Austrasia. In light of this weakness, he may have needed to ensure the support of the secular and ecclesiastical nobility. Theuderic may have decided that Columbanus was too divisive and so needed to be removed from the court.

The last letter in which Columbanus mentions Easter was written to his own communities after his exile in 610.⁵⁵ Much of the letter is concerned with reminding his monks that those who follow Christ will face tribulation and persecution. He encourages them to remain humble, at peace and united. In a section addressed to Athala, whom Columbanus thought might succeed him as abbot, he warns that the community may become divided over Easter. In fact, he thought that cracks were already beginning to appear and urged Athala to stand firm. He worried that his enemies would use Easter to divide the community and that without his presence, his monks might abandon the table he held to be correct.

End of the controversy in the Columbanian communities

Historians do not know when the Columbanian houses finally abandoned the *Latercus*. One possibility is that they did so soon after Columbanus's death in 615. It must be remembered that the leaders of the Columbanian monasteries, such as Eustasius and Athala, were closely linked to the Merovingian aristocracy.⁵⁶ Therefore, they

would have used the Victorian table before joining one of Columbanus's monastic foundations. Perhaps some of the monks had supported the *Latercus* more out of loyalty to their founder and less because of a conviction that it represented the correct method for calculating Easter.

Despite Columbanus's protests, there were strong arguments in favour of the Victorian table. First, it did have wide support. Insofar as church unity is concerned, this is an important factor. Not only had this table been approved by a Merovingian church council, it was the one used in Rome. Second, supporters of the Victorian table could point to the fact that it did agree with the Biblical narrative. As mentioned, according to the Gospel of John, Christ was crucified on *luna* 14, was in the grave on *luna* 15, and resurrected on *luna* 16. Therefore lunar limits beginning with the sixteenth day of the month, as advocated by Victorius, reinforced the concept that Easter is a celebration of Christ's resurrection, not his death. It also allowed for a clearer separation of Jewish and Christian practice by avoiding Easter on *luna* 14.

If Columbanus's monasteries did not abandon the *Latercus* c. 615, the other possibility is that they did so shortly before 628.⁵⁷ Jonas reports that a council was held at Mâcon (626/7) to hear complaints against the Columbanian houses.⁵⁸ If these monasteries were still using the *Latercus*, this could explain, at least in part, why the bishops met. However, Jonas's account of the specific accusations is vague and historians can only speculate if Easter was an issue.⁵⁹ If the Columbanian houses had been using the *Latercus* as late as 626/7, they must have changed soon thereafter because in 628, Pope Honorius (625–38) granted a privilege to Bobbio, one of the houses founded by Columbanus in northern Italy.⁶⁰ Honorius's interest in the Easter controversy is attested in a letter he wrote to Irish clergy in which he argued against the *Latercus*.⁶¹ Since it is doubtful that Luxeuil and Bobbio would have been using different Easter tables and it is unlikely that Honorius would have granted a privilege to Bobbio at a time when it actively condemned the Victorian table, most historians see this as a *terminus post quem non* for the abandonment of the *Latercus* by the Columbanian monastic houses.⁶²

Conclusion

Easter dating was a critical issue that caused divisions between Columbanus and the Merovingian church in the first part of the seventh century. Each group believed that the opposing side's table

violated key Christian concepts associated with this feast. Columbanus's four letters allow the historian to chart a progression in his response to the Easter controversy from his initial confidence that the papacy would condemn the Victorian table, to his suggestion of a compromise where both tables would be used and, finally, his anxiety that his own monks might adopt the Victorian table. Throughout this, Columbanus's ability to continue to use the *Latercus* in the face of mounting episcopal opposition rested heavily on his ability to maintain royal support and patronage.

Columbanus's letters also are important because they reveal the similarities and differences in the arguments and approaches used as the controversy developed in the British Isles. For example, Cummean and Bede both report that the supporters of the *Latercus* from Iona also referenced Anatolius in support of their Easter calculations.⁶³ On the other hand, Bede states that the supporters of the *Latercus* at the Synod of Whitby (664) claimed the table reflected the traditions handed down by the Apostle John.⁶⁴ Columbanus never used this argument. It is possible that this claim was not utilized until the late 620s when the supporters of the Victorian table in Ireland argued that Rome and rest of the church viewed Victorius's calculations as correct. Appealing to the authority of St. John may have been a way to legitimize use of the *Latercus* in the face of this assertion.

Unfortunately, due to the vicissitudes of time coupled with the fact that the Columbanian communities did not want to preserve the memory of their founding saint supporting an Easter table that was eventually rejected by the rest of the church, it is not possible to fully reconstruct all the phases of this conflict or establish for certain when his foundations fully embraced the Victorian table. However, Columbanus's letters do provide invaluable contemporary evidence and preserve the arguments presented by one of the most ardent supporters of the *Latercus* table.

Notes

1. For surveys of the Easter Controversy see Bonnie Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 791–828; Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, ed. and trans. Faith Wallis (Liverpool, 1999), pp. xxxv–lxiii; Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 391–415; George Declercq, *Anno Domini: The Origins of the Christian Era* (Turnhout, 2000); Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *History of Time: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 44–63; Alden Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era* (Oxford, 2008).

2. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) disagree with the Gospel of John. The Synoptic Gospels report that Christ observed Passover with his disciples before being arrested and killed. John states that the Passover had not occurred when Christ died (John 18:28; 19:13, 31).
3. Bede, *On the Nature of Things and On Times*, ed. and trans. Calvin Kendall and Faith Wallis, (Liverpool, 2010), p. 22.
4. For a history of lunar calendars to the early eighth century see Leofranc Holford-Strevens, 'Paschal Lunar Calendars up to Bede', *Peritia* 20 (2008), pp. 165–208.
5. See also Immo Warntjes's chapter in this volume.
6. Hilarius succeeded Leo as pope in 461. Victorius of Aquitaine, *Cursus Paschalis*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, MGH Auct. ant. 9 (Berlin, 1892), pp. 667–735. See also Declercq, *Anno Domini*, pp. 82–95 and Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus*, pp. 239–44.
7. Blackburn and Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year*, pp. 793, 808–9.
8. Bede, *On the Nature of Things*, p. 24.
9. Council of Orléans, c. 1, *Concilia Aevi Merovingici 511–695*, ed. Friedrich Maassen, MGH Conc. 1 (Hanover, 1893), pp. 86–99, at p. 87.
10. Daniel Mc Carthy, 'On the Arrival of the *Latercus* in Ireland', in Immo Warntjes and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, eds., *The Easter Controversy of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, *Studia Traditionis Theologiae* 10 (Turnhout, 2011) pp. 48–75.
11. Daniel Mc Carthy and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'The "Lost" Irish 84-Year Easter Table Rediscovered', *Peritia* 6–7 (1987–88), pp. 227–42.
12. Daniel Mc Carthy, 'Easter Principles and a Lunar Cycle Used by Fifth Century Christian Communities in the British Isles', *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 24 (1993), pp. 204–24.
13. See Blackburn and Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year*, pp. 870–5; and Caitlin Corning, *The Celtic and Roman Traditions: Conflict and Consensus in the Early Medieval Church* (New York, 2006), pp. 183–90.
14. Immo Warntjes, 'The Munich Computus and the 84 (14)-year Easter Reckoning', *PRIA* 107C (2007), pp. 31–85, at 36.
15. For an excellent analysis see Clare Stancliffe, 'Jonas' Life of Columbanus and his Disciples', in John Carey et. al., eds., *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 189–220.
16. For a discussion on hagiography see Thomas Head, *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York, 2000), pp. xiii–xxv.
17. Transcriptions and translations of these letters can be found in G.S.M. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 2 (Dublin, 1957), pp. 2–37.
18. For example, there is a letter (c. 632) by the Irish ecclesiastic Cummean written to convince Iona and others to abandon the *Latercus*. He conveys the arguments by the *Latercus* supporters, but only to counter

- them. Cummián, *Cummián's Letter De Controversia Paschali*, eds. and trans. Maura Walsh and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Toronto, 1988).
19. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 368.
 20. Columbanus, Letter 1, pp. 4–5.
 21. Columbanus, Letter 1, pp. 4–5.
 22. The dating of this feast is complicated by the fact that some Old Testament passages imply that it should last seven days including Passover (*luna* 14–20), while other passages state that it should start the day after Passover (*luna* 15–21). For example, Num. 28:16–17 and Deut. 16:1–4.
 23. Columbanus, Letter 1, pp. 6–7.
 24. Columbanus, Letter 1, pp. 6–7.
 25. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5:23–24; Blackburn and Halford-Stevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year*, p. 791.
 26. Columbanus, Letter 1.
 27. Columbanus, Letter 1.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 8–9. Columbanus quotes from and refers to *De ratione paschali*. Historians disagree whether this is an actual work by Anatolius or an insular ‘forgery’. In either case, Columbanus thought it was an authentic text. For the text and arguments that this is by Anatolius see Daniel Mc Carthy and Aidan Breen, *The Ante-Nicene Christian Pasch. De Ratione Paschali: The Paschal Tract of Anatolius, Bishop of Laodicea* (Dublin, 2003). For arguments that it is a forgery see Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus*, pp. 130–61.
 29. Damien Bracken, ‘Juniors Teaching Elders: Columbanus, Rome and Spiritual Authority,’ in Éamonn Ó Carragáin, ed., *Roma Felix: Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome* (Aldershot, 2007) pp. 253–76.
 30. Columbanus, Letter 2, pp. 16–17; Letter 3, pp. 22–23.
 31. Columbanus, Letter 2, pp. 12–23.
 32. Columbanus, Letter 3, pp. 22–5.
 33. Columbanus, Letter 2, p. 17.
 34. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, v.24.
 35. Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (Ithaca, New York, 1966), pp. 104, 108. Other historians argued that Easter was not the true issue of dispute. Instead, it was one of authority. For example John McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History, AD 200–1200* (Chicago, 1974), p. 109.
 36. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 407–11.
 37. Columbanus, Letter 2, pp. 16–17, and Letter 3, pp. 22–23.
 38. Columbanus, Letter 2, pp. 16–19.
 39. Columbanus, Letter 3, pp. 24–5.
 40. Columbanus, Letter 2, pp. 14–15; Bracken, ‘Juniors Teaching Elders’, pp. 167–71.
 41. Columbanus, Letter 2, pp. 18–19.
 42. Columbanus, Letter 2, pp. 16–17.
 43. Columbanus, Letter 2, pp. 18–19.