

# Chapter XIII Epilogue





## EPILOGUE

**PURGATORY – INDULGENCES - REFORMATION :**  
**IMPACT FOR IONA AND SOMERLED, CLAN DONALD LORDS OF ISLES, 1160-1560**



*Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*; c.1410. This shows purified souls in Purgatory - souls trapped in water, fire, on rocky and grassy land where they are rescued by angels (“Come fly with me!”). Beasts, probably demons, surround a soul. Is that a Bishop with mitre and rear lappets in the water? There is a monk with his nose just under the surface. Saints bypassed purgatory of course.

**‘The key to medieval religion is the fate of the individual’s soul after death’.** Purgatory as a doctrine (a cleansing that involves painful temporal punishment) can hardly be overemphasised – its impact on beliefs was immense. It dominated the theology, teaching, pastoral practise and the beliefs of ordinary people (C. Daniell).

It is said that Purgatory has its origins in Judaism, but there is no “third place” (in addition to heaven and hell) in Jewish theology. There is a temporary purification process, however, which occurs in Gehinnom - the Jewish understanding of hell - which rids the soul of spiritual blemishes before it returns to God. (The Yiddish word for this place is Gehenna).

It is said that St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland who proselytised the Irish people in the 5th century, believed that an entrance to a physical place of penitence was once revealed to him. It was a cave, on Saint’s Island in Lough Derg, County Donegal, where it is believed he had a vision of the afterlife. St. Augustine, an early church father also wrote about a purifying process after a person’s death. One of the most influential Christian thinkers of all time, Augustine (who became Bishop of Hippo in North Africa) wrote his masterpiece, *The City of God*, in the early 5th century.

The Second Council of Lyons in 1274 issued its official teaching on purgatory:

*If those who are truly penitent die in charity before they have done sufficient penance for their sins of omission and commission, their souls are cleansed after death in purgatorial or cleansing punishments...The suffrages of the faithful on earth can be of great help in relieving these punishments, as, for instance, the Sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, almsgiving, and other religious deeds which, in the manner of the Church, the faithful are accustomed to offer for others of the faithful.*

Importantly, purgatory was also a huge money spinner for the medieval roman church. St Paul triumphantly exclaims : “*O death, where is thy sting?*” (1 Corinthians 15:55). Paul would have been appalled, mortified, to know that a millennium later, the biggest *sting* of all was paying indulgences for a reduction in the sentence of purgatory. Increasing amounts of energy, money and effort were devoted by the living to shorten the time their own souls and those of others spent in Purgatory. It began in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the word purgatory appearing **1160-1180** and official recognition by the Pope in 1254.

The great majority of souls had to be “purged” of sins through fire before they could reach heaven (only the blessed went straight to heaven). Full remission of sins could be obtained by the giving of a powerful relic (Donald of Harlaw’s motive? He gave the gold and silver hand of Columba reliquary.) The soul could be helped by pilgrimage, works of charity, public works (donations), taking part in processions for the King and army, and masses, spiritual intercessory prayer for the dead (as many as possible, a “mass machine” - imagine if this was still “fashion” and what could be done today with Facebook and Twitter. Heavens above!) But, to reduce time in Purgatory could also be acquired through *indulgences* and this even led to travelling pardon traders and smuggled falsified papal bulls which led to “spiritual inflation” as people were encouraged to increase payments and the number of pardons (and we think the GFC causes are something new.)

A “trade”, akin, if I may be so impertinent, to the *slicing and dicing* of Saints body parts (*derivatives* have also been around along time – relics in fact). These grew the business by attracting wealthy buyers into sinking their body of wealth into your institution, investing in *your* chapels, chantries, colleges, endless masses, votive offerings, etc, etc. There were thirty-six operating chapels in St Giles, Edinburgh in 1466 and by 1550, fifty! Avoiding the risk of stagnation in Purgatory was a good investment, but as each pardon product usually only returned a 40 day reduction benefit (if truly repentant) it can be appreciated that a larger portfolio of indulgences was aspirational.

It was a locally competitive, but internationally headquartered market; unfortunately a lot of the capital flowed out of the country (could save the €?) However, it might be pointed out, that the Catholic Church was demonstrably not without institutional ethics and a collective conscience back then (or primarily ever?) Pope Innocent IV in 1247 sent Cardinal William of Sabina as legate to Norway. He intervened against encroachments on the part of the bishops, reformed various abuses, and abolished the *ordeal by hot iron!* Archbishops of Nidaros- Trondheim, Norway, Eilif Kortin (d. 1332), Paul Baardson (d. 1346), and Arne Vade (d. 1349) were zealous churchmen. Provincial councils were held, at which serious efforts were made to eliminate abuses and to encourage Christian education and morality. The Bishop of Carlisle, John Kirby 1332- 52, like many other

Bishops, attempted to regulate the trade in indulgences to prevent, for example, “*getting money from the simple*”.<sup>1</sup> In 1515, the Pope delegated the Archbishop of St Andrews to visit every monastery in Scotland and to punish “*excess and enormity of the brethren dwelling therein*” (“too little, too late”?) The 1517 Protestant Reformation obviously originated from concerned Catholic monks like many previous internal reforming synods over the centuries and then there was the Catholic’s reactive Counter-Reformation, 1543-1648.

Two MacDonald Lords of The Isles and a Clan Donald Prior, Abbot in waiting, did take action in some proven cases against corruption, enforcing “*conditionality of endowment*”, ie, :-

**c.1390** - Donald II of Harlaw defeated the corrupt, mutinous MacKinnon’s attempted inside coup of the Lordship - their reaction to abbey governance by him. Hung the chief.

**1405** - The chief’s son, the traitorous **first** Fingune MacKinnon, the “*subtle and wicked councillor – the Green Abbot*” – “*unlawful occupier, who falsely bears himself as Abbot*”; “*the greatest tyrant (who) had his lands from the goods of the monastery, and moreover dilapidated the monastery*” was removed in 1405 by the actions of the Clan Donald Claustal Prior, **John MacAlister** (by a *commissio privationis* against Fingune 26 Aug 1405).<sup>2</sup> And before John is accused of self interest, he had worked his own way up the ladder to Claustal Prior (a MacAllister of descent from Lord Alaxandair OG) which is the second in charge of the Abbey with exactly the responsibilities of checking any corruption in the administration. The *commissio privationis* would also have cost him, or Donald II, dearly – the Vatican really knew how to charge for these kinds of legal actions. It should be remembered that he was a legitimate *ecclesiastical noble* of Clan Donald and as such he was in an institution that only existed because of Clan Donald munificence for centuries. Not like many others who put nothing in, but took all (it might be expressed that Iona Abbey had been acting as a ‘land trust’ for Clan Donald.)

**1443**- Lord Alexander threatened to “*diminish the monastery*” [shut it down – “resume their donations, endowments”] by removing the “*relics and bones of his progenitors who are buried therein and the precious things which have been given (eg, hand of Columba)*” because the **last** of three successive *Fingunes MacKinnon* (monks, Priors, Abbot) was, like the previous two:- “*hateful and corrupt; a bad tree cannot bear good fruit...and... kept noble women as concubines, had offspring by them, and dowered them large with the goods of the monastery*”.

In between these events in 1428 :- To raise funds for restoring timberwork in the choir, the Pope was petitioned by Abbot Dominic, through Alexander to grant an indulgence of three years off purgatory, to all pilgrims going to Iona on St Columba’s feast day, 9 June.

The sale of indulgences, even for the dead, was a major and good reason for the Reformation, along with the systemic selling and buying of clerical offices – called political donations now. It impelled the Augustinian monk Martin Luther to write *The Ninety-Five Theses*, and : he hammered it to the door of a church at Wittenberg in Saxony. No - untrue. The law abiding Luther gave his letter to Archbishop Albrecht, of Mainz, 1517, and his friends. The Reformation was then a triumph of literacy and the new Gutenberg printing press. Millions of copies of his translated Theses and German Bible caused the first media revolution.

‘But even a King of England cannot completely erase that which his people have known, and believed, for so long. As Stephen Greenblatt observes in *Hamlet in Purgatory*’:<sup>3</sup>

*When in 1545 and 1547, with zealous Protestantism in the ascendant, the English Parliament acted to dissolve the whole system of intercessory foundations created to offer prayers for souls in Purgatory, the lawmakers and bureaucrats found themselves faced with an immense task. They had to strike at colleges, free chapels, chantries, hospitals, fraternities, brotherhoods, guilds, stipendiary priests, and priests for terms of years, as well as at many smaller funds left to pay for trentals (the cycle of thirty requiem masses), obits (the yearly memorial service), flowers, bells, and candles... It would have been a social catastrophe simply to shut down all institutions that had been created in the attempt to provide prayers for the dead. (Greenblatt, Hamlet in Purgatory, page 39.)*

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation (1517- 1648), particularly the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 1563, rapidly swept away many of these inappropriate doctrines, beliefs, abuses of Romanism (and all systemic corruption?) and placed an affirmative emphasis on the individual, Bible and faith. (But Henry VIII in the early *Ten Articles*, 1536, interestingly wanted to keep ‘The doctrine of purgatory, and prayers for the dead in purgatory’ and the ‘invocation of Saints’!)

<sup>1</sup> *Death and burial in medieval England, 1066-1550*; Daniell, Christopher; 1997; p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Calendar of Papal Lettaers to Scotland of Benedict VIII of Avignon 1394-1419*; Highland Papers, iv, Vatican Transcripts, 1934; pps 156-7.

<sup>3</sup> Author: Carole D. Bos, J.D. *Purgatory and Dante’s Divine Comedy* (Awesomestories.com).



The Reformation should however be also seen, amongst other both good and bad reasons (eg, Henry VIII's *sinful* gluttony, lust, pride) as a macroeconomic reform. Even as a hostile, no, **violent** takeover by the Crown/State for redistributing enormous wealth to its few major backers, and destroying some remaining essential services. Notwithstanding that some Abbeys were either self-serving, corrupt and/or inefficient and some already not under Abbotorial control with their revenue properly put to proper church use, but were already in the "*capacious craws*" of "*Commendators*" :- **hereditary** family '*property managers*'<sup>1</sup> (some even non-ecclesiastical). They treated the assets and income as their own. Most of whom became Protestant reformers and the "godly band" of Covenanters. It was they who started the *Bishops Wars* 1639 which helped to spark the horrific (Civil) Wars of The Three Kingdoms, kindled with the "divine and tyrannical" Charles I.

For Scotland, these wars, 1644-47, were in large part a clan war between the MacDonalDs and Clan Campbell. **With Oliver Cromwell's victory in England, the marquess became the effective ruler of Scotland.** Upon the restoration, the marquess offered his services to King Charles II but was charged with treason and executed in 1661. His lands and titles were forfeited but were resorted to his son in 1663, Archibald, who became the 9th Earl of Argyll. In 1685 the 9th Earl was executed for his part in the Monmouth rebellion.

***"Thus have the revenues of the ancient primacy of Scotland, founded by kings and prelates for the most holy of purposes, and amply endowed by a succession of noble and pious individuals, passed through a variety of secular hands since the Reformation, and been applied to various private purposes."*** (Rev. CJ Lyon, St Andrews, 1843).

Iona is a good example of the situation in Abbeys with the *wicked* Finguine trio of MacKinnon Abbots and then the Campbell Commendators, Eóin Caimbeul (I), 1499–1510 (and Bishop of Isles from 1487-90) and then Eóin Caimbeul (II), 1514–1532. PS : "After the forfeiture of the lordship 1493, King James at the request of the Earl of Argyll petitioned the Pope that his (King's) cousin Bishop John Campbell should hold the abbey of Iona in *commendum*"<sup>2</sup> (as Commendator).

<sup>1</sup> "*property administrators; regarded as a family propriety interest*".

<sup>2</sup> *Acts of The lords of The Isles*; Monro & Monro; Intro p.lvi.

This was approved from 1499. At exactly the same time, Abbot Alexander (II) MacAllister (also descendant of Alaxandair OG), through James IV "*sought papal authority for the (Saddell) abbey to be* (taken from the See of The Isles and) *united to the Bishopric of Argyll.*"<sup>3</sup> Papal approval and then Royal confirmation by James IV of the Abbey's properties transferring to Argyll was finally and formally sealed in 1508. It is said that the stone from Saddell monastery was used for Campbell stables, outhouses.

A telling and disappointing observation is that fact that one of the main reasons (excuses?) given for dismantling of the monasteries was that the Abbot's positions were being constantly occupied on a hereditary or family basis (what exactly wasn't). But, after the Lordship of the Isles fell and the closely following Reformation beginnings, suppression and dissolution what do we have, for the Iona Abbot and Bishops of the Isles, just for example? As shown before, there are seven periods of Eoin/John Campbells, an Alasdair and a Niall Campbell (and their agent Carsuel) as Abbot/Commendator AND sometimes concurrent Bishop occupations. This is the "worst" case of hereditary (or family elite) occupation in the midlate medieval period of which I am aware. And this is orchestrated by the "Leaders of The Reformed Religion", the Earls of Argyll (and their senior sept elites). There are also two Knox's, a father and then son as Bishop. I needn't explain why that is a contradiction, or example of the highest hypocrisy, even if not immediate family of the reformer John Knox (c. 1514 – 1572).

Andrew Knox,<sup>4</sup> 1605–1619:- He continued to hold both Iona and Raphoe bishoprics till 22 September 1619, when

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* James IV said "there had been no monastic life at Saddell within living memory".

<sup>4</sup> **Two bells he took from the abbey of Iona were by royal edict sent back.** Knox was in February 1609 appointed one of a commission to negotiate with the chieftains for the purpose of devising a scheme for the **religious settlement of the Western Islands**. In May he was the bearer of a confidential message from his colleagues to the king. He returned in June with instructions for a fresh expedition, of which he himself was to be the head. Before the end of July he met the principal chieftains at Iona, and with their consent enacted the "**Statutes of Icolmkill**".

In 1614 the castle of Dunivaig was surprised by the Macdonalds, and Knox, attempting to retake it with insufficient force, was defeated and compelled to treat. He consented to solicit a lease of the Crown lands of Isla for Angus Oig Macdonald, together with the proprietary rights in the castle of Dunivaig, and a free pardon for all crimes up to date, and to leave his son Thomas and his nephew John Knox

he resigned that of the Isles in favour of his eldest son, Thomas Knox; 1619–1628 (Episcopacy was abolished 1688 in Scotland).

Integral to the hereditary occupation of high church positions by the elite is John Calvin's echoing of Martin Luther's "two kingdoms" teaching in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, that there should be separation of Church & State. 'There are two governments: the one religious, by which the conscience is trained to piety and divine worship; the other civil, etc'. Having the Earls of Argyll control both the "State" and the Church in Argyll also meant that these principles could not be observed. *"The General Assembly had become the supreme and uncontrolled court of Scotland, into which the nobility got themselves admitted in the capacity of ruling elders, that they might the more easily carry their political intrigues; and, by humouring the Presbyterian ministers, rule both king and commons at their pleasure. The Marquis of Argyll was present on this occasion, as an humble elder from the Presbytery of Inveraray"*

Many or most monasteries had become relatively insignificant by the 1530s in terms of being essential service providers to the wider community, commerce and agriculture, but were still extremely wealthy in terms of land and revenue (even if Commondaters were, for example, leasing out large parts of the estates to relatives and supporters.)

**Purgatory had existed for 300 years to 1534 (King's Book)** : "With Purgatory no longer in existence, the systems of belief built up upon it collapsed. The theological reasons for the continual stream of prayers supplied by monasteries, friaries and chantries were destroyed. They therefore became much more vulnerable to attack by the Crown, which was desperate for money and land. Political expediency and financial desperation were as much behind the English abolition of Purgatory as the fact that there was only circumstantial evidence of Purgatory in the apocryphal scriptures.

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of Ranfurly as hostages for his good faith. The council, however, refused these terms, and prepared to reduce the Macdonalds by force.

**Bishop Knox then advised deceit in dealing with the Macdonalds**, with a view to the plantation of their lands by men from the north of Ireland and the west of Scotland. **His approach was taken up in part by the Earl of Argyll on behalf of his kinsman, John Campbell of Calder**, who had undertaken their reduction on condition of succeeding to their inheritance. A John Graham managed that Thomas and John Knox were freed, and on 6 January 1616 Campbell of Calder, with the assistance of Sir Oliver Lambart, captured Dunivaig.

The process of the dissolution of the monasteries was systematic and total. The monasteries, nunneries and friaries were dissolved with their lands and incomes passing to 'the Crown'.

**Under severe pressure, and with no strong theological argument to back them up, the monastic system collapsed like a house of cards".**

**The ceaseless rounds of prayers for the founders and benefactors stopped.**

At the last Clan Donald Council of the Isles on Eigg, in July 1545 almost all of the old vassals of the Lordship united under Donald Dubh, last "*Lord of ye Ilis and Erll of Roiss*" – he died 1545, Ireland.

[*"The mate of monarchs, and allied on equal terms with England's pride." Somerled, Rex Insularum, took his place as a leader of men, from whom descended a race of Kings, a dynasty distinguished in the stormy history of the Middle Ages, who ranked themselves before the Scottish Kings."*<sup>1</sup>]

Donald Dhu had made a pact with the King of England, a repeated strategy of most of the independent Lords of the Lords of the Isles, and it failed – again. This of course was Henry VIII and the irony would not be lost on anyone when considering a pact with Henry and his personal affect on the English Reformation, the century later Civil Wars and their combined direct impact on the **"ecclesiastical capital of Clan Donald's island kingdom"** – **and the future survival and struggles of the Clan itself to the final Jacobite rebellion of 1745 with Bonnie Prince Charlie, a Stuart, at Culloden.**

The Jacobite cause was supported by many Highland clans, both Catholic and Protestant.

Charles Stuart, the Young Pretender, died in Rome on 31 January 1788. He was first buried in the Cathedral of Frascati, where his brother Henry Benedict Stuart was Bishop. At Henry's death in 1807, Charles's remains were moved to the crypt of Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican where they were laid to rest next to those of his brother and his father. His mother is also buried in Saint Peter's Basilica.

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<sup>1</sup> *History of the clan Donald, the families of MacDonald, McDonald and McDonnell.* Henry Lee, 1920.

When the body of Charles Stuart was transferred to Saint Peter's Basilica, his "praecordia" were left in Frascati Cathedral: **a small urn encloses the heart of Charles, placed beneath the floor below the funerary monument.**

Purgatory is still an official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church but Limbo, for unbaptised babies, was finally abandoned in 2007.

*We know that purification is needed on our path to God, and we also know that Purgatory exists among the "last things." In the path to God, which is also the path to eternal life after death and judgment, there is purgatory, in*

*other words, the need for purification through reparatory suffering.* (Karol Wojtyla [Pope John Paul II], *The Way to Christ*, page 117.)

In Judaism, *Gehenna* is a place of purification where, according to some traditions, most sinners spend up to a year before release. Roman Catholic belief in purgatory is based, among other reasons, on the previous Jewish practice of prayer for the dead.

The Anglican soul now has "a short period of happy relaxation" before the Resurrection (C. Daniell).

**THE END**



**WOODCUT c.1460** : Pride of the spirit is one of the five temptations of the dying man, according to *Ars Moriendi*, the "Art of Dying" (the original and most serious of the seven deadly sins and the source of the others.) Here, Demons tempt the dying man with crowns (a medieval allegory to earthly pride) under the disapproving gaze of Mary, Christ and God. Woodblock seven (4a) of eleven, Netherlands.